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SUNSHINE AND SENTIMENT IN
PORTUGAL



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IT WAS COLOMBA DA SILVAS.

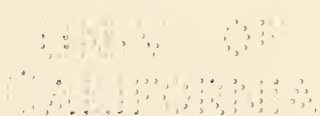
SUNSHINE AND SENTIMENT IN PORTUGAL

BY

GILBERT WATSON

AUTHOR OF 'THREE ROLLING STONES IN JAPAN'

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



LONDON

EDWARD ARNOLD

41 & 43 MADDOX STREET, BOND STREET, W

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‘Give me the clear blue sky over my head, and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and a three hours’ march to dinner—and then to thinking! It is hard if I cannot start some game on these lonely heaths.’

WILLIAM HAZLITT.

SUNSHINE AND SENTIMENT IN PORTUGAL

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH HADOW IS INTRODUCED

‘AND you will come with me, dear boy?’

‘My dear Hadow,’ said I, ‘give me time. Now, tell me once more what your plans are.’

Hadow took the pipe out of his mouth, and blew a cloud of smoke into the air. His short, thick hair stood on end, as though the brain beneath it scorned to possess a covering capable of being parted like that of other men. He was enthusiasm and energy personified. The light of science blazed in his blue eyes. His speech had all the accuracy of a weighing-machine, and his manner was as the manner of one accustomed to view humanity as just so much concentrated chemistry.

‘Ever since we met in the Saeter’s hut in Norway—you remember, Hein? I’ve had it in the back of my brain to go again to Portugal. It will be glorious. There are, I tell you, caverns in the Sierra de Monchique mountains—the Algarve, you know. It may be so old as the Mid-Pleistocene times. We will explore them! Ha!’

‘How did you come to hear of them?’

‘I heard of them when I was there many years ago, and again lately from a very good friend of mine—Tom Warden; he knows Portugal like his pocket. He is engineer in the San Domingo copper-mines on the Guadiana. He, too, has travelled in the Algarve. The animal will be useful, for he

tells me he will come with us, if we pay his expenses. He is a dear boy, and I tell you he speaks very well Portuguese, better than I can English.'

'But is there any likelihood that we will find anything?'

'Any likelihood!' repeated Hadow with scorn. 'They are limestone caverns—unexplored! Know you not the rudiments of palæontology?—limestone caverns are rich in remains of all prehistoric periods. Ancient river-beds are good; lake-bottoms, too, are not to be spoken of with the sneeze; but limestone caverns! Think you only of Kent's Hole, near Torquay! of the Dordogne caves in France! of the Neanderthal cave in Germany! of the cave at Engis in Belgium! of the cave——'

'Stop, stop!' I implored, for Hadow, mounted upon one of his hobby-horses, was riding that scientific animal with such fury that I could not hear myself think for the thunder of his hoofs. 'How can my ignorant brain explore more than one cave at a time? My dear fellow, if you enumerate every cave that honeycombs the earth's surface, you deprive me of all power of thinking. I will concede that the Portuguese caves are overflowing with primitive man. Now let us talk of expense.'

Hadow's face fell.

'Ah,' he sighed, 'that is the difficulty. See you, this English University of yours, to which I have the honour to belong, buttons up its pockets when I go to ask for funds. They will take all *kudos* gladly, but no risk. But'—and here he beamed anew—'we will do it, even if I must sell my father's snuff-box. Portugal is a cheap place—if we buy mules, we will sell them again—food costs but little. Now, dear boy, I do not like to ask too much of you, but if you could pay half, I——'

'Say no more,' I interrupted; 'I am with you heart and soul. I know but little about caves, and still less about palæontology; however, I shall be delighted to see the Algarve. Now, what luggage shall we take?'

'So little as possible. I sometimes take what you call a knapsack, but as we may ride much, let us each get a pair of saddle-bags. We will take our guns, and I will also take an express rifle; say, is it agreed?'

‘Good,’ I assented ; ‘when do we start ?’

‘The steamship *London* sails from Shadwell Basin, London Docks, for Lisbon, on the 27th of June, three days from now ; can you do it ? If that is so, I will engage our passages at once. Eh ? What say you ?’

‘Count on me ; I’ll be there,’ I cried ; and, having arranged matters to our mutual satisfaction, we parted for the night.

I sat long by the fire before I sought my bed. Hans Hadow, M.A., Ph.D., F.R.S., Professor of Palæontology and Zoology at the University of X., dominated my thoughts. He was in many respects a remarkable man. Born and educated in Germany, he had for several years made his home in England. No one, however, could have mistaken him for an Englishman, either in personal appearance or in character, for his methodical habits, his thoroughness, his capacity for stripping facts to the bone, all pointed unmistakably to a subject of the Kaiser. Endowed with exceptional natural gifts, his superb physique was only equalled by his thirst for knowledge. There were, indeed, few countries he had not visited, few subjects which did not excite his interest, few European languages of which he had not more than a superficial knowledge.

His peculiarly English name chimed incongruously with his peculiarly German personality. How he came by it was a mystery. Perchance, English blood had flowed in the veins of one of his remote ancestors ; or, perchance—and this solution appears to be the more probable—the name had been originally German, and, on account of some slight structural alteration—the substitution of an H for a G, let us suppose—had become Anglicized once and for ever. Be this as it may, it misled no one as to his nationality ; to come into his presence was to cross the German Ocean ; to hear his talk was to dream of *Sauerkraut* ; to live with him was to be banished to Berlin.

The scene of our last meeting returned to me, depicted in the glowing embers. Again I saw the dusk falling over Norwegian hills, the rude village huddling under the mountain-spur, and I, a weary traveller, seeking accommodation for the night. Again, as I paused uncertain whither to turn,

a door opened, and from the comfortless interior, dimly lighted by one old lamp, came again the sound of a deep voice, just as I had heard it years before. 'That,' said I, as I smiled into the fire, 'is Hadow, haranguing four Norse farmers in their own dialect.' And so it was.

The Professor had passed his vacation in Norway. His self-imposed tasks struck me as being so above the capacity of the average mortal that I made careful note of them at the time :

No. I.—The study of the invertebrate zoology of Norway, in the pursuit of which he had discovered some distant connection of the Norwegian toad—a poor relation unknown even to Michael Sars.

No. II.—The study of peasant patois, his only assistance being, I remember, a dilapidated dictionary by Ivar Aason, entitled 'Norsk Ordbog.'

No. III.—The collecting of old Norse folk-tales and ancient legends, for which purpose he had sought out and interviewed all sorts and conditions of men scattered over the length and breadth of the country, including minstrels, boatmen, vagabonds, gipsies, and paupers.

No. IV.—The study of runic inscriptions; a ponderous mass of manuscript bore witness to his labours on this subject.

No. V.—The acquiring of anatomical specimens of the fauna of Norway for his museum—viz., bear, lynx, glutton, reindeer, lemming, elk, and wolf, all of which he obtained.

Such was, and is, Hadow! Verily his deeds and words cry aloud for a biographer; but who am I that I should attempt to don the garment of the mighty Boswell? My one hope is that the Professor may never read these pages; for such is his innate antipathy to all those who attempt that which they are not fitted to perform, that, should he fall foul of my unscientific account of this scientific expedition, my life would not be worth a moment's purchase. I am of opinion, however, that all will be well. I have taken my precautions. The title alone is more than sufficient to turn him aside; 'Sunshine and Sentiment,' as I treat them, have no place in his scheme of the universe.

CHAPTER II

FROM LISBON TO MERTOLA

‘BANG! BANG! BANG!’ The door of my bedroom in our Lisbon hotel remonstrated loudly against such treatment. Roused thus noisily from peaceful sleep, I listened to the reiterated blows with disapproval. My slumbering senses returned to their ranks under protest—they had not anticipated so rude an awakening.

‘Who is there?’ I shouted.

‘I am it,’ roared the deep voice of Hadow.

He burst into the room.

‘*Donnerwetter!*’ he ejaculated, in high indignation. ‘Still in bed!’

‘I usually spend my nights in this way,’ I observed mildly.

He snorted, wheeled to the window, tore aside the curtains, wheeled back to the bed, and finally shook his fist in my face.

‘Torpido animal! do you think you are hibernating? Hein?’

I yawned.

‘Know you how late it is?’ he continued—‘a quarter-past five! Have you forgotten that the steamboat starts at six, and that if we miss it we lose the train for Beja? Also, that we have ordered breakfast for five o’clock? Say, now, have you forgotten all these things? Hein?’

The ejaculation ‘Hein’ is very characteristic of Hadow; it is a species of canorous snort, expressive of indignation or contempt, impatience or interrogation, as occasion demanded. Whatever delicate shade of meaning be attached to it hereafter, two things may invariably be taken for

granted : first, that its energy all but knocked you down ; and, second, that it was pronounced with a French accent.

I blinked at him. In the gray light of dawn he loomed into unnatural importance—he all but filled my little bed-chamber. His broad shoulders, fresh complexion, bright eyes, and upstanding hair, all radiated wakefulness ; even his great moustache seemed to scorn the suggestion that it had ever caressed a pillow. He was the last person one would wish to see at a quarter-past five.

I raised myself on my elbow, and inspected him with solemnity.

‘ Professor, tell me : did you go to bed, or did you sit up all night ? ’

‘ More foolishness ! ’ he retorted good-humouredly. ‘ You know well that I go to bed always early ; but, lazy fellow, I tell you to give you shame that I have already been half an hour this morning at Portuguese patois, and half an hour reading that nice old book on cosmography by Pedro Nunes, which I bought yesterday at the bookstall. And now, if you do not come soon, I will eat all the breakfast.’

‘ By Jove ! I’ll get up,’ I said hastily, flinging back the bedclothes.

Hadow chuckled loudly.

‘ Ho, ho ! that is how to move you, is it ? I have to lead you by your pampered stomach ? Greedy animal ! ’

Still chuckling, he ran out of the room, and I was left to my own devices.

Upon reaching the dining-room, I found Hadow busily employed, for he had already made so considerable an incursion on the loaf, and levied so heavy a tax upon the coffee-pot, that, fearing all would vanish, I made haste to claim my share.

Eating in Hadow’s company reminded me always of the gastronomical races associated with school-life, when two boys vied with each other as to who could eat the faster. Hadow had the greatest contempt for eating—theoretically, that is ; for, truth to tell, in practice he played a very excellent knife and fork. To eat at all was, in his mind, to waste time, to pander to carnal lusts, to debase the intellectual to the level of the physical. He did not eat—he stowed away

food-stuffs ; he packed himself against time. It was a wonderful performance. Of drinking he had a much more lenient opinion, and prided himself, not without cause, upon the steadiness of his 'head.' He was—and I can well believe it—the one student capable of drawing a straight line with a piece of chalk upon the floor after a Heidelberg carouse. Strange to relate, the proud consciousness of having performed this feat was dearer to the Professor's heart than all the honours which grateful universities had heaped upon him. And yet, why should we wonder ? All great men have their hallucinations : did not Milton prefer 'Paradise Regained' to 'Paradise Lost' ? Did not Frederick the Great esteem his French verses more than his victories ? So it is no subject for marvel that Professor Hadow was prouder of that undeviating line than of the many letters that trod admiringly in the footsteps of his illustrious name.

Out into the gray of the dawn—for such it appeared to me, although, truth to tell, the sun was already beginning to gild the Eastern sky. The air was chill ; few wayfarers walked the streets ; the world of Lisbon was still abed, unconscious of the pleasure to be gained by early rising.

Hadow, full of energy, drove his somewhat short legs at an unconscionable rate, plunging down stony declivities at a pace that I tried in vain to emulate. Close behind us came two porters laden with our saddlebags. They took the greatest interest in our belongings. Several beggars lay asleep at the door of a church. The noise of our footsteps recalled them to life ; one of their number—an old and toothless woman—held out a skinny hand.

'For the love of the Blessed Virgin, senhor !' she whined, addressing Hadow.

'Get out of my way !' responded the Professor.

'Ah,' wheedled the aged crone, with a leer, 'the English senhor but jests ! A cavalier with so fine a moustache could not refuse a lady !'

Hadow chuckled ; a coin dropped into the claw-like hand, and a blessing followed us as we strode away.

The railway-station from which the traveller leaves Lisbon

for Beja lies on the further bank of the Tagus. No bridge spans the river at this point, so that intending passengers are obliged to make use of a little steamboat that plies to and fro at stated intervals.

Soon we had taken our seats, and were paddling merrily over the sparkling waters of the river. The atmospheric effect was singularly beautiful. The water shone with a cold glitter that trembled into silver and sparkled with an infinity of dazzling lights; it resembled a sheet of chain armour undulated in sunshine. Gazing towards the shore we had so recently quitted, Lisbon appeared like a phantom city, her outlines wavering in the morning mists. Situated, as is the fair capital of Portugal, upon an imposing eminence, her houses, churches, palaces, loomed upon the eye, a towering mass of various architecture, wreathed in the veer of shifting vapours. The haze promised heat; it was but the morning coquetting with the sun before it gave up the earth to the unimpeded sovereignty of his sway.

Notwithstanding the hour—six o'clock chimed from the city towers—many travellers had collected on board the little steamer. With the exception of ourselves, all belonged to the working classes—hard-handed sons and daughters of toil whose day began with, or perchance before, the sunrise. Hadow conversed with several of our fellow-passengers; they responded to his advances with alacrity and good-humour.

'Dear boy,' he said, pausing by my side after a round of sociability, 'talk to everybody of what they know best; above all, be practical. Now, see you that animal in the blue blouse? He is a butcher, and goes to buy oxen; he told me much interesting news of how the Portuguese manage their slaughter-houses. The man next him on the right is a carpenter, but the beast disappointed me; he is a red Republican, and will only talk politics, of which he knows nothing.'

As he spoke, an old gentleman in a battered sombrero, with a ragged cloak thrown over his left shoulder, produced a guitar, and, sweeping the strings with practised fingers, broke into a lively air. Not a soul on board but listened with delight. When he sang a refrain, that occurred at intervals,

several of his audience joined the chorus ; their voices were extraordinarily true and sweet.

The impromptu concert was nearing a close, when Hadow clapped me on the shoulder ; his face expressed satisfaction.

‘ See ! ’ cried he in his enthusiasm, ‘ these musical nations, how nice they are ! This old man, poor, you can see, but filled with love for music, treats us to this fine song only to make us happy. *Ach*, my friend, where would you find such true love of art in your mercenary England ? Hein ? ’

He had barely finished this elegant speech, when the wandering minstrel made a low bow and offered him his hat. Hadow’s jaw fell, and, for the future, the subject of ‘ mercenary England ’ was avoided.

‘ First class, Professor ? ’ inquired I at the station.

‘ *Herr Gott ! nein !* ’ ejaculated he, wheeling upon me in disgust. ‘ To travel by train at all is foolishness ; what for a way of seeing the country is it to shut one’s self in a travelling-box ! But to travel in a *padded* box, as if you were a lunatic, and to pay more to be alone, as if you were suffering from small-pox—there is madness for you ! No, no, dear boy ; if you travel with me you go third class, and that only because there is no fourth.’ He gave a chuckle, and stroked his great moustaches.

‘ I believe you love hardships,’ said I, as we strolled along the platform.

‘ I call them not hardships,’ he retorted. ‘ I hate luxury and to be pampered like a—a dachshund. When I was a boy I would never sleep in a bed ; no, I slept on the floor—that was good for me—winter and summer, with only one blanket. I hate your hot-baths, and great-coats, and afternoon teas, and all signs of degeneration ! Bah ! ’

Hadow would have made an excellent stoic ; had he lived in the times of Diogenes he would have rallied that cynical philosopher upon the luxury of his home life—he would have taught him to scorn the shelter of a tub.

The country to the immediate south of Lisbon is flat and void of interest. The eye rests on nothing but vast and monotonous plains, sandy and sterile, lying naked beneath the blue of the sky. As the traveller advances into the interior, however, he meets with evidences of vegetation ;

great aloes form the boundary between fields and roads ; the massive stems with their spear-like points rear themselves to a height of from six to eight feet, and woe betide the luckless trespasser who attempts to storm the line of their fortifications.

Here and there, surrounded by the formidable leaves, rises the curious growth that occurs but once in the lifetime of the plant, looking for all the world like an immense candelabra fit for the dinner-table of a giant. Oleanders, too, red and white, are to be seen growing in graceful clumps, the beautiful and glowing tints of their blossoms forming a refreshing contrast to the gray and dust-strewn monotony of their surroundings.

There was in the scene a curious and delightful charm peculiar to the countries of the South. These children of the tropics, lured from this gray soil by no cloud-enveloped sun, sang to the imagination with voices sweet and seductive as were the songs of the syrens. They conjured up unfamiliar lives set in a strange environment—children accustomed to play under flowering oleanders, old people seated at cottage doors, watching the sun set over the aloes.

Inside our horse-box of a compartment the babel of tongues was deafening. All spoke, and no one listened. So fiercely animated were the many speakers that to hear them you would have imagined that blows were imminent ; nothing, however, was farther from their thoughts, and it needed but a humorous word, an unexpected gesture, to turn their apparent fury into laughter.

One old fellow who sat opposite interested me much, as did his companion, an old woman of still greater age than himself. He wore a gray night-cap with a yellow tassel, and a tattered coat adorned with metal buttons. It was many days since he had shaved, and the bristles upon his chin stood out like the stubble left by last year's corn. He had a kindly eye, and his courtesy and gentle care towards the old lady was delightful to behold. She was even more picturesque than he ; round her head she had tied a scarlet handkerchief, beneath which her hair, white as silver, straggled downwards in artistic confusion. Unlike the

generality of Portuguese women, she had one of those dear old faces that resembled a rosy-cheeked apple—so placid, so simple, and so kind that you could not but love her at first sight. She sat with her hands folded in her lap—the labour of the better part of a century had left its mark indelibly imprinted upon them—taking but little interest in her surroundings, save when spoken to by her companion. At the sound of his voice, however, she invariably smiled, and all the gentleness and sweetness of her nature became apparent in her happy and contented expression.

Later in the day the old man produced a parcel containing a fowl, a loaf of black bread, a piece of cheese, and a bottle of wine. Tearing the chicken into many portions with his fingers, he invited us to partake. The grace with which he did the honours of the meal charmed us. He appeared to be genuinely sorry when we declined.

At one of the little stations we purchased half a dozen oranges from a pretty girl. She made a charming picture standing on the platform with her basket of fruit poised lightly on her head. We were charged a sum which sounded exorbitant in the quaint coinage of Portugal, but which was in reality something less than a halfpenny.

At 2 p.m. we reached Beja. Barely had we rescued our luggage from the grip of the authorities—our saddle-bags proving so mysterious that we, as their owners, came in for much suspicious criticism—than we were accosted by a burly fellow of cut-throat appearance. Under his sombrero a yellow handkerchief was knotted round his temples; his dress was so patched that it would have gone hard with anyone to have told its original colour. His legs were swathed in cloth gaiters of a somewhat theatrical appearance, so adorned were they with tags and tassels, while his feet were encased in sandals made fast with leather thongs.

‘Are you the English gentlemen from Lisbon?’ said he.

We answered in the affirmative. He then informed us that his name was José, and that he had been sent by the Senhor Warden to guide us to Mertola, a distance of thirty odd miles by road.

‘We will start after you have lunched,’ continued José. ‘Follow me, Senhor Cavaliers, to a little inn at which I am

well known—they have the best wine in Mertola. It is not to be despised, I assure you.’

Talking volubly the while, he flung both our saddle-bags over his back as if they were bath towels and hustled us out of the station. His manner had a touch of gracious condescension; if there were any question of social inferiority, of a surety it lay on our side. José was a Portuguese; he owned mules, he was king of the road; he would have patronized the German Emperor and the King of England with the same impartiality with which he bestowed his patronage upon us, the most humble of their subjects.

‘You are prepared for brigands?’ he asked, pointing to our guns. For the first time I detected a note of admiration in his voice.

We denied the soft impeachment.

‘Why, then, these guns?’

We spoke of wild animals. José looked at us for a moment incredulously, then shrugged his shoulders with ill-concealed scorn.

‘But,’ I questioned, ‘game is to be found in Portugal?’

‘Game! Bah! There are, I am told, wild animals in the mountains’—and he jerked his head towards the south—‘but that does not interest me; had it been brigands now! *Deos!* that is fine sport; but all these guns to shoot four-footed vermin! Bah!’

We entered a long and narrow street, José and Hadow side by side, I treading closely in their footsteps.

‘I am surprised at you,’ I overheard Hadow remark. ‘You, who are a fine fellow, not to know more about the game of your country; that is very bad. Hein? Why, I, who have been in Portugal but once before, have shot both lynx and chamois, and I have heard tell of wolves.’

‘*Deos!* senhor,’ returned the muleteer, ‘that is all very well for you cavaliers, but for me it is different. I leave wolves alone, and pray the Blessed Virgin they may do the same by me. I have no time to think of such things—I think of mules.’

‘How many mules have you?’ inquired the Professor.

‘Five, senhor, but one is lame; it has been useless for ten days. I left it with a friend in Mertola. But here we

are, senhores ; this is the inn I spoke of. Do not forget to try the wine ; you will not regret it.'

So saying, José hurried to the kitchen, having first given us to understand that he would be ready to take the road at 3 p.m.

The innkeeper, a swarthy-looking fellow, received us with scant courtesy, in spite of José's recommendations, and the inn being full of soldiery, we were glad to snatch a hasty meal, after which we started to visit the castle.

'Not a bad old building this, Hein ?' said Hadow, beaming on the circle of ruins with the utmost approval.

'It's a splendid situation,' panted I, for the ascent had been steep. 'And *what* a magnificent view !'

'Extensive, yes. The Romans knew well how to choose fine sites for their castles. And, dear boy, is it not wonderful, all this was built A.D. 534 ? And look you only at that south gate, and, down to the west, at that fine aqueduct ; you would say they could not be older than one hundred years.'

We strolled hither and thither among the ruins, and finally seated ourselves upon a moss-covered wall—part of the outer line of fortifications. Sunshine deluged the scene. Far below us lay the roofs of Beja, and widespread towards the hazy distance the vast province of Alemtejo slumbered in the noonday warmth.

Hadow remained seated for one minute and a half, then, accusing himself of 'great laziness,' sprang to his feet and started on a tour of inspection. Pencil and note-book in hand, he measured distances, copied inscriptions, jotted down details, with as much enthusiasm and importance as though he had been personally engaged by the Romans to rebuild the entire castle. Every now and then he returned to me, for such was his sociable nature that to talk to a 'foolish and ignorant animal' was in his mind preferable to not talking at all. His phraseology was at times abusive, but I never dreamt of taking offence—it was Hadow. As a 'torpid reptile' I was swept off my feet with vituperation ; but as a 'dear boy' I returned to favour with smiles. My philosophic mind learned to dwell contentedly between these two extremes.

‘What think you of all this? You do not speak. Say, now, does it interest you, Hein?’ he demanded, after he had monopolized the conversation for a quarter of an hour by unpacking himself of a theory that accounted satisfactorily for the durable quality of Roman bricks.

I started.

‘Interest me? Yes, indeed it does. I think any ruin is interesting. What a pathetic storehouse of memories!’

‘*Ja wohl!* and of bricks,’ assented Hadow genially.

‘Bricks!’ I ejaculated. ‘Y-e-s, I suppose so. But think what this particular ruin has seen! what tales it might tell us of the days when Beja was no sleepy little town of Alemtejo, but a stronghold, bustling with all the pomp and circumstance of martial glory—the *Pax Julia* of the Romans, the headquarters of the Cæsars.’

‘It never was,’ grunted Hadow.

‘Think, my dear Professor,’ continued I, seizing his arm in my enthusiasm—‘think, if but one of these bricks could talk.’

He shook me off with a snort.

‘*Herr Gott!* silly animal! If you would learn to talk yourself it would be more to the point. What foolishness is this about bricks talking? As if bricks could talk! Ho! ho! ho!’

‘Hadow,’ said I sadly, ‘you are deficient in imagination.’

He laughed the louder.

‘I am sorry for you,’ I continued; ‘at all events, you must own that I am a richer man than you. You possess facts only, whereas I possess facts plus fancies.’

‘Bah!’ he retorted good-humouredly; ‘do not boast of a disease; every madman has fancies, and, I tell you, the madder they are—*Herr Gott!*—the more fancies they have.’

‘You appreciate fancies at times,’ I remarked. ‘You collected folklore in Norway, and in Spain, too, if I remember right.’

Hadow shrugged his shoulders, and began to fill the bowl of his large cherry-wood pipe.

‘*Das kann sein,*’ he assented, as he puffed out great volumes of smoke. ‘*Ja wohl, das kann sein;* but, dear boy, such tales are the foundations of history. I do not

collect them for their so foolish notions, but for the grain of truth that hides in each of them. Even foolish stories and superstitions are good. *Doch!* See, now, do they not trace out so fine, like a beautiful map, the intellectual progress of a people? Hein?’

‘Then you had no real interest in the stories as stories? You simply learnt them as you might learn a nonsense alphabet—if it happened to be the only book available—to aid you in learning a language?’

Hadow rubbed his hands together.

‘Bravo! that is good. You surprise me, dear boy; it is much to see sense, even if you do not possess it. Bravo! I have hope I will make a man of you yet: you have some faint glimmerings of intellect.’

‘Thank you, Professor,’ said I gratefully; upon which we both laughed, and, bidding farewell to the castle, descended to the town to keep our appointment with José.

We were nearly a quarter of an hour late, and reproached ourselves with our unpunctuality, but we had little reason to do so, for not a sign of our muleteer was to be seen. In vain we looked for him in the dilapidated shed which passed muster for the inn stables. There stood the mules, saddled and bridled for the road, but of their master there was no trace. While we stood in doubt as to what course to pursue, a squeal in a woman’s voice, followed by a stentorian laugh in a man’s, came from a loft overhead. We at once recognised the laugh.

‘José!’ we called.

‘Coming, my masters!’ shouted that individual, and two heads appeared in the opening above us. In a moment more José and his companion scrambled down the ladder and stood before us, convicted but unashamed.

‘You are very late, José,’ we remonstrated.

‘Bah!’ he ejaculated good-humouredly, picking scraps of hay from off his jacket. ‘We have still much time before us—there is no hurry. I was just making hay, and Teresa was assisting me—were you not, Teresa?’

Thus appealed to, the girl, who was a buxom lass with eyes as black as night, turned away with a giggle and ran into the inn.

The mules were then brought into the courtyard, and our saddle-bags securely fastened on the fore-peaks of the high Moorish saddles. We commented favourably on their appearance, and indeed, with their gay but faded trappings and musical bells, they were as picturesque a cavalcade as you could wish to see. José was touched—to praise his mules was to praise himself—were they not his children? Yet, with a rigid adherence to etiquette, he affected to disparage them.

‘Bah!’ said he; ‘they are good enough beasts, but at times they are devils: that gray one bit me last week. I tanned her little hide for it, I promise you. But they are good, as mules go. *Carramba!*’ And having sung this qualified praise, he kicked one of them on the stomach to make it stand still.

Off we trotted, our guns in our hands, for all the world like a cavalcade of brigands. A voice in our rear, raised in shrill farewell, caused us to look round. It was the unrepentant Teresa flinging a final salutation after her lover.

‘A fine woman that,’ observed José meditatively, and then, as neither of us commented on his remark, ‘*Carramba!*’ he added, ‘I should not be surprised if I married her one of these fine days.’

A lazy gendarme eyed our party with evident suspicion, but being reassured by our guide’s unmitigated patois, he wished us godspeed, and rejoined his comrades in the guard-room.

Our mules trotted right merrily along the road—not with the lusty abandon of a horse, but with a ‘sober daintiness of gait,’ as of three diminutive ladies dancing a minuet. Their twelve little hoofs kicked up a vast quantity of dust, which floated away behind us in a dense cloud. Our bells jingled out a merry peal of travel music, each brazen throat singing its song of the road. The sunshine blazed down upon us, but its heat was pleasantly tempered by the breeze which raced past. Our muleteer encouraged the animals both with voice and gesture. ‘Forwards, my little angels!’ he would cry in hoarse endearment, but, should one of them happen to stumble, his tone would change, and he would consign it to eternal punishment with a variety

of oaths. Possessed of a fair bass voice, he sang several songs, accompanying himself with the butt-end of his whip on the hindquarters of our mules. It resembled the beating of carpets, for, with every blow, a cloud of dust would arise, which, floating away, would join the larger cloud kicked up by the trotting hoofs. The mules, however, were accustomed to being treated as muffled drums, and, beyond a slight quickening of the pace, paid but little heed to their master's eccentricities. Thus was our journey enlivened both by conversation and song.

The country over which we passed was wild and unfrequented. Desolate moors stretched away on either side, over which our road wound like a coil of gray ribbon. Now and again a herd of swine would come into view—fierce-looking brutes, of a dark-red colour—herded by some uncouth peasant, who eyed us with a dull and meaningless stare till a turning in the road hid us from his sight. Imagine having to spend one's days the companion of swine! To be a prodigal son beyond all hope of redemption! Truly it is no life for a man.

It was seven in the evening before *Estalagem Nova* (New Inn) was reached. This is the half-way house between Beja and Mertola. It is but little better than a shed, and its position in the midst of these wide and desolate moors is one of intense loneliness. The innkeeper proved to be a connection of our guide's, and regaled us with home-made liqueur which was excellent in its way.

After our little steeds had been fed, we took again to the road; on, into the dusk, trot, trot, trot, with the shadows lengthening around us, and the glory of the sunset fading from out the western sky.

Unaccustomed as I had lately been to the saddle, I found myself growing weary. Hadow, however, by no means shared my feelings.

'Tired!' he exclaimed, 'with this very little ride! What nonsense! Why, it is nothing! I could sit this little four-legged mule by the week.'

'Hadow,' said I, 'you are unsympathetic! Have you never been tired, or ill, or anything, in fact, but as objectionably strong as a traction-engine?'

He shrugged his Atlantean shoulders.

‘Tired?’ he repeated meditatively. ‘No, never. But ill? Yes; once I had influenza, and some foolish person sent for a doctor; the animal gave me a bottle of medicine which I found was very bad for the geraniums: two of them died next day. Ho! ho! I had a narrow escape. However, I soon got well, and all the foolish people said: “*Ach*, what a clever doctor!” I did not contradict them.’

It was eleven o’clock and black night when we reached Mertola. At the inn we were disappointed in not obtaining news of Mr. Thomas Warden, the engineer from the San Domingo Mines, who was to accompany us on our expedition. I was all for supper and bed, but Hadow would not hear of pandering to our merely bodily necessities, so off we started on a wild-goose chase after the missing man. The innkeeper preceded us with a lantern. Without its aid we would have been utterly lost, as the streets were dark as Erebus and silent as the tomb. It was a weird experience. The landlord zigzagged in front of us like a huge firefly, while we followed blindly in his track. The feeble light danced on the uneven pavements, splashing the houses with momentary effect, then plunging them once more into even deeper obscurity. I stumbled along in a dazed and stupid condition. It is strange how curiously like another person one feels at such a time; one-half of me was reduced to the level of the brutes through hunger and exhaustion—seventeen hours’ journey, seven of them in the saddle, is enough to tire a man not above sharing the weaknesses of humanity—the other half was busy elsewhere, engaged principally, I believe, in composing seductive menus, yet, even in the midst of such congenial employment, it found time to commiserate its unfortunate twin brother and to breathe a word of encouragement into his ears.

‘Here is the house,’ said the innkeeper.

We were standing in a narrow street in front of a great door, ornamented with iron knobs, upon which the light from our lantern cast a fantastic glow.

‘The house of Senhor Vargas, agent for the San Domingo Mines?’ asked Hadow.

‘Yes, yes,’ returned the other. ‘I know it well. Let us knock.’

Suiting the action to the word, he lifted a heavy iron knocker, and the silent street re-echoed to his blows. An old woman opened the door, and, after much parley, introduced us into the presence of Senhor Vargas, from whom we learned that the Senhor Thomas Warden would, without fail, arrive in Mertola on the following day. This was satisfactory, so, bidding the senhor *boas noites*, we retraced our steps to the inn, and soon were regaling the inner man on poached eggs and black bread, washed down with some excellent wine that, to our thirsty palates, tasted of nothing so much as bottled sunshine.

CHAPTER III

EXPERIENCES, PICTURESQUE AND SOCIABLE

SUNSHINE ushered in the Sunday. It streamed into my room, and reproached me with lying so long abed. Up I sprang, and, crossing to the window, feasted my eyes on the view. Having arrived at Mertola under cover of the darkness, the beauty of its situation came to me as a delightful surprise. Rarely have I seen a town so picturesque, I might almost say so romantic. It recalled to mind tales read long ago of baronial strongholds girt about with ramparts, approached only across the insecure footing of a drawbridge. From my lofty position I could see its massive walls rising sheer from their foundations of solid rock. The roofs, red-tiled and all aglow in the early sunshine, were dominated by the ruins of a picturesque castle that fretted the morning sky with a dark line of battlements. Immediately below flowed the Guadiana—a broad and stately stream—while beyond rose range upon range of mountains receding into the blue distance.

We were seated at breakfast, when the door burst open and a stranger rushed into the room.

‘Hadow!’ exclaimed the newcomer, his face wreathed in smiles.

‘Warden, dear boy!’ cried Hadow in delight.

I was introduced, and looked with interest at Mr. Thomas Warden, in whose society we were to pass many pleasant wandering days. He was in his twenty-eighth year, fair hair and moustache, eyes of clear northern blue, and a lithe and active figure. Dressed in white duck trousers and an old navy-blue jacket, a flower in his button-hole, and

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MERTOLA.

geniality imprinted on his bright and morning face, his appearance had all the freshness of a breeze—one all but expected the table-cloth and window curtains to be stirred into sympathetic agitation. His was a nature that possessed the secret of inspiring confidence and even affection. The most taciturn found their tongues in his presence, and wondered afterwards wherein lay the charm which had drawn them out of habitual reserve. The charm lay in his exceeding naturalness and his cheery habit of looking on the bright side of life ; he was so much at home in your presence that it was but natural that you should feel equally at home in his.

‘Breakfast!’ exclaimed Warden. ‘Capital! I’ve only had one so far, and that was two hours ago. Eat a couple of eggs? I should think so. Nothing like morning air to give a man an appetite.’

‘We have expected you last night,’ said Hadow, as he plied him with eatables.

‘I know ; I intended to come, but I couldn’t get away from the mines. Capital coffee this. Did my friend José meet you at Beja?’

‘Yes ; the animal was waiting for us at the station.’

‘Good man ! The last time I commissioned him to meet some friend of mine he reached Beja two days late, and was surprised to find that they had left the platform. He said there was absolutely no hurry, and that Mertola had been a fixture ever since he could remember. Good fellow, José—one of the best, but, like his compatriots, he has curious ideas about the value of time. *Manaña*, as the Spaniards say ; with them the present is a preparation for a future that never comes.’

‘Dear boy, you grow philosophical,’ bantered Hadow.

‘Five years here has taught me that,’ answered Warden. ‘It was either philosophy or suicide. I chose the former. So we are all going to the Algarve, are we? That’s capital!’

‘But can you spare so much time?’ inquired Hadow.

‘Quite easily. Work is slack at present and one of the fellows has promised to take mine off my hands. There’s not a nicer part of Portugal than the Algarve. The moun-

tains are magnificent. But I expect you know it better than I do, Professor, eh ?’

‘*Ja wohl*, I have been there ; I have many dear friends. We will get on famously.’

‘I suppose we had better sail down this pleasant Guadiana to Villa Real and then work along to Faro?’ continued Hadow. ‘That is what I make to be our way.’

‘That’s it,’ rejoined Warden. ‘And then we come back to Mertola right across the mountains by Salir, Alte, Bartolemia, San Pedro, Quintan, and Mosquito to Pomarão. Oh, I looked it all out on the big Ordnance map at the mines !’

‘It will be a great expedition—*colossal* ! We will find many skeletons. *Hoch ! hoch !*’ chuckled Hadow, rubbing his hands and beaming on us out of the fulness of his heart.

Warden winked at me in great amusement.

‘I suppose you have become a convert to skeletons?’ said he.

I gave a laughing assent.

‘My friend Hadow,’ he continued, laying a hand affectionately on that worthy’s shoulder, ‘is a past-master in skeletons.’

‘Nonsense ! nonsense !’ chuckled Hadow in high delight.

‘Ah, but it’s true,’ continued Warden, still addressing me. ‘He took even me in once, the rascal ; he was so jolly and kind that I thought he really liked me for myself, and what do you think the fact of the matter was ? Well, he had discovered—I know not how—that I had a slight malformation of the left shoulder, and the ogre wanted it for his museum !’

‘Foolish talk, dear boy,’ said Hadow good-humouredly. ‘Now, as you have gorged your little carcass, let us all go to the castle. It is good to see, Hein ?’

‘Indeed it is,’ assented Warden. ‘And afterwards I will take you both to call on a friend of mine who I am sure will interest you.’

The ruined castle proved well worthy of a visit. As before mentioned it dominates the town, being built on the crest of the hill on the slopes of which Mertola is situated. The view that summer’s morning from the tower was magnificent, and

embraced a wide tract of country. Roman inscriptions were still legible, carved on the lintels of the doorways. Hadow translated them for us and waxed very learned, much to our edification. The murmur of the Guadiana reached us in faint pulsations as the breeze rose and fell. The broad stream flashed back the sunlight as though it ran over plates of silver, and away in the distant folds of the hills it glittered like a chain of jewels against the mist-draperies of the morning. A wide and unusual calm slept over the scene.

Descending from the castle hill we traversed the narrow and tortuous streets of the town. I recalled our lamplit walk of the previous evening, and marvelled at the joyous transformation wrought by the daylight. The white-walled houses were full of interest now: balconies overhung the road; the iron of their trellis-work, wrought into fantastic patterns, was often of great beauty. They gave an air of lightness to the sombre character of the architecture. One would imagine how, of an evening, bright eyes would peep over the topmost scroll, and little ears would listen for the music of the serenade. But such romantic episodes lurked only in the imagination, for though I looked long at them no sign of life was to be seen, not even through the slits of the outer Venetian blinds that jealously screened the windows.

We wandered on and on, picking our way over the large and uneven cobble-stones. Through dark and forbidding doorways, barred to the outer world by some ponderous wrought-iron gate, we caught sight of picturesque interiors, tiny courtyards ablaze with flowers, recalling to mind the sunlit *patios* of Spain. The shadows lay blue and cold, but every here and there some opening to the south allowed a shaft of sunlight to fall, and the advent of its appearance was as welcome as it was unexpected. Few passers-by were to be seen, the noonday hours—as in all Southern cities—being consecrated to the *siesta*. Yet, at times, we were obliged to stand aside to allow some cavalcade of mules laden with firewood from the mountains to jangle past. The muleteers, dark-looking fellows in dusty capes and large sombreros, walked alongside. Their hoarse

shouts and the cracking of their whips awoke the echoes. They made quite a stir of animation in the lifeless streets, and for long after they had passed I gave ear to the chime of the receding bells and the clatter, clatter of the many hoofs, till the distance stole the sounds from me.

The friend to whose house Warden conducted us was Senhor Vargas, our acquaintance of the previous evening. We found him within doors, and went through the ceremony of formal introduction. Hearing that Hadow was interested in antiquarian research, our host—himself an enthusiast—proposed that we should adjourn to the house of one of his friends—Senhor da Costa, renowned for his knowledge of all matters appertaining to bygone times. The senhor, a grave and learned gentleman of old-fashioned appearance, was discovered poring over a Latin inscription carved upon a block of granite. He peered up at us, blinking his eyes behind his horn spectacles, and ruffling his silvery hair with both hands. There was a dignified reproach in his manner, as of some venerable owl disturbed in its meditations. His house gave the incomer a delightful sensation of coolness; the whitewashed walls and the light matting laid over the woodwork of the floor came as a perceptible relief after the dusty roads and great heat of the outer world. No museum could have afforded greater pleasure to the connoisseur in antiquities than did the large airy apartment in which we were received. Turn where one would, the eye rested on objects both curious and interesting, relics of the past, and as one gazed at them the spirit of antiquity took the imagination prisoner. The view from the windows was glorious. The house was built into the outer wall of the town, the windows having the appearance of loopholes from which besiegers could be shot in a possible siege.

When he had recovered from his surprise, Senhor da Costa welcomed us with old-fashioned courtesy; his manner had all the dignity and polish which tradition teaches us to associate with the grandees of old Spain. With his hand on his heart he entreated us to consider him, his family, and all his worldly possessions as but existing to do us a service. It was but the honeyed tongue of flattery, and woe betide the man who was of a mind to take him at his word! They

have but one expression for such a fellow. They say, 'He has no shame.' His words, however, fell agreeably on the ears, and pleased us as much as though we could rely implicitly upon their veracity. Alas! however learned I may now appear upon the subject of Portuguese etiquette, my knowledge was dearly purchased, for in the house of Senhor da Costa I was put seriously to the blush, and for the moment appeared in their eyes as one 'who had no shame.'

It is extremely dangerous to admire any object appertaining to a Portuguese. You are at once requested—nay, implored—to consider it yours. Such is his apparent generosity that he hesitates on the brink of no sacrifice: his house, his horse, his most treasured possessions, change hands in the twinkling of an eye. They are yours before you know where you are. The only road out of the dilemma is to assure your host that you are utterly unworthy of such blessings. He will contradict you with heat, but do not despair; make yourself out to be a terrible fellow, a conscienceless rascal, a house-breaker, a horse-stealer! In the end you will succeed in convincing him that it is for the best that he should keep his own. You will lose his belongings, but you will gain his esteem, and, believe me, the latter is the sounder investment. Now, previous to our visit to Senhor da Costa, this canon of Portuguese etiquette had not been sufficiently impressed upon me—in fact, it had been left out of my education altogether. Hadow, too, in spite of past experiences in Portugal, had forgotten this national peculiarity; so that before Warden could interfere, we had embarked on a voyage of admiration that threatened to have serious consequences.

I was the first to transgress, for, catching sight of a sketch of Mertola in an olive-wood frame, I rashly remarked upon its beauty. It was at once presented to me. Hadow expressed his admiration of a valuable work on ancient Portuguese coins. In another minute it was his. We never dreamt of refusing. 'What delightful people!' we thought; 'how kind! how hospitable! and, above all, *how generous!*'

Solid gloom fell upon Senhor da Costa, but as he continued to press his property upon us we paid it no attention. Warden was in despair. His signs were disregarded, and,

all unconscious of the enormity of our conduct, we gaily trod the path that leads to worldly prosperity. The last straw fell when Hadow shamelessly accepted the skeleton of a fine baboon, a particular pet of our host's. Then Warden's soul rose in rebellion: luring us into a corner, he informed us what he thought of our behaviour. We were thunder-struck. I draw a veil over the next ten minutes. Eating humble pie is not an occupation that lends itself to cheerful description. Suffice it to relate that our characters were restored, and that, although poorer, we were distinctly wiser men.

Senhor Vargas and Senhor da Costa were Spaniards, but, out of compliment to Warden and me, the conversation was carried on entirely in Portuguese. Hadow was equally at home in either language. My command of Portuguese was limited; thanks, however, to having studied incessantly ever since the idea of our trip was first mooted, I was able to follow the general drift of conversation, and even to play a small part when occasion offered. Every day added to my stock of words, and under the apt tuition of my friends I was soon able to hold my own without disgracing my preceptors.

The two elderly Spaniards embarked on the dangerous waters of antiquarian discussion. They were, I doubt not, old antagonists, and in the habit of differing with regard to many of their discoveries, but to me their argumentative heat was disconcerting. So engrossed were they in their verbal engagement that we were entirely forgotten. Hadow listened to them with amusement; he twirled his great moustaches, his eyes twinkling with the humour of the situation. With a word he could have set them right, but as they were totally unaware of the presence of a greater antiquarian authority than themselves, he refrained from interference.

The object of their discussion was a remarkable animal discovered by Senhor da Costa in a recent excavation which he had conducted in the neighbourhood of Mertola. It was small, and of mouldy appearance; it possessed four rudimentary legs, a suspicion of whiskers, and two well-defined bumps on its forehead. The friends agreed that it was a

relic of the Bronze Age, but as to its family they could by no means come to an amicable understanding.

‘It is undoubtedly a goat,’ remarked Senhor da Costa.

‘It is distinctly a cat,’ asserted Senhor Vargas.

Hadow suppressed a chuckle.

‘Have you observed these?’ exclaimed Senhor da Costa in gentle triumph, laying a finger on the bumps.

‘Indeed I have,’ answered his friend. ‘I studied them closely with my magnifying glass; they are conclusive evidence in support of my theory.’

Senhor da Costa waved his hand.

‘Do not they prove to you, my dear friend, that it is a young goat? Are they not the budding promise of horns?’

‘Far from it,’ replied Senhor Vargas warmly. ‘These interesting bumps are without doubt bumps of locality, and to my mind incontrovertible evidence that it is a cat.’

‘Bah!’ ejaculated Senhor da Costa in good-humoured scorn.

The eyes of Senhor Vargas flashed with annoyance.

‘It is true,’ he cried, smiting the table with his fist. ‘Only listen to my theory, and I will convince you in two minutes. Cats in the Bronze Age, having to depend largely upon their knowledge of the country in order to follow the rapid movements of bronze mice—who were nomadic in their habits—possessed larger and more visible bumps of locality than are to be found on the craniums of felines at the present day.’

Hadow chuckled again.

‘I cannot agree with you,’ replied our host with heat.

Senhor Vargas shrugged his shoulders with an air of commiseration.

‘It is impossible to treat this affair too seriously,’ cried Senhor da Costa, ruffling his white hair with both hands. ‘For me it is a matter of principle. I stake my honour on these horns. I tell you, my dear Vargas, this goat——’

‘Cat!’ corrected his friend loudly.

‘Goat!’ shouted Senhor da Costa.

The two friends faced each other. There ensued a painful pause.

‘Senhores, senhores!’ interposed Hadow hastily, ‘I pray

of you to consider ! This little cat-like goat and goat-like cat, truly it is not worth so many words !'

In consequence of this diplomatic interruption, the adversaries cooled rapidly. Recalled to our presence, they were, I think, ashamed of having given vent to so much scientific heat. They betrayed a desire to become reconciled. Senhor da Costa offered his snuff-box with the most conciliatory of smiles ; Senhor Vargas, not to be outdone in generosity, took a pinch, saying in tones of conviction :

' My dear Da Costa, it is *very like a goat !* '

Peace being restored, an incident occurred that I cannot recall without a smile.

' Senhores,' said Senhor da Costa, addressing us in his kind and courteous manner, ' you are doubtless thirsty ?'

We pleaded guilty. The old gentleman rubbed his hands.

' Good ! How very fortunate that I have one bottle of it left !'

We beamed approval.

' Yes, yes,' continued our host, nodding his silvery head ; ' it must have been my good star that induced me to spare it for this occasion. It foresaw that one day I would have the honour of entertaining Englishmen.'

So saying, he ran out of the room. Senhor Vargas turned to us.

' I know not,' said he, ' of what wine my friend Da Costa speaks, but it must be very precious ; he has a fine taste in vintages, and an excellent cellar.' He sighed regretfully. ' Yes, a *most* excellent cellar !'

Our host returned, bearing a tray upon which were a bottle encased in cobwebs and five small wine glasses. His expression was a study in sensations ; justifiable pride, however, predominated. Our efforts not to take too visible an interest in those proceedings met with but scant success. Warden's eyes sparkled, Hadow licked his lips, and as for me, my throat of a sudden became parched as the sands of Egypt, and I was of opinion that nothing short of the Nile and all its tributaries could restore it to its normal condition.

Slowly and carefully Senhor da Costa filled the wine-glasses. The liquor was amber-hued ; a slight effervescence sparkled in its depths.

‘ Do me the honour, senhors, to accept of a glass.’

We pledged each other in silence. Where had I tasted that subtle flavour? It reminded me of—I knew not what. I looked at my friends. Hadow was knitting his brows. Warden gazed at the ceiling. Then my eye caught sight of the label, which the sleeve of our host had partially deprived of its dust; on it was written:

‘ *Bass and Co.’s Pale Ale* ’!

CHAPTER IV

WE JOIN OUR STEAMER

BEDROOMS were at a premium. A fair, or some other local excitement, had filled our inn to overflowing, and we three were obliged to share the same room. It was a small apartment, originally intended for a box-room, and our three beds filled it like the pieces of a Chinese puzzle. However, by dint of undressing in the passage and washing out of the window, which overlooked the main thoroughfare of the town; we made the most of the tiny space allotted to us. I grumbled at the discomfort, Hadow affected to be annoyed at the unusual luxury, and Warden treated the whole affair as a joke.

The day began with a somewhat gruesome episode. Hadow disappeared in the early gray of the morning with a canvas bag slung over his shoulder. We were, at that time, too sleepy to pay much attention to this eccentric proceeding; upon his return, however, with the bag distended to its uttermost, we questioned him closely. He sat on the edge of the bed and laughed.

‘What think you I have here, dear boys?’ chuckled he, patting the canvas bag with every sign of satisfaction. ‘Ha! you would never guess,’ he continued, as we shook our heads. ‘What say you to *bones*? Yes, I think the whole skeleton—a very fine specimen—bee-u-tiful!’ And he proceeded to lay out on the bed the osseous fragments of what had once been a human being.

It came out that, lighted by the lamp of science, he had visited a neighbouring graveyard, and unearthed one of its occupants. I confess to being shocked; but, then, I am, as

Hadow called me, a sentimentalist, and by no means a scientist. This array of pitiable memories, discoloured and earth-begrimed, affected my imagination unpleasantly. Had I seen them—as doubtless they now appear—properly articulated and white as ivory, occupying some glass case in Hadow's museum, I would have taken their uncoffined condition as a matter of course. But here, newly torn from their kindred dust!—mutely reproaching us from the bed! No, it was too horrible! It was like time meddling with eternity. Was death 'like all the rest a mockery'? Truly the skull appeared to be of this opinion, for, as it lay upon the bedclothes, it grinned at us with the fixed and mirthless merriment of the tomb.

Bidding farewell to the innkeeper, we started to join our steamer. I think our departure was considerably accelerated by a remark of Warden's, to the effect that he believed there existed a Portuguese vendetta, the sons and all male relations of a man whose grave has been violated being bound by oath to avenge him. I have never seen Hadow so near being alarmed. Understand me! I do not go so far as to say that he was afraid, but he examined his express rifle with interest, and bustled us out of the inn with a precipitancy which was nothing short of indecent.

The morning was, as usual, perfection.

'Who is that boy?' exclaimed Hadow suddenly.

We turned round. A small but sturdy specimen of the genus 'boy' marched behind us. He was dressed in extremes—that is to say, he wore a man's hat many sizes too large, and a boy's trousers many sizes too small—but as these extremes met in a jersey which fitted him surprisingly well, the effect of the whole costume was not as startling as might otherwise be expected. This diminutive voyager carried his travel-effects in a blue handkerchief with yellow spots, and, as he was treading closely upon our heels, appeared to be the natural tailing-off of our party.

'Who is that boy?' repeated Hadow.

'That,' said Warden, not without hesitation—'that is Pedro.'

'Pedro?' repeated Hadow. 'What Pedro?'

'My valet,' explained Warden.

'*Valet !*' shouted Hadow. Had you placed a *train de luxe* or an umbrella at his disposal, he could not have been more seriously annoyed. That Warden, whom he had oftentimes extolled to me as the essence of Spartan simplicity, should break out into a valet was a terrible blow. He eyed the valet grimly. That individual, blandly unconscious of hostile scrutiny, was visibly endeavouring to dispose of a mass of adhesive sweetmeat, that for the moment rendered him incapable of articulation. 'Where is your lady's-maid?' he growled, addressing Warden in tones of the deepest irony.

'I may find her later on,' replied Warden cheerfully.

Hadow laughed; it was impossible to resist Warden's good-humour. That delinquent took him by the arm, and said:

'Never mind, old man; I can faithfully promise you that Pedro will not add to the comfort of this trip. Besides, I really could not help it; I had to bring him—the fellows at the mines insisted on it.'

'Where did you pick him up?' I asked.

'In Pomarão; he is an orphan, and, to tell the truth, I was sorry for the lonely little chap; he attached himself to me like a stray dog.'

We had by this time reached the banks of the Guadiana. The little river steamer, moored to a buoy in mid-stream, looked a civilized and incongruous object compared with the feudal town and wild mountain scenery. A rowing-boat conveyed us on board, and soon we were sitting beneath the awning, in pleasant anticipation of the coming journey. There were numerous passengers. Warden, on the best of terms with all and sundry, joked with the girls, chatted with the old women, offered cigarettes to the men, and appeared to be a perfect savings-bank for copper coins, to the delight of the children. They all knew him, and his information concerning their domestic affairs verged on the miraculous.

'Ha, my best of mothers!' he would cry, addressing a stout peasant-woman, 'this is indeed pleasant; to see you always brings me luck. And how is my Marguerita this morning?'

A small and particularly dirty baby was held out for inspection. Warden made weird noises in his throat that afforded Marguerita food for serious thought. The mother was delighted.

There were two ladies on board—typical Southerners—stout and lazy, with scarce energy sufficient to wield the large fans that took the place of hats and parasols. Attired in black, with lace mantillas draped over their heads, they formed objects of interest to the masculine eye, but, for my part, I could well have dispensed with the thick powder with which they had covered their faces. They sat very near to each other, conversing in undertones, and occasionally breaking into a merry laugh that came pleasantly to the ear. Although affecting to be unconscious of our presence yet at times the dark eyes would peep at us over the fan-rims with an interest which their fair owners were unable to conceal.

To my gratification, Warden discovered that he was acquainted with them. They received him with smiles and a gentle flutter of fans.

‘Introduce us,’ I whispered, interrupting a ramble in the flowery fields of compliment.

‘Certainly. Doña Julia, Doña Fausta, permit me to introduce to you my friends,’ etc.

Hadow clicked his heels, and bowed *à la Heidelberg*. The ladies were visibly touched. I seated myself beside Doña Julia.

‘Do you live in Mertola?’ I asked, by way of starting conversation.

‘Just Heaven!’ she cried in French. ‘No; I come from Seville.’

‘It is celebrated for beautiful ladies and—and fine oranges,’ said I, with a bow.

She smiled.

‘*Et vous, monsieur*, what do you here?’

I threw out my hands.

‘*Mon Dieu, madame!* I travel. I am a bird of passage. Nothing delights me so much as to see the beauties of other countries.’ And I bowed to her with all the grace at my command.

Doña Julia was visibly flattered.

'*Mais, dites moi, monsieur*, how comes it that you are English?'

'A mere accident of birth,' I said lightly.

'But the English men are so cold, so—so unappreciative; where, then, have you learned to say these pretty things?'

'My father travelled in Spain,' I answered gravely.

Doña Julia beamed on me with ever-increasing approval.

'Have you been long in Portugal?' I inquired, after a pause.

The lady sighed.

'Not long, if you count the weeks,' she said mournfully, 'but to me years. You know, monsieur'—here she leant forward, and we retired behind the fan—'we Spaniards love not the Portuguese; to us the very name of Portugal spells banishment from our own beautiful fatherland.'

I murmured my sympathy, and then, after a discreet interval, we rejoined the outer world.

Scraps of Hadow's conversation reached us from time to time.

'*Est-ce possible?*' cried Doña Fausta, in tones of horror.

'The bones may be larger, madame,' asserted Hadow in French, 'but you will find upon comparing them with those of the present day that the species has not materially altered.'

At that moment we were all startled by loud cries.

'Pedro!' exclaimed Warden, and he disappeared in the direction of the engine-room.

It appeared that the irrepressible youth had been riding on the piston-rod when the engines, giving one revolution, had shot him into an oil-tray. The engineer extracted him with excusable violence from his dangerous position, but for days we were reminded of the escapade by the insufferable smell of machine oil. We began to sympathize with the engineers who had expelled him from the mines.

As we glided down-stream, Mertola struck us as even more imposing viewed from the river than when seen from the shore. High above the sea of surrounding houses the ruined castle stood out trenchant and clear. Less boldly prominent, but still a notable landmark, a white-walled building of

monastical appearance caught the sunlight. The high outer walls, broken at intervals by some dwelling resembling a watch-tower, hedged the town about with jealous care. Two or three houses had escaped its vigilant circumference, and stolen unperceived to the river-bank, where they had established themselves within touch of the rushing water. I should not wonder if they paid dearly one day for their temerity. The Guadiana asserts herself at times with a violence which strikes terror into the hearts of the most courageous. High up within the town affixed to one of the houses is a marble slab ; upon it are written the following words, their very simplicity fraught with horror : ' To this spot rose the waters of the Guadiana on the terrible night of 7th December, 1867.'

Nothing tells more clearly the tale of Mertola's past, of her dread of surprise, of her struggle for existence, than her mode of communication with the outer world. The only means of ingress and egress, as seen from the river, is a bridle-path—so narrow that no two mules can traverse it abreast—which winds upwards to the town. Its position is precarious, for on the one side is a precipice, while on the other the frowning walls rise sheer to a height of some forty feet. The entrance-gate to which this path leads is of enormous strength and protected by a ponderous drawbridge.

Our last impression of the town is one which I shall never forget. There it lay, literally steeped in sunshine—picturesque beyond words. But that which impressed me most, and which imparted a sense of unreality to the scene, was the fact that, although the day was well advanced, no sign of life was to be discerned. The air was clear ; every detail stood out within the eye of the morning ; yet so silent was it, so apparently deserted, that it might have been the abode of the dead, or, more happily, some enchanted city 'asleep in lap of legends old.' Yes, that pleased me. The ruined castle contained some sleeping Princess, invisible to mortal eyes, and the huddle of sunlit houses was but silent and still out of tender and loyal sympathy.

We glided onwards ; a turning of the river hid even the castle from us. And so, farewell to little Mertola.

CHAPTER V

DOWN THE GUADIANA TO VILLA REAL AND FARO

THE banks of the Guadiana, high and precipitous in the neighbourhood of Mertola, gradually decreased in size as we neared the sea. From bold and rocky headlands they deteriorated to a succession of sand-hills. Along their margin, where the water laved their shifting base, clumps of cane grew luxuriantly, the feathery foliage all a-quiver in the morning breeze. The river ran with a slow, deliberate movement, neither retarding nor accelerating its pace—a stately advance befitting the dignity of so important a stream; for was it not a national landmark of no little interest—the boundary-line between Spain and Portugal?

The scenery oppressed me. Had I been alone, it would have haunted me like a nightmare. I could imagine no worse fate than to be stranded on one of those sand-hills, without knowing whither to turn for assistance. But travel scenery has this peculiarity—it is unreal; it is composed of the stuff that dreams are made of; even as we see it it vanishes; and when we are most engrossed, it is already far astern. The imagination alone can stray at will among the scenes that smile at us from afar—can foot it towards the distant town, or bask awhile upon the sun-steeped bank.

It is a dead and dreary region, full of loneliness and monotony; the sand shifts and the reeds rustle, and perchance a seabird comes on expanded wings to spy out the poverty of the land, and then, finding it even poorer than he anticipated, wheels in the still air, and is off in search of happier hunting-grounds.

And yet this 'dark Guadiana' has been the spectator of stirring times :

' Whilome upon his banks did legions throng
Of Moor and knight, in mailèd splendour drest :
Here ceased the swift their race, here sunk the strong ;
The Paynim turban and the Christian crest
Mix'd on the bleeding stream, by floating hosts opprest.'

But now this is all over and done with ; the Guadiana has probably forgotten all about it, for long ago she carried the tale to the ocean, and it became one of the songs that the sea sings to all who give ear to her music.

Our little steamer paddled noisily in mid-current ; insignificantly important, its miniature bustle contrasted with the calm and unaltered movement of the water, for the river heeded it no more than if it had been a gnat disporting itself on a summer's evening.

It was strange to think that away to our left, over the barren dunes, lay Spain—the land of romance—as alluring to the imagination as some volume of chivalry. I confess to drawing a deep breath as I gazed with half-closed eyes away over the sunlit plains to where the mountain ranges of the interior met the blue dome of sky. Spain—there was witchery in the very name ! Was it not the land of Cortez and Pizzaro, of Carmen and Don Quixote, of Mantilla and Serenade ? I know not what lit my thoughts with so romantic a glow, unless, indeed, it were the presence of Doña Julia. I turned from the contemplation of sand-hills to gaze at the marble of her complexion, and seemed to behold the white walls of Seville all aglow in the sunlight. She, worthy soul, passed her time principally in consuming oranges, a delicate tribute of affection to the chief export of her native city. She was full of the milk of human kindness ; a little cream of tender personality had collected on its surface, and I enjoyed the light occupation of skimming it off. She seemed to me the personification of every virtue that ladies are heir to—both inherited and acquired. She promised to send me her photograph, and I swore never to forget her. Neither promise was kept. And yet, why should I thus unjustly accuse myself ? My promise has not altogether been broken, for whenever my thoughts

stray, as at times they do, to the Guadiana, the memory of that sunlit morning smiles at me, and the lady of the white face and black eyes awakes a sigh for the days that are no more. Many fine things have been written about youth, but no pen can sufficiently eulogize its sublime powers of self-deception, its enviable faculty of seeing only what it desires, its capacity—as in my case—for discovering Perfection lurking under violet-powder, and Romance beckoning from an atmosphere of Seville oranges.

It was hard upon two o'clock when Villa Real came into sight. It is a straggling and squalid town, lying low, within sound of the sea. Our steamer came to anchor at the distance of a dozen yards from the shore. We clustered to the vessel's side, and gazed at the crowd whom the interest of our arrival had summoned to the banks.

'There is neither landing-stage nor boat,' I remarked. 'Villa Real appears to be somewhat primitive.'

'That is so like Portugal!' said Warden, with a laugh. 'To my certain knowledge it is at least five years since they decided to set up a landing-stage, and, as yet, it has not even been begun! We are forced to get upon the backs of these fellows.' And he pointed to a dozen men who came wading out to meet us.

'I do not approve of this,' objected Hadow; 'to make such use of a man is too luxurious. Have not I two legs? Are they afraid of cold water? *Nein; Gott Bewahr!* I will go alone.'

So saying, he divested himself of shoes and socks, and, rolling his trousers well above the knee, lowered himself over the vessel's side. A shout of indignation greeted him. The professional waders resented this encroachment upon their time-honoured prerogative. I am of opinion that such a performance was unprecedented in the annals of Villa Real.

The ladies of the party were as averse to such a mode of landing as was the Professor.

'*Quel pays barbare!*' cried Doña Julia. 'Do you imagine, monsieur, that I will trust myself to the arms of a man? *Mais non; jamais de la vie!*' And her fan fluttered with outraged propriety.

‘It is but for a few minutes,’ I said consolingly. ‘You can shut your eyes.’

‘*Non ! non ! non !* that would make no difference. I should feel his odious arms around me. *C’est insupportable !* If it were a Spaniard, now, I would have shame, but it would not be so bad.’

‘Or an Englishman ?’ I inquired.

She flashed her dark eyes on me with a smile.

‘*Un Anglais ! quel idée !* But where is one who would undertake the task ?’

‘You see him before you, madame !’

She struck at me playfully with her fan.

‘*Méchant !* you are not serious ; *et puis, voyez vous.* I am too fat ; you would let me fall ; I should drown. *Mon Dieu !* I am horribly afraid !’

I ran my eyes over her ample proportions ; my heart mis-gave me. The situation was serious, for had it not become an affair of honour ? I had left no opening for retreat.

‘Doña Julia,’ said I with solemnity, ‘did you learn history at your school ?’

‘*L’histoire ?*’ she repeated doubtfully. ‘*Mais oui, monsieur.*’

‘Then you must remember that what an Englishman lays his hands on he never relinquishes.’

‘*Que vous êtes drole !*’ she giggled.

‘My one difficulty, I explained, will be, not, as you imagine, to prevent you falling, but to unclasp my arms when we reach shore.’

Doña Julia rippled with laughter.

‘I advise you to take that man, Doña Julia,’ said Warden, pointing to one of the waders. ‘I know him well ; he will be very careful.’

The lady clasped her hands.

‘But I am too frightened,’ she cried. ‘I will drown !’

‘There is no need for alarm,’ soothed Warden ; ‘and as for drowning, it is impossible. Should you fall in, the water will barely reach your——’

‘Monsieur !’ exclaimed Doña Julia, interrupting him in tones of the most painful apprehension.

Warden all but blushed.

'I assure you,' he said earnestly, 'I——'

'Not another word, monsieur, I pray you; *mais, dites moi*, is there no other way than this? *J'ai peur, horriblement peur. O mon Dieu!*

The cries, the shrieks, the lamentations that arose would have entirely misled the uninitiated observer; the 'Rape of the Sabines' would have been the only parallel catastrophe to which he might have likened it. A heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving for my deliverance escaped my lips as I watched their progress towards the shore.

Doña Fausta was no whit behind her friend in obstreperous behaviour. The crowd were convulsed with merriment. Upon the bank we bade the ladies a tender farewell. They were sadly dishevelled and quite out of breath.

'*Adieu, monsieur, et bon voyage,*' panted Doña Julia, laying a little plump brown hand in mine. 'Never again will I believe that all Englishmen are unappreciative.'

'Let them but hold this little hand and look into these great eyes,' said I gaily, 'and, *Sapristi!* I defy even an Englishman to be unappreciative.'

'Flatterer!' she gurgled, '*mais je vous pardonne, vous m'êtes très sympathique. Adieu, où plutôt, au revoir.*'

'*Au revoir,*' I echoed; and, with a final pressure of the yielding fingers, I ran after my companions.

The afternoon was well advanced, and much of our journey lay still before us. We had arranged to sleep at Faro, distant a matter of thirty miles from Villa Real. Considerable difficulty was experienced in obtaining carriages to accommodate our party. Thanks to the interest and energy displayed by Mr. Parkinson, one of Warden's friends, Villa Real was ransacked from end to end, and we inspected the result from the doorstep. A nondescript trap drawn by two mules, a venerable tricycle, and a small bicycle of the description known as 'bone-shaker,' were all that could be mustered. The owner of the tricycle demanded higher payment than did the possessor of the bicycle.

'Look,' said he, 'at the extra wheel; what an advantage that is, to be sure! It is like having three legs.'

Our departure was witnessed by a large crowd. Indeed, I think as soon as the news of our arrival had spread, few, if

any, of the good people of Villa Real remained within doors.

Our presence caused quite a stir of excitement in the sleepy little town ; it shook itself into temporary animation before it sank back once more into the land of dreams—the country of procrastination.

Away we drove, followed by a chorus of farewells. The vehicle held but two people in addition to the driver, so that we were forced to take it in turns to ride the tricycle, the 'bone-shaker' being given over to Pedro. Many a laugh did the little fellow's performance afford us. He rode it in hot haste, and managed to coax a wonderful amount of speed out of its ancient and noisy wheels. Whenever he spoke or was spoken to he invariably fell off, and, as Pedro was of a most sociable nature and much addicted to conversation, the result can better be imagined than described.

Dust rose in clouds and floated away behind us. Trees, hedges, and even occasional wayfarers were covered with a dust-mantle that shone white in the sun.

We stopped twice in order to change mules. Night surprised us long before we reached our destination. The latter part of our journey lay along a dark and desolate road bordering upon the sea.

It was hard upon midnight before Faro came into sight ; our wheels clattered over the cobble-stones, but the inhabitants of the benighted town were all abed ; not a living soul was to be seen. The 'night-porter' of the inn (how ironical the term ! for he slept with such goodwill that we put near a quarter of an hour to awakening him) was at length prevailed upon to unbar the door. His red night-cap and guttering candle lighted the dark entrance with picturesque effect. Supper was declared to be beyond recall, the servants having retired for the night ; so we made the best of a bad job, and, climbing the narrow staircase, betook ourselves to bed.

CHAPTER VI

FARO

THE heat of that day spent at Faro haunts me still. Later on we were several thousand feet nearer the stars, and had all the breezes of heaven to keep us company; but in that furnace called Faro, stranded at sea-level, with never a tree to fling the hem of its shadow over us, we felt it terribly.

In spite of the sweltering atmosphere, I summoned up sufficient energy to wrestle with Portuguese verbs. My studies in the language, though irregular, were always carried on with much goodwill and a great desire to master its difficulties. My experience is that more than half the difficulties are overcome by an honest appeal to the senses. The spirit may be willing, but the weakness of the flesh calls for encouragement. I pandered to mine cheerfully. I consulted my carnal barometer before I opened the book. To be more explicit, I found much consolation during these blazing morning hours in conjugating the verb to freeze. 'I am freezing' came as pleasantly to the ear as the tinkle of falling water. It reminded me of all the delights of winter, and I came near to imagining myself powdered with snowflakes.

'The mind is its own place'—this habit of mine has oftentimes stood me in good stead. I remember on one mournful occasion, when I would have given worlds to have said with truth, 'I am loved,' Philosophy whispered, 'Thou mightst have been loved,' and Hope chiming in with 'Thou mayst be loved,' I took my two comforters by the hand and made a fresh start.

When I had sufficiently frozen myself, I became conscious

of a growing hunger, so without loss of time I attacked the verb 'to eat.'

'I *will* eat,' cried I aloud.

I had no sooner spoken these words than the door opened and Pedro peeped in.

'Where is it?' he questioned.

'What?' inquired I.

'That which you eat,' he explained, immensely interested.

His eyes roved round the room. There was a want of imagination about Pedro. When he understood that it was a species of new game patented by myself, he offered to join me, but he never recovered from his first disappointment sufficiently to treat the matter with any degree of hopefulness. Our studies proceeded after this fashion :

'Let us eat, Pedro,' I began.

'I could eat,' he answered with conviction.

'We *are* eating,' I quoted joyfully.

'I might be eating,' he retorted gloomily.

'We *have* eaten,' I said with satisfaction.

But that was too much for poor Pedro, and he rushed from my imaginary banquet in a condition bordering on tears.

Hiring a boat, we spent the afternoon in exploring the bay.

Between the town and the sea lies a swamp of many miles in extent. At high water this wide expanse is covered by the incoming tide, but, as the water recedes, numberless sandbanks rise into sight. These are black in colour, and are formed by a species of spongy clay or mud, possessing qualities akin to a quicksand. Intersecting the sandbanks are labyrinthine watercourses through which the tide ebbs out to the sea. The appalling desolation and hideousness of this wide expanse, lying waste beneath the blue of the sky, must be seen to be realized; words are inadequate to convey a truthful idea of the depression that wraps it round as with a mantle.

We rowed to and fro, but no signs of life were to be seen. On a promontory we sighted a deserted village. We learned from Warden that it had once been occupied by tunny-fishers, but that owing to the falling off of the trade it had long since been abandoned. The ruined houses—dark and

forlorn—harmonized with the sadness of the scene. We lay on our oars and discussed them in whispers. The silence was oppressive. One sound alone broke on the stagnant air—the hoarse boom of far-off waves. It had a melancholy and monotonous fall—the very spirit of a dirge.

The sunset that evening took us by surprise. It was a transformation scene. The more apparently unattractive a landscape, the better it lends itself to the witchery of atmospheric effect. Swamps possess this power to a marked degree. They regain their pristine loveliness at the first stroke of the sunset's wand—the unsightly becomes beautiful, desolation flames into glory. And yet, it was not a beauty that appealed to calm and peaceful thoughts. No ; there was something awful in the lurid transfiguration. The great sun, hull-down on the horizon, might well have been some huge vampire sucking into itself the light and vitality of the world. The very creeks ran blood, the very air flamed with sanguinary reflection. And as the world felt the tide of its strength ebbing thus irresistibly sunwards, it grew grayer and grayer, more and more ghostly, till it sank at last to its twilight grave and night fell, solemn and sad, over land and sea.

CHAPTER VII

WE SEEK TO ENLIST RECRUITS

LOULÉ was our next halting-place. The town lies distant from Faro a matter of seven miles. Our cavalcade started in high spirits. The muleteer, who strode in front, carolled love-songs of old Portugal with all the strength of his lungs. Warden, who brought up the rear, executed gay solos upon a tin whistle. I have not had previous occasion to mention this accomplishment of Warden's, but gratitude forces me to confess that his tin whistle contributed in no small degree to the success of our trip. Deprived of its tuneful presence, our travelling days would have lost much of the jollity which otherwise distinguished them. It is wonderful how a merry tune puts heart into a man, how it shortens the long road, and makes us forget the tired body. To see Warden astride of his mule—I say astride, but encamped would be a more accurate term, for he occupied its back as though it were a plain of considerable dimensions, it being a matter of indifference to him whether he peeped between the ears or overlooked the tail—to see him, as I say, upon his mule with red face and eager lips, discoursing some world-worn air, was a mental tonic to us all. To hear the merry notes shaking themselves out into the sunlight set our blood a-dancing in very sympathy. Even the mules fell under the influence of the tin whistle; 'Annie Laurie' got into their legs at once, and the musical information that the 'Campbells were coming' made them brisk forwards at such a rate that you would swear they were mulishly determined to avoid an introduction. These to us were songs of the 'open road,' they spoke of all the joys of travel, hackneyed

and indifferently played though they were ; yet for my part I cannot hear one of these old tunes now without a feeling akin to heartache, for they set me dreaming of those marches in the early morning, of the sunlight and the breeze, of the fairyland of expectation, of the wonderland of reality.

The love of travel is indeed an incurable disease, and if, as was the case with me, it steals into the hot blood of your youth, Heaven help you ! While life lasts you will never be a free man again.

What is it that torments us when in the cold gray of our Northern homes we read of the sunny South, the magical East, the lands that lie in the very eye of the sunlight ? Is it not this travel-sickness ? Oh, these golden lands of travel ! how they allured me in the days of my boyhood ! And now that I am older, how they allure me still, calling to me across the seas that separate us with voices that awake the very echoes of desire ! Haunted by their voices I attempted once to put the longing that possessed me into words. One verse came near to expressing my thought, for it spoke of travel-sickness as—

‘ Dreams of grown-up childhood,
Visions of the night ;
When existence seemeth gray,
Narrowing in the appointed way ;
Whispers o’er a syren sea,
Calling you, and calling me,
Out into the light.’

Out into the light ! Ay, there you have the very kernel of the matter, and when I think of the sun-steeped sands of the desert, of the Spanish main, of the coral islands of the Pacific, I am filled with fear lest the time should come for me to die before I am permitted to visit them.

There is a delightful anecdote related of a French *curé*. He was a very old man. A friend accosted him once in some Eastern city. ‘ How comes it,’ inquired the friend, ‘ that at your time of life you travel thus far from home ? ’ ‘ My son,’ replied the old man, ‘ for nigh seventy years I lived at N——’ (mentioning a little village in Northern France), ‘ doing, I hope, a little good, but seeing nothing of the great world. One day I fell ill, and in my dreams I

fancied that I was summoned before my Maker. "And what," said the good God to me—"what think you of the beautiful world in which I permitted you to live?" "O Lord," I replied, "I have seen but little of it. For seventy years, as Thou knowest, I lived at N——" And the good God answered me thus: "Go back," said He, "to the beautiful world, and this time do not fail to visit many lands. Was it for nothing that I shaped it after My own heart and made it beautiful beyond words?" And so, continued the old *curé*, 'I travel always—whenever I have a little money—and I have seen already many lands.'

As we journeyed onwards our eyes rested on the mountains. To us they were the delectable mountains, the goal of our desires, for were not our caves concealed in one of these wild ridges that raised itself so boldly against the morning sky?

At Loulé we found rooms in an inn situated in the principal street of the town. We stayed there but one night, our object being to purchase stores against our intended sojourn in the caves. The entire afternoon was spent in making purchases, and after several hours of exhausting argument we found ourselves possessors of the following necessary articles: Tinned sardines, three iron forks, ditto spoons, ditto cups, several cooking dishes, and a large blanket rug apiece in which to wrap ourselves at night. Not an extensive or luxurious outfit, but were we not travelling with Hadow? Warden, to whose firmness we owed the intrusion of the sardines, had much difficulty in carrying his point. Hadow made ironical suggestions relating to 'nightingales' tongues' and other far-fetched delicacies, but Warden stuck to his sardines in a way that aroused my gratitude. Hadow was forced to yield. We also became owners of a number of implements to be employed in excavating the caves, viz., spades, pickaxes, baskets, etc. The acquiring of these few and simple objects took not only much time, but very considerable powers of conversation. Each article was haggled over, and by the time our equipment was complete we were both hoarse and exhausted. But all this was as nothing compared to the difficulties that beset us when we attempted

to engage the services of Portuguese workmen. We might have been recruiting-sergeants in a hostile country, we were looked upon with such evident suspicion. A crowd of no inconsiderable size dogged our footsteps—their faces menaced us at every turn. At this crisis Warden was a tower of strength; he rose to the occasion nobly. His command of epithets surprised even those who knew him best. He addressed the mob in racy, nervous Portuguese. He might have been a Parliamentary candidate disputing a desperate seat, for he tried every trick of the trade. He cajoled, he flattered, he perjured himself frequently, he menaced, he abused, he lashed them with irony, he transfixed them with epigram. To hear him you would have imagined that he was inviting a select party of Israelites to enter the Promised Land—our rocks ran wine, our caves overflowed with milk and honey. And were they convinced? By no means. They were steeped in prejudice. ‘Caves!’ quoth they; ‘What caves? Who has heard of such caves? Old Pedro who brings wine from over the mountains has not even heard of them, and if anyone knew, it would be Pedro, for has he not traversed the ranges for the last fifty years? Where was Pedro? He would tell us himself; ay, that he would.’ Pedro, being produced, thanked his God that he had other and saner occupations than looking for caves, which, in his estimation, were the abode of evil spirits, otherwise, ‘*why were they so dark?*’ He said this triumphantly, looking round him with the air of one who has scored a point. ‘Was it not well known that devils and such unholy vermin’—here he crossed himself—‘loved darkness rather than light?’ A hoarse murmur of assent rose from the crowd. Warden wiped his face, but Pedro had not done with him. What, inquired the old man, frowning at us—what wanted we with caves? It was well known—had he not seen himself?—that we had bought spades, pickaxes, and other mysterious objects. That was suspicious. There were no vineyards to be tilled in the mountains—wine must be brought from far—up there it was all rocks. Could one dig rocks? No, no; we were clearly to be avoided. Shaking his gray head, he washed his hands of us. We were in despair.

Help came from an unexpected quarter. The similarity of his name with that of our chief persecutor so moved Pedro minor to remorse that he began to bestir himself in our behalf. He had, he informed us, an uncle living in Loulé; he proposed to visit him and seek his advice as to the best course for us to follow. Warden gave his consent, and away sped Pedro in search of his relative. Late that evening he returned accompanied by not one, but four men! Our first impression was that Pedro had discovered a colony of uncles, and our hearts sang a pæan of praise in eulogy of the prolific clan of Pedro; but he explained in great glee that with the assistance of his relative he had induced these noble senhores to enter our service. The senhores were unmistakably nervous, and the meeting—seen by the light of a smoky oil lamp—presented the appearance of a conspiracy. How they talked! They harangued Warden, argued among themselves, appealed occasionally to Pedro. It was interminable. I lay on an apology for a sofa and listened drowsily. I must have slept, for I remember suddenly becoming conscious that the workmen had left the room, that Warden and Pedro were shaking hands, and that Pedro's yearly salary was to be augmented by a microscopic rise. I grasped the situation. Providence chooses humble tools to work out her inscrutable ends. Geese saved the Capitol, Pedro rescued us—beautiful analogy!

Talk no more, O Hadow, of the unpardonable crime of possessing a valet! Was not this Pedro's *apologia pro vita sua*? Were we not, thanks to his small person, to march on the morrow with full ranks and light hearts to the conquest of the caves?

CHAPTER VIII

WHERE ARE THE CAVES ?

DAWN glimmered over the mountains, mist lay along the valleys ; Nature, like some coy wood-nymph, was taking advantage of the early hour to indulge in a dewdrop bath. We came upon the goddess unawares, and gazed Acteon-like at the freshness of her beauty ; but at the first indication of our presence she melted away, dissolving with pleasing metamorphosis into the loveliness of her inanimate children. But we were not thus easily deceived ; had we not seen the hem of her mist-mantle as she flitted before us ? Were not her eyes in the flowers—her smiles in the sunbeams ?

We had stolen out of Loulé at an early hour to escape from the hostile criticism of its inhabitants. In our capacity of cave-hunters we awoke suspicion, and we knew not to what lengths their misguided zeal might lead them. They might even convince themselves that they would be discharging a religious duty in stoning us ; and as the streets of their inhospitable town lent themselves but too well to such a performance, we judged it wiser to embrace discretion and travel betimes.

We made an imposing procession, as, counting our muleteer, we mustered nine of a party.

At first we kept to the track that had conducted us out of Loulé, but as the direction it followed did not satisfy our muleteer, we quitted it for a rough path that struck to the right. We had by this time rounded several spurs, and were sensibly nearing the mountains. The blue of the summer morning clothed them as with a mantle ; they were but a deeper note in the azure gradation that melted into the

ethereal blue of the sky. The Divine Artist had but given them a second wash of heavenly cobalt, with a gleam of gold on the uplands and a suspicion of purple where the valleys receded into shadow.

Bold and barren as the Sierra de Monchique appeared on our first acquaintance with them, yet our more immediate surroundings were softened and rendered beautiful by a vegetation almost tropical in its luxuriance. Fig, plum, and olive trees grew in clusters along our route, giving the country the appearance of a wild and much-neglected orchard ; while at intervals groves of cane lent a peculiarly foreign aspect to the scene. Our path lay along the banks of a little brook ; the noise of its waters tinkled pleasantly on the ear. Its course was overhung by a dense growth of flowering oleanders that grew to a height of seven to eight feet. Through these we were obliged to force our way—a labour attended by no little difficulty, as the path, being seldom traversed, the oleanders grew in wild and wayward entanglement. The difficulty increasing as we advanced, we dismounted and led our mules. As the oleanders crashed before the strokes of our muleteer, the startled denizens of the miniature forest fled in alarm. A kingfisher wheeled to the left with sudden cry, and, seeking the sunlight, sped down-stream, a flame of indignant blue ; a hare that had been dozing in some leafy covert sprang to its feet and vanished at racing speed, its long ears laid level with the working muscles of its back. The air was hot and stagnant ; there was a sad want of ventilation in that oleander world ; one could not but think that the atmosphere had been unchanged for weeks. The advent of our coming, brutal as it must have appeared to flowers and animals, did a kind and salutary service to the little forest ; it opened windows overhead through which the sunlight and the breeze could wander at will.

Leaving the oleanders behind, we struck upwards. The path had by this time vanished—lost in the mazes by the brook—and we were obliged to trust to the hillside and to seek assistance in the undeveloped bump of locality possessed by our muleteer. Both misled us. Even the instinct of the brute creation was at fault. That popular fallacy failed us

completely. The St. Bernard dog may support the delusion when he carries refreshments to the snowed-up voyager, but the Portuguese mule lost among his native hills is as hopelessly at sea as a ship without a compass ; *he* carries nothing but consternation to your heart. If we had taken his advice, we would have remained seated even unto this day. The experiences of that morning proved a severe test to mulish character ; we weighed him in the balance, and found him wanting. But, no ; I do him wrong. He is hardy and sure-footed, but you are apt to lose sight of these excellent qualities when you find yourself confronted by such objectionable vices as laziness and obstinacy. Obstinacy, by the way, should be written in large capital letters ; no printer, however, can supply letters of sufficient size to show this characteristic in its true and glaring light.

To lead a mule up the face of a mountain savours of insanity ; it is a peculiarly disagreeable form of nightmare. I would go far to escape from another such experience. Imagine the situation. There you are—he at one end of the bridle, you at the other. In front of you is a rock, one of the million that await you. Slipping your arm through the reins so as to leave your hands at liberty, you scale it, and, turning round, endeavour to persuade your mule to follow you. And does he respond ? By no means. He feigns not to see you. He appears to be entirely engrossed with the scenery, or to be dreaming of Stables in Portugal, which is his equivalent for ‘ Castles in Spain.’ Recalled to the exigencies of the present, he affects surprise, then attempts to wedge himself into some rocky cleft, although it is evident to all that if allowed to carry out his plan he would stick there to all eternity. You pull and he pulls. You ruin your temper and his mouth beyond all hope of recovery. You are excited and voluble—he is calm and silent. You are streaming with heat—he has every appearance of coolness. He shows you the yellow of his eyes, and settles himself down to starve you out, patient, dogged, immovable—the very personification of obstinacy from clenched jaw to quivering rump. O ye gods ! was it for nothing that he was created a mule ! As you strain at the bridle, a shout is heard, and the muleteer comes running to your assistance. A well-directed blow, a

few kicks, and your adversary changes his mind. Gathering his legs swiftly beneath him, he launches himself with unexpected suddenness forwards and upwards, and together you proceed to the next battle of the rocks.

We halted on a tiny plateau to recover breath. Above, below, around, the eye rested on nothing but rocks and rocks and yet again rocks piled one upon the other, barren and naked as on the morning of creation. A quiver of heat lay over them—golden in the foreground, but melting as it receded into the blue of the distant hills. No living thing was to be seen.

Thankfully I threw myself into the shadow of a boulder. Pedro, curling himself up, fell on the instant fast asleep. The mules, relapsing into daydreams, flicked at the flies with their long tails. It was very peaceful.

Hadow, however, was by no means content with inaction. Standing in the full glare of the sun, he gesticulated violently.

‘Hi, José!’ he shouted, addressing our muleteer, ‘what mean you by bringing us here? We are no chamois to spring up such places. Where is the path?’

José opened wide his vast hands—a comprehensive gesture disclaiming all responsibility whatsoever—then, seating himself beside me, began leisurely to roll a cigarette; perfect indifference was written large on his swarthy face. There was much of the mule in José. What might have occurred—for Hadow’s nature chafed at the delay—I know not, but precisely at that moment the head of a goat appeared above us and gazed down upon our party with faint curiosity.

Another and yet another came into sight. They sprang up unexpectedly upon all sides, from behind every rock and stone. The goatherd was worthy of mention; the same external characteristics were stamped indelibly upon the man as upon the animals, the same faint curiosity, the same slow and meditative manner; their very costume was similar, for he was clad in skins, and wore them as though they were his natural covering. He was an aboriginal man, rude and wild as the rocks among which he lived.

Warden hailed him in patois, but he shook his head, and made as if he would pass us. Upon being addressed by José, however, he deigned to pause, and even to reply at some

length. From the information elicited it appeared that the path lay to the westward, and that the caves were to be seen from a valley at no inconsiderable distance from the hill we had been attempting to climb. Following his advice, we succeeded, after a long and tedious scramble, in regaining the path, and proceeded onwards at a more rapid pace.

It was by far the hottest day we had experienced ; the vertical rays of the sun beat pitilessly upon us.

A brook ran down the valley mentioned by the goatherd. I shall have occasion to speak often of that thrice-blessed little brook. It was always our friend, but I doubt if it was at any time more welcome than on that broiling afternoon. Parched as we were with thirst, the sight of its cool and running waters acted as a delightful anodyne to the fever of the day. We flung ourselves down beside it and drank deep, pouring it over our heads in the fulness of our satisfaction. The mules shared our feelings. The baggage-mule in particular, taking advantage of a temporary lapse of attention on the part of her master, flung herself into a pool, and saturated her pack gleefully in the rushing water. In the midst of these relaxations we were startled by a cry.

‘The caves ! the caves !’ shouted the muleteer.

In a moment even the brook was forgotten, and, all excited, we gazed eagerly at the summit of the opposite hills. There, framed in a setting of gray cliffs, were two dark openings looking from the distance little larger than pin-holes ; without a doubt those were the longed-for caves. Our satisfaction knew no bounds ; everyone shook everyone warmly by the hand. In honour of the occasion, a flask was produced from the person of the dripping mule, healths were drunk with Portuguese honours, and the tin whistle proclaimed the glad tidings to the mountains in the appropriate strains of ‘Home, sweet home.’

CHAPTER IX

A SAINT WORTHY OF A HALO

PICTURE to yourself a little chamber, eighteen feet by twenty, hollowed out of limestone rock, time out of mind, by the hand of Nature. It is not above six feet in height at the entrance, but rises to a considerably greater elevation as one approaches the interior. The walls and floor are composed of layers of stone seamed with fissures ; at the back is a large pile of loose boulders, from which, if one climbs, one can see a low and narrow opening leading to a series of larger and loftier caves in the interior. At the entrance is a narrow ledge not more than six feet in breadth beyond which the ground falls in deep declivities far into the gorge below. Innumerable boulders, often of enormous size, have lodged themselves into every nook and crannie—every precarious terrace that breaks the sharp descent—boulder piled upon boulder testifying to the great forces of Nature that must have caused this giant upheaval long ages ago. This habitation of the rocks was to be to us a home for many a day to come. Here were we to eat, and sleep, and pass our time in glad companionship with every benign and salutary influence that links itself to the world of outdoor nature.

But if the details of our cave-home can be described with reasonable hope of imprinting them upon the reader's mind, it is far otherwise with the outlook which we commanded from our threshold. It was beautiful beyond compare—beautiful with no sylvan softness, with no smiling prospect of meadow and forest, but with a stern and savage beauty which in its more sombre moods came near to verging upon the terrible. We were so high—our vantage-point was so

commanding—that we felt at times as though we were the occupants of a balloon. The fancy is not altogether far-fetched ; for when the clouds rolled past us, rank upon rank, as oftentimes they did on their way to or from the distant ocean, we appeared to share in their slow and stately progress, and to be sweeping onwards with them high over the wild disorder of the hills.

To me the principal charm of our incomparable view lay in the fact that it was the favourite playground of the elements. Not an atmospheric change, but there it was, plainly visible before our eyes. We could foretell the future—we became weather-prophets of more than usual accuracy. The cloud which darkened some distant glade with the blur of falling rain held no secrets from us ; we consulted our friend the wind, and then marked its course upon the vast map that lay spread out beneath our feet. Sunshine and shadow chased each other all day long over these playing-fields of Nature. Oh, it was a brave show—a pastime for the gods ; and, indeed, one could imagine them lying reclined on Olympus watching just such another scene. It elevated the mind above the petty cares of humanity, and instilled something of the incommunicable spirit of Nature into the watcher's heart. The mountains seemed uplifted on the wings of their own loveliness. The glories of the sunrise, the splendours of the sunset, flamed before no unappreciative audience, for not a hill in all that vast and crowded amphitheatre but flushed with sympathy—ay, and retained its glad and radiant face till the sun was high in the heavens or night had drawn her curtain over the scene.

The afternoon was well advanced before we had unpacked our belongings and deposited our various treasures in different parts of the cave. Not having broken our fast since dawn, we set Pedro to light a fire, and as soon as it was well under weigh prepared ourselves some coffee, off which, with an allowance of a biscuit or two apiece, we made a scanty meal. Now, no great sustenance is to be derived from coffee and biscuits, however delicious they may taste at the time, so, having drained the last drop and searched for the last crumb, we came to the conclusion that the first thing to be

done was to set out in search of more solid food. But where to go? Loulé was too far off, and we knew not of any other village nearer at hand to which we might turn for assistance.

‘You must go to Carenta,’ said José, pausing in the act of repairing the pack-saddle of his baggage-mule with pieces of twine.

‘Carenta?’ questioned Hadow; ‘it is not on the map. What for a place is this Carenta, Hein?’

‘And can one obtain food there?’ asked Warden.

‘Yes, yes, senhores. *Deos!* it is as I say. Take the word of a muleteer. It is small, there is no denying; but it stands high, and can be seen from afar. I will direct you to it—you shall not go wrong, I promise you. And as for food, you have but to go to the house of the good Padre Callada; anyone will show it to you. *Ohé!* what a good man!—a saint, I believe. He would feed a multitude with two small fishes, his heart is so large.’

This was out-scripturing Scripture, but as we gazed at our worthy muleteer we at once absolved him of any intention to ‘cap’ Holy Writ; his face was sufficient index to the unimaginary powers of his mind—its expression was pure mule.

‘But, José,’ objected Warden, ‘what will become of your mules in your absence?’

‘Have no fear, senhor; the little dears will await my return with their customary patience; you know our Portuguese proverb. I doubt if they would move a foot unless I were close behind them.’ And he pointed his remark by a complacent grin directed at the toes of his heavy wooden shoes.

Instructing Pedro and his four assistants to clear away the numerous stones which littered the entrance and floor of our new home, and bidding them fetch a supply of fresh water from the brook, we set out on foot, José leading the way.

It was a ticklish piece of rock-climbing, and tried our mountaineering powers to their utmost. José was not to be turned aside by any of the innumerable natural obstacles which Nature had strewn so lavishly in our path. He was a species of fly; his naked feet—for he had left his shoes behind

him as a hint to the baggage-mule—appeared to possess adhesive qualities unknown to those of other men.

At last the saddle was reached, and, peeping over, we spied the blue haze of another valley, bounded by ranges upon ranges of distant mountains. Upon the farther side and topping a hill, a collection of houses dominated by a church spire was to be seen.

‘Behold, senhores! there is Carenta!’ cried José.

Receiving a liberal gratuity with national politeness expressed in an infinity of bows, our guide bade us farewell. He stopped again and again as he receded to wave his sombrero to us and to shout some parting instruction; then a rock caught him from our sight, and we fared forwards alone.

It was a long and fatiguing walk. The distance as seen through the limpid atmosphere of the hills proved deceptive. The nearer we approached, the farther off seemed the little village. Carenta coquetted with us like some mist-maiden, some Will-o’-the-wisp, some ‘mirage’ that

‘Allures from far,
Yet, as we follow, flies.’

It was hard upon six o’clock before we actually vanquished space and set foot within its walls.

The first person we met willingly guided us to the house of Padre Callada. We might have discovered it for ourselves, for, being the abode of the village priest, it was, as is invariably the case, superior in every way to its neighbours. Within a whitewashed room, the windows of which commanded a magnificent view, we found the Padre in the company of two gentlemen of the same cloth. Upon a table in the middle of the room was a large dish of pears, two bottles of wine, and three stout tumblers; one bottle was empty, the other but half full, while the glasses all bore rosy evidence of having been extremely busy. There was no doubt but that the holy fathers had been making merry. They had discarded their flowing upper garments, and sat unceremoniously in shirt-sleeves—a most sensible innovation considering the excessive heat of the day. Padre Callada was of short stature and of most rotund figure. His face, round

GILBERT JAMES.



THE HOLY FATHERS HAD BEEN MAKING MERRY.

and red as the sun when it sets in a mist, glowed with the combined effects of heat and hospitality; his expression was at once engaging and good-natured. Here, you felt, was no bigot, no lean æsthetic to scowl sullenly on joys which he could not appreciate, but a jolly friar, with a taste for good wine, and possibly an eye for a wench. Even so must Friar Tuck have appeared when, having galloped through a Latin grace, he turned gleefully to a venison pasty.

His companions had less of the stamp of good fellowship; yet they flagged not far behind him in appreciation of the joys of good living. Their portly stomachs—‘capon-lined,’ I warrant—allowed no doubt to be entertained on this subject. One of them had evidently been relating some humorous anecdote immediately prior to our intrusion, for the others were in the full swing of irrepressible laughter. The very echoes of the whitewashed room chuckled, the very glasses danced upon the table!

Padre Callada received us with open arms—literally open arms—for in the fulness of his hospitable heart he embraced us all.

Blessings on thy shaven pate, O best of little priests! I know not whether in this unappreciative world, where rewards are meted out with too niggard a hand and true merit but seldom recompensed, thou art admitted to the congregation of saints; but if unhappily thy virtues are still unrecognised, let it console thee that in our memory at least thou art adorned with no insignificant a halo—the best that gratitude can frame or love conceive!

Yes, the Padre went straight to our hearts; he divined that we were starving. At that moment it was the only key to our affections. What a confession! And yet could it well be otherwise? From dawn to dusk in the open air, on the mountain sides, makes a man deaf to all but the voice within—not the ‘still small voice’ heard, perchance, on some day well punctuated with meals, but the clamorous voice of a wild animal roaring for food.

‘Nothing to eat since dawn!’ cried the Padre when he had heard our piteous tale—we had wisely suppressed all mention of the coffee and biscuits. ‘Oh, my sons, my sons! What is this? Poor boys! I will see what can

be done. Take a glass of wine in the meanwhile with my good friends Padre Sebastiano and Padre Gregorio, and I promise you in a little you shall eat—yes, yes, you shall eat!’

He bustled off with a jangle of keys and a shuffle of sandals, and I heard him repeating to himself, ‘Eaten nothing since dawn! Poor boys! well, well!’

Conversation languished during his absence, for although we exchanged courtesies with the Padres, and even went the length of toasting them in the excellent red wine, yet fatigue and hunger are sad dampers to intellectual exertion, and we were in no frame of mind to shine in small talk. Padre Sebastiano produced a horn snuff-box, out of which we all took a pinch. We did this in order to ingratiate ourselves with him, for there is nothing a Portuguese dislikes so much as a man who declines favours which he ought to accept, except, indeed, a man who accepts favours which he ought to decline. There is but a narrow ridge of possible security between these two evils along which the traveller may crawl to a better understanding, but a man must have a clear head and carry his tact ready in his hand to win his way without an occasional slip.

Flies buzzed in and out, making a little stir in the languid air; while, from without, sounds of increasing animation rose from the village street, telling the listener that rural life was awakening after the great heat of the day.

At length the shuffle of approaching sandals announced the glad tidings that the Padre was returning from his errand of mercy; and, sure enough, there he was, accompanied by a buxom and black-eyed maid, each bearing a tray laden with good things. Such a feast! The very enumeration of the dainties makes my mouth water even now, for I still taste them on the palate of recollection, which, by the way, has this advantage over the palate of fact, that the more you taste the hungrier you become.

An omelette, done to a turn, brown and luscious, and of such generous proportions that the large dish on which it overflowed could with difficulty retain it; a fowl, cold and chill, but none the less alluring, his modest drum-sticks pressed close to his plump sides, a silent invitation to hungry teeth; an immense loaf of black bread; plates piled high

with figs and pears ; and last—yet oh, how far from least!—three bottles of good red wine.

‘There, my sons!’ exclaimed the presiding deity of the banquet, stepping back and surveying it critically with head on one side—‘there,’ he continued, rubbing his fat hands together in an ecstasy of satisfaction, ‘it is not much, but to men who have eaten nothing since dawn it will be welcome. Fall to, fall to ; let me see it disappear.’

We needed no second invitation. The omelette vanished as if by magic ; the plump fowl, influenced by the dissecting knife of Hadow, flew into our plates ; the wine flowed as though it could flow for ever. Our host hovered around us like a hospitable bee—he fairly buzzed with importance. The more we ate the better pleased he was. The wine was his special charge.

‘You drink nothing!’ he would cry. ‘Let me fill that glass, so! That is better. See, I too will take a glass, just to keep you company. Do not be afraid, it will do you no harm ; it is very old ; you cannot get such wine within twenty leagues. Empty the bottles. Have no fear ; there is more where this comes from—I have a good cellar. Drink, my sons, drink!’ And he quoted a beautiful Portuguese proverb to the effect that it is a poor heart that never rejoices.

When the remains of our repast—and there were but few, I promise you!—had been removed, we turned our attention to coffee and cigarettes. Conversation became general. As was but natural, our appearance in these unfrequented parts and the reason thereof exercised their minds to no small degree. All three priests were, in fact, brimming over with curiosity, and yet such was their national politeness, and such their fine sense of what was due to an honoured guest, that had we not given them encouragement not a question of a personal nature would have passed their lips. To satisfy this natural and kindly interest in our affairs was of a surety the least we could do in return for the hospitality which we had received ; so for the next quarter of an hour questions and answers flew fast, and our new friends were soon in possession of the general outlines of our expedition. That

our replies astonished them they made no pretence to conceal. I doubt if in the whole course of their uneventful lives these worthy souls had ever been brought face to face with such a conundrum as we must have presented to their limited experience. They eyed us with wonder not un-mixed with a sort of compassionate consternation ; a doubt as to our sanity evidently existed in their minds. Padre Callada voiced the general impression.

‘Caves!’ he said musingly. ‘Yes, I have seen them from the bridle-track to Loulé. But in the name of all the good saints, my sons, you will not *live* there?’

‘Such is our present intention,’ we replied.

He raised his hands to heaven, and, wheeling round, caught the incredulous eyes of his friends fixed upon him. All three shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders.

‘But,’ continued the Padre, ‘you tell me that you look for bones! Now, what sort of bones do you expect to find?’

‘Prehistoric man,’ explained Hadow, ‘or it may be the remains of the mammoth, woolly rhinoceros, cave-lion, cave-bear, reindeer, Irish elk, horse, etc., etc.’

As this inventory of osseous expectations proceeded, the eyes of our new friends grew wider and wider ; their eyebrows all but disappeared beneath their skull-caps.

‘I have never heard of such creatures,’ ejaculated our host, in a tone that banished all delusions relating to such fabulous monsters from every well-regulated mind.

‘They are very, very old,’ said Warden.

‘How old?’ demanded Padre Gregorio in a deep voice. It was the first time he had spoken : he startled us considerably.

‘Hundreds of thousands of years.’

‘It is impossible! The world itself is not so old ; it is but six thousand years at most ; how, then, can “woolly bears” and “Irish men” be older than the world? Ha!’ and he glanced round him with triumph.

‘And,’ continued Padre Callada, ‘you say these bones are to be found in the caves. But you have been deceived, poor boys ; there are no bones.’

‘Eh? How know you that?’ ejaculated Hadow in

alarm, the dreadful idea that the caves had possibly been desecrated by other excavators occurring to him for the first time.

‘How do I know? But very well. The goatherd who comes here at times to milk his goats slept there one winter’s night when a storm raged in the mountains.’

‘Well?’

‘Well, he found no bones, of that I am quite sure; for we spoke about the caves, and had there been bones there I would most assuredly have heard of them.’

‘But, my father, he could not see them; they lie deep underground.’

‘*Underground!*’ ejaculated the Padre, raising both hands.’

‘Yes, yes,’ cried Hadow, the mere mention of bones exciting him like strong wine. ‘Yes, yes,’ he repeated, mounting his hobby-horse in hot haste. ‘They may lie deep. We cannot tell yet how deep, but we know fairly well what we have to expect’—here he thumped the table with his fist, and continued, with sparkling eyes: ‘First, you have blocks of limestone—perhaps very big—then “black mould”; then a floor of stalagmite of possibly a granular character; then a layer called “black band,” composed mainly of charred wood; then “cave earth,” or a species of light red loam; then another stalagmite floor; then below all comes what is known as “breccia,” which is a curious dark-red deposit. Oh yes; I tell you they may lie deep. But we will find them!’

The three priests stared at Hadow, as he galloped furiously into the interior of the earth; their jaws dropped.

The silence that followed this indiscreet outburst was oppressive. Padre Callada was the first to break it.

‘My sons,’ said he earnestly, ‘give up these caves; take the advice of an old man, it is for your good. I can see that some unprincipled person has deceived you; poor boys! It is quite impossible for bones to get under all these extraordinary things you tell me of. No, no; were the bones there they would lie on the surface—unless, indeed, they had been buried, in which case it would be sinful to disturb them. God would not like it; He will raise them up in His own good time. I do not trust caves;

they are often the abode of evil spirits, and I would be sorry if harm befell you. Go home, my sons, and leave the caves alone—such is my advice.’

‘It is well said,’ assented his friends with one voice.

We looked at the leader of the opposition, and our hearts misgave us. We were sorry to pain the good man, he was actuated so entirely by unselfish motives; and yet the impossibility of explaining our conduct in its true and scientific light so that he would see it with our eyes disheartened us.

‘My father,’ said Warden gently, ‘what you ask is impossible. Consider for yourself: we have come far to excavate these caves; land and sea have been crossed, difficulties and dangers have been overcome. Would it speak well for our perseverance were we to listen to your friendly advice and turn back now—*now* that we have actually set foot within the caves themselves? No; much as we value your opinion, much as we are sensible of your kindness, we must go on. The bones await us; we will not disappoint them. I have spoken.’

‘Hear, hear! This, too, is our opinion,’ said Hadow and I simultaneously.

The three priests gazed at us in silence, Padre Callada ‘more in sorrow than in anger,’ his friends with evident disapproval. Padre Gregorio crossed himself repeatedly. It was plain that his thoughts rested upon the ‘woolly bear,’ born before the creation of the world. The mere idea of such a premature birth was highly repugnant to him.

‘Ah, well,’ sighed our host at length, ‘I see that I cannot convince you, and I know not but what I admire you for your firmness. Were I once more a boy, and did I love bones as fondly as you appear to do, I also, even I, might be tempted to excavate caves. But, my sons, have you spoken to the owner of the caves—the Senhor Manuel da Silvas?’

‘Not yet,’ replied Warden. ‘Where is he to be found?’

‘His cottage stands not far from here. It is farther down the valley; you cannot mistake it, it stands alone. His consent you must obtain; you see, it is his ground. I would advise your calling on him now, as it is on your homeward way.’

‘*Ach*, that is good advice,’ said Hadow. ‘We can then start work to-morrow without loss of time.’

We rose to take our leave, but the Padre cried :

‘Stay, stay, my sons ; there is a little something I wish to give to you’; and running out of the room, he presently returned carrying a basket in which I caught sight of two giant loaves and several bottles of wine.

‘To please me,’ he panted—for his exertions had deprived him of breath—‘to start your housekeeping. Yes, I shall of a surety sleep better to-night if I know for certain that you will not want for breakfast to-morrow.’

We found no words with which to thank him.

‘And, my sons,’ he continued, ‘if by chance you require assistance, do not forget that Carenta lies just over the mountain, not far distant, and that you have now a friend there ever willing to do you a service.’

‘There is still a favour you can do us, my father,’ began Warden.

‘Name it, my son,’ cried the Padre gaily.

Warden proffered him a gold coin.

Padre Callada drew himself up to his full height, his face flushed ominously ; all the pride of his race concentrated itself in the scornful gesture of his hands. We stared at them both in consternation, and for a moment the tick of a great clock in the passage was distinctly audible. But we need not have felt anxious, nor doubted the tact of our friend.

‘For the Mass,’ he said gently.

Padre Callada grasped both his hands impulsively.

‘My son, my *dear* son, forgive me ! I doubted you—I was wrong. For the Mass—yes, that I can accept ; for in the service of God I am the most humble of servants.’

He escorted us to the door, bubbling over with cheerful conversation ; instructions as to our route, messages to our new landlord and especially to his two daughters, assurances of affection, fell from his lips in a steady stream. We left him on the confines of the village—for he insisted on accompanying us thus far upon our road—and filled with gratitude and an excellent dinner we tramped away into the gathering dusk.

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH WE CONVINCED MANUEL

DAY was all but dead, and dusk came creeping up the valleys, as we started in the direction indicated by the Padre. It was the hour of the afterglow, the most beautiful of the twenty-four. The western sky still flushed with rose and paled with amber, where the last smiles of day had vanished behind the blue and distant hills; while away to the east one peak, more lofty than its neighbours, showed still a radiant crest lighted by the rays of the sunken sun. A sensible coolness pervaded the air, and as we felt its gentle and refreshing influence, our bodies grew more delicately alive to the delights of the hill-road with its attendant train of mountain scenery. But although our powers of appreciation were sensibly quickened, yet our thoughts—immersed in the blue glooms of dusk—attuned themselves to the pensive and almost melancholy character of our surroundings. This gradual and mysterious approach of night, mustering its forces among the hills and stealing upwards to the conquest of the heights, acted on the spirits like an opiate; and as we fell more and more under the witchery of its charm, our voices were unconsciously hushed, and we moved onwards like men in a dream.

The path which we had been advised to follow led us along the lower edge of the hill, at some distance from the extreme depth of the valley. After walking for the better part of half an hour we descried the white walls of a cottage, and feeling convinced that it was the house of which we were in search, we accordingly bent our steps in that direction.

‘Dear boys,’ said Hadow in a low voice as we walked along, ‘it is just possible that we may have some difficulty

with this Manuel da Silvas. I know, and so do you, Warden, what for peoples these Portuguese peasants are ; the animals are mules for obstinacy and he-asses for stupidity. My advice is, do not let us tell him *all*. You did see what those priests thought of the affair ; our cave to them was a sort of bottomless pit—eh ?

‘ Say rather a whited sepulchre, full of dead men’s bones,’ I suggested.

‘ Not bad for one so young,’ approved Hadow. ‘ You have some glimmerings of wit, in spite of your diary. But, to continue, if priests, who are learned, are stuffed with such notions, what can be expected from peasants ?’

‘ What would you have us say ?’ inquired Warden.

‘ Say only that we want to camp in his caves, and can afford to pay for the luxury. But no mention of bones, I pray you. He would not understand bones ; do not let us cast pearls before swine.’

‘ Would you like to tackle him yourself ?’

‘ No, no, dear boy ; I am too choleric. I can pardon anything but stupidity and indifference to bones. I would fume and perhaps brain the animal with his own jaw-bone. No, it would not do. Now you, with your ever sweet smile and inexhaustible patience——’

‘ Flatterer !’ chuckled Warden.

‘ *Ach nein !* You are all that and more. You understand these peasants ; you shall be our spokesman.’

As he said these words we reached a boundary fence which separated what appeared in the semi-darkness to be a patch of garden from the surrounding wilds. It was broken in many places, and offered no opposition to whoever desired admittance. The cottage was small, but it was impossible to distinguish details ; a dim light burned in one of the windows.

Making our way to the door, we knocked gently.

It was opened to us by a young girl ; a still younger girl peeped over her shoulder.

‘ Is this the house of the Senhor Manuel da Silvas ?’

‘ Yes, senhores.’

Even as she said the words, I saw her glance from one to the other, a growing wonder in her eyes. Her sister

whispered in her ear, but she shook her head. The door was but half open, and the light coming to us from behind the girls, we were unable to see them with any distinctness. The fingers of the speaker still rested on the handle of the door, as though reluctant to trust such strange and unexpected travellers ; and truly, when I think of the lateness of the hour and the unusual appearance we must have presented, I cannot but sympathize with her caution.

‘ If,’ continued Warden in his most courteous manner— ‘ if the senhor is at home, and if it is not inconvenient to him, my friends and I beg the honour of an interview.’

This polished address attained its merited reward. Gentlemen of such courtly phrases could not be otherwise than honest—at least, such was evidently the opinion of Senhora da Silvas, for there was a distinct unbending in her manner as she replied :

‘ The senhores will pardon me if I keep them waiting. I go to tell my father.’

She vanished from the door, and left us standing on the threshold. Sounds of voices reached us, a broken voice, half bass and half falsetto, chiming in with a clear girlish treble. The consultation proved satisfactory, for in a moment she was back again, and requested us to enter.

The inner room into which we were conducted was lighted by a brazen lamp of Moorish design. Its four wicks, unprotected by chimneys, burned with a dull and smoky flame. With its aid we could distinguish the figure of an old man crouching over the blazing embers of a wood fire.

His long and grizzled hair appeared innocent of the attentions of brush and comb ; his features were regular ; his eyes dark and of unusual brightness ; his hollow cheeks—fallen in owing to an almost entire absence of teeth—made him appear older than he really was. Crouching over the smouldering logs, he resembled nothing so much as some ungainly and ancient fowl. His two daughters stood beside him, the elder a handsome girl of the warm Southern type ; the younger had an elf-like appearance, partly on account of her diminutive size, and partly owing to the almost unnatural intelligence expressed in her childish face. But we had little time to take more than a general impression of

the ladies of the household, for their father addressing them in an undertone, they reluctantly left the room.

The old man peered at us, an apathetic wonder visible in his eyes, then waved his hand and requested us to be seated. We had some difficulty in complying with his request, as seats were rare articles of furniture in the humble dwelling ; by dint of reversing a tub, however, and pressing a chest into our service, we were at last accommodated.

Manuel da Silvas looked from one to the other for some time in silence, his eyes resting on the well-stocked basket of the Padre.

‘What have you to sell?’ he demanded at last.

‘We have nothing to sell,’ replied our spokesman. ‘We are travellers come from far to see your fine country.’

‘Ugh!’ grunted Manuel. ‘I know not about its being “fine”; it brings in little money.’

‘You do not farm it, then?’

‘Farm it! Blessed Virgin! Can one farm rocks? No; land has no value. I own a little, but I am poor—very poor. Taxation, too, is severe, and it takes me all my time to collect the taxes; there is little enough left over, I can tell you. But what did you say you had to sell?’

‘Nothing. But if you own land can you not get tenants?’

Manuel flung his head back and indulged in a dry laugh—it *was* a laugh, although it resembled a cough.

‘Tenants!’ he cried in derision, his voice breaking into its usual thin falsetto. ‘Holy Mother of God! it is well seen that you are strangers. Who would lease rocks? Who can farm stones? Why these questions? Who are you, senhores, and why come you here? I have never seen you before.’ His eyes returned more and more suspiciously to our basket. ‘Are you sure you have nothing to sell? You say these things but to make me curious, in the hope that I will pay more, eh? Is it not so?’

‘No, no,’ replied Warden. ‘I will tell you soon the object of our visit; but is it not the case that you are the proprietor of some caves not far from here?’

‘Yes; there are two caves over the mountain,’ mumbled the old man, biting his nails.

‘Would you be willing to lease them to us for a few weeks?’

‘Eh? What is that you say?’

Warden repeated his question. Manuel gazed at us open-mouthed, incredulity and amazement in his expression. All at once he laughed another cough.

‘Ho! ho! ho! Why come you here to make jokes? Lease my caves! Well, of all strange ideas, that is the most strange! Lease my caves! Well, well!’

‘But we are in earnest; with your permission we will rent your caves by the week.’

‘What would you with them?’

‘We want to live there.’

‘Live in my caves?’

‘Why not? It is a fancy of ours, and we are quite prepared to pay for it.’

We could see that it was necessary to treat him with unusual patience. He was old and a peasant—his wits were dull. He might be led, but he would never be driven.

‘But what do you want with my caves?’ he repeated obstinately.

‘Senhor Manuel,’ said Warden, ‘you are poor; you complain of taxes; your land is of little value; you have no tenants. Well, here come three Englishmen who are prepared to pay you one thousand reis (= 4s. 5d.) a week, just for the right of living in your caves, and you do not jump at it!’

‘Ah, well, perhaps—it may be—but it is so strange. Look you, no one has ever wanted my caves before!’

‘I should not think there was much demand for caves in this neighbourhood,’ said Warden grimly.

‘Demand! No, perhaps not—at least, not yet. Who can tell? They are the best caves, my wife used always to say.’

‘Listen,’ interrupted Warden. ‘You are poor?’

‘You may well say that. With land that is all rocks, and two daughters to clothe and feed, it is difficult to see one’s way. Why, it was only yesterday I met a good neighbour of mine at Carenta. “José,” said I, “do you——”’

Warden interrupted him.

‘And you would gladly earn money if it could be done with no cost or trouble to yourself?’

‘Y-e-s,’ said the old man cautiously, rubbing his unshaven chin with the palm of his hand.

‘Well, then, let us live in your caves. We will pay you good money—in your hand—say, is it a bargain?’

‘I—do—not—know. If it were a house, now, and you wanted to live in it, I would say yes, and welcome; but a cave! It is very remarkable! Who has ever heard of such a thing? If you wished to buy onions, now, I could let you have some quite cheap. They are large—the finest in the valley. Shall I show you some of them?’

‘No!’ shouted Warden; ‘we are talking of caves, not onions.’

Manuel moved uneasily in his chair. It was plain to us that his fingers itched for the money, and yet the singularity of our proposition troubled him. Three strangers, fallen from the skies, as it were, mysteriously visiting him after dark was a puzzle that required more than his limited amount of brains to solve.

‘Yes, yes,’ he muttered; ‘but I do not know you. What is your reason for making such a strange request? How can I tell that you are not planning to do me an evil turn? It was only the other day that a man tried to sell me a mule that was——’

‘For the love of God, stick to the subject in hand, or we will never finish! Now, Senhor Manuel, you are a wise man; think for one moment. We will be good tenants. You shall always be paid beforehand—a thousand reis in your hand every week—is that clear?’

‘But what do you want with my caves? It is so odd, so unusual! I know not what to say. After all, a thousand reis is very little. They are good caves—they are worth more than that. No, no; I think I will wait and see if someone comes who will give me more.’

Warden looked at us. There was a suppressed conflagration in his eyes.

‘Did you ever see such an old addlehead?’ he muttered in English.

‘What is that you say?’ snapped Manuel suspiciously.

‘Listen,’ continued Warden. ‘If it was good land I could understand your objections; but reflect—it is only a cave! What, after all, is a cave? A hole in a rock! Of what use is it to you?’

‘Oh, you would wonder! It belongs to me—yes, and it belonged to my father before me. A cave is a cave—you cannot get out of that. It is something solid. You always know where you are with a cave—it is always there.’

‘But has it ever earned you money?’

Manuel stroked his chin thoughtfully. He was racking his brains to try and discover the reason which prompted us to drive so singular a bargain.

‘N-o-o,’ he replied at length; ‘not yet, but one day, perhaps. No, no; I can see that we will not agree. I would rather sell you my onions. They are large and——’

‘May the foul fiend fly away with both you and your onions!’ cried Warden, shoving his chair back in sudden anger.

‘S-h-h! s-h-h!’ whispered the old man, crossing himself nervously. ‘Do not talk in that wicked way. One never knows—he may be here now!’ and he peered into the dark corners of the room with the utmost concern.

Warden glared at him. I could not have believed that so much animosity—I might almost say bloodthirstiness—could find its way into the eyes of our friend. But he did not despair—he was but pondering a new move. All of a sudden he jumped up.

‘Ah, well, Senhor Manuel, it is a pity we cannot agree. After all, it does not much matter. We might wear your caves out! You will easily get other tenants, I am sure. And as for us, I hear of some caves to the north—larger ones—which will suit our purpose much better. Good-bye.’

We walked to the door. The sound of heavy breathing from the direction of the old man told us that Warden’s parting shot had taken effect, but we did not look round. Our retreat was conducted with silent dignity. We had quitted the room, and were on the point of closing the door, when an agitated cry of ‘Senhores, Senhores!’ came from behind us. Warden turned on his heel.

‘Did you call?’ he asked.

‘How much did you say you would pay me?’

‘It really does not matter, Senhor Manuel, seeing, as you wisely said, that we cannot agree!’

‘But how much?’

‘I did name a thousand reis, but——’

‘Make it five thousand a month, and I will agree.’

And so it was settled. A further argument resulted in a promise on our part to buy most of our provisions from our new landlord—a promise which added greatly to the amicable character of the proceedings. Wine being produced, we drank to the success of the caves; Manuel pledged us, then we pledged Manuel. Festivity and good-fellowship were the order of the night. I know not whether it was the effect of the wine, or the sight of our money, or the mention of Padre Callada, whose kindly messages we called to mind, but, whatever the cause, the fact remains that the old gentleman grew more and more friendly—nay, affectionate—as the minutes passed. He drew his chair closer and closer to us, patted us on the knees, and peered up in our faces with smiles of tenderness.

When we rose to depart, he protested loudly.

‘Do not go yet! Another glass of wine, my dear, dear friends—just when we have become so gay, such good comrades! What happiness to have met you! The English are a fine race. A little quarter of an hour longer—yes? Ah, you *will* go?’

‘We must go, Manuel; it grows late. But may we not say farewell to the ladies?’

He chuckled loudly.

‘They are in bed, senhores—the best place for young girls at this hour of night. They can do no mischief there. Ho! ho! You are really going. Well, then, I, too, will come.’

In vain we protested.

‘Yes, yes, it is black night; no moon is to be seen. You might lose your way and wander all night on the mountains. With me you will be quite safe. I will conduct you by a mule-track to the very caves themselves.’

There was no denying the advantage this would be to us; we remonstrated no longer. The old man carefully stamped

out the smouldering embers of the wood-fire, then, after he had shouted many parting injunctions through the keyhole of his daughters' bedroom, led the way into the open air.

'Wait for me here, senhores,' he said; 'I go but to saddle my donkey. I will be with you in five minutes.'

He was as good as his word; the specified time had barely elapsed before we saw a light zigzagging up to us, and Manuel, carrying a lantern and mounted upon a diminutive donkey, placed himself at our head. Off we started. It was the most weird march imaginable. The path by which he led us was but a bare foot in breadth—a thread of dim security coiled among a sea of invisible dangers. The light showed us only the outlines of a shadow-figure and portions of a ghostly donkey. Now and again some rock bordering our track came into the dancing halo, then disappeared instantly as if snatched away by the fingers of night. But comparatively useless as was the lantern, it gave us a feeling of companionship—a sense of something tangible and visible in the immense void of surrounding darkness which we would not have been without for worlds. The night air fanned us gently, its touch was soft as velvet; it carried strange scents on its wings—the deep breath of the mountains and the freshness of falling dew. A hoarse chorus of frogs, rendered well-nigh inaudible by the distance, rose from the depths of the valley; but up where we were, on the little track which climbed ever higher on the mountain-side, no sound was to be heard save the tramp of our feet stumbling onwards in the darkness. I looked upwards at the mountains; the sombre outline of their crests loomed like a solid wall of darkness against the deep and starlit azure of the sky. We marched in silence, save that, now and again, Manuel cursed his donkey in a muffled roll of Portuguese oaths; for the rest, each one was intent with his own thoughts, and too much occupied with the difficulty of avoiding stones, to converse. Speaking for myself, I was weary, and lifted my legs mechanically; one idea alone possessed me—to reach the caves, so that I might sleep.

At length we topped the brow of the great hill that separated our valley from the valley of Carenta. The glow of a distant fire put fresh heart into us. It shone from the ledge

in front of our cave, and had, as we found later, been lighted with singular thoughtfulness by Pedro, so that we might have a beacon to guide us homeward in the dark. The star in the east was not more welcome nor yet more beautiful to the magi than that little fire was to us, dulling and glowing alternately as Pedro supplied it with fuel. It spoke to us of all we longed for—of home, of shelter, of bed. When we were come a little nearer we gave a view-halloo with all the strength of our lungs. The mountains caught up the cry and shouted it to each other, bandying about the sounds, from misty peak to misty peak, till they grew weary of the sport, and relapsed once more into their solemn and ancient stillness. The path led us round the further side of the cave ; had we but known of its existence at an earlier hour, we might have saved ourselves the long and dangerous climb of the afternoon.

We discovered Pedro in the act of dancing a Portuguese breakdown ; great joy, he explained, always affected him in that manner. Our workmen were by this time asleep, having taken possession of our second cave.

Manuel refused to part from us. In vain we entreated him to go home ; in vain we reminded him of his duties as a father, and of the unprotected condition of both house and daughters. He coughed at us in scorn.

What was friendship, he asked, if it was to be turned aside by mere domestic details. He talked for such a length of time that, weary with words, we entreated him to say no more, but go to bed. Wrapping himself in an immense blue cape, he lay down, and soon was snoring peacefully. As for me, barely had I placed my head on my saddle-bags than the subtle glue of oblivion sealed my eyelids together. My friends, Portugal, the caves, even Manuel da Silvas, were forgotten, and without loss of time I fell asleep.

CHAPTER XI

WE BEGIN OUR CAVE-LIFE

NEVER, I trust, will I be called upon to pass another such night ; it haunts me like a nightmare even now. My nocturnal experiences at Faro had been unpleasant—the inn a very den of vermin—but this, our first night in our new home, was infinitely worse ; it out-heroded Herod ! It would take the stoicism of a Hadow combined with the philosophy of a Mark Tapley to discover anything in the experience save an incentive to black and bloodthirsty thoughts.

Foremost in the ranks of my foes were the mosquitoes. The mountain-air had apparently put a keen edge on their appetites, for they fell on the exposed portions of my body with shrill trumpeting of satisfaction.

Another evil of which I have to complain was the hardness of my rock-bed. Separated as this was from me but by the single thickness of a blanket, it chafed me beyond belief.

Then there were the bats. The entrance to the cave was constantly darkened by their erratic flight, for no sooner had dusk fallen than they issued from their homes in legions. There is something creepy and cold-blooded about a bat—something weird and all but devilish. I own to a feeling of positive aversion, almost amounting to fear, when I am brought within danger of personal contact with these bird-like reptiles, these wandering spirits of the night. The light colour of my blanket was possibly an attraction to them, for they zigzagged so closely to my head that my hair was stirred by the swish of their invisible wings.

Yet, in spite of those enemies to slumber, Nature asserted herself, and I fell into a doze. How long I slept I know not, but it appeared to me that I had but had time to close my

eyes when the sound of a voice recalled me to consciousness. The voice was painfully familiar to me ; there was no mistaking the droning undertones breaking into the weird falsetto—querulous, monotonous, persistent. By the light of the stars—for the night had cleared, and a thin glimmer of starlight was in the air—I could see Manuel seated on his blue cape. He was scratching himself vigorously. Even as he scratched he grumbled, and from the few words I managed to overhear he was consigning his tormentors to regions hotter even than a Portuguese summer.

I lay still, and listened and watched and waited, and all the while the droning of the old man's voice and the scratch, scratch of his busy fingers continued with maddening monotony. At last I could bear it no longer.

'Manuel,' cried I, 'can you not keep quiet?'

'It would be difficult, senhor. Ugh! pestiferous vermin! They give me no peace.'

Scratch, scratch, scratch!

'Why do you scratch?' I said testily. 'Much better leave them alone; you only annoy them.'

But even as I said the words, I became conscious of an attack upon my own body—an attack so irritating and so painful that, uttering an exclamation of annoyance, I furtively followed his example.

The old man chuckled. For some time we scratched in silence.

'I wonder much why the good God created vermin?' observed the thin falsetto vindictively.

'For the same purpose that he created you,' I growled, with perhaps unnecessary rudeness.

The old man desisted from his occupation in surprise.

'No, no, senhor; do not think it for a moment. We are very different, I assure you. Their ways are not my ways, although their God is my God.'

'You both disturb honest folk at ungodly hours.'

'Is it my fault, senhor?'

'It is my misfortune, Manuel.'

He pondered over this singular view of the matter, then said with decision:

'It is the fault of the blue cape.'

‘How so?’ I inquired, peering at him in the semi-darkness.

‘I lent it to a friend of mine for a week. It came back lively as a village fair. It is quite spoilt. Formerly it was an excellent bed; it had its fleas, of course, but nothing to this—just a scratch or two before one slept. But now! Holy Virgin!’ and scratch, scratch, scratch completed the sentence.

Sheer fatigue forced my eyelids together. I fell into a restless sleep. Again and again I awakened during the night, always to find Manuel talking and scratching. I doubt whether he slept at all; perhaps he dozed at his post, and the sounds which reached me were merely of a mechanical and somniferous nature, like the snores of Pedro.

I was awakened for the last time by the consciousness that someone was leaning over me, so closely that I was sensible of a warm current of breath on my face. Opening my eyes, I saw by the gray light of the dawn that had begun to gather in the east a dark and hairy face within two inches of my own. It was alarming, to say the least of it; a cry escaped my lips. The face disappeared as if by magic, and a clatter of hoofs on the floor of our cave betrayed the intruder. It was Manuel’s donkey, who, having breakfasted upon the tether with which his master had secured him to a neighbouring rock, had wandered in to the shelter of our cave. The little animal, startled by my shout, galloped for a full quarter of a mile before he was caught.

The noise awakened the entire cave-party, and, seeing the light of the new day creeping over the mountain-brow, we decided to sleep no more.

It says much for the magnificence of our outlook that I forgot the discomfort of the night in my appreciation of the scenery.

The lovely and gradual coming in of day was a spectacular effect of more than usual grandeur. From our lofty and isolated position we obtained a superb view over the wild and broken chain of the Sierra de Monchique; gray and cold they lay, partly visible through the blue gloom of early morning, partly invisible where a sea of mist enveloped them in its soft and fleecy embraces. From out this atmospheric ocean isolated peaks rose like volcanic islands. The

sense of distance, so dear to the artist's eye, was admirably preserved in the delicate gradations of intervening shadow—from the black and almost formless masses in the immediate foreground, to the faint pearl-grays where the far-off ranges melted into the sky.

It was difficult to believe that this mist-sea was not a veritable ocean, so liquid was its appearance, so carefully did it follow every trend of the mountainous coast-line, so completely did it fill every bay and inlet. Nor was it motionless, as might be imagined ; for, like the great ocean which it so closely resembled, it was ever on the move, in a state of gentle and unwearying agitation.

A chill air, precursor of the dawn, 'breathed like a long sigh' full upon us. As we watched, the light deepened gradually ; distant details crept into view ; far-off mountaintops dawned into prominence, while those already within the circle of our vision reared themselves upwards, solemn and sharp, into the green and gold of the morning. At length a long shaft of sunlight overtopped the eastern hills, and, winging its way far overhead, rested on a peak in the yet dusky west. It was as if you had splashed it with colour. It glowed above the waves of rolling hills—a mark for every eye—an earnest of the coming day. One by one the hills lit up their beacons, the conflagration spread apace, the sunlight swept at a gallop along the mountains, and day sprang into sight.

But it must not be imagined that Hadow wasted his precious moments in watching a sunrise. By no means ! His thoroughly practical mind was full of other and more important considerations. His self-imposed duties were numerous. He was never idle for the fraction of a second. To see him mustering our tools, making his bed, lighting the fire, to the accompaniment of irregular verbs, or to the sound of condensed notes on the flora and fauna of Southern Portugal, was to blush for your own degenerate habits.

'Lazy animal !' he would cry, shaking his fist at me ; 'I learn more from an inch of the *Bufo vulgaris* (common toad) than from your entire carcass. What is the good of lying on your empty stomach when breakfast has to be got ready ? Eh ? Tell me that.'

‘Hadow,’ I replied humbly, ‘you looked so happy I did not like to interfere; but show me what to do, and I will try to be as useful and instructive as, not one, but two inches of your friend the *Bufo*.’

And truly I owed him a debt of gratitude far deeper than I realized during those travelling days. Without his inexhaustible energy and wonderful fund of resource it would have gone hard with a dreamer like myself; for, after all, one cannot live by sunrise alone, nor sustain the inner man on feasts of mountain scenery. But with the thoughtlessness, and I fear also the selfishness, of youth, I accepted his all and gave but little in return, and it is only the lapse of years that has brought a ‘wiser seeing’ to my eyes, and made me conscious of a debt that I can never hope to repay.

To awaken Pedro was a matter of ten minutes’ hard labour. Never knew I anyone sleep more soundly. If you called to him, he paid no heed whatsoever; if you shook him, he but snored the louder; if you forced him into a sitting posture, his backbone collapsed with awful and unexpected suddenness, and, coiling himself into a human knot, he slept as though he would awaken no more.

At last we discovered an infallible means of awakening him; this was to drag him by the heels to the outer ledge, and there to wash his face in cold blood—that is to say, with cold water. At the first touch of the desecrating fluid, Pedro fairly spluttered with indignation. Cleanliness in any form was abhorrent to his Portuguese soul; it was a personal insult to his natural condition that rankled in his mind for hours.

We made our breakfast off black coffee and one of the Padre’s loaves. Never have I enjoyed a meal more. Hadow ladled the coffee out of a saucepan with a tin mug, and operated on the loaf with a dissecting-knife. Warden, Manuel, Pedro, and I grouped ourselves around him in a picturesque circle, and drank and munched and drank again with the greatest gusto imaginable. Manuel proved himself an excellent trencher man, and was quite the ‘lion’ of the party, nothing short of the proverbial share of that animal contenting his voracious appetite. He was more

silent than usual ; indeed, since he had returned from the pursuit of his donkey something appeared to be weighing on his mind. I caught his eyes fixed upon us with dull suspicion. At last his thoughts overflowed, for, wiping his mouth on the back of his horny hand, he said :

‘ Ah, senhores, what is this I hear ? When I go to catch my donkey, I talk with one of your men—he is an old friend of mine—he tells me that you intend to dig in my caves !’

We glanced furtively in each other’s faces, for all the world like schoolboys discovered in wrong-doing.

‘ We forgot to mention it,’ said Warden, with gravity.

The old man peered into his face.

‘ All very well, senhor, but what I now hear may change our agreement. To live in my caves is one thing, but to dig in them is another. Why do you dig ? What do you seek ? Ha ! tell me that.’

Warden groaned. Was the interminable argument of the previous evening to be served up once more ? Was the antagonism of the unbelieving priests to be fought again in the person of Manuel ? A thousand times no ! And yet, what escape was there ? A plain question demands a plain answer.

Diplomacy rose in arms.

‘ After all, Manuel,’ he said pleasantly, ‘ what matters it to you ?’

The old man’s face assumed an expression of cunning. Leaning forward, he laid two fingers of grimy appearance on Warden’s knee.

‘ Wait then—wait then, my senhor. You think I am a simple old man. You say, “ Manuel does not know much ; we can deceive him easily.” But, by the holy saints ! you are wrong. I know that gold comes out of rocks—yes, and silver and copper, too. And let me tell you that what comes out of my caves belongs to me—yes, *me*, Manuel da Silvas, very much at your service, senhores !’

As he said these words, he smote himself on the chest, and, drawing himself up to his full height, glared round at the assembled company. Warden shrugged his shoulders.

‘ My very worthy friend,’ he said lightly, ‘ do not deceive

yourself! We seek neither gold nor silver. We are in search of nothing that you would care to possess.'

'Then, tell me what you look for.'

'It would not interest you, Manuel.'

'Tell—me—what—you—look—for.'

Warden glanced at us; we read desperation in his eye.

'What shall I do with the beast?' he muttered in English.

'You might as well tell him,' advised Hadow.

Manuel meanwhile was repeating his question with the monotonous regularity of a machine.

'Tell—me—what——'

'Bones,' interrupted Warden fiercely.

'*What!*' cried the old man in unaffected astonishment.

He looked from one to the other, but the solemnity of our expression afforded him no clue to the mystery. For long he gazed at us in blank amazement, then the humour of the situation seemed to strike him, for, throwing back his head, he cackled loudly:

'Ho, ho! *Bones!* Holy Mother of God! can that be believed? Seven men and one boy to look for bones! *Bones!* It is a great joke! But tell me, my dear friends, *why* look you for bones?'

'I cannot discuss our reasons now, Manuel,' said Warden. 'I have told you the truth, let that content you. If we come across anything more valuable than bones, it will be yours. Will that do?'

'Y-e-s, I suppose so,' assented Manuel, unsatisfied curiosity, however, plainly visible in his eyes.

'Well, then, that closes the matter once and for all. Now we are going for a morning dip; will you join us?'

'Dip?'

'Yes—bath, if you prefer it; there should be a pool to be found in the gorge.'

'Bath! But why?'

'Because we prefer to be clean. Come along, Manuel. Come and pretend to be an Englishman.'

'God forbid!' cried the old man, and he crossed himself piously. I could read the word 'madmen' in every line of his outraged expression.

Bidding him farewell, we turned to descend the mountain;

but barely had we taken a dozen steps when he recalled us.

‘Senhores!’

‘Well, Manuel?’

‘Have you enough provisions for to-day?’

‘Yes, they will just last out.’

‘Then, to-morrow I will come with a supply for you; say, is it understood?’

‘Quite right; good-bye.’

We turned away, but we had reckoned without our host; it was none so easy to shake off Manuel.

‘*Holdá*, senhores!’ he shouted, ‘come back; I have something of importance to say.’

We retraced our steps.

‘Make haste, Manuel; what is it you wish to tell us?’

‘Yes, yes, senhores; I will make haste, although I, for one, see no reason for any such hurry. The good God made to-morrow for any little thing that cannot be done to-day. It would scarcely be respectful not to take advantage of His kindness. Surely He knows best what we should do, and what it is convenient for us to leave undone?’

‘Did you recall us to tell us that?’

‘No, senhores; it was not in my head when I called to you. It came to me afterwards like—like an inspiration! It is wonderful what thoughts come into my head, quite unexpectedly, you would say. It is like a flea in a blanket—you cannot see it, but all at once it bites you.’

‘For Heaven’s sake! what do you want?’

‘Do not be impatient, senhor. I only wished to ask a little question for your good. To me it matters not, but to you it is, I am sure, of much importance.’

‘Well?’

‘You will tell me, will you not, senhor?’

‘Anything, only be quick!’

‘Then, tell me why—do—you—look—for—bones?’

CHAPTER XII

AN UNEXPECTED INTRUSION

THE descent into the gorge was long and tedious, but at length it was accomplished, and wandering upstream we cast about to discover a suitable pool for our morning bath. We were not obliged to go far, for turning a rocky promontory we came unexpectedly upon an ideal bathing-place. The little stream was at this point not more than eight yards in width, the rocky banks having contracted and forced the waters into a deeper and less broken channel. Along the margin on either hand a tiny shore, or bed of soil, had collected, and from this precarious resting-place there sprang a thicket of reeds intermingled with oleanders, the latter already in full bloom. The favourable nature of the position, sheltered from every adverse wind, and bathed daily in the full flood of perennial sunshine, and also the peculiarly rich character of the soil, a description of dark peaty loam rendered moist by its proximity to the running water, had encouraged the plants to luxurious growth—tall and strong, they reared themselves to a height of eight to nine feet. The oleanders were particularly beautiful. The blossoms of vivid crimson and long pointed leaves hung pendulous in the air, or waved gently to and fro with a silken and almost inaudible rustle when agitated by the passing of a breeze. The pool extended itself to a length of some forty yards. At its upper end it was fed continually by a waterfall that flung itself from an overhanging ledge and filled the air with hoarse music, while lower down it narrowed still further into miniature rapids before spreading out once again to its accustomed width.

Between these two extremes, however, it was no longer urged impetuously forward by the declivity of the ground—it could do as it pleased, and like a sensible little stream it slept the hours away, dallying with the sunlight and the oleanders after the manner of a traveller taking his ease at an inn before he turns again to the road.

‘I believe it’s deep enough for a swim,’ cried Warden.

‘*Ach Himmel! Wie schön!*’ chuckled Hadow, ‘it is the very place for reptiles.’

In a few minutes more our clothes knew us no longer. Plop! plop! plop! in we splashed like so many frogs—naked and unashamed; the quiet pool was churned into foam; the hills re-echoed with our shouts. The water in mid-stream came breast-high, and was deliciously cool—not cold, for the daily influence of the sun still lurked in its quiet depths, even though it had passed the dark hours in the refrigerating chambers of the hills. A more ideal swimming-bath it would be hard to imagine.

To attempt to sit under the waterfall, to be knocked down, to be pommelled as with fifty boxing-gloves, and, finally, to be swept away like a log over and over in the clear brown water, was a breathless and overpowering delight. To lie in the shallows beneath the shade of the oleanders, and to gaze upwards at the intricate network of leafage, lighted here and there with the glow of crimson blossoms, was to feel that the life of a fish in a Portuguese pool was by no means to be disparaged. For some time we swam up and down with great enjoyment. Hadow was the first to weary of this amusement; leaving us in the middle of a race he started on a reptile hunt.

A large, a very large portion of Hadow’s heart was given over entirely to reptiles. I know not why this was so, unless, indeed, the old and apparently inexplicable fascination which our opposites cast over us was in some way answerable for the mystery, for the hot-blooded Hadow was as unlike a cold-blooded reptile as it was possible to imagine.

Away he went, crawling round the banks, feeling between submerged roots, thrusting his arm into interstices among the rocks.

The pool appeared to be well stocked, or it may have been that Hadow's knowledge of the habits of reptiles guided him instinctively to their hiding-places, for in less than a minute he had pounced upon a very fine specimen of a frog. His cry of success attracted our attention. There he stood holding the frog on high by one of its hind legs—the picture of joyous enthusiasm.

'Come quick, dear boys!' he shouted. 'A beauty! *Gott sei dank!* Never have I seen one of so much loveliness.'

We waded to the bank to inspect his struggling prey.

'*Rana esculenta!*' exclaimed Hadow. 'See the beautiful green colour! Keep still, my little angel, or you will most certainly kick your hind leg off. It is to be found in both Spain and Portugal. It loves much the deep and still water. I have found him near Villafranca, at Burbia, Leon, and many other places. Be quiet, my heart's delight. *Rana*, as you know, is the Spanish for frog, but here in Portugal he is called *ra* or *arra*. Monlau declares that he has often seen this beautiful one in——*Donnerwetter!*'

He gave a gasp, and stared over our heads at the opposite bank. The frog, escaping from his hand, dived into the water, and instantly disappeared, but no one heeded it. Simultaneously Warden and I wheeled to seek the reason for this extraordinary behaviour. In a moment we shared his consternation: there, on the bank, parting the oleander-stems with both hands, and surveying us with mingled surprise and amusement, were two young women! It was the story of Susannah and the elders reversed. Without a moment's hesitation we followed the frog, and, submerged to our necks, faced the situation with comparative equanimity. † ;

'Go away!' shouted Hadow with virtuous indignation. *não têm vergonha*

'You have no shame!' cried Warden. (*Non tem vergonia*, I think it is written—a most useful phrase, and one which all travellers in Portugal would do well to commit to memory).

But my friends might as well have kept silent for all the effect their words produced. The girls did *not* go away; in fact, they showed not the slightest intention of leaving

us. Their smiles broadened into a laugh. When I came to reconsider the situation calmly at a later period, I did justice to the picturesqueness of their appearance. They were fine healthy young women, with a great deal of local colour concentrated for the most part in their lips, cheeks, and the scarlet kerchiefs tied round their heads, and topped by the national sombrero. Framed in a setting of glossy oleander leaves they made a cheerful and even an attractive picture, but at the time we were in no humour for artistic appreciation. They appeared to be mistresses of the situation, and entirely without the innate modesty which one is taught to associate with the habits and customs of the gentler sex. In vain Warden abjured them in the broadest of patois to leave us to the privacy of our pool. In vain Hadow called them by fearsome names, borrowed from his great work, 'The Fauna of Southern Portugal.' No, they were neither to be flattered nor frightened; they would neither answer nor retire. They were convulsed with merriment, and one of them in particular displayed as fine a set of teeth as you could wish to see. It was a ticklish situation! I defy a man to realize the ludicrous helplessness of our feelings unless he has sat immersed to the neck in a pool, the butt of two pairs of laughing black eyes. However cool we were externally, I can answer for the heat within—we fumed with perplexity. Talk of the bold brutality of man! I doubt if any man—with the exception of the Biblical elders, who would appear to have been badly brought up—would have subjected ladies to this treatment had they discovered them in a like delicate situation. The transparency of the water added not a little to our confusion. We looked at each other, and despite our annoyance came near to laughing; each of us confessed, at a later period, that he considered the other two the most comical objects he had seen for many a day.

Putting our heads together, in the literal sense of the term, we held a council of war.

'What shall we do? What shall we do?' growled Hadow's head, bobbing up and down like an agitated buoy.

'A volley of stones?' suggested Warden.

‘No, no,’ I cried; ‘let us pretend to attack them. I don’t think they will wait to receive us.’

‘*Sehr gut, colossal!*’ assented Hadow.

‘Now,’ I continued, ‘are you all ready? We will give a shout all together and rush the bank. One, two, three!’

‘Hurrah!’ we shouted with one voice, and swept down on the opposite shore. The feint was successful. In a flash the oleanders rustled together, and our tormentors vanished, apparently into thin air.

But although they were for the time being snatched from our sight we still heard the sound of receding laughter, and while we were dressing, many minutes later, they reappeared far above, two little dots on the precipitous track leading to one of the more distant mountain hamlets.

CHAPTER XIII

WE EXPLORE THE CAVES

It was with feelings of intense interest that we explored the interior of our subterranean dwelling. Even I—the useless and unscientific member of our party—confess to a thrill of excitement as I crawled on hands and knees through the narrow passage which connected our entrance cave with other and more distant caverns. Hadow, who led the party, carried a miner's lantern, which cast a dim and uncertain light over his surroundings. Warden, similarly equipped, came second, I 'made a good third,' while the rest of the 'field,' tailing off with little Pedro, whose curiosity overcame his fear of evil spirits, followed closely on my heels. It was by no means pleasant to be obliged to crawl thus along a damp passage, inhaling a vast quantity of lamp smoke, and hitting one's head occasionally on acute angles in the roof. I doubt if any but prehistoric reasons could have succeeded in placing me in such an uncomfortable situation.

My imagination fairly ran riot. Inflamed by Hadow's enthusiasm, I spurned aside the intervening centuries, and peopled the place with phantoms of the past. When Hadow was of a mind, he could, as our American cousins express it, 'take you right there.' There was a reality about his descriptions that would convince the most sceptical. He had talked familiarly, and even affectionately, of the mammoth—what an excellent creature it was, how bluff and hearty its manners, how satisfactory and large its bones! To hear him you would have imagined that he had lived on intimate terms with one for years! He had also expressed a hope that our cave would prove

to be the private mausoleum of the mammoth family, formerly resident in Portugal.

But I confess that my first cave experience staggered my credulity sadly. How could a creature whose size at the lowest computation exceeded that of the elephant, who was thirteen feet high, fifteen feet in length, with tusks eight feet long, squeeze himself through a passage so narrow that it necessitated our crawling 'upon all fours' in order to traverse it at all? He might possibly have lain upon his side in the entrance hall, and looked with one eye through the corridor to see how his live stock—cave-men, women, and children—were fattening within, but the chances of his ever having turned that inner apartment into a regular dining-room were so remote that I for one refused to credit them for a moment.

After a little time we emerged from the passage and were able to stand upright. Our lamps shed but a feeble light, and our eyes, as yet unaccustomed to the semi-darkness of the inner caves—could with difficulty distinguish our surroundings. Soon, however, we made out that we were standing in a large hall to which our little dwelling-cave was but the tiniest of antechambers. The vast dome rose above us into impenetrable blackness; the walls in our vicinity were streaming with moisture; the floor was covered with *débris* of all descriptions; every here and there a stalagmite pillar rose from the ground, or a stalactite shaft descended from the roof—in some cases already joined into columns, in others approaching each other with the slow and monotonous accumulations of centuries.

'Holy Mother of God!' ejaculated Pedro.

We turned upon him. He was shaking all over, and pointed in his terror to an object which had escaped our attention. Facing us was the most remarkable stalagmite I have ever seen; it was shaped into the form of a headless woman. The outlines may have been blurred, but not more so than is to be observed in statuary exposed for long to the open air. The upper half of the body was perfectly delineated; the lower half, however, was but indicated, as though some light and clinging drapery had been flung

over it. The silence and darkness of the subterranean home lent her an air of unapproachable mystery. It was no marvel that Pedro felt alarm ; I myself gazed at her in wonder. The light from our lamps flickered over the whiteness of her form, lending it an even more unearthly air. And truly there was something uncanny in this statuesque figure carved by no human hand—fashioned by the mysterious forces of Nature into the likeness of a woman. Warden and I conversed about her in whispers, as though conscious of our intrusion—we feared to disturb the guardian deity of the caves. The workmen crossed themselves repeatedly. Hadow alone was unimpressed.

The air in the buried chamber was chill and damp ; it gave me a shuddering sense of aversion, as though I had broken unexpectedly upon the silence and darkness of a tomb. No sound from the sunlit world came to our ears, nothing broke the dread and awful silence save the ‘drip, drip, drip’ from the invisible roof, marking the moments as Time glided into Eternity. Silence is said to send a man mad, but to my mind this regular and monotonous sound, never waxing, never waning, was much more calculated to steal away the senses. It was like tiny hammers beating relentlessly upon the very doors of the brain. To be imprisoned in such a place ! Terrible ! A man would begin to count the ‘drip, drip, drip,’ and then——God help him !

Numerous passages similar to the one by which we had entered branched off from the large central hall, one of them being at a height of seven feet from the floor, and having the appearance of a chamber in a ruined castle. At a later date Hadow explored those inner passages ; they led to other caverns, some of considerable size, though none so large as the great cave where the excavations were in the main conducted. The general plan of these subterranean halls and corridors was confusing as that of a labyrinth, so often did they cross and recross, returning always to the large hall from which they started. Upon one occasion Hadow lost his way in this maze of passages. He had started with the intention of prospecting one of the smaller caves in the interior. His candle was extinguished

by a drop of water falling from the roof, and for the better part of an hour he groped blindly in the inner darkness of the earth, unable to find his way back to the point of departure. It was an adventure I had no wish to share, though Hadow professed to enjoy the experience.

Curiosity satisfied, I retraced my steps towards daylight. I was glad to turn my back on this abode of night, and seek the sunshine and fresh air. The excavators had already commenced operations, and the sounds that pursued me along the narrow entrance passage were the ringing blows of pickaxes and the indignant voices of the echoes screaming to each other from their prisons far within.

CHAPTER XIV

BARTOLOMEO'S STORY

A SINGULAR object was in possession of my armchair (my armchair was composed of four large stones, and, as a piece of cave furniture, would have delighted the heart of a prehistoric Maple). The 'object' was an elderly person dressed in a faded green coat; his sombrero was ragged, as were his boots; his nether-man was clad in goatskin trousers, the hair worn outside; his faded yellow shirt, open at the neck, exposed a broad expanse of chest fully as hairy as his trousers. Furrowed and baked past all belief, his very garments sun-dyed and weather-stained, Nature had moulded him into harmonious affinity with the rocks and the grasses, and were it not for a certain amount of gentle animation which at times possessed him he might well have been mistaken for some natural feature of the landscape.

'*Bons dias, senhor!*' I remarked by way of introduction.

He looked in my direction with the listening attitude of one who hears the cry of some distant animal.

'You have come far?' was my next attempt at conversation.

He shrugged his shoulders.

'Far or near, what matters it?'

His voice was drowsy, and accorded well with the warm tide of the noonday hour. I seated myself by his side; his presence was soothing; he radiated peace; his whole personality was saturated with repose. He would stare in one direction with steady eyelids for a minute, yet he never appeared to be conscious of what he was looking at. He had a trick of looking through you that was slightly

disconcerting until you came to realize that his deep-set eyes were but the tombstones of buried intellect, and that, in all probability, he was gazing into the limitless regions of Nowhere.

We were silent for many minutes, yet there was nothing awkward or oppressive in our silence; even so would I have sat beside an oak-tree or a moss-covered boulder.

‘What is your name?’ asked I at length.

He started slightly, and requested me in a gentle voice to repeat my question. I did so.

‘My senhor,’ he replied, ‘I am Bartolomeo.’

‘And what do you on the mountains?’

‘I am a hunter; have you not heard of me?’

‘No, Bartolomeo, I have not.’

He expressed so much surprise that I made haste to add: ‘I live so far away.’

‘Where did the senhor say?’

‘In Scotland.’

‘I have heard of it,’ he replied, after looking through me for some time. ‘It rains there without ceasing.’

I spread out my hands—the gesture was non-committal. I was prepared to go to great lengths for my native land. Did not the Latin sentence, ‘Beautiful and appropriate is it that a man should die for his country,’ still ring in my ears? But between dying and lying there is a great gulf fixed. I changed the subject.

‘Bartolomeo,’ I said, ‘I see you have a gun.’ An old and battered specimen of a muzzle-loader lay by his side.

‘It is my friend,’ and he laid his hand on the weapon with the tenderness of a caress. His eyes wandered to our guns arranged along the wall of the cave, and a gleam of enthusiasm crept into their dull cavities. ‘You too are a hunter, senhor?’

‘Y-e-s,’ said I doubtfully; ‘oh yes, we shoot—not much as yet, but’—and I lost my way sadly among the tenses—‘we can shoot, we used to shoot, we might have been shooting, we wish or desire to shoot.’

He listened to this explanation with polite but perplexed attention, shook his head sadly, then contemplated the distant scenery with unwavering gaze. The minutes passed.

THE
ADVENTURE
OF
GILBERT JAMES



A SINGULAR OBJECT WAS IN POSSESSION OF MY ARMCHAIR.

'I would like to hold them in my hands,' he said, gazing fixedly at the mountains. I stared at him in surprise, but he never noticed it. His next remark enlightened me. 'I have never touched a real English gun,' he murmured half to himself.

I hastened to satisfy his curiosity. Together we inspected our armament. Warden's pistol was dismissed with scant praise; Hadow's and my double-barrelled breech-loaders were approved of, but the superlative expression of his admiration was reserved for the express rifle.

'*Que bello! Ah, Deos! Que bello!*' he murmured; then, after a lengthy pause: 'It will kill far?'

'It will drop a man at many hundred yards,' said I lightly, with the tone of one who has 'dropped' many men in his time. He made me repeat it twice—the news seemed almost too good to be true.

'*Ee, isto assim possível?*' (Is it really possible?) was all that he said, but there was no mistaking the note of deep admiration in his voice. I longed to make him the present of just such another rifle; he would have been the happiest man in all the length and breadth of the Algarve. The sight of that rifle kindled a little fire upon the altar of friendship. Bartolomeo nodded to me, and, feeling in all his pockets one after the other, at length discovered a snuff-box. We pledged each other in the nauseous dust.

'You drink wine, Bartolomeo?' I inquired, not to be outdone in generosity. He drew the back of his hand across his mouth, and something akin to a smile crept into his eyes. I sought the wine-skin and two of our tin cups. The crimson gush of the wine was as music to our ears; the heat was as usual oppressive, and the mere thought of drinking made one conscious of the parched condition of one's throat. My new friend raised his cup with a steady hand.

'*A sua saúde, meu senhor*' (Your health, sir).

'To you, my Bartolomeo, and to our better acquaintance.

'Another?' I suggested, when he had drained the last drop.

He nodded assent, and, holding out his cup, remarked:

'It is good wine.'

We toasted each other with many polite speeches. After

our third or fourth application to the wine-skin a little animation was to be observed in his manner; he visibly relaxed, or rather concentrated his attention upon the subject in hand; his eyes occasionally appeared to be conscious of my presence.

‘And now tell me, Bartolomeo,’ said I, laying one hand confidentially on his hairy knee—I felt as though I were touching a goat—‘tell me what is to be shot here.’

He surveyed me with kindly good-humour.

‘Once upon a time,’ he began in a thoughtful voice; the words had a familiar sound, they took me back to childhood and the atmosphere of fairy tales—‘once upon a time,’ he continued dreamily, ‘there were bears in these mountains—*bears*, senhor!’

‘I know, Bartolomeo,’ I cried joyously—‘*three bears*.’

‘Not so, senhor; many more than three, I assure you.’ He paused to let this information reach my brain, then continued in the same even and monotonous voice: ‘Now, there are none to be found—not one; but we have wolves, —yes, they are everywhere. Has the noble senhor ever seen a wolf?’

‘Y-e-s, I think so—once or twice.’

‘Ah! where was that?’

‘At the Zoo.’

Bartolomeo’s brow furrowed with thought.

‘I know not where that is,’ said he slowly. ‘I have not travelled far, that is God’s truth. But tell me, senhor, when you saw this wolf did you shoot him?’

‘No,’ I replied musingly—‘no, I did not shoot him.’

‘Why was that, senhor?’

‘I—I had forgotten my gun, Bartolomeo.’

‘Ah! that was a thousand pities; it is well to kill the vermin whenever you see them. Now, senhor, take the advice of an old sportsman: never go unarmed, and the next time you travel through this country of Zoo, kill all you see; believe me, you will never regret it.’

‘I am none so sure of that,’ I said under my breath, and I thought of my ignominious expulsion by the keepers after a brief battue in Regent’s Park.

Bartolomeo was warming to his subject.

‘Do you see many wolves hereabouts?’ I asked him.

‘Yes; in the winter-time, driven by hunger, they come down into the valleys. They kill many sheep and calves. We are obliged to protect the folds with men and great wolf-dogs, bred on purpose for this work.’

‘And have you ever killed a wolf, Bartolomeo?’

‘Many, senhor; glory be to God!’

‘Tell me a wolf story,’ I pleaded.

The request pleased him, for he surveyed me in a complacent and friendly manner. Settling himself more comfortably in my armchair he produced a pipe. He was, by the way, one of the few men in the neighbourhood who were in the habit of patronizing pipes; cigarettes were more fashionable. Striking a light with flint and steel, and filling the grimy bowl with coarse tobacco which he carried loose in a corner of his coat-pocket, he soon puffed vigorously. The smoke rose in the still air; the rank and pungent odour was far from pleasant. The smell recalled the days of my boyhood; it was a similar brand to that which our old gardener was in the habit of using to kill objectionable insects in the conservatory. I looked at Bartolomeo, and smiled approval.

‘I will tell you of the last one I killed, senhor. It was no later ago than January. Much snow was on the mountains; the passes were blocked up; it was a bitter time, and many wolves came down from the high hills. At night I used to hear them round my cottage; a wolf howling at night is a dismal sound. I had been spending the day at Carenta, and was going home in the dusk; it was not dark, for a little starlight was in the sky, and so much snow made the valley appear very white. All at once something big jumped from behind a rock and ran away. I thought, “*Ohé!* A stray dog!” but then he did not run like a dog. As I stood still staring after him the moon came up behind the Grey Lady—that is the name of a hill near Carenta—and I saw he was a lone wolf. Yes, senhor, a lone wolf!’

‘Well?’ I inquired, for Bartolomeo had relapsed into dreamland, and was gazing at the distant mountains.

‘Of course, senhor—of course; it is as I was saying. You

know what the light of the full moon looks on snow?—it was clear as day. I determined to stalk him. *Carramba!* What a night for a stalk! I looked at his spoor, and close beside the marks of his pads were drops of blood, and on returning to the rock I found the bones of a young sheep, and blood on the trampled snow.'

'He had killed?' I cried, as the old man paused in his story.

'As you say, senhor, he had killed. All night I stalked him in the clear moonlight, up and down hill, through deep gorges, and once down a rocky spur that I would not go down in the daytime—no, not if you paid me for it in yellow gold. I was tired, and wet, and hungry, but my blood was up, and I vowed two beautiful candles to the Madonna de Carenta if she would help me to kill that wolf.'

Bartolomeo crossed himself, then relit his pipe, which had gone out.

'Please go on,' I entreated.

'Well, senhor, the night was far spent when I tracked him to a cave, far from here, above Salir, a lonely spot. I saw to the priming of my gun, and with much care I crept to the entrance. It was like this'—he made a little plan with stones on the floor at our feet—'here was the cave, and here was I behind this rock, and here was the top of the hill not far away. It was all black within, but, as I looked, I saw two eyes like stars in the darkness. Taking aim, I fired, but he must have moved as I fired, for I did not kill him. In my excitement I had stepped from behind my rock, and in a moment he was on me. His spring knocked my gun out of my hands; I could feel his hot breath and the hot blood from his wound as we rolled over and over in the snow, and then his teeth met in my shoulder—I have the marks still; you can put your fingers into them quite easily. It was my left shoulder, or I should have been in a worse plight, for my right hand was free, and it sought my knife—this one here.' He drew a Spanish knife with a long keen blade from his belt, and ran one finger gently along its edge. 'I gave him this, not once or twice, but four times, senhor, to the hilt. Holy Virgin! he was all soft inside! It was like carving butter, and at

the fourth thrust his jaws relaxed, and I flung him from me and staggered to my feet. He was dead! Yes, dead as goat's-flesh, and *I* had killed him! It was a great moment, senhor!

'I can well believe it,' I cried with sympathy.

Bartolomeo told this story and particularly the end of it with much dramatic power. I would never have given him credit for so hot an enthusiasm. Where were his lethargy, his indifference, his day-dreams? Gone, all gone, and in their place were a host of fiery feelings that carried you along with them, 'hot foot' over the snow in the blue moonlight, to the last fierce struggle in the cave. It was no imaginary wolf that Bartolomeo tracked and slew with impassioned gesture, but a real live animal, for by the light in his eyes and the convulsive twitching of his hands you were made to feel the reality of every word he uttered. But, strange to relate, no sooner was the story finished than he relapsed once more into dreamland.

We sat silent for a long time. The flies buzzed in and out. The drowsy influence of the hour and of my companions acted like some 'dull opiate' on my senses. I, too, was content to sit and dream while my eyes strayed over the sun-steeped valley to the distant hills. At last Bartolomeo spoke:

'Senhor, it grows late; the shadows tell me that I must be going. To meet you has been a pleasure, senhor; once more I thank you. *Adeos e obrigado;*' and with these parting words, spoken with stately and old-fashioned courtesy, my new friend wandered gently away into the sunlight.

CHAPTER XV

I MEET WITH COLOMBA

I WAS seated within the low entrance to our cave engaged in writing up my diary. A broad stone was my table, and, astride on my saddle-bags, I was endeavouring to translate the events of our nomadic life into words. It was very hot; our thermometer stood at ninety-five degrees in the shade. The sunshine fell like a flame mantle over the country-side; the mountains quivered through a veil of heat. Far down in the valley I caught sight of the glitter of our brook as it flashed back the sunlight. The sound of a dull hammering broke on my ears; it was faint and irregular, coming as it did from a considerable distance. It told of 'Hadow, Warden, and Co., Searchers for Old Bones, Limited' (alas! too limited), toiling deep in the bowels of the earth.

'Thank heaven!' I ejaculated, 'that my connection with the Company does not force me to immure myself in inner darkness on such a fine morning as this.' In one respect my friends had the best of it; I suffered most from the heat. The interior of the cave was a temperate zone compared with the tropics of the outer hall. My costume, more comfortable than presentable, consisted of a pair of gray flannel trousers—they had once been white!—a dark flannel shirt, and a Portuguese sombrero. My jacket was donned only on Sundays. Hadow had primitive but deep-rooted convictions on the subject of dress; he scoffed my necktie into my saddle-bags, and on one occasion when, with youthful love of adornment, I appeared with a button-hole, I narrowly escaped being stoned.

My diary was a never-failing jest with my companions. No circumstance so trivial but they implored me to record it in my pages. When Warden's tooth-brush wore out he seriously asked me to insert a paragraph to that effect. A sentence, he said, was not sufficient to give strangers an adequate idea of all that tooth-brush had undergone. In that he said truth, for it was a tooth-brush of an obliging character, and while it lasted was extremely useful 'about the house.' Hadow was full of anatomical fancies, which he said the public would be glad to hear. Many of them were extremely gruesome, and more suited for the records of a dissecting-room than for the pages of an unpretentious diary.

In his more serious moments Hadow frequently remonstrated with me, not only upon the flippancy of my manner, but also upon the triviality of my matter. With judicial gravity he took my diary into his hands upon one occasion, and as he turned the pages gave vent to loud and continuous snorts of disapproval.

'What is this?' he cried. 'Two pages about one sunset! Hein! many details about that foolish woman you did flirt with on the steamer. Faugh! and, worse than all, silly schoolboy jokes about bones. Bah!'

For a moment he eyed me grimly, then, tossing my long-suffering volume contemptuously from him, continued sadly:

'It grieves me to see you in this bad state. What for a future are you mapping out for yourself? Think you what you will become?'

Such was the solemnity of his voice that I at once became uncomfortable—anxiety for my future beset me. Hadow swept on in a torrent of prophetic denunciation.

'You will become a trifler with life; a mere dilettante; a man of no real knowledge. *Ja wohl!* and, I fear'—he paused, then continued in a voice of profound commiseration—'an object of contempt to all scientific men.'

I wriggled.

'Sir, you are a dabbler!' thundered Hadow, pointing at me with the stem of his pipe.

'I can't help it,' I said dejectedly. 'I suppose it is my

nature. I don't want to be an object of contempt to anyone ; it's not a pleasant prospect—but what can I do ?'

Hadow laid his hand on my shoulder.

'Dear boy,' said he kindly, 'you are young ; there is time to change. Now, you are fond of writing ; why not write something that is good and worthy to be written, Hein ?'

'What would you have me write ?' I questioned, in extreme doubt as to whether any emanation from my pen would ever be classed under the heading of 'good, and worthy to be written.'

'What say you to history ?' suggested Hadow, giving me a friendly shake.

'History !' I ejaculated.

'*Ja wohl!* Why not? If you had the taste for it I should say study some definite branch of scientific knowledge, such as biology, or geology ; but no, your brain would not grasp such work, so, I say, try history.'

'But that requires a brain too ; there is a science of history.'

'*Doch!* it is the function of historical science to record facts.'

'And what do you call the sciences you go in for ?' I asked.

Hadow laughed softly.

'I, dear boy ! I go in for many, as you know, but most of all for the material and natural sciences ; all, you may say, that rest on outward observation and not on introspection. *Na!* that is perhaps a Cartesian distinction.'

'What do you mean by Cartesian ?'

'*Gott!*' flared the Professor, 'you are an ignorant animal ! One has to teach you the alphabet ; *nicht wahr?*'

'Be patient ; I am a willing pupil, at all events. Now tell me what it means.'

'It means the philosophy developed by Des Cartes, Malebranche, and Spinoza. Hein, are you any the wiser ?'

'Very little !'

Hadow snorted.

'Now,' I continued, 'to show how willing I am I will listen to all you were going to say on the subject of history.'

You never know your luck. Perhaps some "mute inglorious" Gibbon may be slumbering in my soul. Speak on, my candid friend.'

Hadow seated himself by me, and began to light his pipe.

'Dear boy,' he said, between immense puffs of smoke, 'I advise you to take up a period of your English history—say Charles I. and the Parliamentary Wars, with the battles of Marston Moor, Newbury, and Naseby. Read everything that has been written about that period; there are many histories, and also many memoirs of great interest. It is a fine subject. Read very carefully and take many notes, then let it soak; do not forget it, but just let it simmer in the back of your brain. In time will come a wish to write. Good! do so; but, for God's sake, do not publish your foolish first thoughts! Lock them in a drawer for one year. One day you will open that drawer, and you will say as you read them: "What foolish writing is this! I can do better now," and you will write it all over again, and perhaps—see, now, I say only *perhaps*—you may one day write a book that will be worth a little to the world.'

I gazed at him in consternation. What good advice it was! and yet, alas! how little could it profit me! I shook my head sadly.

'It is hardly my line,' I hazarded.

'Why not?' demanded Hadow.

'My dear Professor,' cried I, striking an oratorical attitude, 'such is your enthusiasm that I must admit that at first your words depressed me, but I now see how impossible it is that all men can follow in the footsteps of science. You ask me why! Surely you, a student of human nature, ought to know? Why does one man go in for art, another for business? Listen to wisdom falling from the lips of folly. Hereditary instinct, temperament, individuality—call it what you will—join hands with circumstances to carve our destinies for us. History! No, I would be a most unsatisfactory historian. I would dally with the Queens—and utterly neglect the Kings. I would laugh and jest with the Maids of Honour, and allow the most important political events to go unrecorded. For the sake of the nation which has adopted you do not elevate me, against my will, to the

proud position of historian. It would be a poor return for benefits received. And why Charles I.? Surely that unfortunate monarch deserves better from posterity? Why appoint a man who loses his heart to pen the records of a King who has already lost his head?’

Hadow glanced at me with an expression of comical disapproval.

‘You are incorrigible, I fear,’ said he.

‘Recognise that, once and for all, and we will be happy,’ said I cheerfully.

‘But, dear boy——’

‘My dear Professor, “but me no buts”; accept my useless existence as an admirable foil to your own useful career. You edify and instruct the audience—I but amuse them. You are ungrateful; I do you an inestimable service, for my folly is the effective background against which your wisdom shines so brightly—like “a rich jewel in an Ethiop’s ear,” eh? What? No, no, once and for all hold out the hand of friendship to my limitations; believe me, it is the only way.’

Hadow fumed and laughed in the same breath.

‘And yet——’ he began, tugging at his great moustache, as was his wont in moments of perplexity. I interrupted him at once.

‘For Heaven’s sake, Professor, don’t argue! I don’t want to get the worst of it. Listen, that is Warden’s voice calling you to begin work. Go and excavate there as much as you like, but, if you are wise, don’t dig for buried wisdom in my head; you won’t find it!’

Hadow gazed at me sternly, opened his mouth to speak, closed it without a sound, shrugged his shoulders, wheeled to the ‘right about,’ and disappeared into the inner cave.

But this has led me far from diaries, which was the subject I had in mind at the commencement of this chapter. It is a digression, but if I am to apologize for every digression that occurs in the length and breadth of these pages, then my whole attitude and tone will be one of abject apology, for, to confess it at once, I intend to digress just so often as it takes my fancy.

Hadow, too, is a strong argument in favour of digression—

he loathed digressions ! To write about him in a series of digressions is a temptation that I cannot resist. It is a form of humour that is distinctly piquant ; it is nearly on a par with my master-stroke of ironical inspiration—viz., the idea of kidnapping Hadow, clapping him under hatches, and sailing away with him, willy nilly, in a vessel entitled 'Sunshine and Sentiment.'

But to return to diaries in general, and my diary in particular. Behold me, then, wrestling in the agonies of composition ! It was a most serious undertaking.

When I became involved in the coils of some labyrinthian sentence, and knew not how to extricate myself, I invariably walked to the mouth of the cave and threw a great stone into the valley. The sight of it crashing downwards in ever-increasing leaps was wonderfully composing to my thoughts, and never failed to bring me safely to the haven of a full-stop. During one of these interruptions I heard a curious sound which appeared to come from a distance—click, click, click, click, and running out into the sunlight I caught sight of a girl, mounted on a donkey, riding slowly down the track which was our only means of communication with the outer world. The noise I had heard was the tapping of the donkey's hoofs against the stones with which the path was strewn. On her nearer approach I recognised her as the daughter of Manuel da Silvas, whom I had seen on the occasion of our visit to his cottage. The sight gave me pleasure, and I awaited her coming with impatience. To be sure, my costume somewhat disconcerted me ; but I reflected that the young lady would not expect an elaborate toilet in a cave-dweller, that she was as much primitive woman as I was primitive man, and that after all this was not Bond Street, but a particularly wild corner of the Sierra de Monchique. Sustained by these reflections I watched her without further misgivings. She was a picturesque figure seated on the little gray donkey. A large sun-bonnet shaded her face ; her short blue skirt revealed a pleasing sufficiency of ankle ; her feet were encased in wooden shoes, with which from time to time she gently kicked the donkey's sides to encourage him to further exertions. On her arm she carried a wickerwork

basket, and tucked into her waist-band I noticed a bunch of scarlet flowers.

I hastened to assist her to alight.

'Senhora,' said I, with a bow, 'consider yourself welcome.'

There was a Continental smack about the phrase that took my fancy.

'I have come with provisions for you,' she said with a smile. The words were simple; even had I not understood them the gestures would have proved amply illustrative of her meaning. I bowed again.

'My father, Manuel da Silvas, sent me. He has gone to Loulé on business.'

'The sun is hot,' I hazarded, after a pause.

She assented.

'The cave is cool.'

She assented again. We were 'getting on' famously.

'Let us go in,' I cried, waving my hand in the direction of the entrance.

'But my donkey?'

'I will tie him up,' said I, and laying hold of the reins I speedily anchored the little animal to the shadow-side of the rocks. We seated ourselves upon the table.

I looked at my visitor with approval. Her face was by no means perfect, yet any slight defect was more than counterbalanced by some uncommon charm, so that the effect of the whole was delightful. For example, the nose was somewhat *retroussé*, but then the ears were little pink shells; the mouth was perhaps larger than symmetry demanded, but then the teeth dazzled you; the hair was less fine than it ought to be, but its colour and abundance made you forget its slight failing in quality. And her eyes! Had she a dozen defects, each one more visible than the other, these eyes would have redeemed them all. Dreamy, voluptuous, soft, full of languor in repose, full of fire in animation. Ah! one must fly to the South for such eyes as these; the flame that glowed in their dark depths could have been born under no Northern sun.

And her figure? But there—Messrs. Webster, Nuttall, and Co., makers of dictionaries, must invent an entirely

new set of adjectives if I am to describe her figure with any chance of success. It was too full of sweet curves and seductive undulations to be bound by the fetters of description. It required to be seen, perched on my table, to be properly appreciated. Masculine eyes, bold enough to start on a voyage of discovery, had but to trust themselves to the switchback of admiration, and, heigh, presto! off they went, up one hill and down another—the inclines were irresistible, ‘alluring up and enticing down’—until the bold adventurer not only lost his breath, but his heart into the bargain, which, as I can tell him from personal experience, was a much more serious matter.

Whilst I was making these observations I was, in my turn, subjected to critical scrutiny, but as I was gazing at her, it followed as a matter of course that whenever she looked at me our eyes met. This threw her into a pretty confusion, and the donkey being the only other living object within sight, she transferred her attention to him. Now, as is to be supposed, the features of her donkey were familiar to her—too familiar to excite interest, so that her eyes speedily returned to me. Again we gazed at each other, and again her eyes reverted to the donkey; again she stole a glance at me, and again she inspected my rival. This occurred many times. Playing hide-and-seek with such eyes as belonged to the *Senhora da Silvas* was a pretty enough pastime, yet, truth to tell, I grew weary of it—I wanted them all to myself—I envied the little donkey his share in the game. When a man, a maid, and a donkey meet upon a mountain the donkey must give way; he must be taught his place. This was no ‘*Midsummer-Night’s Dream*’; my little maiden in the sun-bonnet was no enchanted queen to fall enamoured of an ass.

‘*Senhora,*’ I said, ‘please to look at me only; I am of a very jealous disposition.’

My visitor smiled. A dimple appeared hard by her mouth. I studied it with interest. My attention must have disconcerted her, for speedily it vanished, and a demure expression crept into its place. Her eyes returned to the donkey.

‘Do you see any resemblance?’ I questioned with a smile.

‘Not much, senhor.’ But although her voice was serious there was a tell-tale twinkle in her eyes.

‘What is your name?’ I inquired with great interest.

‘I am Colomba.’

‘Colomba! What a pretty name! And may I call you Colomba?’

‘Why not? It is my name; everyone calls me Colomba.’

‘Oh, indeed! Who, then, is everyone?’

‘Father and Carmen—Carmen is my sister—and my dear old Padre, and Santos, and cousin Filipe, and Pedro, and Carlos—— Oh, everyone—all my friends.’

‘Then if I call you Colomba I will be a friend too?’

‘You are full of kindness, senhor.’

‘I have a warm heart, Colomba.’

She looked at me swiftly; her eyes convinced me, as nothing else could, of the warmth of my heart. The space between us on the table grew perceptibly less.

‘And do you really live in this hole?’ she asked, gazing wonderingly around her.

‘Temporally,’ I assented.

‘And no woman to look after you?’

I shook my head.

‘Holy Mary! I wonder you live at all.’

‘’Tis but a makeshift for life, Colomba; yet we have our consolations, as, for instance, when we are visited unawares by a little angel on a gray donkey.’

Colomba smiled, then shook her head.

‘No, no,’ she remonstrated, ‘you say that but to please me; you do not really mean it, I know. Santos told me to beware of such fine compliments.’

‘Confound Santos!’ I muttered in English.

‘Pardon?’ she inquired.

‘Never mind, Colomba; it was an expression of pain.’

She looked at me doubtfully. I made haste to convince her.

‘That you should think me capable of insulting you with an empty phrase, gives me pain. Am not I to be permitted to speak the truth? The sun shines—and I am warmed; a flower opens—and I am pleased; Colomba comes—and I am happy.’

‘Forgive me,’ she said simply.

We shook hands. The space between us on the table was by this time invisible to the naked eye.

‘Carmen would like to see this cave,’ she remarked. ‘We have often played here when we were children, but to think of it as a real house is too droll. Where do you sleep? I see no bed.’

I pointed to the ledge outside.

‘That is my bed, Colomba; it is hard, but healthy. The air is fresh, and the view is very fine when one wakes in the morning.’

‘Where are your friends, the senhores, whom I saw you with the other day?’

‘They are in there.’

She turned round, and gazed at the dark entrance to the inner cave with consternation.

‘What do they in that hole? There are bats there and— and evil spirits!’ She spoke in an awestruck voice, as though she feared to arouse such unpleasant neighbours.

‘They look for bones,’ I whispered.

‘*Bones!*’ she cried in horror.

‘Yes, bones,’ I said resignedly.

‘Ah, the bones of saints perhaps?’ There was a note of hope in her voice; out of the kindness of her heart she was anxious to make the best of any friends of mine.

‘No, I am afraid I cannot truthfully say that.’

‘They must be mad,’ she cried in alarm.

‘It looks like it,’ I assented.

She cast a glance at her donkey. I read flight in her eye. I laid my hand on hers reassuringly.

‘Do not be frightened; there is no cause for alarm. They suffer, it is true, from palæontology—sandstone caves excite them strangely, but otherwise they are harmless.’

‘But how terrible for you! Oh, I would not travel with two mad men for anything! No, not even a piece of the Blessed Cross could tempt me.’

I shrugged my shoulders.

‘What will you? One must live; we have all our little anxieties. But let us talk of something more cheerful. Do you know, I am glad you live near us. I shall think

of you often—over the brow of the mountain where the valley dips. When the sun peeps at me in the morning, I will say, “Colomba is getting up”; and at night when all is dark I will think, “Colomba is in bed”; and the light and the darkness will both be dear to me, for Colombo will see them too.’

‘You have beautiful thoughts, senhor; when you speak like that I think I am in church. Our Padre, too, has beautiful thoughts.’

I paused. To be compared seriously to the Padre was an honour I had not expected. She gazed at me with a saintly look in her beautiful eyes. The compliment was evidently sincere.

‘You will come to see us often?’ I asked appealingly.

‘Is it quite safe?’ she murmured.

‘You are as safe with me as if you were in—well, in church.’

‘But they might get worse. A day may come when they find no longer any bones, or perhaps the bones may be too old—they may long for fresh ones.’

She shuddered; tales of ghouls and vampires were evidently running riot in her imagination.

‘There is no need for alarm,’ I said soothingly. ‘Now tell me, Colomba, will you come to see me sometimes?’

‘Sometimes, perhaps, but not often. My father says young girls must not go out often.’

‘Your father is a sensible man. If I were he I would keep you *always* at home. These eyes of yours are far too beautiful to be shining like twin stars over all the country.’

‘Oh, senhor!’

‘Yes, it is true. They are calculated to do much harm—to wound many hearts. Now, look at me; not down there, look straight at me! You would say, would you not, that I appeared to be a cautious, unimpressionable man?’

‘I—I do not know,’ she murmured doubtfully.

‘And yet,’ I continued, warming to my subject, ‘these eyes of yours, these beautiful eyes of yours—’

The lashes fell, and she half averted her head.

‘I swear, Colomba,’ I cried, becoming more and more animated, ‘that these glorious—’

‘What ho!’ shouted a voice behind us.

We sprang apart. In the inner entrance two faces were to be seen, both indicative of the most exasperating amusement.

‘Sorry to interrupt you,’ chuckled Warden.

‘Shall we go back again, dear boy?’ asked Hadow politely.

I felt myself flushing.

‘Don’t be an ass, Hadow. And, Warden, stop that inane giggle; there is no need for these misplaced jokes. The situation explains itself.’

‘It does,’ chuckled Warden.

‘This young lady,’ continued I, ‘has been good enough to bring us some provisions from her home. I was just thanking her when you arrived.’

‘Do you always give the ladies thanks after such a kind manner?’ inquired Hadow with deep interest.

‘Where are the provisions?’ asked Warden, casting his eyes round the cave.

Where were they? Truth to tell, we had forgotten all about them. I looked at Colomba, and she looked at me, and we read something near to consternation in each other’s eyes.

‘Where did you put the basket, senhora?’ I inquired politely.

‘I believe it is outside, senhor,’ she answered with equal decorum.

I ran into the sunlight, and bringing it into the cave placed it upon our table. The interest it excited was of service to us in our present dilemma—the jests at our expense died a natural death. We surrounded Hadow, who proceeded to open it in silence. The contents were as follows:

A pigskin of red wine, a paper parcel of olives, seven eggs (one broken), a bottle of olive oil, a pot of honey, and a basket of pears.

‘No bread?’ questioned I.

‘No meat?’ asked Warden.

‘Epicures! Sybarites!’ grunted Hadow.

‘Does it not please the senhores?’ inquired Colomba with a note of anxiety in her voice.

‘It is delicious; we are all delighted,’ answered Warden; and then he began to talk softly to my new-found friend, making use of Portuguese patois, which from the tender inflections of his voice seemed to my jealous ears the one language in the world suited to the requirements of lovers. Colomba was obviously interested; her black eyes sparkled, and she replied with animation. Judge if I was annoyed! There was no doubt that Warden was a good-looking and amusing fellow, but was that sufficient reason for such treacherous conduct? Was I to stand meekly aside while he flirted, thus disgracefully, with my best—indeed, I may say my only girl? By all the gods of Egypt—no! He had plainly got the better of me with his Portuguese patois, but I had the winning card up my sleeve—let him laugh who wins! I stole behind him, and, waiting patiently till I caught Colomba’s eye, tapped my forehead significantly, and murmured ‘Bones!’ The effect of that cabalistic word was as instantaneous as it was remarkable. Colomba turned pale, fear crept into her eyes.

‘I—I must be going home,’ she stammered; ‘it is late. Good-bye!’

‘Let me assist you,’ said Warden genially.

‘Holy Virgin! no, no!’ she cried, recoiling from him in horror. ‘Please do not give yourself the trouble; I will go alone. Good-bye, good-bye,’ and she fairly took to her heels. The next moment we heard the sounds of a donkey, urged to its topmost speed, galloping ‘clatter, clatter, clatter’ up the stony track that led to the mountain brow.

We gazed in blank astonishment at the basket which Colomba had forgotten in her precipitate flight, and then consulted each other’s faces.

‘What an *extraordinary* girl!’ exclaimed Warden.

CHAPTER XVI

DAILY LIFE IN OUR CAVE

SINCE that first unforgettable night I invariably slept in the open air. The ledge made an excellent sleeping-place, a row of large stones placed on the extreme outer edge preventing the possibility of my rolling into the gorge. I was unaccustomed to spending the dark hours in the open air, and deeply did I enjoy the experience. The nights were fine, and there was a remarkable absence of dew. My one blanket proved covering sufficient, so that I cannot remember to have suffered from cold. Even during the hours that more immediately precede the dawn, when Nature appears to shiver in anticipation of the day, I was never inconvenienced by these breaths of wandering air that disturbed the inanimate world. To me they came always as gentle and salutary influences, and, as they fanned my cheek and stirred my hair, I welcomed them with thankful heart. Nor was it to be wondered at that I never felt cold. All day long the great chain of the Sierra de Monchique steeped itself in sunshine; it basked and baked till the very rocks fevered into a dull glow that made them painful to the touch. The hours when the great celestial fire withdrew its beams were but few in number, and the heat imprisoned in the mountains had not time sufficient to escape.

The hardness of my bed was the one drawback to these open-air nights, and even that disadvantage was reduced to a minimum by a careful disposition of spare shirts and other contributions from my saddle-bags. The mosquitoes and other pests ceased to trouble me after the first night;

strange to narrate, they patronized only the interior of the cave, and, having moved my bed into the open air, I rid myself of them for good and all.

There were many pleasures connected with this out-of-door life. It was all pure delight to awaken suddenly in the night watches, and little by little to become conscious of my situation; to see the roof of my vast bed-chamber blazing with stars; to realize that no eye but mine rested on the misty mountain-tops, and that the subdued and starlit beauty of the scene was unrolled, as it were, for me alone.

We were astir betimes. They who sleep afield need have no fear of oversleeping themselves. Nature has many little voices to remind one that the season of rest has merged into the season of toil, and he must indeed be a deep sleeper or a man of more than usually slothful habits who can close his ears to these voices of the dawn. I cannot mention, with any degree of certainty, the precise hour at which we were called. It sometimes appeared to me to be within a wink of bedtime, for no sooner had I laid my head on my saddle-bags than the night vanished in the stir of an eyelash, and, behold! it was already morning. Did I disregard the call of the frogs—there were the grasshoppers! Did I turn a deaf ear to the grasshoppers—there was Hadow; and, were you acquainted with Hadow, you would not ask me how long I successfully affected to be unconscious of his presence. I have referred to being awakened by the ‘little voices’ of the dawn, but surely this is a flight of fancy, this is comparing greater things to lesser; in a word, this is looking at Hadow’s voice through the wrong end of the telescope?

A clamber down the gorge, followed by a plunge into the clear and cool water of our brook, was the first event in our daily programme. Not that we neglected our pool of the oleanders at other and less matutinal seasons—for indeed we bathed frequently—but these morning dips were by far the most enjoyable of our experiences.

With the exception of the embarrassing episode which occurred during our first bathe, our early morning swims were free from interruption. We had not only the pool,

but the entire sweep of the surrounding hills to ourselves. The valley lay naked in the cold light. Every rock and stone stood out with startling distinctness. The folds of the hills rose like walls between us and the great world beyond. The gorge became a sanctuary—a haven of refuge—and the outcast who sought shelter within it was disturbed by no ruder voices than the sigh of the breeze and the singing of the brook. Indeed, there was something in its solemnity at this early hour which made me think of it as a pagan temple. The hills, the slopes, the rocks, and, above all, the brook, fell naturally into their places, calm and benignant servants ministering to the weary souls of wayfarers.

The cave had by this time assumed a more habitable aspect. A flagstaff had been erected at the entrance, from which a red handkerchief, belonging to Warden, informed the surrounding country that the 'family' were at home. Within our living-room the method and neatness of Hadow were observable at every turn. The limited space was mapped into microscopic apartments; it was possible for you to lie with your head in the dining-room, your body in the hall, and your feet in Hadow's study. N.B.—the Professor was much annoyed—as was Romulus on a similar occasion—if you jumped over the insignificant walls of his study on your way to the kitchen. To leave a gun in the library, or a book in the gun-room, was a crime punishable by court-martial. The study was our show-room, and the pride of Hadow's heart. In it everything bore a ticket—the most stupid of men could not possibly make a mistake no more than could the students at — College when they were led through Hadow's museum.

You observed a repulsive object in a glass bottle, in which you at once became interested, for on the label you read: '*Salamandra maculosa*, found at 3,000 feet elevation; see notebook B. 2, page 415'; or you found yourself face to face with the body of some unhappy bird, hanging in suicidal attitude from a nail, and, consulting its dying confession, discovered that it was 'The desiccated skin of *Alcedo ispida* Martin pescador; see red pocket-book, No. 2, page 15.'

Warden, unfortunately, was deeply impressed. I say

‘unfortunately,’ because the feeling awoke the spirit of emulation within him. Convinced that he had but to go and do likewise in order to become a scientific collector, he captured a flea, and, pinning it side by side with other specimens in Hadow’s study, wrote underneath in large characters : ‘Cave flea (*Germanico Furioso*), found on the Professor’s person, at 5 feet elevation. See Hadow on profane language, page 50000.’

I draw a veil over the storm which followed on the heels of this ill-judged humour.

The day was parcelled out in portions. Hadow composed what he termed a *Stunden Plan*. A copy of this unique document was attached to the entrance wall of our cave. As far as I can recollect it was couched in the following language :

‘5 a.m.—All shall get up ; no lazy bones shall be seen.

‘5.10.—Make beds. Blankets not to be shaken in cave, as the fleas of Manuel are still with us.

‘5.15.—Go to bath ; all shall seek frogs.

‘5.45.—Breakfast—coffee and bread. Sardines on Sunday !

‘6.15.—Smoke, arrange specimens, learn patois, etc.

‘6.30.—Start workmen. Alfonso is lazy animal. Wake him up ; see my notebook S. on Portuguese curses,’ etc.

And so it continued, minuetting up the ladder of the hours till, finally :

‘10.30 p.m.—All to sleep ; no word shall be spoken after this late hour.’

‘But, my dear fellow,’ cried Warden aghast, ‘you surely don’t expect us to obey this ?’

‘*Ja wohl*, dear boy, why not ? It is for your great good.’

‘But we are not schoolboys, or convicts, or—or Germans ! This is what comes of being born in Berlin, of having what is called a “Paternal Government” ! By heavens, what a subject for a speech !’

‘It is a most *colossal* fine Government,’ said Hadow warmly.

‘Fine ? Yes, but you can never get far enough away to appreciate its fineness ; it keeps you in leading-strings ;

it is as bad as the orthodox mother-in-law—it will not even let you manage your domestic affairs without its assistance.’

Poor Hadow! Often have I since thought what a difficult task he had set himself! He likened himself to an Irishman driving pigs to market, and truly the simile was appropriate. We would *not* be driven! In vain he hounded us on with gutterals! In vain he pelted us with adjectives. We avoided the beaten track of regularity as we would the devil.

As sleeping partner in the firm I asserted my right immemorial to sleep, not, perhaps, in the literal, but certainly in the metaphorical acceptation of the word, which, to my mind, meant that I was to be tied down by no rules or regulations whatsoever. What! Was not I the recognised recorder of sunshine, the licensed purveyor of sentiment? And was it to be expected that a being dedicated to an existence so necessarily transcendental was to be fettered by a *Stunden Plan*?

Warden seconded me loyally. It was his holiday, and although he threw himself into the occupation of bone-hunting with characteristic enthusiasm, yet to have his entire day doled out to him in rations was more than he bargained for. He addressed the house with fiery eloquence. It was no mere after-dinner speech—it was a declaration of independence!

And yet we owed Hadow many a debt of gratitude, none perhaps more deserved than for his willing services as cook. Cooks were difficult to obtain in the Sierra de Monchique. I am certain that no registry office would have undertaken to supply the deficiency. Even had we promised them unlimited young men, and not only Sundays, but every day—ay, even every night—out, they would not have accepted the situation. There was a difficulty—even cooks have their limitations. However partial they may be to masculine society—and Heaven knows they kindle the fire on the altar of love fully as often as in the grate of servitude—yet for one woman to be asked to ‘keep company’ simultaneously with seven men and a boy would have staggered every applicant for the post.

Forced back upon our own resources, Warden and I tried

our 'prentice hand' at culinary art, but although more than satisfied with our own concoctions, each unhesitatingly condemned those of the other as unfit for human food. Hadow, philosophically indifferent, ate every noxious mess which we placed before him without remark. Our discussion amused him ; he aired his opinions thus :

'What matters it how food is cooked? You are foolish animals ; to cook is easy.'

'I only wish you would try it,' grumbled Warden.

'I will, my dear boy. Yes, I am a good cook—you will see.'

'Why didn't you tell us before this that you could cook?'

'*Mein Gott!* you have never asked me. It is all same to me what for food I eat ; but, as you are so particular, I will be *chef*, and if you pampered fellows do not like to eat my good things, I will eat them myself.'

But the office he had undertaken was no sinecure. Part of the outer ledge had been chosen as the most fitting spot for our kitchen. We never, with the exception of the first day, lighted a fire within our cave, and that for two reasons—firstly, on account of the smoke, which came near to stifling us ; and, secondly, owing to the great heat which, increased by the burning logs, rendered our dwelling-room a veritable chamber of horrors. The kitchen, then, was set up in the open air, and as our cave opened to the south-west, and was for that reason exposed to long hours of sunshine, the post of cook would have disgusted any but a Salamander.

Think of it and tremble. The thermometer within the shadow-margin of our cave registered oftentimes from one hundred to one hundred and four degrees, which will give some faint notion of what Hadow must have suffered in the full glare of the sun, to say nothing of the heat radiated by the burning logs ; and to make matters worse, imagine his being forced to listen to sounds of revelry proceeding from within, where Warden and I made merry over the wine-skin in anticipation of the coming meal.

How well I recall the scene ! The sunshine without, the mountains shimmering through a veil of heat, Hadow growling but good-natured, the wafted smoke of the fire,

the oppressive but tempered atmosphere of the cave, and Warden and I in shirt-sleeves pledging each other over our stone table.

‘Mr. Warden, your health, sir!’

‘Why, certainly, my boy. Wait a minute. I must make a speech. Ladies and gentlemen,’ etc. (Warden, with his usual gallantry, never became accustomed to the unavoidable absence of the fair sex.) Our tin cups met with a convivial click. We beamed at each other with true brotherly love. I shall never forget the peculiar but not unpleasant taste imparted to the wine by its skin receptacle. What gay times we had! How we laughed!

‘How comes it, dear boy,’ said Hadow to me, ‘that you are so different an animal when you get your skinful of wine?’

‘Wine,’ I cried, filling my cup to the brim, ‘has the same effect on me as your extremely rude health has on you—it sends the blood quicker through my veins; it fills me with spirits; it dresses life in *couleur de rose*; it enables me to take a philosophic view of evolution; it all but convinces me of the poetry of bones! Wine, my dear Professor, when taken in moderation, is the gift of the gods.

“I often wonder what the vintners buy
One half so precious as the goods they sell.”

Hadow, here’s to you, and may Heaven grant you a just appreciation of the grape.’ So saying, I drained my cup to its last drop.

Upon one occasion our supply of wine ran out, and not anticipating a further supply before the following day, we were unhappy indeed. Hadow, as usual, scoffed good-humouredly at what he termed our depraved appetites.

‘What want you with wine?’ said he, standing in the cave entrance and gesticulating with the frying-pan.

‘Drink water, or do not drink at all. Hein? Look you at me: I like wine, and can drink much wine, as you know; but if there is no wine, I shrug the shoulders. I like best beer—much beer; well, here there is no beer. Do you hear me *grommeln*? *Nein!* To-day wine is out, but water

is in. All right, I say; drink water.' And having relieved his feelings, he returned to his culinary duties.

'Drink water!' Objectionable advice! Could water reconcile me to evolution? Could water steep life in *couleur de rose*? Certainly not! Warden agreed with me. How was it possible for him, he asked indignantly, to build after-dinner speeches upon so unstable a foundation as water? There was no body about water—as well construct these airy fabrics upon sand! To turn water into wine was a miracle of infinite merit, but that wine should be turned into water was a misfortune little short of a calamity.

Pedro listened to our arguments with profound attention. At times there appeared to exist a possibility that he might eventually become a man; on these occasions you would swear that you saw the dawn of intellect in his face, but the hope was short-lived, for some irredeemably apish trick made you again wonder at the absence of a tail. Like Alice of Wonderland fame, Pedro loved eating and drinking, and any question concerning either of these occupations thrilled him to the core. He crept nearer and nearer; he could not, indeed, understand our words, for we spoke in English, but the empty wine-skin, backed by our despair, was more eloquent than language.

'What is to be done, Pedro?' said I, touched by the intelligent interest depicted on his face.

'Wine all finished?' he asked.

I nodded.

'You wish for more?'

I nodded again.

'Wait,' said he, holding up one finger; and without another word he ran out into the sunlight.

We awaited his reappearance with curiosity. In five minutes he was again with us.

'Come,' said he, fairly shining with heat and satisfaction.

We followed him on to the ledge. He danced with excitement.

'Look!' he cried, pointing at the mountain brow over which lay the track leading to Carenta. 'See you that, senhores?'

Shading our eyes, we gazed in the direction indicated.

A string of mules descended the steep track. We could see the leisurely advance of the animals as they hung on every downward step. Two muleteers trudged beside them. One of them was singing; the lusty notes vibrated through the air.

‘Well, Pedro?’

‘Wine, senhores—wine! *Deos!* they bring it from over the mountains. See you not that upon every mule is a wine-skin? *Ohé!* you are in good fortune; those men will sell you what it pleases you to buy.’

Barely had he finished speaking before we had run into the cave to seek our leathern bottles, and in another minus. were racing along the track to intercept the wine-merchants.

Once within earshot, we shouted aloud, upon which the cavalcade came to a halt. It made a picturesque feature in the landscape seen thus on the narrow track midway down the mountain slope. The mules were adorned with the faded relics of what had once been scarlet trappings, from whose torn streamers there still hung chains of little bells. With every movement of the animals these jangled out a merry peal, and the effect of this graduated and sonorous music floating to us over the sunlit space was infinitely pleasing.

Across the back of each mule, and secured with ropes, was a *baraquinha*, or large wine-skin, the hair outside. Judging by their appearance, you would have taken them only for the carcasses of swine had you not observed that the extremities of the legs and the neck were secured with cords. One of the former is used as the neck of the receptacle, the cord being unfastened and fastened as occasion demands. The smaller variety of wine-skin similar to the one which we were accustomed to use is called *garaffa de pele*.

‘*Hola!* my friends,’ said Warden breathlessly, ‘we wish to purchase some of your wine.’

‘Willingly, senhores,’ replied the foremost muleteer, a bronzed and handsome son of the road. They were both fine-looking fellows of the brigand type; in their ears were silver rings, and round their waists were broad scarlet sashes.

‘Is it good wine?’ we inquired.

‘By the saints, yes! No wine is better than ours. You shall taste. Shut your eyes, and you may smell the pure grape,’ and he offered us a brimming cup.

We sampled its contents, and oracularly nodded our heads.

‘Ha!’ cried the muleteer, highly delighted, ‘I knew well you were cavaliers who could appreciate good wine. These were the very words I said to Fernandez when you came into sight.’

‘They were your very words, Alfonso,’ echoed his companion.

No doubt they lied like Orientals, but a pleasant falsehood is oftentimes more palatable than an unpleasant truth, and truly they uttered this little romance with such an engaging air of frankness and naïveté that we lent ourselves willingly to the deception.

‘Shall I fill your *garaffa*, senhores?’ said Alfonso, still holding the leathern neck of the great skin with his hands.

‘What will be your charge, my friend?’ inquired Warden cautiously.

The muleteer looked at our boots, and, consulting his companion’s face with one swift glance, named a price which would have been extravagant if it had been demanded for six times the quantity.

‘Ho, ho!’ chuckled Warden, ‘you love jests, my good friends. But tell me what is it you sell—moulten gold or liquid dispensation from sins? It cannot be wine, it is so very dear. I love a jest too; you are merry fellows, ho! ho!’

‘Look you, senhor,’ cried Alfonso, striking his chest, ‘I am a father!’

‘You are to be envied, Alfonso.’

‘And—and one must live.’

‘As an honest man—yes.’

‘And see, furthermore: you are Englishmen, though you speak Portuguese. We heard of you at Carenta, and your boots are such as we have never seen.’

‘Englishmen, yes, but not fools, as the saying hath it; and, moreover, know you not—’

And here Warden dashed into the most fluent vernacular, showing in unmitigated patois such knowledge of

Portuguese wine-lists, and turning so unsparing a search-light on the dark ways of Portuguese wine-merchants, that the muleteers gasped for very astonishment. Truly this was no man to be deceived. Heaven spare them from such another customer! And yet, through visible consternation, I perceived a vein of admiration. Alfonso whispered to Fernandez, upon which Fernandez nodded his head and expectorated his unqualified assent. In another minute our *garrafa* was filled at vineyard prices.

'You have come far, my friends?' questioned Warden, when the money had changed hands.

'A matter of ten leagues, senhor. We are late, for our best mule fell lame, and we were obliged to leave him behind and get another at Carenta to take his place. On the far side of Carenta the track is like a water-course in the dry season—a true purgatory for mules. *Heu*, there! *Sacramento!*' and he cracked his long whip at one of his team, who betrayed an inclination to lie down. The report of the lash rang out like a pistol-shot, followed by a wild clash of bells.

'A cigarette?' suggested Warden, offering his case.

'*Obrigado, senhor*; to smoke is to forget the heat.'

His comrade accepted with equal willingness. When they had lit them, Alfonso fastened up his wine-skin, and, raising his sombrero, said with native courtesy:

'*Adeos e obrigado, senhores, vai-se fazendo tarde* (it grows late). We must be on the road. I am bound to reach the next *estalagem* (inn) by sunset, and see, the shadows are already long. I am sorry not to see more of such an Englishman. *Deos, senhor!* What a wine-merchant you would make! Ah, well! *Basta! Heu! A-h, c-c-cruz! A-h, pur-r-ro!*' Crack! crack! jangle, jangle, and the cavalcade moved leisurely forwards.

CHAPTER XVII

THE EPISODE OF THE STEPPING-STONES

FARTHER down the valley our brook, freed from its fringe of oleanders, sped onwards singing to itself among mossy boulders and ledges of rock. It was a most companionable little river. It would speak to you by the hour, and you would never grow weary of its voice. From our side no path lay directly along its banks, but, farther on, a little foot-track led up to it, and its clear waters were fretted by a dozen stepping-stones. This foot-track conducted the wayfarer southwards to Loulé and northwards to the valley where the cottage of Manuel da Silvas was situated.

One memorable Sunday afternoon I started on a ramble down-stream. Hadow and Warden were deep in caves, prospecting the floor for some likely spot on which to start work the following day. The heavy rain which had fallen during the preceding night had swollen the waters to an almost unrecognisable extent, and the current flowed with more than its accustomed velocity. It was dark-brown in colour—a fine rich hue—and irresistibly made me think of Scotland and a ‘spate’ on a Highland burn seen long ago in the days of my boyhood. I climbed and sprang from boulder to boulder, now lowering myself with my arms, now clinging to some ledge along which lay my self-made road, and all the while the little river sang beside me in hoarse, full-voiced music that drowned all other sounds. The keen mountain air, the beautiful scenery, the unwonted exertion, all exhilarated me beyond words, and sent my blood surging through my veins, till I was tempted to shout aloud merely to give vent to the glad exuberance of my feelings. The

sunset hour was not far distant, and the great orb of day sent a fiery glow down into the valley. Here and there, where the water of the brook was stayed in its headlong career, the deep pools reflected somewhat of its sanguine illumination. The rocks, too, were splashed with colour, and the whole scene was softened and rendered beautiful by the influence of the departing sun.

Turning a corner abruptly, where the river made a bend, I thought I heard the sound of a voice faintly audible above the clamour of the water. I was not mistaken. Shading my eyes—for the sunlight dazzled me—I saw the figure of a woman standing upon one of the stepping-stones. As I gazed I recognised her. It was Colomba da Silvas ; but not the Colomba of weekdays in the tattered blue dress and faded sun-bonnet. No, this was a young lady ! And the marvel was, not that I had failed to recognise her at the first glance, but that ever I had come to recognise her at all. I shall never forget the pretty picture she made standing thus in mid-current, fearful of the brown waters that rushed so swiftly by her. Over her head was draped a piece of lace, a most pleasing and appropriate setting to the warm richness of her complexion. Her dress was red, and seemed to possess the gift of attracting the sunbeams, for it glowed like a flame against the darker background. She had taken off her shoes and stockings—I could see them in her left hand—and with her right she held up her skirt out of the way of the foam. The stone upon which she had found refuge was the only one not entirely submerged, and against its dark surface the whiteness of her naked feet was distinctly noticeable.

The situation flashed across me in an instant. She had been spending the day with friends at Loulé, hence the unusual grandeur of mantilla and red dress, to say nothing of real leather shoes. The water had risen since she crossed it in the early morning, and now its depth and turbulency frightened her ; so there she stood, not daring to move a step, as heartrending an image of a distressed damsel as ever appealed to the chivalry of the ‘ knight of the woeful countenance.’

All this took place in the twinkling of an eye, and yet it takes me a considerable number of lines to paint in the scene

with words. And now, before I proceed with my adventure, I wish to remark that the conversation which fills the latter part of this chapter was spoken in many languages. Portuguese was the foundation, but there was also the language of gesture, the language of intuition, the language of the eyes, the language of palmistry, the language of —— But no ; I will let the story speak for itself.

When Colomba saw me approaching, she again raised her voice in pathetic appeal, stretching out her arms the while to make me understand how seriously she was in need of assistance. Her words were drowned by the noise of the water ; her attitude, however, was more eloquent than any spoken language—in fact, it was itself one of the languages to which I have already referred, and if anything could have inflamed my desire to rescue her, it was the sight of those two appealing arms.

‘ I come, I come ! ’ I shouted, and, divesting myself of my boots and stockings, and rolling my trousers well above the knee, I embarked upon the adventure. It was, however, more hazardous than I had anticipated. Gaining the first stepping-stone, I found that the water came nearly to my knees, and such was its strength and velocity that I experienced considerable difficulty in keeping my feet. It boiled around my onward course as though some water-god, jealous of so gallant an enterprise, had determined to overthrow me on the way. Step by step I approached Colomba. At length I reached the stone upon which she was standing. There was but little room on it for two people, and in order to stand at all we were obliged to support each other. My arm encircled her waist, and she clung to me with a tenacity which spoke feelingly of the frightened heart fluttering beneath the red bodice. The situation was not without its charms, and yet I could not but think that the same scene enacted on a less precarious stage would please me even better.

‘ Colomba, ’ I cried, ‘ trust to me ! ’

‘ I do, I do ! ’ she sobbed, and clung to me the tighter.

We swayed dangerously ; the river gave a hoarse shout of excitement.

‘ Then do not hold me quite so firmly ! ’ I roared.

‘How shall we get across?’ she cried, with a break in her voice that went straight to my heart.

‘Do you think you can manage it if I hold your hand?’

‘No, no,’ she panted; ‘I am frightened. I shall certainly fall. Oh, I do not wish to be drowned! Holy Mary! what a terrible situation!’

It might be worse, thought I, giving her waist a squeeze. She gave vent to a little squeal, but whether from fear of the water or on account of the squeeze I am not in a position to relate.

‘Colomba, dear Colomba,’ I roared once more, ‘I see I must carry you; you will be quite safe in my arms.’

‘Blessed Virgin!’ ejaculated Colomba.

‘Put your arms round my neck,’ I continued; ‘let me breathe occasionally, and, whatever happens, do not kick, for that would be the death of us both.’

As I gave this piece of necessary advice, I lifted her from the stone, and, stepping boldly into the water, set out on the return journey. No repentant sinner ever clung to the cross with a fraction of the ardour with which Colomba clung to me. I gasped a remonstrance, but her arms never relaxed so much as a hair’s-breadth. If prayer possesses the efficacy that is claimed for it, we were as good as saved before half the journey was accomplished; for, with every onward step, Colomba invoked at least a dozen of her patron saints. Her knowledge of these dignitaries was extraordinarily profound; she was never at a loss. Colomba was no light weight; her charms—and, believe me, I speak from no superficial knowledge—might be classed under the solid order; there was a fulness and firmness about them you did not properly appreciate till you held them in your arms. How they spoke to the man in me of the fascination which is woman! My heart beat faster, my arms involuntarily clasped her with a more tender pressure; and I swear that had it not been for the coldness of my legs, which were immersed in the water, my cheeks would have vied in colour with the scarlet bodice against which one of them was pressed so tightly. Step by step we fared forward. There were but a beggarly six or eight of these stones in all—at all events, not more than a dozen—yet it is my humour to write of them

as though they were countless as the sands of Egypt. My legs are warmer now, so perhaps that is the reason I love to dally by the way.

‘St. Francis assist us!’ panted Colomba; ‘St. Joseph, St. Peter, and St. Paul come to our rescue! St. Ursula and St. Margaret do not forsake us! Holy Mary! what a terrible situation!’

At last we neared the bank. It had been a great struggle; the water-god shouted his disappointment. With a final effort I staggered to shore, and deposited my burden in safety. Then, when I had somewhat recovered—for I was sadly out of breath—I took her by the hand, and assisted her to clamber over the rocks until we came to a hollow at some distance from the brook. It was a tiny, open-air chamber in which we found ourselves; three of its walls were formed by great moss-covered boulders; the fourth, opening due west, let in the beams of the setting sun. It was a little goblet of sunshine, and still retained all the heat of the great fire at whose kindly rays it had warmed itself all day long. We sat down on a hot slab of rock. And now that the enforced intimacy of our adventure was behind us, the propriety of our former relationship returned to us in a great wave of decorum that tied our tongues and made us both painfully conscious of the situation. I knew that, like all other waves, it would most probably subside, but for the moment it affected me powerfully. I looked at Colomba; she averted her eyes, and I had to tell myself that she had lain in my arms to keep up even a semblance of courage. Her hand, which, by the way, we had both of us forgotten, was nervously withdrawn, and then its original possessor made an effort to conceal her bare ankles with the hem of her skirt. Silence is said to be golden, but at that moment I would gladly have exchanged golden silence for a little brazen speech.

‘Colomba,’ I said desperately.

‘Senhor?’ she inquired.

This was terrible; I had not a notion what to say.

‘Where,’ I began, burning my bridges with the torch of curiosity—‘where is your donkey?’

Colomba laughed.

‘ Ah, the poor little fellow !’ she said ; ‘ he fell lame, and I was obliged to leave him in Loulé. They wished me to ride another ; but no, I love the walk. I love the mountains—*my* mountains.’

‘ Your heart is apparently full of love ?’

‘ Does not St. Jerome tell us to love everything ?’ she asked in surprise.

‘ It is a large order,’ I said musingly.

Colomba looked puzzled, but, possibly imagining my words to be some concise form of prayer, she smiled her approbation. We sat silent for a little time ; I became conscious that I was looking fixedly at her ankles.

‘ Colomba,’ said I, ‘ they are still wet.’

‘ It is nothing,’ she answered confusedly ; ‘ the good sun will dry them.’

‘ The good sun,’ said I, ‘ will be out of sight in ten minutes—he has other work to do ; so, with your permission, I will look after them myself.’

‘ No, no !’ she exclaimed ; ‘ I cannot allow it for one moment ! I can do it alone.’

‘ But you have no handkerchief !’

The supposition was purely fanciful, but it hit the mark. We searched in her pocket, we looked among the rocks—Colomba had some vague idea that handkerchiefs grew in stony places—but we were unsuccessful.

‘ We must use mine,’ I said firmly ; and even as I spoke I took possession of one of her little feet.

‘ Holy Mother !’ ejaculated Colomba, and I felt a tremble run through her entire body. Our eyes met, and she blushed deeply. My breath came short, and above the singing of the brook I could hear the beating of my heart.

‘ St. Anthony save us !’ murmured Colomba. It was the most appropriate prayer she had offered up that afternoon.

‘ Have I behaved like a gentleman or only like a fool ?’ said I to myself, as I sat alone just without our little chamber of the rocks. To run away from the devil is meritorious, and yet flight, even from His Satanic Majesty, savours of cowardice. Were it not better done to fight it out ?’

And then I took to enumerating all the pleasant things

which belonged to the girl I had left behind me. Item : two black eyes, two clinging arms, two stockings to be put on, two rosy lips that——! But I felt myself unequal to continuing the inventory. ‘Does she,’ I cried aloud—‘does she appreciate the delicacy of my conduct in thus leaving her to finish her toilet alone in the privacy of her rocks? O ye gods! had I but stayed!’ And I cast a despairing glance at my damp handkerchief, which had served in lieu of towel to dry her beautiful limbs; its dampness affected my spirits. ‘I swear,’ said I, addressing the scenery, ‘that she would have accepted my further assistance willingly; did she not say that she would rather die than allow me to touch her, and what could be more promising than such words from a woman? Colomba! What a beautiful name! What modesty! What a sweet disposition! What saintly eloquence! What ankles! What stockings! O my one particular star! have I behaved like a gentleman or only like a fool?’

When I rejoined Colomba she was already dressed. There was a certain demureness about her which accorded ill with a twinkle in her eyes. Was she laughing at me? Did she think that I was, after all, somewhat of a sluggard in affairs of the heart? Masculine morality is, I fear, at a low ebb, otherwise it goes hard to account for the fact that the majority of men would prefer to be taken for Don Juan rather than for Joseph. Colomba, however, set my fears at rest. Advancing to meet me, she held out her hand.

‘Thank you,’ she said simply, ‘for being so kind to me, Senhor—Senhor—— Is it not strange that I do not even know your name?’

‘Call me Gilbert,’ I murmured, taking her hand.

‘Senhor Geelberto,’ she mused. ‘Yes, it suits you. Yet it is droll, very droll!’

‘What is droll, Colomba?’

‘That I have never heard of a saint of that name.’

‘This afternoon has supplied the long-felt want,’ said I gravely. ‘My behaviour has been saintly to the verge of martyrdom. I have more than earned my halo. Colomba,

whenever you are tempted to—well, to obtain masculine assistance in the putting on of stockings, just mention my name. Saint Geelberto from Scotland ; don't forget.'

'I won't,' she promised ; and we shook hands on it, as people do, to emphasize the solemnity of a compact.

'A hand,' I remarked, looking alternately from the little brown hand which I retained, to the fresh young face—'a hand, Colomba, when it is as pretty as yours, is an excellent thing ; but I am told that, as a vehicle of thanks, lips are better.'

Colomba gurgled into a laugh. I looked at the suggested vehicle with emotion. Never was newly-made saint so precariously placed ; my very pedestal was tottering. I felt reckless, and in the frame of mind to barter my saintship for a kiss, and count the loss a gain.

'Now,' I continued, bending over her, 'I have worked hard this afternoon ; is not the labourer worthy of his hire ? I will take but one, if——'

'If you can !' interrupted Colomba suddenly ; and with one bound she was out of our little open-air room, and, leaping from rock to rock, was half-way towards the mountain-path before I had well recovered from my surprise. I did not attempt to follow her, but stood watching her as she sped up the hill. Never was chamois more sure-footed, more agile, more graceful in its movements. It was more like the flight of a bird than that of a girl. Higher and higher she flitted, till at last she stood, a dark silhouette, clearly defined against the skyline. Then she turned round, saw me where I stood watching her, waved her hand, then vanished from sight. At that instant the golden rim of the sun sank in the west. The light faded from the scene, the short-lived twilight bathed everything in obscurity. 'At one stride came the dark.'

CHAPTER XVIII

REPTILES AND HOSPITALITY

SUNDAY in our cave-life was a day of no little importance—a day to which we all looked forward with feelings of pleasure. We were no strict Sabbatarians in the orthodox sense of the word ; no church bells broke upon the calm of our valley ; no shuttered shops imparted an air of desolation to the scene ; no Sunday garments depressed us with an atmosphere of devotional respectability ; and yet Sunday was with us—a gentle and benignant influence.

The mountains, the valley, the brook, all kept the Sabbath after their own fashion ; an air, if I may so express it, of cheerful piety pervaded the entire face of Nature, and we, who by our outdoor life had crept so near to Nature's heart, could not but be influenced by her feelings.

Sunday with us combined the advantages of many nations—each was at liberty to spend it as he pleased—and, as we were of necessity a cosmopolitan party, it was pleasant for each unit to feel a touch of fatherland in the air. Our tastes lay naturally in different directions ; thus :

Peace—with a capital P—descended on Warden.

Sleep—with a capital S—beset Pedro.

Reptiles—with a capital R—wooded Hadow.

As for me, my everyday life was so entirely given over to pleasurable duty and dutiful pleasure that it was a matter of some difficulty to increase either the one or the other. Still, if it were possible, the Sunday steeped me a little more in sunshine, and saturated me a little more with sentiment. I came to this conclusion aided by Hadow, who was of opinion that on the Sunday I became even more insufferable than on weekdays.

Nor were our workmen forgotten in this scheme of universal happiness ; they, too, were at liberty to do as they chose.

Late on the Saturday night they were paid off for the week, and forthwith vanished in the direction of Loulé. I saw but little of them, immured as they were for the greater part of the day deep in the bowels of the earth ; the little I saw, however, impressed me favourably. They answered to the names of Juan, Alfonso, Rafael, and Miguel. The further cave was their bedchamber ; their food they provided for themselves ; their spare time was passed in sleep, in eating, or in gambling. Washing, or undressing before they lay down for the night, were refinements of life that did not occur to them ; indeed, I doubt if they took a bath or removed a garment from one year's end to another. To converse with, in a general way, they were sociable fellows, and quite ready to impart their views upon any subject of interest that might arise. Although familiar, they never presumed ; and as we treated them with consideration, they invariably repaid us with courtesy.

Rafael, the foreman, was a swarthy-looking ruffian in picturesque tatters, fond of hearing himself talk ; his voice rang out above others in any dispute connected with the fascinating subject of 'play.' All carried sheaths containing long, murderous-looking Spanish knives. A quarrel with them was as fierce, though, thank Heaven ! as short-lived, as a tropical storm.

Let me sketch in a few words a gambling scene, which was but one of many that attracted my attention.

They are, let us suppose, seated on the shadow side of some rock, smoking cigarettes of the vilest description. Cards, greasy and begrimed till all distinguishing marks are well-nigh obliterated, circulate from hand to hand. A number of copper coins lying on a stone forms the 'pool.' Cigarette-smoke reeks into the torpid air.

'Your turn to play, Alfonso,' remarks Miguel, wiping his face.

'I have played. *I* make no mistakes. But *you* should have taken the pool last round. Ho, ho !'

'Why did you not tell me ?' cries Miguel indignantly.

'Bah!' retorts Alfonso; 'near is my coat, but nearer is my skin.'

'By the Blessed Virgin, then, I take this one!' and Miguel lays his hand upon the money.

'*O diabo te leve!*' (Leave it alone!), shouts Rafael.

'It is mine by right,' retorts Miguel angrily.

'*Embusteiro!* Take your hand away!'

'*Asneirão*, it is mine!'

'You lie!'

'You give me the lie? You? You? Ah, *Carramba!*'

The voices mount in a crescendo, the black eyes flash, the white teeth clench, the hands steal to the knife-hilts, and then—then someone turns a jest, and the affair shakes itself out in laughter.

Many a time I watched them, as with tense muscles and shortened breath they faced each other, prepared for I knew not what grim tragedy; but the climax was always the same—some thrust of Rabelaisian humour that woke deep-chested laughter, and the knives sank reluctantly into their sheaths.

Our first Sunday was a red-letter day, and as such entitled to the consideration of my diary; for on the preceding evening a find of some importance was made—a bone weapon, a jawbone of some unknown animal, a number of teeth, and several fragments of rude pottery.

These treasures were found at a depth of many feet, and, needless to relate, aroused the enthusiasm of the excavators to the highest possible pitch. I doubt if the discovery of a complete mammoth could have been hailed with greater rejoicings.

In consequence of this event, the Sunday became an example to all other Sundays, for each of its seventh-day advantages was intensified, so that, had you taken us by surprise, and 'dropped in' to the Algarve to see how it fared with our party, you would have been convinced that the reign of universal happiness was at last established. Hadow rose at four a.m. instead of five; Warden and I slept till eight a.m. instead of seven; Pedro slept all day.

When we awoke on that particularly blissful morning, Hadow was nowhere to be seen.

‘I wonder where the beggar is,’ said Warden, with a yawn.

We peered through the sunlight down into the valley ; the air was clear as crystal, and the sight, telescopic in its power to distinguish distant objects, laid bare the waste places of the hills, but all to no effect. The mountains had caught Hadow to themselves ; they had swallowed him whole, and seemed no whit the worse !

I shook my blanket in the sunshine, and then began to put on my boots.

‘I shouldn’t be surprised,’ said I, ‘if he is after reptiles ; he did say something about it last night. Look ! he has taken a collecting-bag with him ; and his gun, too, is missing. What a chap he is ! Hullo ! what’s this ?’ A scrap of paper fastened to an upright stick attracted my attention ; opening it, I read : ‘“Lazy animals ! I go to another gorge where Rafael tells me are many fine frogs. Will be back for coffee at nine. Be happy as you cannot be virtuous.—H. H. P.S.—Do not touch my bones ; they are under the table.”’

We looked at each other, and laughed.

‘Characteristic,’ I remarked.

‘You can almost hear the German accent,’ assented Warden. ‘But come on ; since coffee is to be at nine, we must be quick over our bath.’

Before we had accomplished three-fourths of the return journey, the figure of our learned friend appeared suddenly far above us.

‘Hoch ! Hoch ! Eureka !’ he shouted ; and then, to our astonishment, he began to dance a heavy German fling.

‘Never a-seen him like a-this before,’ I panted.

‘Must have—struck—bones,’ puffed Warden, upon which we strained every muscle to reach the ledge.

When we joined him, he pointed triumphantly to the table ; upon it lay a brace of red-legged partridges, the collecting-bag distended to its uttermost, and a silk handkerchief, knotted at the four corners, and evidently enclosing some large and ponderous object. We congratulated him heartily. He waved his arms, then, seating himself, mopped his scarlet face and neck with a bath-towel.

‘*Ach, Herr Gott, was für eine hitze!* (Oh, what heat!) That is good business, Hein? Not so bad for one morning’s work, Ho? Hans Hadow, my dear boy, I am pleased with you!’

‘What have you got in your bag?’ I asked.

‘Look’—and he held it open for my inspection.

My upper lip curled in disgust. Frog sweltered upon toad, toad sprawled over frog, nameless horrors crawled their loathsome way over horrors as nameless as themselves—cold-blooded, repulsive, nauseating; a slimy mass of reptile life undulating slowly but ceaselessly throughout its entire depth.

‘Little pet darlings of heart’s children!’ cooed Hadow, plunging his hand among them with delight. ‘But, see now; I have still more beautiful. Ha! what say you to this?’ and he drew a four-foot snake from out the capacious pocket of his Norfolk jacket.

The reptile twisted and coiled round his arm. Hadow held it close to his face. The venomous flat head, the bright and beadlike eyes, the yellow jaws and the forked and restless tongue, played hither and thither on his neck, cheek, and hair; and I give you my word of honour, incredible though it may sound, the man liked it! He sat still, with a smile on his face, muttering guttural words of endearment below his breath; he could not have looked happier had that loathsome tongue been the lips of a pretty woman. I have seen Hindoos work wonders with cobras, and Moors perform weird rites with the snakes of Morocco, but never before or since have I met a man so absolutely in sympathy with the crawling fraternity as Hans Hadow. There was an understanding between them that fascinated and yet repelled me; I felt that he loved the reptile, and that somewhere in the cold, sluggish reptile-heart there existed a germ of feeling that wriggled into sympathy. We watched them spellbound—the snake all but caressed him. You would swear they were conversing together in some unknown tongue, and that the man was receiving a lesson in the dark and ancient wisdom of the serpent.

‘How *can* you do that?’ I gasped; ‘won’t he bite?’

Hadow laughed softly.

‘No, no, dear boy; he is a good snake. See, his head is not the head of a poison snake—not the true viper cranium.’

‘What sort is he?’ said Warden, recoiling as he spoke; for the reptile made a quick feint in his direction.

‘He belongs to the family of *Natricidæ*, as differing from the *Viperidæ*, no poison fangs; and, you see, the head is covered with large plates. He is a gentleman with a fine appetite for lizards and mice and birds’ eggs, but he loves best frogs. He was eating a frog when I saw him. Ho, ho! I let him finish his dinner.’

‘I should shove him into alcohol at once,’ said Warden; ‘supposing you made a mistake, and he were a poison snake, and he bit you—what then?’

‘*Gott in Himmel!*’ cried Hadow impatiently, ‘no one but fools make mistakes; he will not bite me. *Ach, nein!* he loves me too much, *nicht war, mein Schatz?*’ (don’t you, my treasure?). And he made curious reptile noises between his teeth, to which the snake responded by a dancing motion of its head.

‘But,’ continued Hadow, replacing the snake in his pocket, ‘all these are nothings—just nothings at all—compared to this;’ and he laid his hand tenderly upon the object wrapped within the silk handkerchief.

‘Another horror,’ thought I, but I kept my thoughts to myself. With infinite gentleness he untied the knots and withdrew the covering. We gave a cry of astonishment. Squatting within the handkerchief was a toad as large as a soup-plate—a monster brute, a giant among toads. There it sat—brown, horned, covered with warts, two large excrescences behind its ears oozing with a fœtid and milk-like fluid—solemn, immovable, no sign of life about its vast, bloated body save the tremor of its throat and the bright, unwavering fixity of its eyes.

‘This,’ said Hadow reverently, ‘is one colossal fine specimen of *Bufo vulgaris*. I believe a *subgenus* of that family. *Ach!* it is a great find. I have never seen one so large, so fine; I have christened her—Eliza.’

‘Eliza Hadow sounds well,’ said Warden.

‘Is it for better or for worse?’ I inquired.

‘*Ja wohl*, that is so; we part never any more. And I tell

you, if you wish for to content me, you will be kind to my Eliza ; the others, they die, but, please *Gott!* Eliza lives.'

'Where did you find her?' we asked.

Hadow built a little stone house in a safe corner of his study, lowered Eliza into it, capped it with a weighty roof, then set about preparing the breakfast.

'*Ach!*' he cried between intervals of blowing the wood into brighter flame, 'I met one old reptile of a man, a fine fellow ; it was much good luck to see the animal, for he is as wise as a snake, and told me many things. He was smoking under a tree, and when I spoke to him he turned only his head to one side, very slowly—so—just like an old tortoise when it sleeps in the sun. I never saw such an odd fellow ; his eyes looked right through me, just as though he counted the joints in my vertebral column.'

'Had he goatskin trousers, hair outside?' I asked.

'That is so.'

'And an old muzzle-loader?'

'He had.'

'I knew it! That was Bartolomeo, my old sportsman.'

Hadow pulled at his big moustache, then shrugged his shoulders.

'*Ach, das kann sein* (that may be) ; we talked not of names, we had much more interesting conversations—we talked of reptiles, a little also of rocks and stones, of patois and of shootings ; he showed me where to get these.' He pointed to the partridges. 'He took me to the best pool for frogs ; he knew Eliza, and took me to her home between some great rocks, and he will come one day to show me an eagle's nest and where are many tortoises. *Ach Ja!* he is a fine fellow, this Bartolomeo, but, like Eliza, he loves not to show excitement. *Nun*, be pleased to come to table, dear boys ; here is coffee, and I am hungry as wolves.'

After breakfast we each betook ourselves to congenial occupation. Warden lay on his blanket, and practised solos on his tin-whistle ; Hadow, note-book and pencil in hand, consulted the latest authority on reptiles in identification of his specimens ; whilst I, climbing still higher to a cleft between two rocks shaded from the sun, and commanding

an even more extensive view than did our ledge, wrote up my diary.

No sound of church-bells stole upwards from the valley, yet Sunday was in the air. It impressed itself upon the spirit without audible assistance—you could not doubt its presence. The quiet and the calm, the absolute peace, enfolded one like an atmosphere; it sank into the soul, and distilled itself through every channel of the mind. The beautiful scene before me allured my thoughts from my work; my book lay neglected on my knees, my eyes strayed over our sunlit valley, over the ridges and lesser hilltops to other and more distant valleys which lay beyond. The faintly audible notes of Warden's whistle were wafted to me, mingling pleasantly with the near tinkle of running water; for a tiny spring at my side laughed upwards into the sunlight and made a little music to itself among the rocks. A bird of prey passed overhead, a moving shadow on motionless wings. The strong beating sunshine deluged the scene. The heat was intense. The lazy, unrecorded hours crept past.

I must have fallen asleep, for I remember waking to the sound of conversation. I listened with drowsy interest. Surely I knew that voice? No two people could possess the same droning, querulous falsetto.

'Yes, yes, it is a long way, but affection led me by the hand. Without friends life is impossible. I am no flatterer—such an one deserves contempt; you know our saying, "*Bocca de Mel, coração de fe!*" (Mouth of honey, heart of gall)—but I—no, I am honest, I say what I mean. And how goes the digging? *Carramba, Senhores!* it is a good joke! Bones! Just fancy! And—yes, you owe me some little money too; not that I wish to press you. Oh no! I am a gentleman, but money is not to be found on the road—no, nor in the hoof of a mule, as the saying goes,' etc.

Even as this continual stream of small-talk fell on my ears, the cave entrance was darkened by two figures, and Manuel and Hadow came into sight.

The old man was the first of a long string of visitors. The news of our arrival had got noised abroad, and the peasant-

folk from far and near came to gaze at the strangers. I doubt if ever before that quiet valley had been taken possession of by travellers from a far country. It was an occasion not to be thrown away, and right well did the good folk of the Algarve profit by it.

They arrived in little bands of three or four, talking and laughing the while. Now a father and mother would climb the track, leading the little ones by the hand, the baby of the party slung on the back, from which position it eyed us with infantile solemnity; and again a group of gossips advanced by stages, shrilling scandal in breathless bursts. At times two people only would arrive, as when a he and she, arm linked within arm, loving it by the way, would stroll into sight; or on occasion a single arrival would round the corner, some aged man or woman, it might be, supporting tottering steps with a stick.

They came, and still they came, until our cave and ledge could hold no more; the overflow perched upon adjacent rocks. I counted eighty-two living souls that afternoon! I had no idea that the valleys of the Sierra de Monchique contained so many people.

What we should have done without Manuel da Silvas I know not; of a truth he saved the situation. He was in his element. The steady stream of his conversation never ceased—he was both showman and policeman; that he himself was but one of our guests was a fact that never entered his brain. As our visitors arrived, he introduced us to each newcomer in many inappropriate words. An air of proprietorship sat upon him that was distinctly refreshing; to hear him talk you would imagine that he had created us out of nothing.

Many of the women were pretty; their dark eyes surveyed us with lazy wonderment. All wore large sombreros, underneath which were twined gaily-coloured kerchiefs. Voluminous skirts, covering, it would seem, an infinity of petticoats, so buncy and rotund did their wearers appear, were all the fashion; while check bodices of the chess-board type were numerous. The sashes of the men lent a gay appearance to the gathering.

We made great efforts to worthily enact the part of hosts.

Warden delivered a speech, and performed with much success upon his tin-whistle ; he also chatted with all and sundry, and so infectious was his smile, so friendly were his words, that our visitors at once felt themselves at home. Hadow unveiled Eliza. I exhibited my inkstand—always an object of admiration, for could it not fold upon itself, and become as unlike an inkstand as it was possible to imagine ? Manuel talked. Our efforts were rewarded, for one and all were delighted, and our cave party was pronounced an immense success—in fact, the event of the season.

It was late before the last of our guests could make up his mind to betake himself homewards. Manuel outstayed them all. We came to fear that we would never get rid of him. He invited himself to supper, and led the conversation throughout the whole of the long, interminable evening in his usual indefatigable manner. In vain we resorted to stratagem, in vain we yawned, in vain we even proceeded to undress for the night—Manuel never ceased to talk. The last sound I heard, as stretched on the ledge I drifted into sleep, was the old man's voice meandering along the grooves of one-sided conversation.

‘ Yes, senhores—yes, you see what an important man I am ; all the neighbours know me. Last year two of them came even to ask my advice on a matter of much importance. I gave it to them without any charge ; they did not take it, I must admit, but was that my fault ? Ah, you were wise not to try and feed these people—it would have been a foolish thing ; it is waste of soap to wash the head of an ass. Well, I must be going, or you will say I talk too much ; talk little and well—that is my motto. Some men talk too much ; that old man who was the last to go away—Antonio Lopez—ah, what a talker ! You have heard him—it is terrible ; I cannot get in a word when he is present. “ *Pella bocca morre o peixe* ” (Much talking brings much woe) ; that is God's truth. Well, well, I am off. You will get these provisions in the morning. And eggs are scarcer now ; I must charge a little more. *Fiquem se ambora, senhores, a Deos—a Deos* ’ (Farewell, gentlemen—farewell).

His voice grew fainter and fainter, till at last it died away, and thrice-blessed silence descended upon the scene.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SUN-BONNET

WHAT was more natural than that after my former experience I should be haunted by a winsome face and a pair of dark eyes framed in a sun-bonnet? I was young, and does not youth scent a romance in the flutter of every petticoat? And surely it is better to smile upon that essentially feminine garment like a true believer, as the key to a possible heaven, than to frown on it with the eyes of a cynic, as a species of charity covering only a multitude of sins.

And so it came to pass that I took to listening for the beat of hoofs on our mountain-path, and to gazing down the valley for the sight of a girl perched on a gray donkey; but day followed day, and Colomba came no more to visit us in our cave.

Many reasons for her absence chased each other through my mind. She might be ill? Perchance Manuel objected to her absenting herself from home? Or it might be that she had taken offence at my proffered embrace? I determined to find out.

Taking my lunch with me, off I started into the sunlight. It was early morning, and the sun had not yet acquired the full force with which he tyrannized it over us during the midday hours. The air was still cool with the dews of night. The path led downwards for a considerable distance, and then, rounding a spur, climbed upwards in steep coils to the skyline. After a long and arduous ascent, I reached the saddle. On the farther side of the ridge the scenery was wild and grand in the extreme. Nothing but mountain after mountain, sinking and swelling; crest and billow

alternating with precipice and valley—a tumultuous sea stilled for ever beneath the blue of the sky. Not a living creature was to be seen—not a sound reached me ; it was lonely, but very beautiful.

Continuing the descent, I espied the cottage of Colomba, its whitewashed walls gleaming out, as the highest light in the landscape. It stood, as before mentioned, in the lower portion of the valley, surrounded by a tiny tract of cultivated land, consisting of a garden and a little orchard. It was hard to convince one's self that it was a real house, so toylike did it appear dwarfed by the distance. Someone was moving in the garden. Was it Colomba ? No, it was a man, for the bent figure wore a man's sombrero. It was Manuel da Silvas. I continued the descent. Manuel sighted me from afar, and, long before I reached him, launched himself on the stream of his usual interminable conversation. When I had approached sufficiently near to distinguish the words, I was greeted with :

'Ha, Senhor Fatson !' (the nearest approach to my name that Manuel could ever attain), 'what brings you out so early ? Found any bones, eh ? Ho, ho ! Never have I heard such a joke ! What a day ! Much too hot, is it not ? If only we could get a little rain ! The onions are thirsty plants ; that is a truth. Have you ever worked with a broken spade ? It is like digging in sand, this—it is so dry. You are hot, eh ? I saw you run down the hill. Why was that ? Do Englishmen always run down hills ? You are out of breath ; come in and have a little wine ; nothing like wine to take the dust out of a man's mouth,' etc.

I followed him indoors and, once seated, looked about me with curiosity. My former visit had been so much a visit of ceremony, and so much a battleground of argument, that I had been unable to observe the details of this humble Portuguese home. The fireplace was in the middle of the room. From the dark and smoke-begrimed beams which supported the ceiling there hung a row of hams, strings of onions, and sides of bacon. The floor was simply virgin rock, seamed with cracks. The few articles of furniture were made of dark wood, with rude attempts at ornamentation carved upon them. On the walls were cheap prints of saints and

other ecclesiastical personages. The apartment was not without its refinements, the touch that told of feminine influence—a bouquet of wildflowers, books on the table, a piece of embroidery upon one of the chairs. The place had a clean and comfortable look despite its smoke-begrimed ceiling, and I could not but come to the conclusion that Manuel was the one incongruous and dirty object in his own home.

A pigskin of wine and two glasses were produced. On the latter Manuel breathed for some moments, then polished them with a conveniently ragged portion of his coat. I cannot say I found this an appetizing prelude to a drink, but to have refused the proffered refreshment would have given the deepest offence. We pledged each other with bows and an infinity of courtesies. The wine was, as usual, excellent, and smacked strongly of the grape. Then seated opposite him, the table and wine-glasses between us, I guided the indefatigable stream of his conversation into domestic channels. He prattled on contentedly. One subject was as good as another to him; were they not all legitimate food for talk?

‘Yes, yes,’ he said, rubbing a six-days’ beard with the palm of his hand, ‘I am alone. Carmen has gone to see a friend; she lives over there’—and he jerked his head in the direction of Carenta. ‘And what do you think they do? Ho, ho! Such foolishness! They make a new dress! Think of that—a *new dress!* For my part, I cannot see why a girl should want a new dress before her old one is worn out. Look at my coat—old, you will say, and thread-bare, and patched; it is true, but it will last for long yet. No, no; it is mere foolishness to spend good money on clothes.’

‘And Colomba?’ I suggested.

Manuel shrugged his shoulders.

‘Ah, Colomba—yes, she is just as bad—full of fancies. A good girl at heart, but very like Juanita—that was her mother. Ah, *she* was a fine woman, if you like; she weighed thirteen stone, and I buried her two years ago. Ah, Senhor Fatson, you will not believe how I miss that woman; it is so lonely without her, especially at night.’

As he said these words, Manuel shook his head mournfully, and appeared to be lost in tender reminiscence. We sat silent awhile.

‘And Colomba?’ I suggested again.

Manuel poured himself out another glass of wine, and, holding it up, peered into it with unblinking eyes. The reflected light lent a rosy hue to his nose.

‘Colomba,’ he went on—‘just the same as her mother. Yes, she even reads books!’ He paused to laugh, then continued: ‘Books are all very well in their way; one on the table, now, on a fête-day is ornamental. I like the outside of a book, and can spell out a title with any man; but to read it! No, I leave that to the priest; and talking of priests, it is inconceivable to imagine how that girl loves priests, and Mass, and saints. There’s a fancy for you! Now, I like a woman who can cook—that’s her business. Good cooking comes straight from the heart, and speaks straight to the stomach; there’s poetry for you! Ho, ho! And what is cooking without garlic? Do you grow much garlic in England, Senhor Fatson?’

‘Where did you say she had gone?’ I asked.

‘Who?’ he inquired in surprise.

‘Colomba, of course; we were talking of her.’

‘Were we? No, no. You mistake; we talked of garlic. But as you wish to know, she has gone out. You would never guess where. Ho, ho! she has gone up there!’

I followed the direction of his finger; it pointed to the top of a hill of a peculiarly conical formation which appeared to bar the lower end of the valley. He seemed pleased at my evident astonishment, for he lay back in his chair and opened his mouth.

‘Ha!’ he cried, ‘you do well to wonder; it is a mad fancy, yet she often goes up there. She says she can see farther from that hill than from any of the others. What an idea! What does she want to see, eh?’

‘It is a pleasure to see far,’ I answered thoughtfully. ‘Now, I think I too will climb that hill; shall I take her any message from you, should we by any chance happen to meet?’

He raised his hands and his eyebrows.

‘Holy Mary!’ he ejaculated, ‘you too have fancies!’

That is because you are an Englishman—you English are all mad, I am told ; and no wonder, for you live on raw meat and are entirely surrounded by salt water. Climb that hill in this heat ! Well, well !

I left him still talking, and set out briskly towards the hill in question. No path led up its precipitous sides, so I climbed upwards from point to point, as fancy dictated. In about three-quarters of an hour I neared the top, expecting momentarily to come upon traces of the missing princess ; but the summit appeared to be as lonely as the slopes. The sun was by this time high in the heavens, and the force of his beams was a thing to be avoided. I stopped frequently to pant for breath and to wipe the perspiration from my face. Higher and higher I climbed, stumbling over the boulders, till at last I reached the topmost point, and gazed around me with growing despair. Colomba was not there. I had the place all to myself—a solitary and disheartened mortal surrounded on every side by a chaos of rocks sweltering in the heat of the noonday sun. I confess to a rising anger ; Manuel had deceived me ; and yet I could have pledged my word that he had spoken the truth—he had not sufficient imagination to lie. I called aloud, but nothing but my own voice returned to me in faint reverberations from cliff and rock. Ah, well ! Whosoever the fault, the fact remained that I had come up on a wild-goose chase, and must e'en march down again with what heart I could summon to my assistance. I was on the point of turning away, when my eye caught sight of something that arrested my attention. It was but a glint of sunlit colour lying at the foot of one of the rocks. I ran to it, and as I stooped to take it up my heart beat faster ; *it was the sun-bonnet !* I could have sung aloud for very joy. I gazed at it tenderly—hope rekindled itself within me. The owner of the pink bonnet, I assured myself, could not be far distant. I looked around. The summit of the hill was at my back—a matter of some fifty yards. I was standing on the western slope ; before me the ground fell in steep declivities far into the valley, while all around was piled a world of boulders, tossed about as by a giant at play, and covered for the most part by moss and silver-gray lichen. The rock at the foot of which the sun-

bonnet had lain was of immense size ; it formed an upright such as one may see in Druidical remains, and as I took a few steps forward I saw that with the aid of another upright and a slab of stone which had fallen across them, and, so to speak, held them in their perpendicular position, it formed a natural cave of most inviting aspect. I peeped in, and stood spellbound. Colomba ! I had found her at last. The abandonment of the sun-bonnet was at once accounted for—she was asleep !

There she lay, her head pillowed on her arm ; her dark hair had shaken itself free, and fell around her shoulders in graceful confusion ; one tress had escaped from its companions, and, straggling off, lay coiled around a stone, for all the world like a long black snake. She had discarded her wooden shoes, and the little feet encased in coarse brown stockings peeped from beneath the hem of blue skirt. Her disengaged arm, flung out, lay nearly at right angles to her body—a careless gesture, beautifully expressive of the abandonment of sleep. In her outstretched hand I caught sight of the beads of a rosary, and lying beside her was a little volume, which upon examination proved to be ‘The Lives of the Blessed Saints.’

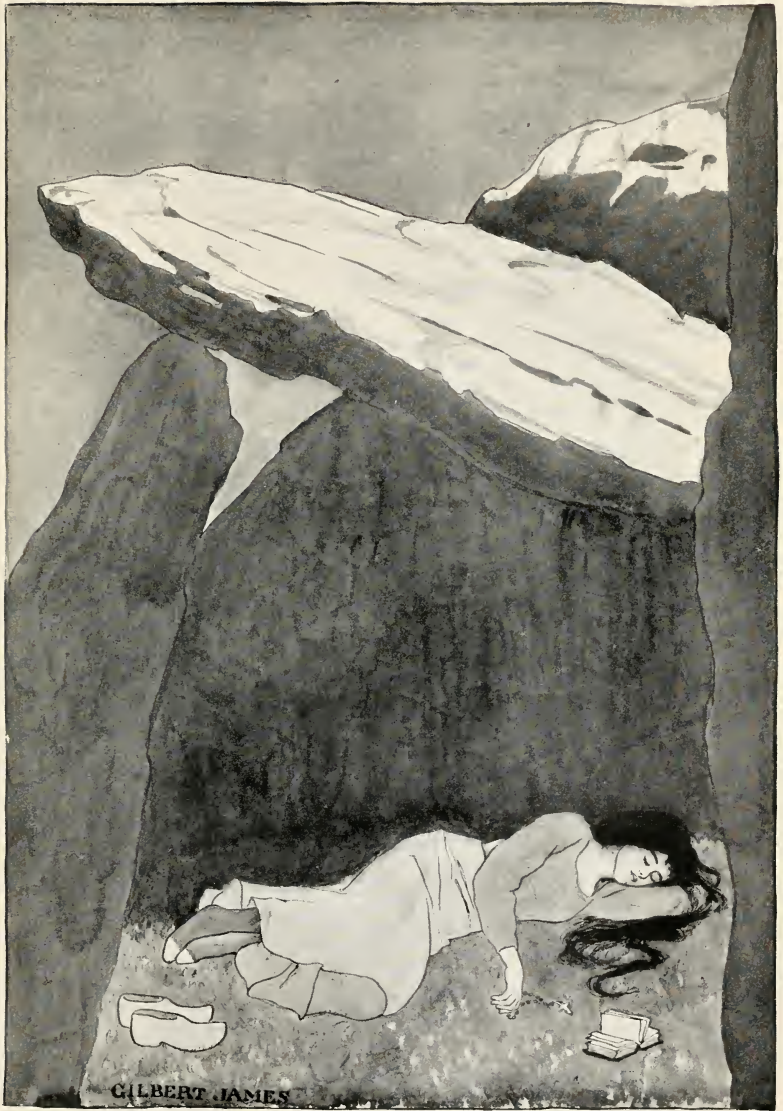
So, sleep had stolen upon her in the holy middle of her devotions ! What a quaint little hermit she made ! I gazed at her with the liveliest interest ; a sigh and a smile struggled for precedence.

I seated myself noiselessly by her side. To disturb her would have been a crime equal to altering the composition of a beautiful picture. I could mar, but I could not make ; and who could tell if the waking attitude would be equally expressive of unconscious loveliness ? How like a child she looked ! Not that she ever appeared weighed down by the weight of years—Heaven forbid ! Still, sleep and emancipated hair had taken to themselves more than one of her bygone summers, and the rest lay as lightly on her as ‘tir’d eyelids upon tir’d eyes.’ A warm flush mantled over the sunburnt olive of her cheek, and through her parted lips her breath came and went with the utmost gentleness and regularity. There were touches about her which bespoke her humble condition of life ; the hand that lay outstretched

showed evident signs of housework, and from her homely garments came a faint odour of wood-fires, recalling to mind the cottage far below us in the valley.

I gazed around. The air was full of languor—a passport to dreamland. The view, as seen through our open door, was magnificent; no mere terrestrial mansion could have commanded a finer prospect; we were perched, as it were, in an eagle's eyrie, midway between earth and heaven. The sun beat upon the world as on an anvil. Within our shadow-nook the air, if less charged with celestial fire, was still hot as a breath from a furnace. The flies buzzed in and out, filling our little shelter with the hum of busy wings, and twice a tiny green lizard ran in unsuspectingly, and, finding the room occupied, vanished again into the sunlight.

My eye came back to Colomba. She still slept peacefully. Twice, however, she stirred in the 'light anarchy of dreaming sleep,' and once a smile flitted across her face and vanished into the little dimple that lay hard by her mouth. The thought of our last meeting came to me, and with it the memory of the kiss that had never been given. I had claimed it as my due for services rendered, and, alas! Colomba had shirked payment. The advantage of the present situation dawned upon me; what a glorious opportunity to wipe off the debt! And then, there was the question of interest. The mere thought of interest connected with those lips reduced me to the level of a Jew; Shylock himself could not have been swayed by feelings more usurious. The scale of interest rose by leaps and bounds; five hundred per cent. was, I felt, the very least I had the right to expect. I leant over her. Her breath ebbed and flowed; the warm current touched my cheek; my blood thrilled with sympathy. The world held but us two in all its wide circumference. Lower and lower I bent, when, instinctively, I drew back. The impulses which prompt our actions are oftentimes beyond our ken, and I have but a faint inkling of the impulse which rose between Colomba and me on this occasion. I think, however, it was the wing of her guardian angel. She was so childlike, so like the dawn of innocence, so unconscious of my presence. After all, was



SHE WAS ASLEEP.

it quite fair? Would it not be taking advantage of her helplessness? I drew a deep breath, and shook my head. No, I could not do it. But, oh, the pathos of it!

‘Is,’ cried I mournfully, addressing the rocks—‘is our whole intercourse to be a series of plaintive variations on “the kiss that never was given”?’

CHAPTER XX

SAINTS AND SUNSETS

I LAID my hand lightly on Colomba's, and in a moment the spell was broken. She stirred in her sleep, moaned, opened drowsy eyelids, and gazed at me in wonderment.

'Senhor Geelberto!' she ejaculated.

In the strain of surprise there was an unmistakable note of welcome that came pleasantly to my ears—it all but compensated for the delights of the might-have-been.

'What brought you here?' she asked in astonishment.

'This,' I replied with a smile, and I caressed the pink bonnet which adorned my knee. 'It was on the outlook for me; I owe it much gratitude; it told me you were here.'

Colomba bestowed on it a smile, then, becoming conscious for the first time of the disorder of her attire, she blushed a bright pink, and proceeded to recall her tresses.

'It is very long and very thick,' I said softly.

Her expression proved that the life of an ascetic upon mountain-tops had not robbed her of a healthy love of admiration. She raised her arms, and shook back her hair with a graceful movement of the head. I watched her fingers plying in and out among the dark masses with approval.

'Who really told you where to find me?' she asked.

The unconscious assumption that I had been looking for her was delightful.

'Your father; his one regret was that you were not cooking something seasoned with garlic.'

'Poor father!' she murmured. 'He is always kind, but—'

is it not sad?—he cannot understand any of the things I love best in the world!’

‘Sunsets!’ I suggested.

‘Yes; and the mountains, and how they change from hour to hour.’

‘And saints?’ I added lightly.

Colomba looked grave.

‘Do not speak so, senhor; it is very wrong. Oh, you do not know how beautiful are their holy lives! What great happiness must it not be to give one’s self to God! When I read this book’—here she clasped the volume to her breast—‘I, too, feel as if I would love to lay down my life for Him—I, even I, a sinful girl!’

Her voice trembled with emotion, and tears stood within her eyes. My heart was touched.

‘Forgive me,’ I said in a low voice. ‘I may be wicked, but, believe me, I am not so wicked as to scoff at feelings such as yours.’

A silence fell. We both gazed far out into the valley. I was the first to speak.

‘Religion,’ I said thoughtfully, ‘is a great force.’

‘It is the one beautiful thing in the world,’ she cried with enthusiasm. ‘I cannot talk about it, as my dear Padre can; I can only feel it!’ and she pressed both hands to her heart.

I looked at her wonderingly. She caught the wonder in my glance.

‘Ah,’ she cried again, ‘you do not know what it is to be an ignorant girl. My life is not like yours, senhor; it sees few changes, it is hemmed in by the mountains. I sometimes long to get away. But I go to confession, and find how wicked it is to wish such things; for is not the good God in the mountains as much as in the great cities? But—but, I know not why I say such things to you.’

She hesitated. In her eyes I could read the fear that she had said too much; for, after all, we were but on the borderland of friendship—she could not tell in what spirit I would receive her confidence. I hastened to reassure her.

‘Colomba,’ I said, touching her hand lightly, ‘your words

sink into my heart—they open a little door that I thought closed long ago. They do me good. The church under whose wings you have lived all your life has been always of interest to me. Confession, now : what a wonderful thing ! Is it possible that you, for instance, have anything to confess ?’

She looked up at me swiftly. A doubt as to my sincerity flashed across her, but the hesitation was short ; the unfeigned interest in my eyes reassured her.

‘My heart is very wicked,’ she said earnestly. ‘At times I dread confession, for I say to myself : “How can I tell even my dear Padre all my bad thoughts ?” But he is so good—so good. When I pause I hear his gentle voice saying : “What next, my child ?” *That* helps me. But once, when I had done something so wicked that I had not the courage to continue, he said : “Go and take a little walk, my child, and God will enable you to tell me all” ; but I cried : “No, no, my father ; if I go away now I may not be brave enough to come back” ; and even as I spoke, strength was given to me, and I showed him all the blackness of my heart.’

I did not speak. This peep into another world silenced me. The consciousness that any remark that I could make would jar on the pure spirit that instilled itself into Colomba’s conversation kept my lips shut.

The green lizard whisked round the corner and surveyed us with astonishment. I put out my hand to intercept his flight.

‘Do not hurt him,’ pleaded Colomba.

The lizard vanished like an emerald flame. Colomba advanced one stockinged foot and gazed at it thoughtfully ; then, as if conscious of its bold isolation, withdrew it again.

‘How long had you been here before I awoke ?’ said she at length.

My frivolous mind rejoiced at this change of subject. When a man gets a pretty woman all to himself on a lonely hill-top he does not expect to pass the entire time discussing questions of theology.

‘Not very long,’ I said cheerfully.

‘ Five minutes ? ’

‘ Perhaps twenty, but they passed like one ; and yet,’ I continued more seriously, ‘ I was in a position of great moral danger.’

‘ Danger ! ’ she cried in surprise.

‘ Yes, danger. Do you remember our last parting ? Ah, I see you do ! Well, finding you asleep, I was tempted to claim the kiss I asked for on that occasion.’

Colomba gave a little gasp.

‘ And—and—did you ? ’

‘ No, I did not.’

We looked at each other. A smile stole into her face—one of those tantalizing, bewitching, incomprehensibly feminine smiles that all my life I have been trying to translate into words—the sort of affirmative smile that routs ten audible negatives.

‘ That was nice of you,’ she said softly.

The words were full of approbation. I should have felt flattered, but the memory of that smile haunted me like a reproach.

‘ I don’t know about its being *nice*,’ I remarked with severity ; ‘ it was *saintly*.’

Colomba was silent for a few moments. She was evidently pondering over the situation.

‘ I was fast asleep ? ’ she said at length, in a meditative voice.

‘ You were.’

‘ It would have been easy to do it ? ’

‘ The easiest thing in the world.’

Colomba darted an incomprehensible look at me from under long lashes, impressed little white teeth on a rosy underlip, smiled, then blushed. Ye gods ! it was a distinct invitation ! I stared at her in astonishment. Was this *Saint Colomba* ?

‘ Don’t you see,’ I began ; ‘ oh, can’t you understand ? It would have been a mean thing to do. You were asleep—at my mercy—it would have been a theft ! ’

‘ To steal is wicked,’ she observed solemnly ; but, even as she said it, there was a twinkle in her eyes.

‘ You would never have spoken to me again.’

‘No-o-o—at least, not for a long time.’

I looked her full in the face ; her eyes fell, and she feigned to be much interested in her finger-tips.

‘Colomba,’ I said desperately, ‘would you have forgiven me?’

As I said these words I leant over her. She trembled and drew back.

‘I must be going home,’ she said nervously. ‘What is the time, senhor? It must be very late.’

‘O woman in our hours of ease!’ In all the world you could not have found a man more perplexed. I surveyed her with youthful suspicion—she was far beyond the range of my limited experience. Words altogether failed me—I watched her in gloomy silence. Apparently unconscious of my presence, she donned the little shoes, humming a tune the while. To see her ‘in maiden meditation, fancy free,’ you would never have imagined for one fleeting moment that she was the same girl who a moment before had trembled at the approach of a kiss. Her preparations complete, she turned to me.

‘Let us start, senhor.’

‘Why are you going home?’ I asked gravely.

She hesitated. I could see that she was cudgelling her brains for a plausible excuse.

‘I—I am hungry.’

‘Is that all?’ I cried gaily, my ill-humour vanishing like mist before the sun. ‘I have a cure for that. We will lunch here.’

‘Lunch!’ she repeated incredulously.

For answer I plunged into my pockets, and fishing up several little parcels, placed them triumphantly before her. She stared at them as if she expected them to vanish before her eyes, and then, heigh presto! the Colomba of the dignified mien disappeared in the twinkling of an eye, and a merry, laughing, thoughtless little maiden stood before me. I felt rather dazzled, but I accepted the new transformation in a thankful spirit—I was learning a great deal that afternoon. She flung herself into the game of lunch with all the gaiety of a child. What a merry luncheon party that was! Shall I ever forget it?

‘Eggs, Colomba,’ I cried, as I unrolled two hard-boiled eggs from out their paper coverings. ‘And sardines, and bread, and an apple apiece. It is not much, but we will flavour it with sunshine and scenery. And, oh, I forgot—what say you to this?’—and I flourished a flask—‘red wine and of the best!’

Colomba clapped her hands.

‘It is a dear little lunch,’ she cried gaily; ‘and how clever of you to think of it! I have often longed to lunch up here.’

‘With me?’ I asked, pausing in the act of pouring out the wine.

Colomba made an adorable little grimace, upon which we both laughed heartily. We were like a couple of school-children set free on Saturday afternoon.

A flat stone, rolled in from without, made an impromptu table, my pocket-knife served us in lieu of a variety of useful articles; a few saints were invoked while we bent our heads reverently, and then, seated opposite each other, we attacked the meal in earnest.

I watched Colomba eat with unfeigned interest. She had a way of fishing for sardines that was altogether delightful, and her delicate manipulation of a hard-boiled egg was worthy of the highest praise. Now and again she caught my eye and repaid me with a smile, but for the most part her appetite, sharpened by the keen hill air and the long climb, would not allow her to pay attention to side-issues. The flies buzzed their satisfaction; the green lizard, grown bolder, surveyed us with a bright and patronizing eye, as who should say, ‘Very unusual this; but yes, it has my approval.’

The meal over, I stretched myself in front of the wooden shoes and lit a cigarette. Colomba’s eyes beamed on me through rings of smoke. After a few spasmodic efforts conversation died away. The drowsy influence of the hour, and, to be prosaic, the satisfaction born of an appreciated meal, lulled us into silence. It was enough for me to know that she was there. I doubt if I were ever happier. Of her feelings I do not pretend to be aware; was she cognizant of them herself? Did they strike a just mean between saints and sunsets? Did the advent of my appearance in

that little world of mountains trouble the calm and peaceful current of her life, instilling into it the subtle poison of alien thoughts, and dreams destined never to be realized? I did not ask—I preferred not to know. But there was an invisible and an inaudible means of communication overlooked by those who do not believe in any phenomena outside the range of their actual experience. There is in every heart a delicate intuitive sense which tells the happy possessor how much he is loved; it is rarely mistaken, for it bases its assumptions upon the force of the invisible waves of magnetic affinity. It is the wing of Cupid, thrust between the portals of reticence; the door cannot altogether close while the little feathered barrier of love retains its position, and if you are very clever you may peep in and feast your eyes on the delights that may one day be yours. I listened to the whispers of that sixth sense that afternoon, and it told me many little secrets of a highly soothing and satisfactory nature. It was but our fourth meeting, and yet we had so far advanced towards the Promised Land of intimacy that we could be silent together and enjoy the situation.

The day drooped towards its close; the shadows were lengthening slowly to the far confines of the world, where over the purpling rim the clouds had piled their palaces into the blue. By faint and imperceptible degrees the light grew more tender, the air more caressing. A hush of expectancy made itself felt; it rose from the golden haze like an exhalation, it filled the mind with feelings beyond the reach of words. We were spectators at a divine tragedy; the miracle play of the departing sun was enacted before us, filling with glory unspeakable the stupendous stage, the vast amphitheatre of hills. We watched it breathlessly. What need of words? Nature was speaking for us. And as the divine sentences emblazoned themselves in crimson and gold, in amethyst and azure, upon the manuscript of the west, we felt that the love of beauty had forged another link in the chain of friendship. If we could not share the saints, we could, at all events, appreciate the sunsets.

CHAPTER XXI

ALMOST A LOVE-LETTER

I PAUSED by the cottage door. The hum of bees stole on the ear, for Manuel da Silvas kept a beehive on the outskirts of his garden. Otherwise the silence of the warm afternoon hour was all but oppressive. No sound came from the interior of the cottage, but I was in hopes of meeting Colomba. I had seen Manuel accompanied by Carmen—two tiny figures, one afoot, the other mounted on the gray donkey—proceeding along the track in the direction of Loulé. The occasion appearing propitious, I had at once set out with the intention of calling on Colomba.

I knocked gently, but no answer was returned. I knocked again, and was rewarded by the sound of someone stirring within the cottage. In another minute the door opened, and Colomba stood on the threshold.

‘May I come in?’ I asked.

‘Yes, senhor, by all means.’

As she said the words she smiled, yet I could not but notice that the welcome of her smile by no means accorded with the sadness of her voice.

I followed her into the little living-room of the cottage. On the table lay a collection of writing materials—a horn inkstand, a quill pen, a bottle of fine sand, and several sheets of note-paper, covered with what appeared to be rough drafts of correspondence. Myself an obscure scribe, I eyed those evidences of a kindred taste with lively interest.

‘Be so good as to sit down, senhor.’

I complied with her request, whereupon she followed my example. The little table was between us; by resting our

elbows upon it and our chins upon our hands, our faces were not more than a yard apart. No one spoke. I know not whether it was the fault of my youth and my inexperience, or whether it was owing to my want of facility in the language, but the fact remains that there were times when I felt almost tongue-tied in the presence of Colomba. Another reason that has just occurred to me, and one that perchance may solve the enigma, is that my feelings were oftentimes too overpowering to lend themselves to description.

I studied Colomba with admiring eyes, and all the while I was conscious that her surroundings, too, were impressing themselves upon me—the homely room, with its stone floor; the scents of the wood-fire, mingling with those of old-fashioned garden flowers; the hams and strings of onions dangling from the rafters; the patch of brightness where the sunlight fell upon a corner of the cupboard; the warm and languid air stirred by the wings of flies—all were imprinting themselves upon my memory. The visible and tangible environment of Colomba, her home—all would return to me long afterwards, and whisper to me of the little maiden of the Sierra de Monchique.

She was looking particularly desirable that afternoon; but no credence can be attached to this statement, for every time I saw her I was seized by the conviction that that individual occasion had been chosen by the fates for Colomba to reach the high-water mark of desirability.

Her dark and abundant hair was ruffled, as though her hands had been thrust into it in the agony of composition; her fingers were stained with ink; her face had the flushed appearance that we notice on the faces of children when roused from midday slumbers. The rounded curves of her figure spoke to the eye even through the coarse material of her dress; the bodice, opening low on the neck, revealed a tiny silver charm pillowed upon the warm olive of her skin.

‘You have been crying,’ said I.

She averted her eyes.

‘How know you that, senhor?’

‘Very easily; your eyes are tell-tale—they keep no emotion to themselves. And’—I leant forward and scrutinized her face—‘there are traces of tears on both your cheeks.’

Colomba rubbed the traitor cheeks with the back of her hand.

We remained silent for a few minutes. All at once she spoke.

‘ Senhor.’

‘ Geelberto,’ I corrected.

Colomba blushed. There never was a maiden born with a more bewitching facility for blushing. At a word, at a glance, the warm blood sprang to betray the lively emotions of her heart. You discovered her thoughts even before she became aware of them herself.

‘ Senhor Geelberto,’ she said sadly, ‘ I am a most unhappy girl.’

‘ Confide in me,’ I murmured, taking her hand.

She seemed unconscious of the action ; her fingers lay listlessly within mine ; she looked at the ink-bottle, and sighed.

‘ Confide in me,’ I reiterated, giving her hand a gentle pressure. ‘ I might be able to assist you.’

She murmured inaudibly, but though her words escaped me, I judged from her expression that she was favourably impressed. Encouraged, I continued :

‘ If anyone has caused you one moment’s unhappiness, *Deos!* I’ll——’ My clenched fist completed the sentence.

She raised her eyes to mine ; tears were again imminent.

‘ No, no, senhor, it is not as you suppose—indeed, everyone I know is too kind to me ; even father spoils me. If I am sad now, it is all my own fault.’

‘ Yes ?’ I murmured interrogatively.

She did not take the hint. Her chin rested in the palm of her disengaged hand. Every line of her mobile face spelt despondency.

‘ If you would only confide in me ?’ I again suggested softly.

She shook her head. Then all at once, as if struck by a sudden thought, she sat up, clasped her hands, and gazed at me with bright and questioning eyes.

‘ Can you write ?’ she asked eagerly.

‘ Can I write !’ I ejaculated ; the question made me smile.

‘ Ah ! but I mean can you write a letter ?’

‘Of course I can.’

Colomba eyed me doubtfully.

‘Well?’ I questioned.

‘Senhor Geelberto,’ she said gravely, ‘this is no ordinary letter; this is’—she leant across the table; her voice sank to an impressive whisper—‘this is—*almost* a love-letter!’

‘*Almost* a love-letter!’

She nodded her head at me; the importance of the occasion deprived her of words.

‘*Almost* a love-letter,’ I repeated thoughtfully. ‘Yes, I think I may say that I have written several letters answering to that description.’

Still Colomba hesitated.

‘Senhor,’ she said solemnly, ‘have you ever written a refusal to an offer of marriage?’

‘Refusal! Offer of marriage!’ I ejaculated, thoroughly taken aback. ‘No, Colomba, never.’

‘Then, I fear you cannot help me,’ she said dejectedly.

‘But,’ I exclaimed eagerly, ‘I can easily *imagine* myself refusing an offer of marriage!’

Hope reappeared in her eyes.

‘Come, now,’ I continued cheerfully, ‘I’ve written much more difficult letters than that. I’ll help you with pleasure; only you must tell me all about it. First of all, who is the man?’

‘It is Santos,’ she said brokenly.

‘Ah, the fellow who told you to beware of compliments?’

‘Y-e-s.’

‘And now I suppose he has written you four pages of flattery?’ And I eyed a masculine letter with disapproval.

‘Only three and a half,’ murmured Colomba.

‘And what does he say?’

‘He says such nice things; he asks me to be his wife, and he says that he can’t live without me, and that my eyes are beautiful, and that he has a good deal of money in the bank, and that he has sold two cows— Oh, and many more things. It is a beautiful letter—my first *real* love-letter! But I don’t want to marry him, and I can’t love him like that, and I must write and tell him so, and he will be unhappy; and I hate making him unhappy, for he is a dear, kind man, and

I have known him all my life. I thought a love-letter was a nice thing, but I find it is a horrid thing, and—and—I am the most miserable girl in the world.'

Her voice wavered and broke ; she winked very fast to keep back the rising tears, but they would not be kept back, for two of them, escaping from the brimming eyes, trickled down her cheeks and fell upon the table. I was sadly at a loss to comfort her. My experience failed me altogether. The confidences I had invited overpowered me. She cried quietly ; only an occasional sob broke the stillness of the room.

'Colomba,' I said softly, 'dear Colomba, don't cry.'

No answer was returned.

'Trust to me, Colomba. I confess that I've never written a refusal of marriage before, but it ought not to be so difficult. We will tell the fellow that you don't want him, and—and he'll go away and marry someone else, and we'll—all live happily ever after.'

This airy solution of the difficulty surprised her ; in her mind the refusal of an offer of marriage was a much more tremendous undertaking.

'Will you help me to write it, Senhor Geelberto ? I have tried many times, and it always comes wrong.' She gazed tearfully at her inky fingers.

'Of course I will ; I'll tell him to go about his business.'

'Oh no, senhor, that will never do ; you must say how proud I am and how sorry.'

'But *are* you sorry ?'

'Yes, very sorry.'

'Then, why don't you marry him ?'

'Because I do not love him in that way. Oh, Senhor Geelberto, anyone can see that you have never written a refusal of marriage before.'

We eyed each other dejectedly.

'Colomba,' I said in desperation, 'for the sake of the whole calendar of saints, do not let us discuss feelings. Here is a clean sheet of note-paper ; come and sit beside me, and we will make a start at once.'

She took her place on the other half of the little wooden bench on which I had found a seat. Writing a letter that

was 'almost a love-letter' presented but little difficulties to my hopeful imagination with Colomba seated by my side. I dipped the pen in the horn ink-bottle, and wrote the date and address in a fine flowing hand.

'How easily you do that!' she sighed enviously.

Her head was very close to mine; I could feel her hair brushing the tip of my ear. My desire to annihilate Santos became a positive mania. A fresh dip, and away flew the pen.

'Senhor, it is with feelings of annoyance and surprise that——'

'No, no,' interrupted Colomba. I was warming to my task, and the little hand laid upon my arm disconcerted me.

'No, no,' she repeated; 'that is all wrong.'

'What is wrong with it?'

'It is *all* wrong. You must begin "My dear Santos," and you must speak the truth; my feelings were not surprised. We must be truthful, even to the least word, the Padre says.'

'What! not surprised!'

'N-o-o.'

'You knew he was in love with you.'

She smiled through her tears.

'I begin to be rather sorry for Santos,' said I, laying down the pen.

'It is not my fault, Senhor Geelberto—really, really not. I own I liked to talk with him—he was always kind to me—but I never guessed how much in earnest he was till one evening in the garden he tried to speak to me of marriage. I grew frightened and ran into the house, for I did not want to marry him at all; and as I ran, he called after me that he would write it instead, and—this is his letter.'

'But, Colomba——'

'Yes, senhor?'

'How comes it that Santos has not first spoken to your father? Is not that the correct thing to do in Portugal?'

'He has spoken, Geelberto.'

'And your father consents?'

'Y-e-s; he told him to speak to me.'

'Ah! I see.'

I looked at the clumsy writing of Santos, and then raised

my eyes to the wistful little face of the girl he fain would call his wife.

‘Santos will be unhappy,’ I said slowly.

Her eyes filled again with tears.

‘I fear it,’ she said mournfully; ‘but oh, Senhor Geelberto, if only you will help me to write him a nice—a *really* nice—letter, I think it will make it easier for him.’

‘Let us try again,’ said I.

That letter took a long time to write. It was necessary to temper refusal with kindness—to season modesty with affection. Colomba summoned several of the more intimate of her saints to bear witness to her sincerity. She likewise strongly recommended Santos to the keeping of Saint Ursula—an arrangement which we both agreed would go far to console him in his hour of need. We congratulated him also on the sale of his cows, and in the same sentence testified our willingness to pray for his spiritual welfare. Finally, we threw ourselves upon his generosity, and assured him that we counted upon his lifelong friendship.

At last the letter was actually finished. We smiled at each other, and then at it, with justifiable pride. Considering the circumstances, it was an original and extremely creditable production. Whether Santos would look upon it with as approving an eye was, however, open to doubt.

CHAPTER XXII

BARTOLOMEO LEADS THE WAY

WAS someone moving in the valley? I shaded my eyes and looked again. Yes, a solitary figure was approaching—a speck of shadow in the glare of the sunlight. I sat on our ledge and speculated lazily as to who could be coming to visit us at so early an hour, for breakfast was a memory of no distant date. It could not be Manuel, for no donkey was to be seen, and our landlord never visited us without his donkey; it was not the goatherd, nor was it a muleteer, for goats and mules were absent. At last I bethought me of Bartolomeo, the hunter of the Sierra de Monchique. The slow sedateness of his pace confirmed me in the idea. It *was* Bartolomeo, there was no mistaking him; unto no one else was it given to so nearly resemble a partially-animated tree-stump, armed with an antiquated muzzle-loader.

He approached slowly—he literally crawled up the track like an old snake.

I awaited his coming with pleasure. We had been such good comrades on the occasion of his last visit that I looked forward to a happy renewal of the friendship.

When he had come within ear-shot I hailed him with a shout.

‘Good-day to you, Bartolomeo,’ I cried.

‘Good-day, senhor.’

‘I am glad to see you. I have been expecting you daily. But do not let us talk here. Come into the cave, it is cooler inside.’

The old man preceded me into our natural home. I noticed that he carried a basket made of woven rushes.

'These are pears,' said he, laying the basket on an adjacent stone.

So saying, he seated himself in my armchair.

'Pears! It is your lunch, perhaps?'

This suggestion gave him food for thought.

'No,' he said slowly; 'no, they are for you.'

His manner of tendering the gift was almost impersonal; had it not been for his words, I would have imagined him to be sacrificing pears to Pan or Diana, or some other equally mythological personage. The thoughtfulness of the act touched me—a kind heart beat underneath the tattered coat.

'How good of you, Bartolomeo! I accept them with pleasure.' I turned over the large leaves with which he had covered them. 'They look so tempting that I really must eat one now. You will join me? Yes?'

We ate in silence.

'Another, Bartolomeo? One but whets the appetite.'

'Where,' asked the old man, dreamily gazing round the cave—'where is the *Bichero-mor*?'

'Who?' inquired I, thoroughly puzzled.

'The *Bichero-mor*—the great hunter of little reptiles.'

I laughed, for I took his meaning at last. I recollected that the word *bicho* in Portuguese means anything that crawls or creeps—used generally in an objectionable sense; hence *bichero* is one who collects such creatures, the affix *mor* being a somewhat antiquated adjective signifying 'great.' I chuckled my approval. Without a doubt *bichero-mor*, or 'great hunter of little reptiles,' was a delightfully appropriate title for Hadow.

'Where is the senhor?' repeated Bartolomeo.

'He is at work in the inner cave. Listen! you can hear them.'

The pick—pick—pick of the excavators was distinctly audible. To me it had become so accustomed a sound that I but rarely noticed it. The old man opened his mouth.

'What is he doing in there?'

'He looks for bones.'

'Bones?' he repeated wonderingly.

'Yes, bones.'

‘But—but tell me why——’

‘Not now, Bartolomeo, I interrupted hastily.

Bones were a sore subject—they literally ached—recollections of the Padre Callada and Manuel rose before me. Curiosity concerning bones must be nipped in the bud. I was sick unto death of justifying Hadow’s eccentricities to the *Olla Podrida* of Portugal.

‘You wish to see my friend?’ I continued.

Bartolomeo started. He had the air of a man pinned to an inconsiderate suggestion.

‘Eh? I don’t know. Well, yes, perhaps; but do not disturb yourself, senhor. I am in no haste. To-morrow, or the day after, will suit me quite as well.’

‘Or next week, or next month?’

He looked through me with gravity.

‘Yes,’ he said slowly, ‘quite as well.’

Did no grain of humour slumber under that battered sombrero? Was he never guilty of scenting a joke?

Very slowly he lit his pipe, then, with his eyes fixed on the mountains, he retired into dreamland. He resembled a young child who cannot be trusted alone—you were obliged to lead him by the hand along the pathway of his ideas; if you left him, were it but for a moment, he sat down.

I looked at him; he had already forgotten me. Unless I took the initiative, he would sit there till dinner-time.

‘Bartolomeo,’ said I with determination.

‘Senhor!’ His voice had a far-off quality.

‘Tell me, what do you want with the *Bichero-mor*?’

He mumbled something about *cagados* (tortoises) and *cobras* (snakes), something also about an eagle’s nest.

Then I recollected. This was no chance visit. This was the fulfilment of a promise; for had not Bartolomeo promised Hadow to assist him in a grand reptile hunt?

‘Of course I’ll fetch him,’ I cried; ‘he wants to see you, not to-morrow, O Bartolomeo, not the day after, but to-day—*now, at once!* Do you understand?’

The old man oscillated his head gently. The smoke from his pipe drifted out into the sunlight.

Hadow was much excited.

‘You can spare the time?’ I asked.

‘*Doch!* not easily; but to seek reptiles, yes. I will show Warden where to dig in my absence. *So!* the old animal calls me *Bichero-mor*, does he? Ha! I will show him what for a hunter I am. It will be fine fun! *Colossal!* You will come with us, I hope, Sleeping One?’

‘Yes.’

‘Good! then get my bag and collecting tins. We will bring back a brace of eagles; I have a case ready for them in my museum. *Hoch!*’

The sporting party set forth. Bartolomeo strolled in front, Hadow and I sauntered behind. I do not think our pace exceeded a mile an hour.

In a short time we quitted the path and attacked unmitigated mountain. Bartolomeo was not to be turned aside by any natural obstacles; rocks, boulders, etc., he took them all in his crawl. We clutched and we climbed, we slid and we leapt, and still the old sombrero bobbed in front—still the goat-skin trousers led the way. I came to the conclusion that somewhat of the spirit of their former owner still clung to those goat-skin relics, for surely never did trousers conceal more goat-like understandings than did those of Bartolomeo. The old man was plainly a satyr.

‘Senhores mine!’ said he, pausing unexpectedly, ‘we have arrived.’

We stood on a broad ledge of rock. Hadow and I panted and mopped—mopped and panted.

‘*Ach!*’ gasped the Professor. ‘How say you, my friend, is the nest on the cliff below us?’

‘Yes, senhor, but you cannot see it from here, it is overhung by the face of the rock.’

‘What, then, do you want us to do?’

‘What I propose is that we should hide in that cleft; it will hold us all. It looks outwards, as you see, and we will be able to watch the eagles as they come and go, but, thanks to our position, they will not be able to see us until they are within range of your beautiful English guns.’

Hadow uttered gurgles of delight.

‘Are there eggs in the nest at present?’ I inquired.

‘No, senhor; they were hatched last week, for I myself

saw the old birds carrying food to the eaglets. The young ones must now be eight or nine days old.'

'*Ach Himmel!* what ten million pities that we have no rope! I would give much for the skeletons of healthy young eaglets.'

'But,' I remonstrated, 'we cannot shoot the parent birds now.'

'Eh? Why not?' ejaculated the Professor, thoroughly taken aback.

Bartolomeo stared at me in astonishment.

'Because, don't you see, the young ones would starve.'

'Ho! ho! ho!' roared Hadow.

'It is good for such vermin to starve,' remarked Bartolomeo.

I looked from one to the other. No hope for the eaglets was to be read in either of their faces—science and Portuguese sport stamped on humaner feelings. There was evidently no 'close season' in the Sierra de Monchique. What was I to do? I could not let the eaglets starve without another effort; but for the time being I shut my mouth. I plainly saw that this was no occasion for words.

We reached the cleft, and found that it held us all with comfort. Indeed, it formed a delightful resting-place after our exertions, for it lay submerged in shadow—a natural channel that focussed every wandering breath of air. We sat on the extreme edge of the cliff, our feet dangling into space, Hadow between Bartolomeo and me, our guns in our hands. The Professor had armed himself with his rifle; I carried my double-barrelled gun, while the old huntsman caressed his cherished piece of breach-loading antiquity.

'They will be coming soon,' whispered Bartolomeo.

'I will fire first,' said Hadow in a low voice. 'I have but one shot; then, if I miss, do you and Bartolomeo fire at once. Is it understood, Hein?'

We assured him that we would follow his instructions. Conversation languished. We sat silent in the drowsy warmth and watched the sunshine deluging the rocks beyond the margin of the shadow. Curiously enough, it was Bartolomeo who appeared to be the most excited of

the party. The old man was like another person. The sportsman in him was roused ; his eyes burned with an inward fire, and he watched the line—where cliff met sky—with the unwavering fixity, something of the hungry rapacity of a lynx. The lust to kill was hot upon him ; he was like a wild animal when it first smells blood.

With Hadow it was different. He was actuated more by devotion to science than by love of sport. In imagination he already saw those eagles adorning a prominent position in his museum. The idea thrilled him ; he fumed with excitement. Fragmentary German bubbled from his lips ; his impatient fingers itched on the trigger.

As for me, to a certain extent I shared this excitement—the killing of something never appeals in vain to a Briton—but although, under other circumstances I should have gloried in shooting an eagle—what a stirring event to record in my diary !—yet on this occasion I dreaded the arrival of the parent birds. I could not forget the eaglets. I do not pride myself on being a humaner man than either of my companions, but simply that I believe I looked facts in the face with a saner eye—that is, an eye less blinded by the glamour of those powerful deities—Science and Sport. No plan of action suggested itself to me—my brain was a blank. I sat, and waited, and watched, haunted the while by a sense of imminent catastrophe.

‘Is your gun loaded, dear boy?’ whispered Hadow.

I replied in the affirmative, and we again relapsed into silence. How long we sat on that ledge I could not say ; it might have been an hour, it might have been ten minutes. Be that as it may, I had grown stiff, and was on the point of stretching my cramped limbs, when my movements were arrested by a gasp from Bartolomeo :

‘S-s-t, senhores !’

Every nerve tingled into attention.

Round the distant line of cliffs sailed an eagle—a glorious, kingly bird. Unconscious of our presence, it neared us in a steady sweep, buoyed upon the sunlit air, spirited onwards upon broad and motionless wings. I have rarely beheld a more beautiful sight. In its claws it grasped some object, scarcely to be distinguished at so considerable

a distance, but which I instinctively surmised to be food for its little ones. I recalled the nest and its tiny occupants—pity knocked against my heart.

Hadow's rifle sought his shoulder. Then, I know not how it happened, but at the very moment when he pressed the trigger, I accidentally jogged his elbow. The report and a German oath rang out simultaneously—the eagle and I were equally alarmed.

'Shoot! shoot! *Dumbart!*' roared Hadow.

I fired both barrels with the utmost promptitude. Bartolomeo attempted to follow my example, but Providence had bribed the muzzle-loader, for it absolutely refused to speak. The eagle wheeled in the still air, and with a hoarse scream disappeared behind a wall of rock. Then came the day of reckoning!

Hadow turned fiercely upon me. But there, my lips are closed. There are occasions when, like Bartolomeo's gun, I, too, prefer to remain silent.

Still, I had one consolation—a consolation that even Hadow could not take from me—the eaglets had but postponed their dinner-hour!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GREAT HUNT FOR LITTLE REPTILES

PEACE had been restored ; Bartolomeo again led the way. This time 'little reptiles' lured us on. After a long and arduous descent, we reached the bottom of a gorge between whose rocky walls there ran a streamlet. It was *our* brook—the brook endeared to us by many a familiar reminiscence, the brook of the oleanders, the brook of the stepping-stones ; but, on account of our being so much further up-stream, we failed to recognise it until Bartolomeo called our attention to its identity. Then we blamed ourselves for our stupidity, for its face was as the face of a friend, and its voice sang the old familiar tunes.

Our first desire was to quench our thirst. Stretching ourselves on the bank, we drank and drank again. It was an exquisite pleasure to allow the current to ripple through our fingers—to immerse our arms elbow-deep in the cool brightness of the running water. The brook greeted us joyously, laughing and gurgling at the encounter. One could almost imagine that it was alive, and that it was glad to see us.

The scenery was wild, for although the slopes were clad with *stiva*—a low bush reminding me of gum-cistus—yet the rocks rose in places to a great height, in sheer cliff and precipice, up which the eyes climbed and climbed, until they rested finally on the summer sky.

'Senhores!' exclaimed Bartolomeo, 'the pool that lies at your feet is known to me ! In it you will find tortoises. Now, with your permission, I will show you the best way to capture them.'

So saying, he drew his hunting-knife from its sheath. We

watched him with interest. Was he going to spear them? Bartolomeo spearing tortoises with a hunting-knife would be a novel entertainment! The old man, however, knew well what he was about. Cutting down a large armful of oleander reeds from a clump that grew hard by, he set about plaiting them into a hurdle.

'This, senhores,' said he, 'will be of much assistance to us. If you'—nodding to me—'will take one end of it, I will take the other; we will then drag it across the pool in the direction of the *Bichero-mor*, who will receive the tortoises as they arrive.'

It was a brilliant idea. His instructions were carried out to the letter. A tortoise-drive is exciting sport; the rocks rang to Hadow's shouts. Our first venture resulted in a 'bag' of seven tortoises, two water-snakes, five frogs, and one eel. Bartolomeo was triumphant; he, too, had vindicated his claim to the proud title of *Bichero-mor*. In our gratitude, we presented him with the eel, the only one of our captives that lent itself to being eaten.

Among the tortoises was one of singularly beautiful marking—a dainty little creature with bright eyes, a coquettish tail, and an entire absence of fear.

'I really must have this tortoise as my share of the spoil,' I remarked to Hadow, as the courageous little animal clawed its way up my sleeve, never desisting in its efforts till it reached my shoulder.

'But, dear boy, it is the most beautiful!'

'That is why I ask for it.'

'It will look so nice in my museum. You would not take from it the honour of a glass case, with its fine name written below—*Clemmys leprosa* S. Sigrig. It would be too cruel a disappointment for the animal.'

'Would you rather give me "Eliza"?' I inquired.

'*Ach nein!* no such foolish jokes; keep the little animal, if you will.'

I consigned my new property to a safety match-box. It made a comfortable travelling home for it, in which it could all but turn round.

'But, Hadow,' I said, 'tell me, why do you call my tortoise by such a name?'

‘Because, ignorant animal, it *is* its name.’

‘But why *leprosa*? It sounds like a disease.’

‘It *is* a disease. Look at its horny epidermal shield. See you these gangrenous patches—the markings that you think so beautiful? They are caused by freshwater algæ which penetrate between the Malpighian layer and the underlying bone; they cause this leprous look. *Ja wohl!* that is the reason of the specific name *leprosa*.’

‘Senhor,’ interrupted Bartolomeo, with excitement, ‘*cobra! cobra!*’ (a snake! a snake!).

Our eyes followed his outstretched finger to where, between two rocks, the head of a large snake could distinctly be seen. Hadow dropped a handful of tortoises and darted forward, but the snake vanished among the rocks, and he came back disappointed. I laughed.

‘You’re too slow, Professor! Try a pinch of salt next time!’

He made a pointed allusion to eagles, so I wisely changed the subject. Bartolomeo, however, considered snakes too enthralling a topic of conversation to be thus lightly dismissed, so, seating himself on a mossy boulder, with his back to a rock, he gave us much curious information respecting these reptiles. He proved a mine of quaint folklore. With his shaggy breeches, straw sandals, venerable coat, and weather-beaten face, dark as rough-hewn mahogany, he accorded well with the wild and savage character of the landscape. No artist, painting that sunlit gorge, could have desired a more appropriate model.

‘Yes, senhores,’ said he, gazing drowsily at the water with half-closed lids—‘yes, snakes are dangerous vermin, and to be avoided at all times’—he expectorated meditatively—‘but, to my thinking, the grass or ringed snake is the worst.’

‘Ah, for what reason?’ inquired Hadow, immensely interested.

‘Because of its fondness for milk.’

‘For milk?’

‘Yes, *meu senhor*, for milk. *Em consciencia, he verdade.* (On my conscience, it is true.) The rascal will go anywhere for milk. Imagine to yourselves how cunning it is; it lays its

eggs in manure-heaps, so as to be close to the cows, for it loves to steal to the animals and suck their udders, and, if disturbed, it bites them.'

'So! a curious story; but'—and Hadow shook his head—'is it to be believed, Hein?'

'Believed!' cried Bartolomeo, in a tone that was all but animated. '*Assim Deos me salve!* (As God shall save me!) yes. But I have a more wonderful story still, and one that I know well is true, for I had it from my father—worthy man, God rest his soul!—and he had it from an uncle on his mother's side; so you see, senhores, it may be accepted as gospel.'

'Undoubtedly, Bartolomeo,' we assented gravely.

The old man nodded his head in great contentment, and continued:

'It took place on a farm near Salir. There was a grass-snake there that loved warm milk, and was in the habit of stealing it from the cows; you know our proverb, "Once a thief, always a thief." Now, for some reason the cows went dry, and the snake could not get the milk it was accustomed to. The farmer's wife—a fine woman—was feeding her baby at the breast; it was night, and she was in bed, when she felt something crawl under the bedclothes—something cold that, passing over the body, glued itself to her other breast.'

I gave a cry of disgust.

'Yes,' continued Bartolomeo, 'it was the grass-snake. The woman was terrified, as you may suppose, but she knew well that if she cried for assistance, she or her baby would be bitten; so she lay still—quite still—and let it drink undisturbed. When it had finished its meal it crawled away in the direction of the farmyard.'

'Did they kill it?' I asked.

'Not in the house, senhor—no; everyone in the neighbourhood said that would bring bad luck to the baby. Even the Padre said so—he refused to exorcise the reptile on that account.'

'Was it never killed?'

'Oh yes; for, on the advice of a very wise old woman, the husband put a saucer of milk on the outer doorstep, and,

lying in wait, had the good fortune to kill the vermin in the act of drinking milk out of the saucer on the following night. Yes, it is quite true. And the best of the story is that the baby grew into a man, just like the rest of us !

We sat silent for some time, Hadow and I dipping our naked feet in the water. The old man spoke again.

‘ I could tell you stranger things than that, senhores.’

‘ Really ?’ we murmured incredulously.

‘ Yes, I could tell you of the marvellous *Huhu* bird ; have you ever heard of it ?’

‘ No, Bartolomeo.’

‘ I am not surprised ; few people know of its existence. It is only to be found in the North of Portugal, in the Sierra Gerez. It is a most singular bird, quite unlike other birds, for it objects so much to the sun that it always flies stern foremost, using its tail as a fan to keep the light out of its eyes.’

We could not refrain from laughter ; Bartolomeo was visibly annoyed.

‘ It is quite true ; I have known of it all my life. You do not seem to believe it ! Why do you laugh ? You might as well deny that, in the *Tras os Montes*, there are *Cobras con azas* (snakes with wings), or that the female viper swallows her young when danger is near !’

‘ Yes, Bartolomeo, quite as well.’

‘ But I assure you, senhores, that——’

‘ *Ach Gott !*’ interrupted Hadow.

Bartolomeo and I jumped in sympathy. With a bound the Professor was in mid-stream, making for an object that neared him with the downward current. It was a snake. The reptile betrayed no symptom of fear. With head erect it swam towards him, and when it was come within the distance of a few yards it opened its mouth and hissed venomously. Watching his opportunity, Hadow made a sudden dart forwards and seized it by the neck, immediately behind the head. His captive lashed vigorously with its tail, but the Professor, holding it on high, gave vent to loud shouts of victory.

‘ *Hoch ! hoch !* dear boy, what fine luck ! A beautiful specimen of *Tropidonotus natrix* ; it is the grass or ringed

snake of which Bartolomeo told us. Now, I have this beautiful one and the other fine specimen of *Coronella lævis*, or smooth snake. Be quiet, my treasure ; I will not let you go.'

'Is it poisonous ?' I asked, as the reptile snapped its jaws.

'*Ach nein !* it is a good snake, and belongs to a respectable family—the non-poisonous Colubrine snakes ; see how pretty it is. Saw you anything so fine, Hein ?'

I looked at it with interest ; its colouring was indeed beautiful—brownish-gray with a green tinge above, and dull pale-blue beneath ; there was but a faint indication of a white and yellow collar round its neck, while its eyes were of a lustrous red hue.

'I will soon make it to know me,' said Hadow ; 'see, you would say we are good friends already.'

He made a peculiar whistling noise between his teeth ; the reptile, its tongue trembling like an aspen-leaf, ceased to struggle. Hadow, still continuing the noise, shifted his grasp so as to allow the snake greater freedom, upon which the reptile made faint passes with its head, responding to Hadow's left hand, which moved in rhythmical motions just beyond its reach.

'And foolish people say that snakes are deaf !' said Hadow, with infinite scorn. 'But tell me, dear boy, what o'clock it is ; we must not forget the caves.'

'Half-past twelve,' said I, looking at my watch.

'*Gott in Himmel !*—springing to his feet. 'We must be off. Half-past twelve ! and that poor animal Warden digs for me all these many hours ! Take this bag ; I will carry the tins. Come quick.' And with a bound he had started on the homeward journey.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCERNING A LAMB AND OTHER MATTERS

‘*OHE, senhor !*’

I opened my eyes, and surveyed Manuel drowsily, for he had awakened me in the middle of a siesta. I blinked at him in silence for a few moments ; he seemed very unreal.

‘What do you want ?’ I asked at length.

‘Come out, senhor, and behold what I have brought you.’

I struggled to the cave-mouth ; in the sunlight Manuel’s gray donkey, with a large pannier upon its back, stood patiently.

‘We don’t buy donkeys,’ I said testily ; for I was still under the depressing influence of interrupted sleep.

‘Ho, senhor!’ he chuckled dryly. ‘See now, be not so impatient. Come nearer. Look into my pannier ; you will be surprised.’

I followed his advice, and beheld a lamb. The little creature turned its head to me with a pathetic look in its eyes.

‘Why, it’s alive, Manuel !’

‘But surely, senhor.’

‘Whatever made you bring us a live lamb ?’ As I said this, I fondled the little woolly head.

‘It can be killed,’ said the old man.

The lamb licked my hand.

‘*Hola !* what have we here ?’ shouted a voice behind us, and Hadow stumbled out of the inner cave. ‘What is this ?’ he cried, blinking in the strong light.

‘A fine lamb, Senhor Hadow ; you remember you asked me for some fresh meat, and when I could bring it to you.’

‘Very good ; now, how much wish you for this so small animal ?’ And Hadow felt its ribs in a knowing manner.

The lamb struggled feebly, for its legs were tied together. Manuel named the Portuguese equivalent for 4s. 6d. Hadow eventually beat him down to 3s. 3d., at which price the lamb changed hands.

‘What are we going to do with it ?’ I asked, as we watched Manuel riding slowly up the mountain-track.

‘Do with it ? *Herr Gott !* what for a question ! Why, eat it, of course, foolish one !’

‘But—but it’s alive !’

‘That hinders nothing ; we will kill it.’

The lamb looked at me. I longed to save its life, but what was the good ? Once set free amongst this wilderness of rocks, what was it to do ? It was clearly no sort of life for a lamb. And, moreover—I blush to own it—I was hungry ; the carnivorous animal within me craved for flesh. The memory of mint sauce, with its more substantial accompaniment, silenced me. I returned its look sadly.

‘Now,’ continued Hadow, ‘would *you* like to kill the little animal, dear boy ?’

‘No !’ I cried.

‘*Ach so !* do not look so fierce. I ask you for a treat. I will gladly kill it myself. Let me see—to cut his throat is one way, and, I am told, better for the meat. My knife is good, and with one strong cut—I——’

But here I left him.

The expenses incurred during our cave life were far from being ruinous. As the reader doubtless remembers, I had agreed to pay half of the entire cost of the expedition, and I see, from my notes, that my share of living expenses during the period passed in the cave averaged two shillings a day.

According to agreement, Manuel continued to call or send daily ; his contributions to our table included eggs (at three-pence halfpenny per dozen), immense loaves of bread (two-pence each), wine (our *garaffe* contained three quarts, and cost us ninepence), besides potatoes, milk, honey, coffee, fruit. The latter articles, being considered great delicacies,

were not eaten at every meal ; milk, honey, and fruit were served only on great and solemn occasions. Two shillings a day, or one shilling per head—for Pedro ate from the crumbs that fell from our table—think of it ! It practically annihilated poverty. I often wondered why all the poor relations, scattered so plentifully over the surface of the globe, did not emigrate to the Sierra de Monchique Mountains, and purchase health and happiness at the cost price of one shilling a day.

For this insignificant sum a man had a dry roof over his head, a cool and airy chamber, a superb view, air filtered over mountain ranges, a bathroom fit for an Eastern potentate, and a sufficiency of wholesome food. No neighbours to trouble him, no barking dogs, no taxes, no display of riches to make him envious. Only Nature and quiet, sunshine and starlight, health and happiness ; it seemed almost too good to be true. This was tasting life in earnest. This was the realization of many an old dream, many a boyish fancy, and it seemed to me that never before had I crept nearer to Nature's heart than I was privileged to do among these hills of Portugal.

‘ What write you in that book, senhor ? ’

‘ Many things, Pedro.’

The small imp upon the rock hugged his knees.

‘ Do you speak of me ? ’ he inquired, after a pause.

‘ Sometimes.’

‘ And of what I do ? ’

‘ Y-e-s.’

‘ It must be fun to write ; but what do you say I do ? ’

I eyed him thoughtfully. He was a remarkable object, with his brown face, his small trousers, and his large hat.

‘ I *might* say that you stole some sardines yesterday, or that you threw a rock over the cliff which nearly killed Senhor Hadow, or that you poured my ink into the pocket of——’

‘ Do you think I could hit it ? ’ interrupted Pedro suddenly.

‘ Hit what ? ’

‘ That little stone upon the top of the great one—there ! ’

And he flung a piece of rock at the object of his thoughts.
 'That was very near it, don't you think?'

'I think you had better run away; I want to write.'

I wrote for exactly fifteen seconds, when:

'Could *you* hit it, senhor?'

'What, Pedro?' I spoke testily, for I had forgotten his existence.

'The little stone upon the top of the great one.'

'*Basta! basta!* (Enough! enough!) Pedro.'

'I don't believe you could,' he muttered, half to himself.

For some time he hurled about rocks in silence, then:

'When I am a man I will have a gun like Senhor Hadoo.
Que Alegria! (What joy!) Yes; and I will carry snakes
 in all my pockets. *Ah, que gosto!* (Ah, what pleasure!)

I laid down my pen.

'The chances are, my dear Pedro, that if you continue to annoy me, you will not live to be a man.'

But Pedro only laughed, and flung another stone.

'*Ah, que gloria!*' he shouted, clapping his hands. 'I have hit it! *Que gloria! Que gloria!*'

'*Marote!*' (Rascal!) I cried, springing to my feet.

But before I could reach him he had vanished, apparently into space, although the rocks still repeated the cry, '*Ah, que gloria!—que gloria!*'

Our mail-bag was made up weekly, and Pedro, laden with injunctions and letters, was despatched across the mountains to Loulé. I was the chief contributor to the foreign mail-bag, for Hadow wrote but one letter a week, and Warden corresponded with his English friends but twice in the year.

This weekly letter of Hadow's aroused my curiosity. He admitted that letter-writing was abhorrent to him, and yet he never allowed a week to go by without sending off this one letter of numerous pages covered closely with his neat and methodical handwriting. Who could be the recipient? A woman? For surely nothing short of powerful feminine attraction could force a man to undertake so arduous and uncongenial a task. And yet was such a solution credible? Would it not be foreign to his character?

Lying beside him one day when he was deep in its pages, I began lazily to poke fun at him.

‘Give her my love,’ I suggested.

‘*Ja wohl*, dear boy.’ And he plied his pen in silence.

‘Could you get me a few shares in her affection?’

‘All are taken up and paid for in full.’ He stroked his long moustaches, and gazed at his letter with admiration.

‘Hadow, tell me, *is* she pretty?’

‘She is—b-e-a-utiful!’ he chuckled deep in his throat.

‘You old humbug! You pretend to be indifferent to women, and yet you carry on a weekly flirtation with a pretty girl. What do you mean by it?’

A twinkle came into his eyes.

‘*Ach!* what will you? If you were a philosopher you would know right well that there is always one big exception to every rule. Well, dear boy, *this*’—and he tapped the letter before him—‘is my one big exception.’

‘Tell me what she is like,’ I persisted.

‘Ah, Mr. Curiosity! Why should I tell you of my so private affairs?’

‘Oh, well, of course, if you are ashamed——’

‘Ashamed! No; very proud. Well, to please you I will tell. She has a dear, good face, and her eyes are full of truth; her step is soft and light, like a little lizard’s. When she speaks, you hear nothing but kindness, and when she is near you, you think to yourself, “*Ach!* what a great clumsy animal I am!”’

I looked at him in amazement. *Could this be Hadow?*

He nodded his head, and began to light his pipe.

‘Tell me more about her. What colour is her hair?’ I asked, after a pause.

‘Her hair? *Ach so!* it is gray.’

‘Gray!’

‘*Doch!* I think nearly white.’

‘*White!* Why, then, she is quite old!’

‘She will never be old.’

‘But if her hair is white!’

‘*Ach!* that makes no difference; her heart is so very young. I tell her so often. “*Mutterchen,*” I say——’

‘Mother!’ I ejaculated.

‘Certainly. I may be allowed to have *one* mother, I suppose?’

‘Oh, ah! y-e-s, I suppose so.’

The idea of Hadow’s mother deprived me of breath—there was something unnatural in such a relationship. An incubator, now, I could have understood.

‘Yes, I tell her so many times,’ repeated Hadow, puffing at his pipe. “‘*Mutterchen*,” I say, “you make me to feel shame, you are so young, and I feel old enough to be your father; what for a future is before us! I grow older every day; before long I will be your grandfather! It is not right of you, little mother!” Then will she kiss my ugly head and say in her kind voice: “Dear boy, you flatter your old mother; but what I wish is for you and me always to be the same age, and if God wills it we will grow old together!” There, you curious animal!’ he concluded gruffly, turning on me a broad and non-committal back, ‘take your lazy carcass out of my light. Go and catch for me a few fine frogs to justify your useless existence!’

‘Is it any use digging further?’ said Warden.

We were seated round the fire, and my friends, with a long and arduous day’s work behind them, were discussing the advantages and disadvantages connected with further excavation. The night was dark, for a canopy of thick clouds blotted out the stars. The wind moaned uneasily.

‘I tell you they *must* be there!’ cried Hadow, smiting the floor with his clenched fist.

Warden shrugged his shoulders.

‘I would stay if I could, old man, but I can’t afford the time. You know that my leave is up in a day or two, and although the fellows at the mines are awfully decent, yet I can’t ask them to do my work for me any longer. You see, Hadow’—and he laid his hand persuasively on the Professor’s knee—‘even after we leave this we have several days travelling before us. You remember, we decided to go back across the mountains.’

‘They *must* be there!’ repeated Hadow doggedly.

‘Well, it doesn’t look like it. We’ve made hay of the

floor of that inner cave to the depth of goodness knows how many feet, not to mention prospecting in the workmen's cave, and what have we got? Only these odds and ends you found last week. I am awfully sorry for your disappointment, old man; I feel it myself. I'd give anything for you to have made a big find; but we've done our best, and—well, it simply can't be helped!

Hadow sprang to his feet, and began to stride from one end of the cave to the other, utterly regardless of apartments, looking for all the world like a caged animal. Back and forward, back and forward he swept, wheeling out of firelight into shadow, and back into firelight again. Suddenly he came to a stop, faced us, smote his right fist into his left hand with much heat, and said:

'They *must* be there!'

He said it with the air of a man profoundly convinced of the truth of his assertion. We gazed at him sadly. He dashed his hat into the study and ran his fingers through his thick hair. His distress was great, yet we found no words with which to console him.

'I thank you both for your time and attentions. I see well how it looks from your eyes. You think all has been done? Hein? But so long as they are not found, all has *not* been done! Now, you may both go away—I may not ask you to stay longer—but as for me, I stay here.'

We endeavoured to dissuade him. Warden spoke long and persuasively. Hadow resumed his monotonous pacing to and fro.

'Oh, but only to think of it!' he cried, shaking his fist in the direction of the black inner cave. '*Ach Gott!* it is too much misfortune. How can I go back to England with so little to show?—I, who talked so big! I, who had set my heart upon so many fine bones! Dear boys!' and he wheeled upon us impetuously, 'have patience; give me but four days more. Yes?'

Warden shook his head.

'But three, then?'

'I wish I could, old fellow.'

'*Um Gottes willen!* you are too bad, animal of a Jew!

Give me but two ! See, now, two little days ; that is all I ask ! ’

Warden was moved. He laid a hand on Hadow’s shoulder.

‘ All right, old man, two be it, beginning to-morrow ; but, whatever happens, I have your word that you start with us on Saturday morning ? ’

‘ You have, ’ said Hadow with solemnity ; and upon this understanding we went to bed.

CHAPTER XXV

CARMEN'S VISIT

EARLY on the following morning we were awakened by the sound of many little bells. They stole into our sleep, and tinkled in unison with our dreams ; and then, with musical insistence—becoming nearer and louder—they recalled us to waking life. The jingle-jangle vibrated through the dawn, for the sun had not yet risen, although the growing light stood tiptoe on the threshold of the day ; it shook itself round us in bursts of merriment, in foreign clamour that was pleasing to the ear, bell answering unto bell in every ascending and descending note of sonorous sound.

Delightful though this may appear to the fully awakened senses, yet, visiting us in the gray dawn, it was not so welcomed with universal approval.

I rubbed my eyes, and, raising myself on my elbow, gazed questioningly around. The bell-ringers were the herd of Jew-like goats which we had met with on the occasion of our first finding of the cave. They peered down at us from above, they gazed up at us from below, and they inspected us from either end of our ledge.

‘Confound the beasts!’ exclaimed Warden.

‘It is good for you to rise early,’ commented Hadow, who was already up and dressed. ‘*Ach!* there is the goatherd! Let us have a talk with the animal now that we know a little of this mountain patois.’

The man made his appearance unexpectedly, the same wild and uncouth object which we had seen before. He sprang from rock to rock with the light and sure-footed

certainly of a goat, his sandals of hemp appearing to cling to the surface of the boulders with the same tenacity as did the tiny hoofs of his herd. He proved more willing to converse than on the previous occasion; our guns—and particularly Hadow's rifle—attracted him, and when, in answer to his entreaties, we fired at a distant rock, planting a bullet well within a given mark, his surprise and admiration knew no bounds.

In return he displayed his skill with the sling, which he carried in his hand, probably the same description of primitive weapon with which David killed Goliath in the good days of yore. Singling out a goat which had strayed from the herd, he picked up a stone, placed it in the leathern holder of the sling, whirled it several times round his head, then sent it whizzing on its way with a graceful motion of the arm. The stone hit the animal full in the ribs with a resounding thwack. Never have I seen a goat more painfully surprised. Turning its patriarchal face in our direction, it gave vent to a bleat of reproach. The pathetic sound was symbolical of 'wrongs unredressed and insults unavenged,' and as I gave ear to it, I seemed to be listening to the lamentations of a persecuted race.

Breakfast that morning was a joyous experience; the goatherd milked several of his charges into our spare dishes, and we enjoyed the luxury of unlimited hot milk with our coffee.

I had not seen Colomba for several days. Many times had I looked for her—in the morning, when Manuel or his substitute might be expected to appear on the track leading over the hill; and in the evening, when, perchance, she might be returning from some visit to Loulé—but thus far my expectations had been disappointed. I had even gone the length on one or two occasions of climbing to the saddle, from which a bird's-eye view of Manuel's house could be obtained; but the little dwelling had always the same air of desertion: not a soul to be seen, save once, when I could distinguish Manuel at work, a little patch of moving shadow in the sunlight of the garden.

Colomba's sister Carmen visited us twice, bringing

with her the basket containing our daily supply of provisions.

There was something singular about Carmen—she was so small, so elfin-like. She gave you the impression that she was some fairy changeling, for she lived in a world of her own, where everything was alive, and would talk by the hour to birds and trees and flowers, as if she possessed the key to their language, and could enter at will into their feelings. Her mind was not accustomed to run in commonplace grooves, like those of ordinary mortals. She suffered from marked eccentricity—let me not call it madness; the term is too harsh, too gross, to be applicable to the delicate waywardness of fancy that swayed her thoughts—her mind resembled her body, in that it was fairy-like and active. Childhood still flung the hem of its mantle over her words, and you realized that the advance of years would not rob her of the simplicity and naïveté of early youth.

‘You are the Senhor Geelberto?’ she had said on the occasion of her first visit. I took the basket out of her hand as I replied in the affirmative. She nodded her head many times. ‘Yes, yes, I thought so. I like you. You look kind.’

‘I always try my best,’ I said with a smile.

She sprang lightly from the donkey’s back and ran into the cave.

‘Oh!’ she cried, clapping her hands, ‘Colomba told me, but I had no idea it would look so nice; it is quite a little house! I would like to live here.’

The impossibility of acting on this hint kept me silent. The little creature flitted hither and thither, touching everything lightly with the tips of her fingers, as a butterfly might do in its wayward and erratic flight.

‘And you,’ I asked at length, ‘are Carmen?’

She danced up to me and laughed in my face

‘Yes, I am Carmen. Do you think it is a pretty name?’

‘Very; it reminds me of olive-trees and sunshine.’

‘Does it really? I am so glad. You say nice things; I like you more and more every minute.’

My eyes opened to their widest.

‘We are certainly getting on,’ I rejoined politely, but she

had flitted off upon another voyage of exploration. As she moved she sang a little crooning song. I could not catch the words ; the air, however, was wild and sad.

‘You are fond of birds, Carmen?’ said I, seeing her turning over the pages of a book on natural history belonging to Hadow.

She did not answer, but as the leaves rustled under her light fingers, she gave a cry of delight. Looking over her shoulder, I saw that she had been attracted by a coloured illustration of a kingfisher.

‘Ah, the beautiful creature!’ she murmured, laying her cheek against the page. ‘I love it—I love it!’

‘It is only the picture of a bird,’ said I gently, for I felt sorry to see her so unlike other girls.

She shook her head.

‘No, no ; I know better. It is a real bird ; it will come to life one day. See how beautiful it is ! What fine colours it has !’

I was about to change the subject, when she gave a cry of pain.

‘What is that?’ There was fear as well as anger in her voice.

I followed her eyes to the wall, against which Hadow pinned his specimens.

‘That is a kingfisher, too—the skin of one. But do not fear, it cannot hurt you ; it is dead.’

‘Who killed it?’ she gasped.

Her agitation was grievous to witness. I was taken aback.

‘Oh, I don’t know. Well—that is to say, I suppose it was shot by one of my friends.’

She sprang to her feet and faced me.

‘Oh, cruel!’ she cried breathlessly. ‘Cruel! cruel!’

Her eyes blazed with indignation, and all her little figure seemed distorted with rage. I gazed at her in consternation. Then the flood-gates of her speech were opened, and she let loose such a torrent of words, speaking so quickly and gesticulating with so much passion, that I was unable to follow her, and stood dumfounded and wordless, while she lashed me with her small but unmerciful tongue. It was a humiliating experience. Fortunately, it did not last long ; the fiery flow came abruptly to an end, and, without

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CARMEN'S VISIT.



vouchsafing me so much as a look, she caught up the empty basket and disappeared into the sunshine.

On the occasion of her second visit she had so far forgiven me that she stayed awhile to talk, although she would by no means consent to enter the cave. Our conversation verged on the fantastic. She informed me that she had been a flower in a former existence, also a bird, and, on one occasion, even a tree. She told me, too, what the rain sang when it came dancing down to earth, and the reason why the shadows chased the sunshine over the hills, with many other pieces of curious and unexpected information. She had many little stories connected with material objects, which lifted them at once out of the commonplace into the atmosphere of fantasy. She was the friend and the confidante of all Nature. Poor little Carmen!

‘Where do you learn all these things?’ I asked her.

For answer she put her finger to her lips, then bent her head in a listening attitude. I watched her in silence.

‘Do you hear it?’ she asked in a whisper.

‘Hear what?’

‘It is calling me now. It cries, “Carmen! Carmen! come and be one of us; come, and we will tell you all our secrets!”’

I questioned her, but she would not tell me more, and when I pressed her for information she frowned and gave a shrill cry, like that of an angry bird. I guided the conversation to Colomba; but beyond telling me how good and kind Colomba was, she did not follow my lead, preferring to wander away into bypaths of her own, which she peopled with fancies and made musical with snatches of song.

When I assisted her to mount her donkey, I said:

‘Good-bye, Carmen; I have enjoyed your visit. I also love your friends, the birds and the sunbeams; now, will you do me a kindness?’

She allowed her little brown hand to rest for a moment in mine as she replied:

‘I will do what I can for you, Senhor Geelberto.’

‘Well, then, ask Colomba to bring the basket to-morrow herself. Tell her that we leave the mountains very soon. Good-bye!’

CHAPTER XXVI

COLOMBA ONCE MORE

SEATED on the ledge, I strained my eyes in the direction of the saddle. The morning was misty; the clouds hemmed us in with a gray mantle, through which even the sunlight was powerless to force its way. The view as seen from my aerial standpoint was weird in the extreme. The mists assumed fantastic forms. At times the gorge below seemed one vast caldron, sending its dense fumes upwards into the higher levels. The air was cool and damp; from out the unseen spaces came the hoarse murmur of the brook.

My thoughts were full of Colomba. Would she come? Was it wise of me to trust so irresponsible a messenger as Carmen? I could but wait and see.

The mists parted in the direction of the saddle. A shaft of sunlight fell on the track where it topped the mountain brow. A moving object attracted my attention. I gazed, my whole heart in my eyes. Was it? Yes, *it was!* I could see the donkey dropping from stone to stone, a little figure perched upon his back, and, topping all, the glint of a pink bonnet. At that moment a swirl of vapour swept between us, snatching mountain, track, and Colomba from my sight; but I had seen enough to set Nature singing in my heart, and, without loss of time, I started upwards to meet my coming visitor.

Before long the click, clack of the donkey's hoofs striking the stones caught my ear; then a phantom figure rose out of the mist.

'Colomba!' I called.

‘ Senhor Geelberto, is it you ? ’ the fresh young voice rang through the still air.

I felt myself smiling with pleasure. Reaching her side, I took her hand in mine, but, for the moment, found no words to say.

‘ I have brought the basket to-day, as—as you wished it,’ said she at length. There was a pretty shyness in her manner.

‘ Let us take it back to the cave,’ I rejoined ; and, without further conversation, we proceeded downwards side by side.

The little gray donkey was powdered with dew-diamonds—they sparkled on his shaggy coat and glittered upon his long ears like numbers of misplaced earrings, which he flung into the air whenever he shook his head.

When we reached the cave I offered to assist Colomba to dismount, but she would not hear of it.

‘ No, no, senhor ! I must not stay.’

I own to feeling a sense of disappointment.

‘ Won’t you even get off for a few minutes ? It is drier in the cave, and I have much to say to you.’

‘ No, no,’ she repeated ; ‘ besides ’—with feminine irrelevance—‘ I can talk to you just as well here.’

I felt piqued. To me it was by no means the same thing. A conversation in the mist, standing by the side of a donkey, and a conversation seated side by side with Colomba upon a small table, were not to be compared for a moment. She observed my ill-humour.

‘ Senhor Geelberto,’ laying a hand timidly on my arm, ‘ do not be angry with me ; we have been such good friends. I would willingly do all you ask of me, but I promised my father not to stay long here and not to go into the cave. I must keep my promise. I, too, am sorry. Oh, *please, please*, senhor, say you understand.’

‘ Yes, I understand. You are quite right—we will talk here ;’ and I smiled up into her perplexed face.

Her dark eyes showed an answering gleam, then clouded over as she asked :

‘ And is it true—Carmen told me—that you leave so soon ?’

‘Yes, it is but too true. To-morrow morning we strike northward across the mountains.’

‘Why do you go away? Are you not happy here?’

‘Very happy; but things come to an end, you know. Senhor Warden must return to his work at the mines of San Domingo. Senhor Hadow and I also must go to our homes. This has been a holiday to us—a fête-day, as it were—and you know, Colomba, even fête-days, however happy they may have been, come at last to an end.’

She withdrew her hand from my arm and shivered.

‘You are cold. Let me get my overcoat to put round you,’ I entreated.

But she would not consent, and denied stoutly that the cold had made her shiver.

‘Why have you avoided us lately?’ I asked, after a pause.

She hesitated, and began plucking at the donkey’s shaggy neck with her fingers.

‘I—I cannot tell. No, I do not mean that; but there have been many reasons. My father wished me to stay more at home, and then, too, Carmen was so glad to take my place; she was all curiosity to see the cave and—and you.’

‘You told her about me, then?’

‘Y-e-s, a little.’

‘Now I wonder what you said about me?’

A gleam of fun came into her eyes as she replied demurely:

‘I told her you were a very bold young man, and that she must be careful not to fall asleep.’

We both laughed. It was wonderful how Colomba’s face lighted up when she laughed!

‘You have gained her heart, Senhor Geelberto; no one has talked to her of flowers, and birds, and sunshine as you have talked.’

‘I think it is they who have gained her heart, and not I. I was much interested in her; she is a strange little girl.’

‘Yes’—and she sighed—‘I wish much that she was a little different for her own sake. For my sake I would not have her different at all; to me she is always sweet and kind,

but father does not understand her, and sometimes it is terrible—terrible, senhor!’ And she shuddered.

‘She can be rather—well, fierce at times.’

‘It is because her heart is so tender, senhor; it is too tender for this world. She cannot bear to see anything suffer. Father once killed a little bird she had—he did not really mean to do it, I am sure, but he was angry. I thought she would kill him, Holy Mary! She became as one possessed. She ran away and wandered among the mountains for many days. I looked for her day and night, and so did father, for he was sorry that he had killed her little bird. But’—and she waved her hand—‘do not let us talk more of such sad things; there are sad things enough in one’s very own life, one has no need to seek for them.’

I looked at her with sympathy; her eyes were full of melancholy.

‘Sadness ought not to have touched such a young life as yours, Colomba. Surely it is early morning still with you; the brightness, the freshness, the sunshine of existence, are they not all yours?’

She shook her head.

‘Come, come,’ I continued, ‘you ought to be scolded—you have no right to be morbid. Consider, for a little moment, all the nice things which are yours: health, beauty, friends, and even lovers—as I know well.’

My thoughts reverted to the letter that was ‘almost a love-letter,’ and I smiled.

She tossed her head petulantly.

‘Lovers indeed! I do not want them. I hate them all. I have never seen anyone I could have loved—that is, since—since——’

‘Since when?’ I asked lightly.

She looked at me swiftly; her eyes were a wordless reproach; their expression filled me with sadness. A moment we stood thus. I was the first to look away. For a short time neither of us spoke. The little gray donkey made an effort to reach a tuft of grass.

‘You will like them one day,’ said I, breaking silence.

She started; her thoughts had strayed far from her lovers.

‘It is but natural,’ I continued, patting the donkey’s

neck; 'flowers expand their petals to the sun, and youth opens the doors of its heart to love. It is but natural. Oh yes! you will want them one day.'

'Why do you talk to me thus?' She spoke rapidly, almost breathlessly. 'You speak of things that I have never thought of before. And you make me feel uncomfortable, for I am only an ignorant girl, and it seems to me at times that—that you are laughing at me.'

Alas! was there not a grain of truth in the accusation? As I cast my thoughts back to our former interviews, I could not but remember that I had taken Colomba very lightly—it had seemed impossible to treat her seriously; but now everything appeared different. She was the same winsome and unsophisticated girl, but through the veil of words I read traces of deeper meaning, and the feelings I had jested with rose and condemned me. She looked at me, and I imagined that in her eyes I caught sight of coming tears.

'God forbid!' I ejaculated, in sudden contrition, laying my hand upon her knee. 'Why should you imagine such things? We have jested together, and I have laughed many times—not at, but with you; but when we speak seriously of so grave a topic as love, God forbid that I should laugh! Besides, Colomba, do you not think that I am capable of serious feeling myself? I wish I could show you my heart at the present moment. Believe me, I feel—I feel——'

She pushed my hand away petulantly.

'How can I tell you what you feel?' and her voice and gestures reminded me of Carmen—of Carmen, angry and indignant at the death of the bird. 'Your words are serious and beautiful; you speak to me as no one has ever spoken to me before, and then, as I look in your face, you smile! You are so different from Carlos, and Pedro, and all the men I know. I love to hear you speak, but sometimes I could *hate* your smile. May all the saints forgive me for such wicked words! Not that it is an ugly smile—far from it—but it seems to tell me that you belong to a different world, and it appears to say also that you think me still a child. I am no child'—and she drew herself up. 'I am eighteen years old—*quite* a woman!'

I did not speak.

‘Ah, Senhor Geelberto!’ and her words swept on, aided on their way by quick, impassioned gestures, ‘you come here into our mountains, unexpectedly like—like these mists, and then you go away, perhaps for ever. Ah! you are so different, so different! How can I tell what you feel? Holy Mother of God! How can I even tell what I feel myself?’

She broke off suddenly. I glanced up at her; there was a look of pain in her face, her bosom rose and fell, and her eyes gazed out through the mists to where one mountain-top showed faintly through the swirl of vapours. We remained silent for some time; for my part I racked my brain unsuccessfully for something to say.

‘Will you please take the basket?’ she said at length, and her voice sounded low and constrained.

Without a word I carried it into the cave and emptied its contents upon the table. When I rejoined her she smiled faintly.

‘Good-bye, senhor.’

‘Not good-bye, Colomba.’

‘Why not? You leave to-morrow. We will not meet again.’

‘Ah! but I cannot say good-bye like this. No, no’—as she strove to speak—‘hear me! I *must* see you again. Just once before I go. Ah, Colomba! little friend! do not say no! Meet me but once more—to-night, when the moon shines; for see, the mist is breaking fast, the sunshine is driving it away.’

As I spoke I pointed outward. The air was luminous with struggling sun and flying vapours; shreds of cloud were being hounded up the valley by a pursuing breeze; the mists smoked off the warm hill-side; the glorious August weather was asserting itself; it promised to be a perfect day.

Colomba hesitated.

‘You will come?’ I whispered, taking her hand in mine. She drew a long breath, and moved uneasily.

‘I—I do not know. Oh, *why* do you ask me to come?’

‘Only to say good-bye. I leave to-morrow.’

A look of pain came into her face. I winced at the sight.

'Forgive me,' I faltered; 'I think only of myself. Yes, you are right; we must not meet again. We will say good-bye—here—now. Colomba! dear Colomba!'—I pressed the fingers that lay within my own—'you will be very happy one day; I can see it. You will say to yourself, "I am so glad I did not get too fond of that Englishman."' '

Colomba cried quietly.

'I would not pain you for worlds,' I continued gently. 'I wish to be a pleasant memory to you. God knows you will be one to me. I—but there, I must not talk; if I do, I will be selfish again. Now, little friend, good-bye. See, it is going to be a fine day after all. Let me assist you with your basket. One must fasten it to the saddle—there, that is right. Once more, good-bye.'

I strove to school my voice to cheerfulness, but it was a poor attempt. My heart ached for her. At the thought that I was voluntarily saying farewell for ever, a great depression seized me. I made way for her on the narrow track, but the donkey did not move. Against my will I looked at her; her eyes were fixed on me; they were full of trouble. I took a step forward, checked myself, and again drew back.

'Good-bye,' I said again.

'Good-bye, senhor, but——'

'Yes, Colomba?'

'It is quite certain that you go to-morrow?'

'Quite certain.'

'Do you start early?'

'Yes, at daybreak.'

She cast a sidelong glance at me, bit the tip of her forefinger, then looked down.

'Perhaps,' she murmured, then stopped in confusion.

I gazed at her wonderingly. What was she about to say?

'Perhaps,' she continued, examining the handle of the basket with minute attention—'perhaps I have been too—too unkind.'

'No, no!' I cried hastily in self-reproach. 'It has been *all* my fault. You have been sweetness itself—too sweet.'

'Ah, but that is not what I mean. Senhor! I mean too

unkind about refusing to see you once more. I, too, thought only of myself. How wrong of me! We should all make sacrifices for others; do not the lives of the blessed saints teach us beautiful lessons in self-sacrifice?’

I looked at her in astonishment. This little girl was far beyond my limited comprehension. Not a trace of a smile played over her face—she was in earnest. I was forced to take her seriously. But to be assisted by the saints, all but deprived me of breath.

‘I—I have heard so,’ I said disjointedly.

‘How glad I am that I thought of that, senhor!’ Her tone and expression voiced contentment.

‘But I cannot allow you to do it,’ I expostulated.

‘But I insist,’ she cried eagerly.

We faced each other.

‘Senhor Geelberto,’ she said with solemnity, ‘tell me the truth. Do you wish to see me once more? Would it give you pleasure?’

‘You know it would, Colomba, but——’

She held up her hand.

‘Then I *will* come. Meet me on the mountain, up there, at half-past nine.’ She pointed to where the track reached the sky-line. ‘Good-bye!’ And without another word she rode away.

I stood gazing after her, my brain in a whirl. Then a wave of happiness swept over me.

‘God bless the saints!’ I ejaculated.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE EVE OF DEPARTURE

THE time was at hand that we should bid farewell to our cave-life, and cross the barrier of mountains that lay between us and the world beyond. Day after day, to the northward, the beckoning hills had spoken to us of home, and yet it was with regret that we recorded the march of Time. The period passed in our cave-life was of so happy a nature, the days glided by one after another with so smooth and joyous a step, that we were loth to put them behind us for ever. Fain would we have dallied with Time—fain have stayed the hands upon the face of the hours ; but it could not be.

Seated on our ledge, we discussed plans connected with our departure on the following day. The house was divided. Warden and I were in favour of riding ; Hadow championed walking. As usual, a powerful minority gained the day. In deference to its wishes, only one animal—a baggage-mule—was ordered through the agency of Manuel. We were forced to listen to a tirade directed against degenerate men and incompetent mules, and it would go hard to say which class suffered most under the lash of the Professor's contempt.

'But you rode a mule from Loulé !' I reminded him.

'*Doch !* but never again. I could well have walked twice the distance with half of the fatigue. *Ach !* when I think how I did kick that miserable little animal up those rocks, I feel shame !'

'You should have carried him,' I said reproachfully.

'Ah, you may laugh if you will,' he rejoined ; 'but I speak truth. Yes, we will walk to Salir to-morrow ; it will

be good for our great laziness.' And he slapped his muscular legs with satisfaction.

But though Warden and I, actuated solely by sympathy for his disappointment, refrained from argument, this arrangement was by no means to our taste. We did not share his contempt for the legs of mules ; and, what is more, a walking tour in the fierce heat over the rough mountain-tracks was a pleasure we had not anticipated.

'It will be all right,' said Warden, taking me aside ; 'just let him imagine he is having his own way now—it's not much of a walk to-morrow—and I'll arrange to get mules for you and me at Salir.'

'I'll do anything to make him happier,' I assented ; 'even at the expense of my own legs. But why does he leave off excavating because you have to go back to San Domingo ? You are useful, but not indispensable—as the cat remarked to the old maid.'

Warden looked over his shoulder, then laid a hand upon my arm.

'My dear fellow, there's no use his digging further ; the caves are cleaned out, and he knows it.'

'What ! every one of them ?'

'No, not every one, of course, but all that promised to repay excavation. Poor old Hadow ! how keen he is ! Why, that man would go through fire to get what he wanted. A disappointment like this would make even me pretty savage, and I have only a tenth part of Hadow's enthusiasm. By Jove ! I wonder he doesn't brain us all some dark night, and take our skeletons back to his museum.'

'He might pass you off as the remains of the woolly rhinoceros,' I said thoughtfully.

'And you as the missing link,' retorted Warden.

And we parted with a laugh.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A MOONLIGHT MEETING

MOONLIGHT on the Sierra de Monchique. Peak after peak rose pale and mystic from the obscurity of the valleys.

I sat upon a boulder where the mountain bent its back ; its mighty flanks sloped downwards to the dusk of the valleys ; to the left it reared its head into the night, silent and solemn—a mysterious mass, fronting the stars.

It was unspeakably grand—indescribably beautiful. A few lights twinkled far off, where Carenta clung to its precarious resting-place. The low hooting of an owl came faintly to the ear. The night breeze fluttered, then died away, then fluttered again ; it rose and fell fitfully, like a sigh ; its breath was infinitely soft and caressing.

Immersed in thought, I sat with my chin resting upon my hand. Many conflicting emotions chased each other through my brain.

I was young—the moon shone bright—I was awaiting a woman ; were not these reasons sufficient for my breath to come faster, and for my heart to beat with more than its usual precipitation ?

Colomba ! The name stirred my feelings like a sigh. She was so young, so pretty, so unprotected ; was it fair to trouble the smooth current of her life with attentions which I saw well would come to nothing ? To me the episode was but a touch of sentiment, of no more lasting effect than the sunlight which gilded each of those long summer days with the alchemy of its smile. It would be forgotten in the night of absence ; and even as each particular wave of sunshine dies with every dying hour, so, too, would this little wave of

sentiment subside upon the shores of forgetfulness, chased into oblivion, perchance, by other and newer waves following relentlessly upon its track.

I consulted my watch ; by the bright moonlight I could easily distinguish the hour—it wanted but five minutes of ten. Colomba was late ; I grew impatient.

Gazing downwards into the valley, I could see one of the white walls of Manuel's cottage as it caught the moonbeams and focussed them into a point of silvery light. One of the windows also looked out upon the night with a red and watchful eye ; someone was stirring in the little living-room. But on the track, as far as could be seen in the moonlight, no sign of life was to be observed. The little footpath snaked downwards into the valley—now coiling behind some great rock, now twisting into silvery light, but all the while looking as deserted and forlorn as though it had never been pressed and sanctified for ever by the little feet of Colomba. I marvelled at its stony insensibility !

The minutes passed slowly. Doubts began to beset me. Perhaps she was unable to make good her escape ? Perhaps Manuel held her in the toils of interminable conversation ? Perhaps—and at this contingency a solid gloom fell on my soul—perhaps she did not intend to come at all ! Inaction tortured me ; I sprang to my feet, and faced the mountains with determination. My mind was made up ; if she would not come to me, I would go to her. The mountains, thinking doubtless of Mahomet, nodded their approval ; the moon smiled encouragement ; the owl alone uttered a derisive hoot.

Barely had I taken one downward step before a something on the path glued me to the spot ; this something was a tiny, upward-moving figure that flitted in and out of the moonlit spaces, never pausing, never stopping, coming nearer and nearer with every turn of the track. I watched it vanish and reappear a dozen times. From an insignificant detail, it grew and grew, until—O blessed moment !—I could distinguish by its form that it was a woman. She neared me quickly, at a breathless pace that was more than half a run. All the beauty of the night centred itself in that tripping little figure.

At the sight my heart beat a quick and lively march, to

which every drop of blood in my body danced a mad fandango.

O youth, youth ! to be so moved by the flutter of an approaching petticoat ! to start full-tilt for the gates of Paradise because, forsooth, a little maiden meeteth thee in the moonlight !

I wished to welcome her by a friendly shout, but my throat was dry and the words would not come. She approached me in silence, and held out both hands. I took them in mine, and, holding them tightly, devoured her with my eyes. How pale she looked in the moonlight ! Her head was uncovered ; the night wind played at will with her dark tresses. Her eyes shone like stars, and the touch of her little hands was warm and clinging.

Still in silence—for I could not trust myself to speak—I led her to a rock, upon which we sat down side by side.

The sweetness of her personality oppressed me ; it stole upon my senses like a subtle and overpowering odour ; it crept over me in insidious waves ; it invaded my brain—it surged upwards from my heart. The witchery of the moonlight but increased the intoxication of the moment ; it invested her with a silver radiance ; it surrounded her with an atmosphere of romance. The isolation of our trysting-place also added its quota to the difficulties that beset me. Not another human being within miles—nothing but the dim and silent mountains, asleep in the light of the moon, and Colomba, seated by my side. All the world receded into the background, unreal, unimportant, and in its place my little companion filled the vacant spaces with a satisfying completeness which defies description.

I gazed at her. Never before had she appeared so attractive. The moonlight sketched in the outlines of her profile and rested like a benediction upon her head. The little hands, the flower-like face, the dark and errant tresses, the girlish figure divined beneath the coarse blue dress, my heart ached for them all—my arms yearned to gather them within the warm confines of a caress.

Truly I was in a parlous state !

Colomba came to my rescue ; the sound of her voice recalled me to myself.

‘I hope I have done right to come,’ she said nervously, withdrawing her hands from mine.

‘It was a kind act,’ I said softly.

‘I meant it for one, but in reading the life of St. Margaret to-night for guidance, I find she recommends young girls to be watchful and circumspect. Oh, Senhor Geelberto, *have* I been circumspect?’

‘I—I think so, Colomba.’

‘I hope I have, but since I saw you this morning, doubts have beset me. It is so difficult to do right. This morning it seemed a fine thing to please others at the cost of my own selfish feelings, but now—I fear I have done wrong.’ Her head drooped to her breast.

‘No, no!’ I cried, pained to witness the intensity of her emotions.

‘Yes,’ she continued dejectedly, ‘it is true. I see it now—it is not circumspect; but I was so full of pride in trying to please you that I did not pause to think what St. Margaret would think of my conduct.’

‘She would make allowances.’

‘Saints never make allowances; they are always circumspect. I have done wrong. And now I am unhappy for two reasons. Oh, I am the most miserable girl in Portugal!’

Her voice broke, tears were not far distant. Her thoughts ran into another groove.

‘I will have to confess it on Sunday to the Padre. Oh, what *will* he say? Never before have I told him anything so dreadful!’

She hid her face in her hands; I made haste to console her.

‘Padre Callada is a kind man—a man of sense; he has not forgotten that he, too, was young once. He is deeply learned, and probably understands how difficult it is to be both self-sacrificing and circumspect. Oh, please do not grieve, Colomba! It is not so very dreadful to meet me, is it?’

She raised her head; her eyes were suffused with tears.

‘N-o-o, it is not that that is so dreadful; I—you know I really wished to come here. But to do it secretly, and to come out at so late an hour into so lonely a place! Surely that is very, very wrong, Senhor Geelberto?’

‘We could not have seen the mountains so well from any

other place ; they are worth the trouble we have taken to visit them. Look, Colomba, how beautiful they are !’

She allowed her eyes to travel over the circle of moonlit peaks, then drew a deep breath.

‘ The dear, dear hills !’ she said softly.

I bent over her, but she never saw me ; her whole soul was lost in admiration.

‘ I will always remember this,’ I whispered into her ear.

She turned to me with a start ; unhappiness peeped from her eyes ; the peaceful memory of the moonlight and the mountains was blotted out of her mind as the sweep of a sponge blots figures from off a slate. Her expression was a lively index to her feelings.

‘ You—you go to-morrow ?’ Her voice was low and tremulous.

‘ Yes.’

‘ I may never see you again !’

‘ I may come back. I——’

‘ No, no ; you say these kind words, but you do not really mean them. You know that we will never meet again—never ! never ! never !’

I sought words in vain.

‘ Ah, Blessed Virgin !’ she cried passionately, raising her face into the moonlight. ‘ Why did you allow me to come here ? Each time only makes it worse. I had better have stayed away, as I thought of doing, but something stronger than me drew me out of doors and led me up the mountain—to you !’

‘ Colomba !’ I cried brokenly, ‘ don’t talk like that. It is not so bad as you think. We have been happy together—very happy—and surely happiness counts for something in this life of ours ?’

She gazed at me in silence ; I continued :

‘ Is it not something to have known each other, to have met but for a few summer days, to have been drawn together by our love for all that is beautiful ?’

She gave a long sigh ; we sat silent for several minutes.

‘ I will never forget you, senhor !’ The solemnity of her voice awed me. ‘ I see well what will happen : you go away to-morrow and forget——’ I raised my hand in denial, but

she silenced me with a gesture. 'Yes, it is true ; you go away and forget—I stay here and remember. I do not blame you—it is natural ; but oh !'—and she pressed her hands to her heart—'it pains—it pains !'

'Colomba !' I exclaimed ; but she interrupted me, and the sadness of her voice haunts me even now.

'Let me say one or two words, and then go quickly away ; it is better so. I—I will pray for your happiness ; I——' She broke off suddenly. 'Hush !' she whispered. 'Listen !'

In the silence of the hills a cry arose—a long, wavering cry ; it came from the depths of the valley.

'Col-om-ba ! Col-om-ba !'

We sprang to our feet, and gazed questioningly into each other's eyes.

The mountains awoke and muttered the name to themselves ; peak after peak repeated it drowsily, then the distant hills took it up, and we heard it no more.

Colomba stood with finger on lip.

'It is father,' she whispered. 'I must go ; good-bye.'

'Colomba !' I cried.

She gazed at me ; her lips moved, but no sound escaped them. Then, without a word, she raised her face to mine. Breathlessly, I caught her to my arms : our lips met. She clung to me passionately with all the strength of her two little hands. A moment—a century—then with a sob she broke from me, and with a strange tightening of the heart-strings I watched her pass rapidly away down the moonlight of the track.

CHAPTER XXIX

FAREWELL TO THE CAVES

ON the following morning we bade farewell to our cave. Five o'clock saw us afoot, watching for the last time the well-known peaks flush one after the other under the glance of the rising sun. I do not think I ever felt sadder. I assisted Hadow in the preparation of breakfast with a dull ache at my heart utterly foreign to the making of coffee, and I packed my saddle-bags with inward anguish, feeling, as I interred one garment after another, as though I were chief mourner at the obsequies of some dearly-beloved friend. It was infinitely pathetic.

Many ties bound my affection to the spot which we were on the point of leaving for ever. Colomba, the mountains, our free and open-air life, the spirit of good-fellowship and Bohemianism that radiated from every day of our sojourn—all pulled at my heart-strings, and made the occasion one of the saddest experiences of my inexperienced life.

To contemplate the magnifying power of youth fills me with amazement. I am quite awestruck now when I recall the solid gloom which fell on my soul ; I almost speak about it in whispers. If the surplus emotion of youth, over and above the high-water mark of necessity, could only be diverted into altruistic channels, what a glorious day for philanthropism ! But no ; the fires burn only on the altar of egoism, and as the youthful priest piles on the fuel, with a fine disregard for economy, what wonder if the entire temple is oftentimes ablaze ? Youthful suffering is but an undeveloped sense of humour. Things amuse us, but they are the trivialities of existence, and have little or nothing

to do with the plot of comedy which surrounds us. Not even an echo from the 'laughter of the gods' reaches us; we miss the point, and never dream in our ignorance that our very lives are but the grim jest of Fate. When I think of my mental condition on that doleful 16th of July, I long to send a little parcel of grown-up humour backwards down the ladder of the years. How it would have gilded the sunlight and made the coming day bright with the smiles of hope! It would have taken all the bitterness out of life, and also—which was of some importance—out of the coffee; for I sipped it in my despondency feeling that all the sugar of the Indies would never sweeten coffee for me again.

And yet, to be quite truthful, there was a grain of consolation sown in my heart by the thought of the coming journey. I was in a curiously complex condition—a condition which absolutely defies the analytical powers of my pen. I have already confessed to the thrill of joyous anticipation which the very thought of a journey brings to me. It is an affair of the blood; I will never grow out of it. And imagine how this feeling was intensified by the picturesqueness of the journey upon which we were about to embark. Such a journey! Stripped of time-tables and railway-stations; innocent of chambermaids, and superior to highroads; for was I not to be conveyed across these delectable mountains by no more prosaic means than a Portuguese mule, over no more beaten tracks than paths trodden by muleteers when they breasted the morning hills or jingle-jangled into the gold of the sunset?

Under happier circumstances, it was a thought to set me singing, and even as it was it proved sufficiently powerful to sternly rebuke the suicidal ideas that tormented my brain.

In spite of the early hour, several of our friends had assembled to bid us farewell. Bartolomeo was there, his old muzzle-loader slung over his arm, his expression as detached as ever from the actualities of existence. Manuel, too, accompanied by Carmen, had footed it over the hill in the dawn, and the sound of his voice rose and fell monotonously. He advised me how to pack, condemned our coffee, told inappropriate anecdotes connected with his past, lamented our departure, criticised our personal appearance, and finally

begged without ceasing. Oh, how he begged! Never have I seen a human being more gifted by nature with qualities which go to make a really great beggar; coolness, audacity, resourcefulness, unblushing impudence—all were his.

‘*Ah, senhores!* so you are really going? Well, *Ide com Deos!* (God be with you!) It is a pity you have not found as many bones as you wish, after all your labour, too! It is like eating a whole ox, and tainting at the tail. Ho, ho! that is a fine cucumber, Senhor Hadoo; you might as well give it to me. If I take it, your luggage will be lightened. That is not the way to pack, Senhor Fatson; put a little more into the left side; make it even; saddle-bags must hang well. See, too, you have forgotten your brown shoes. They are rather old; I believe they would fit me. No? you do not think so? The black pair, then? They are still older. No? Ah, well, I will try to make mine last a little longer. Stop, stop, Senhor Farden! That parcel of sugar can have no more use for you, and surely you are too great a senhor to take away that loaf? You will get fresh bread at Salir. That recalls a story to me you will be glad to hear,’ etc.

Our workmen, too, had stayed the night in order to speed our departure instead of returning to Loulé on the previous evening. It was kindly intentioned. We had all been good friends, labouring in a common cause, and now that we were to part they expressed their good wishes with a warmth which took us by surprise. Their words had a genuine ring about them which convinced us of their sincerity, and what made the occasion even more touching was that Alfonso, whom we had often scolded severely—he was of an incurably lazy disposition, his one ambition being to pose as my understudy—was foremost in many little acts of helpfulness and goodwill.

Carmen fluttered here and there. Although with us, she was not of us—no more than if her presence had been the airy passage of a butterfly. No one heeded her; even the workmen stood on one side when she signified by an imperious gesture that she wished to pass. I wonder if this deference was due to a knowledge of her peculiarities, or was merely the outward sign of national courtesy? In some

lands a person whose mind is unlike those of others becomes the object of an unusually protective tenderness. In her bosom she wore a scarlet flower. I touched it lightly as she paused for an instant by my side.

‘A flower, Carmen! That is surely unlike you. See how it hangs its head. You have taken it from the dew and the sunlight; in a little while it will die.’

The words were thoughtlessly spoken. She raised her face to mine, and I saw the hot tears start to her eyes.

‘I did not do it. I never kill flowers—never!’ She stamped her foot.

‘You found it, perhaps?’

‘No.’

‘Then someone gave it to you?’

‘No, senhor, not to me; I would not have taken it. It is for you.’

‘For me?’

‘Yes, Colomba sent it.’

I held out my hand without a word. Unpinning it from her bodice, she gave it to me. I cast a furtive glance at my companions, then pressed the scarlet petals to my lips. Carmen watched me; wonder awoke in her eyes.

‘Why do you kiss it, senhor?’

‘Because it means much to me.’

‘Ah, I know; it is your kind heart.’

‘Alas! Yes, Carmen, it is all the fault of my heart.’

‘You are sorry for it?’

The question was difficult to answer. She referred to the flower; I, alas! thought of Colomba. I looked at her; her eyes were full of sympathetic admiration. A feeling of shame troubled me—I was sailing under false colours.

‘You are sorry for it?’ she repeated.

I nodded my head.

‘You love it?’

I nodded again, this time without mental reservation. Her face lighted with pleasure; it was as though she had discovered that we belonged to the same secret society. She held out her hand; my fingers clasped hers, and never in all my life have I taken part in a more solemn and satisfactory shake.

The lading of our baggage-mule interested everyone. Not a soul present but 'fancied' himself as a packer of baggage-mules, Carmen alone excepted. Manuel and the mule led the van. Their ideas on the subject were original, but were diametrically opposed. Manuel was all for burying the little animal under every movable object that the cave contained; the mule, on the contrary, attempted at intervals to empty its panniers into the gorge. The noise was terrific; from Pedro's shrill tenor to the muleteer's blasphemous bass, from Manuel's interminable falsetto to the mule's indignant squeal—every tone was represented. If we had been lading an army of mules, we could not have made more disturbance; the rocks screamed their remonstrance. At last the work was done, and the mule, resembling a tortoise—head and tail alone visible—stood on the track awaiting the signal of departure.

After a final handshake, we moved away, treading for the last time the path we had come to know so well.

Before the caves were hid from us, I turned to pay them the tribute of a final farewell. The rising sun shone on the scene with tempered brilliance; in the depths of the valley a veil of mist still lingered; the brook—*our* brook, in which we had bathed so often—still sang to the oleanders; the b eeze raced out of the distance. It was all just as I had seen it often and just as I will ever remember it, yet it was different; or, rather, the difference lay not in it, but in me. It absorbed the sunshine, but was indifferent to the sentiment, whereas I, alas! was steeped in sentiment, but felt that I had missed the sunshine.

The party on the ledge was still there. Manuel appeared to be addressing them collectively. I could see his arms waving in frantic gesticulation. Then a rock intervened, and I saw them no more.

Wending our downward way, we at length reached the bottom of the valley. Midway between its shelving side the path climbed along a watercourse. It was the bed of a mountain torrent; dried scum clung to the rocks, green ooze lay in the hollows, the boulders were rounded by the action of water. Summer had sucked up the last trickle of stream, and it lay hot and naked in the glare of the sun. It was a

matter of surprise to me that our muleteer pursued his way with so much certainty. A Red Indian would have been puzzled to find our path, so often did it play hide-and-seek among the boulders. We climbed over stones, we dropped down steep descents, we scrambled over precipitous shingle, with—for my part—many a yearning backward glance to where the impassive mountains set their seal upon the past.

The mule was manipulated onwards with every semitone between curses and endearments—between caresses and blows. Warden played breathless snatches upon his tin-whistle. Hadow swung along with an eye for retiring reptiles, while I trudged in their track, my heart in my dilapidated shoes, thinking only of the girl I had left behind me.

As we neared Salir, the country began to show signs of cultivation; little fields intersected by artificial water-courses came into view; cork-trees stripped of their bark, and clumps of olive-trees, promised shelter from the rays of the sun. A couple of donkeys laden with firewood were passed—miserable creatures with more than one red sore crying aloud for pity.

At a little farmsteading where we halted for a few minutes we discovered the old farmer threshing his corn with the assistance of fifty goats. The corn was strewn thickly over the floor of a large circular barn; the farmer, whip in hand, stood in the centre; the goats cantered round and round him. They reminded us of circus-horses. Poor Jew-like goats!—history repeats itself with but little change—how they must have cursed this nineteenth-century Pharaoh! This time, however, it was no longer a case of being forced to make bricks without straw, but of being obliged to manufacture straw without bricks, and, as far as we could judge, the captives had not benefited by the exchange. Their cries rent the air, but the farmer was adamant, and if but one of them loitered, the lash spoke out—a most unfavourable report—and the melancholy canter was resumed.

About ten o'clock Salir straggled into sight—a curious collection of dwellings huddling under a hill; and as the heat was by this time well-nigh unbearable, we welcomed it with feelings of satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXX

SALIR

SALIR won our hearts ; it boasted of no inn. Not even the humblest tavern pandered to the requirements of travellers ; to visit the place was pure and unadulterated adventure. It was an antiquated little town ; so primitive was it, it might have been fragments of Noah's ark pitchforked on to the knees of the mountain.

We straggled along the narrow street ; here and there, through an open door or from the shadow side of a wall, some face would watch us with drowsy curiosity—a listless glance that rested on us only so long as we could be seen without the fatigue of turning the head. The heat quivered along the ground.

‘ Let us camp in the shade of this wall,’ I suggested, as I mopped my streaming face.

Hadow grunted.

‘ Why wish you to camp ? No one is tired.’

‘ Come, Professor,’ I coaxed, ‘ be reasonable ; it is long after ten o'clock, and nothing has passed our lips except a cup of coffee at five, and we've been walking since six. We deserve a rest and a meal.’

Hadow reluctantly gave way, and we cast about for a suitable camping-ground.

We were weighing a shady corner of the cemetery in the balance, when a hoarse voice exclaimed :

‘ *Deos ! He possivel ?* It is—it is ; I know it !’

Looking round, we discovered a head addressing us from the top of a wall ; the rest of the body lurked on the further side.

‘You are the Senhor Hadoo?’ inquired the stranger, taking off a battered sombrero; his eyes surveyed us with much goodwill.

Hadow replied in the affirmative.

‘*Ah, que felicidade!* And do you not remember me—your affectionate friend Miguel Vegas?’

‘What!’ cried Hadow, ‘not Senhor Vegas with whom I stayed two years ago?’

‘The same, the same—not a bit altered!’ And the head nodded with enthusiasm. ‘Ah, senhores’—addressing us—‘I knew him at once. *He verdade*, I said, so great a moustache could not grow upon anyone but my good friend the Senhor Hadoo. He looks well—stiff as garlic, as we say. But tell me, what do you here?’

We explained the situation. Miguel Vegas took unaffected interest in our plans. Climbing the wall, he seated himself at our side, and plied us with questions; nothing was too personal, nothing too trivial to feed his friendly curiosity.

‘And you would eat here—*here!*’ he cried in surprise.

‘The shadow of one wall is as cool as that of another,’ replied Hadow.

‘It is not that, but to be homeless when I, your friend, have a room to place at your disposal, *sinto isso na alma* (that touches my very soul). It is a poor place—a hovel, you will say—but it is yours; it has already ceased to be mine.’

We thanked him warmly. But although repeatedly requested to accept him and all his worldly possessions *sem cerimonia* (without ceremony), we knew well the exigencies of the case necessitated a world of etiquette. We bowed, and he returned our bow with interest. He flowered with compliments; we protested with modesty. He debased himself unto the earth; we exalted him unto the heavens. Never was there such a throwing about of phrases! Never did invited guests stand so long upon the order of their coming. At last it was all arranged; we were to accompany him to his house, there to rest during the heat of the day. Together we quitted the shadow of the wall and moved leisurely along the baking street. The air was as the breath of a furnace; the walls appeared to pant in the fierce vertical sunlight.

Our new friend led the way, and after a minute or two paused before a dark entrance. At the far end of this passage was a door, so massive, so studded with nails, that it would have done justice to a prison. Opening this with a large key which he carried on his person, Senhor Vegas introduced us to his home.

‘Take care, senhores ; there are four steps. It is dark here, for, as you see, there are no windows ; but it is something to have a roof over one’s head, and it is cool in this heat.’

When our eyes became accustomed to our dark surroundings, we found that we were in a long, semi-underground apartment paved with uneven flagstones. The rough walls were festooned with cobwebs ; a large heap of locust-beans lay in one corner, but the principal—indeed, I may say the only—articles of furniture were a double row, one against either wall, of large wine-barrels. The house of Senhor Vegas stood confessed—a wine-cellar ! Could Bacchus himself have led us to more appropriate quarters ? We gazed at the great barrels tenderly. The dust and heat of travel clung to our throats, and nothing but the red trickle of their contents could satisfy us. For my part, I felt sadly material. Poetry, Nature, Love—what were they all to me at such a moment compared to the crimson promise of the wine-barrels ? There they lay, numerous enough to conceal the forty thieves, strong enough to lay a regiment of dragoons under the mahogany, and yet silent, self-contained, and sober, as though their capacious stomachs concealed merely water. Poetry ! Why, every one of these barrels was a lyric touch that sang straight to my heart ! Sunshine had wooed Spring among the vineyards, till she smiled in flowers and laughed up at him through nodding leaves ; he had kissed her till her blood mounted in hot waves to the emerald grapes, filling them with colour and perfume, intoxication and desire. Then by some mysterious but blessed process they had passed from rounded fulness to liquid delight. Time, the destroyer, was their slave ; powerless to harm, he could but mellow and perfect. They had taken unto themselves new names ; to the ignorant they were but lifeless denizens of a wine-list, posing under such prosaic aliases as Burgundy and Claret, but to the initiated they

were the nymphs of Bacchus—Folly and Fun, Gaiety and Good-humour, Laughter and Love.

‘ Like to a moving vintage down they came,
And faces all aflame,
To scare thee, Melancholy.’

Yes, and to welcome us ! It was almost an inspiration, and as it passed through my mind I became conscious of a thirst which, as the saying goes, I would not have sold for a fortune. Warden knocked on the nearest barrel with the knuckle of his forefinger ; the sound was as good as an invitation to ‘ Come in.’ *It was full !*

‘ You have here much wine,’ remarked Hadow.

Our host nodded his head.

‘ True, true ; last season was a good one. Not that it is all from last year. Oh no, some of it is much older ; you shall taste.’

He tapped an old and cobwebbed barrel—the farthest from the door—and soon we were pledging each other in the generous liquid. The wine was sound, full of body, and tasted soft on the palate ; the fatigues of the journey slipped from us like a discarded mantle.

Pedro, who had been sent to purchase provisions, returned laden with a loaf, half a dozen eggs, and a couple of cucumbers. Seated on sundry blocks of wood, we made a cheerful meal. Senhor Vegas was persuaded to join us.

He was a singular object—the tatters of a beggar and the courtesy of a prince ; truly, that ‘ Appearances are deceitful ’ is a proverb that must have been coined originally for Portugal. Had we encountered him in London, we would for a certainty have taken him for one of those gentlemen who pass their days in courting sleep and their nights in avoiding the police ; but here, in Salir, he was a man of importance and our very worthy host.

The meal over, I listened languidly to a discussion that arose between Hadow and Senhor Vegas. The subject has escaped me, for, full of the drowsy torpor that follows hard upon the heels of a well-earned meal, I was in no mood to wrestle with the difficulties of the Portuguese language. I wished them elsewhere, and when Senhor Vegas proposed to

Hadow that they should visit one of his acquaintances, who he said would be able to corroborate his assertions, I gave a sigh of relief. They left the cellar arm within arm, Hadow talking loudly. The sound of his voice receded into the distance, then died away.

Warden and I, supported by wine-barrels, smiled at each other with great contentment.

‘Sleepy place this,’ mumbled Warden.

I yawned assent.

For some time no one spoke.

‘Hate walking after good lunch,’ said I drowsily.

Warden snored.

A rat peeped at us from under a wine-barrel ; at the end of the passage the street gasped in sunshine ; the air was hot and stagnant ; my eyelids closed involuntarily—my head drooped to my chest—my surroundings drifted from me—I fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE LITTLE CEMETERY

I SAW the cemetery of Salir for the first time with something akin to a shock, for there are places one finds it difficult to associate with the idea of death. Salir was so peaceful and secluded, so warm and sunny, that it seemed to me as if its inhabitants must of necessity be as eternal as the hills which bent above them. But the King of Terrors had set the seal of his image and superscription even on little Salir ; he had not overlooked it in his triumphal march, and the mortality of man was brought home to me by the saddest cemetery I have ever seen.

We entered it by a gap in the wall, for the masonry was dislodged and fast crumbling into ruin. Dark cypress-trees stood sentinel, rigid and silent, as though their solitary vigils had instilled into them the spirit of desolation. Their shadows fell athwart the tangled green of flowers and grasses with the solidity of a pall. The graves had been neglected. They were no longer the token of recollection, but of abandonment. Weeds grew rank and luxuriant among the long grasses ; they flaunted their unsightly heads, and lorded it over the sickly garden-flowers. Mildew and moss laid their finger on the tomb-stones, erasing the very names of those whose resting-places had been forgotten. But the saddest sight of all was a great heap of bones which, to a height of four feet, lay piled one upon the other in a remote corner of the cemetery. There was nothing nauseating in the spectacle, for the kindly sun had bleached them to a dazzling whiteness, pure as polished ivory ; yet to see skulls that had aforetime belonged to kindly men and women lusting in the

joy of life, even as we then were, tossed up to rot filled me with melancholy.

The heat rose in hot breaths from the sun-steeped soil ; it quivered along the ground in transparent waves ; it touched wall and tombs, weeds and bones, until they appeared to tremble into animation. Innumerable flies buzzed to and fro, returning always to the vicinity of the bones. A lizard peeped from beneath a skull, and surveyed us with bright, unwinking eyes. The sunshine but intensified the sadness. I know not whether others are affected by the sensations which sway my feelings—we are all so differently constituted—but to me death in lands deluged with perennial sunshine is infinitely more pathetic than death contemplated in the gray environment of our Northern homes. In many tropical countries have I seen death ; in one and all have I prayed that I might be spared to meet him eventually under other and more appropriate skies. These were my feelings in the cemetery of Salir. The village was a goblet of sunshine, a fragment of the tropics ; it radiated life and warmth ; it had no right to be an ally of the great enemy, a storehouse erected for the grim accumulation of bones.

Seen through the veil of noonday heat, the whole place had an air of unreality about it ; it wavered into dreamland, it all but slipped back into the regions of fancy. Yet it was real, for, as I gazed, the flies still made a stir in the quiet sunshine—the lizard still watched us from beneath the skull.

The sound of wood being sawn drew us towards the chapel that abutted on the graveyard. It was a primitive building. Within it we discovered the Padre busily occupied with amateur carpentry. I say 'amateur,' but it is more probable that he 'contrived a double debt to pay,' and that carpentry in his eyes ranked as a professional occupation, secondary only to religion.

The good man was in a state of great heat, and had discarded his upper garment. In him we recognised an acquaintance—one of the priests, in fact, whom we had met at the house of Padre Callada upon the occasion of our first visit to Carenta. He expressed delight at our appearance. Being in his own village, and, so to speak, our host, warmed his heart towards us ; and although we were accustomed to

anticipate welcome, yet the geniality of his greeting took us by surprise. His saw was at once laid aside, and, donning his sombre robe, he took pleasure in showing us the chapel. His manner was full of old-fashioned courtesy.

The interior of the little building was of so simple a construction that we imagined that it must be the work of the Padre's own hands. Upon our taxing him with it, he beamed his pride, and confessed that he had laboured with the workmen, and that the design that they had followed had emanated from him alone. The pulpit was an event upon which he expected congratulations, and my request for permission to sketch it went straight to his heart.

We strolled into the cemetery. His eye rested upon the neglected graves with no shadow of remorse; even the accumulation of bones left him unaffected.

'Yes, my sons,' said he, taking a pinch of snuff. 'We must all come to this—dust unto dust. In the midst of life we are in death.'

'But, my father, why are they thus exposed to view?' inquired Warden.

The Padre shrugged his shoulders.

'It is a question of space—a case of necessity. As you see, our cemetery is small; it cannot hold everyone, and for the present it is difficult to obtain additional ground that could be consecrated for the purpose. So should we discover the remains of one body when we are about to inter another, we are forced to dispose of the bones; that is the reason you see them laid out in this manner.'

When he made this remark we were standing within a few feet of the melancholy spectacle. Hadow took a stride forward and picked up a skull. Enthusiasm beamed from his eyes; he handled it with the deft skill, the understanding touch, of the expert.

'See, dear boys!' he cried, obviously forgetful of the Padre—'see what a beauty! He caught my eye among all these other fine skulls. He is a perfect specimen of the cranium of an idiot.'

'How can you tell?' asked Warden. 'One skull looks exactly like another to me.'

'*Ach!* I saw him at once. Look you, he has no frontal

development, and see, too, his peculiar animal look ; the occipital lobes are wanting, the temporal lobes are deep, the opening of the ear is placed abnormally low, the crown is narrow. You would say he has no retentive powers—intelligence undeveloped. *Himmel!* what a find ! I might have dug up every grave in Salir and not come across so beautiful, so splendid a specimen. Hans Hadow, my boy, you are in luck !’

The Padre gazed at him in amazement, and I fancied that I could detect in his expression the shadow of displeasure. Unconscious of the sensations he was exciting, Hadow continued to handle the skull with delighted enthusiasm.

‘It will be a beautiful object for my museum,’ he murmured, half to himself.

‘My son,’ remarked the Padre.

Hadow started.

‘I know not what you have been saying, but I pray you not to disturb these remains ; they are sacred, and in my charge. I am answerable for their safety.’

Hadow, the skull of the idiot under one arm, stared at him in open-mouthed surprise.

‘*Donnerwetter!*’ he ejaculated.

‘You will be doing me a favour, senhor, if you leave them alone ; have the goodness to return that skull to where you found it.’

Poor Hadow ! his disappointment was great. The unreasonableness of the request staggered him. The skull was obviously of no use to anyone—its former owner had been forgotten in the march of Time, his grave desecrated, his bones cast up to bleach in rain and sunshine ; and yet this ignorant and prejudiced priest stopped him with mere sentiment and, what was even worse, he felt himself powerless to brush it aside. It was the unconscious irony of Fate—to find such a skull, and to lose it in such a manner ! What wonder that, as we left the cemetery, he tugged at his great moustaches with ferocity ? What wonder that the air grew sultry with German oaths ?

CHAPTER XXXII

THE OPEN ROAD

WE left Salir when the shadows were lengthening along its dusty street. Warden had been as good as his word. After much bargaining, he had engaged the services of two muleteers and three mules, so that he and I were once more transformed into light cavalry—a transformation which, for my part, I hailed with thankfulness.

It was a satisfaction to be 'mounted,' to feel that you commanded four legs instead of two, to be conscious of the living continuation of your seated self bearing you onwards in mid-air with the ease, if not the velocity, of a genii. It was but a mule I bestrode, but what of that? A mule is very like a horse; with the exercise of a little imagination you can transform him, if you will, into Alexander's Bucephalus, or the Cid's Babieca, endowing him with as many fanciful qualities as Don Quixote bestowed upon his Rocinante. But such was not my humour. Mule he was, and, for me, mule he should remain. Nothing but a mule would have contented me. Let Rajahs boast of their elephants, or Arabs of their steeds, but for pure unadulterated pleasure, instinct with the spirit of adventure, let me get astride a mule, with liberty to wander at will among the mountains of Portugal.

The Padre and Senhor Vegas walked with us a little way, and parted from us with expressions of the liveliest regret.

All honour to the Portuguese! All honour to their generous hearts! I met with more unaffected kindness, more genuine hospitality from these Portuguese peasants than from more cultured classes in other lands who make

a boast of their consideration for strangers. What mattered it that their clothes were ragged, their homes but hovels, their persons unacquainted with soap and water? Did not courtesy radiate from their manners, and kindness shine from their eyes. Time and again they placed their little all at our disposal with such true breeding that we felt almost as though we were conferring instead of receiving a benefit; and surely that is the high-water mark of that elastic term—'a gentleman.'

Our little cavalcade clattered along the stony track, the hoofs of our mules forming a castanet accompaniment to the jingle of bells.

The muleteers trudged in the rear, chatting and laughing together, with every now and then an oath, an endearment, or a blow bestowed with the unmost partiality upon one of their charges. Before them trotted the baggage-mule, upon the top of whose mountainous pack Pedro's small person rode triumphant. Then came the light brigade, composed of Warden and me astride of our saddle-bags. Foremost of all strode Hadow.

The Professor had clung to his decision to have done with mules. No man had to a greater extent the courage of his opinions; you felt that he would kill you for the least of them.

I watched him with interest. Forward he swung untiring, devouring the miles one after the other 'with steady driving strokes from the loins,' his broad shadow shouldering far before him in the dust of the track. He was a storehouse of energy, a fund of vitality, that felt impelled to blow off its superfluous strength in occasional shouts. At times he would dart hot-foot on the trail of some reptile, or, had we to ford a brook, he would fling himself on the bank, and, lying face downwards, would grope with both hands for the frogs and tortoises that made their homes among the rocks.

The air, pleasantly cool, fanned us after the heat of the day.

It is marvellous with what rapidity the mind of the traveller responds to the least perceptible of atmospheric changes. And more especially is this the case when the

conditions of life are such as to permit of the entire day being passed in the open air.

We fully experienced these smiles and frowns of the goddess. In the early hours, when the earth was cool and the wind still tasted of the dawn, life appeared a glorious promise, full of anticipated pleasure, too delightful to be true. We felt as though we could never grow weary ; our imaginations raced ahead and climbed every mountain peak without so much as a laboured breath. It was a glorious sensation !

Then the day's march began, and the sun rose higher and higher. At first his beams were more than welcome ; we rejoiced in his return as in that of an intimate friend, and our shadows nodding westward were an earnest of the bright comradeship that was to be with us all day long.

But little by little his power increased ; from a friend he became a foe. He pursued us along shadowless tracks ; he struck at us in hot and pitiless anger. We avoided his gaze. Hour by hour we rode onwards, longing for but a single cloud to protect us from his wrath. But the dome overhead held no promise of a cloud ; its infinity was bright and blue as burnished steel—a thing to dazzle and repel.

On and ever on, lashed upwards across the shimmering hills, hounded downwards into the coil of the valleys.

Then came the noonday halt. With what feelings of delight we welcomed it ! To stretch our cramped limbs in the friendly shade, to gaze outwards at the sun-soaked street, to tilt the wine-skin and feel the crimson runlets trickling down our throats, and to close our eyes in the noonday siesta while the lazy unrecorded hours drifted past, was a chain of experiences that I shall never forget.

Last of all, our evening march began. With the exception of early morning, those twilight hours were the most enjoyable of the twenty-four, for when the lengthening shadows pointed eastwards, happiness returned to us in a wave whose volume had but increased by being temporarily withheld.

The sun, shorn of his strength, wheeled to meet the horizon. Again he had become our friend, and smiled at us with a bright and kindly eye. We forgave him all

the discomfort he had caused us ; we even regretted his departure.

The fever and heat of the day were forgotten. Each in his own way revealed a spirit of thanksgiving. The muleteers burst into song ; the mules tossed their heads and sent the message of their bells floating over the hillsides ; Warden wooed Old-World melodies on his whistle ; Hadow, with head erect, swung forward indefatigably ; whilst I, perched on my swaying seat, drank deep of the joy of travel—the delight of wandering midst unfamiliar scenes, lured onward by the beckoning track into the glories of the sunset.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A SURLY WELCOME

BEMAFIM was enshrouded in twilight. It was another mountain-hamlet straggling along a foetid lane, full of the dirt and squalor of Portuguese village life.

In the dusk of the evening it was impossible to judge of its size. It seemed, however, to extend for a considerable distance, the houses in many cases being isolated from their neighbours by pools of evil odour and heaps of manure. The lane was paved with cobble-stones, but full of holes, a source of danger to benighted travellers. Our mules felt their onward way, pausing at every step.

‘Halt!’ cried Hadow.

The cavalcade came to a standstill. The muleteers hastened forward to listen to our conversation.

‘Dear boys, shall we sleep further on, on the dry hill-side, or shall we try to find someone to house us for the night? Say it only quickly.’

‘Is there no inn?’ suggested Warden.

Hadow questioned the muleteers.

‘Yes, yes, senhor!’ answered one of them; ‘there is an *estalagem* but a little way from here. It belongs to one Senhor Alvarez, a man, I must admit, with an ill name. Still, it is a shelter. We have stayed there several times, and will stable our mules there to-night.’

‘Let us go to the inn,’ I suggested. ‘They will, at all events, give us something to eat.’

‘*Vamos!*’ cried Hadow, and the cavalcade clattered on in the darkness.

‘When I was here before I wished for to find an inn.’

observed Hadow, 'but for my sins I met with one—Senhor Vieyra, I think was his name—who made me sleep in his ever-to-be-cursed house! *Gott!* the old animal was a menagerie. I pray that we do not meet him this time. *Donnerwetter!* I nearly fell that time!

'Why need we go?' I asked him, as he steadied himself on the neck of my mule. 'Surely one has the right to refuse?'

'*Ach nein!* So is it not done in Portugal, dear boy. But I am too much abusive, perhaps, for the reptile had good meanings. He introduced me to much fine aristocracy. He was the chief Baron of Bemafim. Ho, ho! It is a curious race—proud as Lucifer. They sit with their heads in the stars and their tails in the pigsties.'

We halted before a long low building. By the light of the stars, which by this time had begun to twinkle in the sky, I could see that it was divided into two equal parts by a large courtyard. A central arch led into open country behind.

Wheeling through the gateway, the pillars of which had once boasted of a gate, for the hinges still showed against a background of mossy stone, we roused the echoes with our shouts. On the right, an open door showed us the fitful glimmer of a wood fire. Two or three dark forms were lying beside the embers. Disturbed by our cries, they came out to meet us. One of them lit a torch, and holding it above his head sent its lurid light over the scene. The red glow splashed on courtyard and buildings, on mules and muleteers, on Hadow and Warden, and on the wild and uncouth figures that gazed at us in silence from the doorway. The effect was singularly picturesque.

'Which of you is the host of this inn?' questioned Warden.

'I am,' answered the fellow who bore the torch.

'Well, my friend, we wish to spend the night here. Can you give us beds, supper, and accommodation for our mules?'

The man eyed us for some time without speaking, and then, turning to one of his companions, held a whispered conversation, of which we were evidently the subject. He appeared to be urging some course of action which did not

meet with approval, for their gesticulations were fierce, and their words, although indistinguishable, sounded ominous as the prelude to a quarrel. At length they appeared to arrive at a better understanding, for the torch-bearer said aloud, '*Sera melhor que*' (It will be better so), and the other, shrugging his shoulders, turned away with a yawn. The night wind wandered in at the gateway, the stars glittered overhead, the mules stamped on the stones with an occasional jingle of bells.

'Well, my friend?' prompted Warden at last.

'I cannot do what you ask.'

'What! we cannot stay here for the night?'

'No.'

'You cannot even give us supper?'

'No.'

'*Deos!* this is pleasant! Come, now, you are a good fellow, I am sure. You have not the heart to turn us out into the night at this hour.'

'*Eu assim o quero!*' (I will have it so) returned the fellow curtly.

'*Ohé!* Senhor Alvarez!' expostulated one of our muleteers. 'This is no way to treat noble senhores whom we bring to your inn. And what about the little mules, our children? Are there no empty stalls in the stable? You know us well; we have been often here before.'

The man eyed them with awakening favour.

'*Carramba!* It is Anselmo and Isodoro from Salir! I did not recognise you. Well, you can put up your mules. The stable is nearly empty, and we will give you and the boy a corner of the fire; but as for beds and supper for your senhores, we cannot do it. Let them seek elsewhere. That is my last word.'

So saying, he joined his companions, who had already resumed their recumbent attitudes around the fire.

Warden and I dismounted; the muleteers led the animals in the direction of the stable. The clatter of hoofs sounded fainter and fainter; we three outcasts were left stranded in the dark courtyard.

It was a novel, I may say a unique, experience. But a short time ago I sang the praises of hospitable Portugal, and

here, in the very next chapter, I am forced to eat my words, and to confess that there existed a Portuguese innkeeper who would have none of us. It is humiliating. But I do not retract one note from my praise. We looked upon this rebuff as the exception that proves the rule. The kindness of others but shone the brighter by comparison.

'It is a case of the hillside,' said I with an attempt at cheerfulness.

'Suppers don't grow on hillsides,' sighed Warden.

This depressing fact saddened us. We thought over the situation in silence.

'I have it!' I cried.

'Ah?' they questioned with one voice.

'Yes, let us call on your friend the "Baron," Hadow.'

Hadow grunted.

'Don't you think it's a good idea?'

'H-m-m! Was that your fine thought?'

'He'll feed us, at all events.'

'*Doch!* he'll feed us and we'll feed his menagerie. It is what you call "tit for tat," Hein?'

Warden reflected for a moment, then said:

'I'll tell you what we'll do: let us call on Senhor Vieyra, and induce him to give us supper. Leave it to me to get us out of all other difficulties. What do you say to that?'

'*Colossal!*' approved Hadow.

And thus it was arranged.

A boy was roused from a dark corner and persuaded, by the magic touch of a piece of silver, to act as our guide.

Our muleteers were as sorry to part from us as we from them. They were fine fellows, and had already endeared themselves to us by their courtesy and good-humour. Isodoro took me aside.

'Senhor, I am deeply grieved. It is an insult. To turn you away like this into the night—like—like dogs! *Car-ramba! esta animal!* (he is a brute). I have a good mind to give him a taste of this;' and his fingers played with his knife-hilt.

'It does not matter, Isodoro. We will find sleeping-quarters elsewhere.'

‘ Ah, but it is a personal matter with us. Anselmo and I are muleteers ; you are our friends. We introduce you to this—this *maroto* (rascal) of an innkeeper, and he insults. *Deos !* it is not to be borne !’

He smote himself on the chest, and the whites of his eyes gleamed in the starlight.

I soothed the honest fellow with difficulty. He was in deadly earnest, and would, I believe, have been as good, or rather as bloodthirsty, as his word.

Leaving instructions that they should call for us, ready for the road, on the following morning, we bade them good-night, and, preceded by our little guide, set out in search of supper.

CHAPTER XXXIV

BARON BEMAFIM

It was but fifty paces to the house of Senhor Vieyra. Having pointed out the dwelling, the boy snatched at the coin, and forthwith vanished into the darkness. The door was ajar ; a dim light struggled outwards and fell athwart the dusky street. The sound of voices raised in apparent altercation floated out to us, as we paused irresolute on the threshold—a woman's voice, young and fresh, and that of a man, deep but muffled as though its owner suffered from a cold in his head. The woman was scolding vehemently, for we distinctly heard the man make occasional ineffectual efforts to stem the current of her anger. We had stumbled upon that most awkward of episodes—a family quarrel.

‘ You did not speak of a woman ! ’ whispered Warden to Hadow in tones of reproach.

‘ Did I not ? *Herr Gott !* only listen to her. She can speak for herself. The old menagerie has, I now remember, two women : a wife in bed always—and a very good place for a wife, too ! ’ he chuckled softly—‘ and a daughter. This must be the daughter ! Nice thing to own a daughter, Hein ? ’

‘ Let us knock, ’ said I wearily. ‘ They will perhaps leave off quarrelling if they know we're here. ’

Hadow knocked, but the noise still continued.

‘ Knock louder, ’ suggested Warden.

Tap, tap, tap ! Tap, tap, tap !

The door opened, and a girl peered at us.

‘ What do you want ? ’ she said curtly.

Her voice betrayed marked hostility ; possibly, however,

it was but the track of the storm—the back-wash of the quarrel. Warden took off his hat ; his manner was courtly. We both followed his example ; the air was a-flutter with obsequious sombreros.

‘ Senhora,’ said he, ‘ you behold three benighted travellers flinging themselves at your hospitable feet.’

As he uttered this remarkable statement, he made as though he would indeed fling himself at the extremities in question.

The girl was alarmed. She retreated further within the entrance.

‘ This,’ continued Warden, pointing to the Professor, ‘ is the celebrated Senhor Hadow, a learned Englishman.’ (‘ German, you animal!’ remonstrated Hadow.) ‘ He had the happiness to see you once, when he spent a night in your father’s house ; he has not forgotten it ; he has travelled from England in the hope of seeing you again. Oh senhora !’—Warden’s voice dropped the rhetorical tone so dear to his soul, and trembled with unaffected emotion—‘ Oh senhora ! don’t go away ; don’t shut the door ; be kind to us ; we are very tired, and very, very hungry.’

The girl softened visibly. Turning round, she spoke to someone within the dwelling. An old man made his appearance. Was this Hadow’s nobleman of many aliases—Senhor Fernando Vieyra, Baron Bemafim, the Old Menagerie, etc. ? By the light of the lamp which he held in his hand, he appeared to be in the sear and yellow leaf ; his features were fine ; his nose, especially, was aristocratic ; his eyes were black ; his hair iron-gray ; but the garments which hung from his drooping shoulders were stained and tattered beyond belief. On his chin a gray stubble bristled pug-naciously, and the hand with which he supported himself on the door-post bespoke a lifelong abstinence from soap and water. Poverty and pride sat upon him as on a throne. The girl was a fine, upstanding wench, with full bosom and statuesque figure. Her hair, black as night, grew low upon her forehead ; her eyebrows met in a level line over her eyes ; while two deeply-indented wrinkles above the nose, combined with the defiant set of her chin, told a tale of strong will, and perhaps also of temper uncontrolled.

Hadow took a step forwards.

‘Ah, Senhor Vieyra, you remember me and the fine frogs we did catch many years ago?’

‘Frogs?’ repeated the Baron wonderingly.

‘Yes, frogs,’ chimed in the girl. ‘I remember you quite well now: you are the Englishman who gave me a piece of silver for catching tortoises. You also caught snakes. You *must* remember, father!’ She shook him by the shoulder.

‘Yes, yes,’ said the old man nervously. ‘Of course, frogs and snakes—they are not to be forgotten. Yes, senhor—senhor?’

‘Hadow,’ suggested that individual.

‘Ah, Hadoo! Of course, your moustache is familiar to me. I recall you perfectly. But come in, senhores; do not stand outside. My house is at your disposal; all that I have is yours.’

He waved his disengaged hand. His manner was princely. He had the air of one who presents some magnificent gift. The French had intuition when they coined the dreamland phrase ‘Châteaux en Espagne’; the people of the Peninsula may live in hovels, but they dream of castles.

We followed him into the cottage. The living-room—for it had but one—presented a cheerless and untidy aspect. The embers of a dead fire lay on the hearth. Once upon a time the walls had boasted of whitewash, but that was long ago, for they were dirty as only years of neglect could account for. Overhead the ceiling was composed of bamboo rods laid side by side—not so close but that the upward smoke from the fire could filter itself between them. The mud floor was littered with a variety of miscellaneous articles—brooms, pails, an axe, a heap of firewood, etc. The oil-lamp shed its feeble light over this comfortless interior, enticing some objects into partial relief, plunging others into shadow, making a mock of us with distorted reflections cast upon the opposite wall.

Warden and I seated ourselves upon the bench; the Baron took his place between us, an arm twined round either of our shoulders. The attitude was affecting, but neither of us were pleasantly affected. To tell the truth, he was by no means a pleasant companion at close quarters. He was,

however, so unconscious of anything distasteful to us in the situation—so full of kindness, condescension, and hospitality—that we could not find it in our hearts to undeceive him. His daughter had disappeared.

‘And so you like Portugal, dear senhor?’ breathed the Baron into my ear.

As he spoke, he patted my shoulder as one would that of a friendly dog. I murmured my admiration. Warden in his turn was patted and questioned.

‘That is right, that is right,’ continued our host, nodding his head, and patting both our shoulders simultaneously. ‘You have a proper appreciation of Portugal; it must be very superior to England, so many Englishmen come to see it.’ Then he added in a wave of irrepressible hospitality: ‘Dear senhores, consider me and mine as but existing to do you a service.’

We made the reply demanded by etiquette, neither accepting nor declining the responsibility of his possessions, after which a silence fell which no one seemed desirous of breaking.

A craving for food beset me—the sinking sensation that follows on the footsteps of hungry hours. I felt I could have relished the ‘husks’ of the prodigal son.

‘Can’t you suggest supper?’ I murmured in English.

‘No,’ returned Warden in the same language, ‘certainly not; you must wait till he suggests it himself.’

Silence settled on us again. All at once Hadow’s voice, coming unexpectedly from his dark corner, made us start.

‘And how is the Senhora Vieyra, your honoured wife? I hope she is well.’

The Baron gave a violent start; he was dozing on our shoulders.

‘Eh? How? My wife! Oh yes, did you not hear? She is dead.’

‘Oh, really!’ ejaculated Hadow, quite taken aback.

‘Yes, yes,’ continued the Baron, warming to his subject. ‘She is quite dead this time; she died ten months ago. She had been in bed for seven years, a poor useless creature; it was a happy release. We have given her room to the sow.’

‘To the *sow*!’ We could scarce believe our ears.

‘Yes, senhores; our sow littered a fortnight ago—ten

little brown pigs, as lively a brood as you could wish to see. We have no pig-sty—we used it for firewood years ago—and we could not well allow the poor animal to litter in the street. So my wife's death was after all a blessing in disguise. God be praised ! He knows what is best for us.'

This philosophical reasoning staggered us. We looked at him with suspicion ; was he jesting ? But no, his face expressed cheerful resignation ; his words were simple and earnest, his tone full of natural piety ; we were forced to take him seriously.

At that moment the girl re-entered the room.

'What ! are you still here ?' she cried, addressing her father in tones of annoyance.

'Where should I be, Camilla ?' replied the old man placidly.

'But at supper, of course ; it grows late. Will you not take the *senhores* to supper ? You cannot stay here talking all the night.'

The Baron rose up slowly. He plainly feared his daughter.

'True, true, Camilla ; words cannot fill the belly.'

'Father grows old,' continued the girl, turning to us ; 'he forgets things sadly. Why, it was only yesterday that he paid a sum of money to a man from *Alte*, and we owed him nothing ! The debt had been paid two months ago. Think of it, *senhores* : we might have lost all that money had I not overheard their talk ! It makes me wild, and he doesn't care at all ;' and she frowned at her offending parent.

'Where do we sup ?' questioned Warden.

'At *Senhor Sarto's*,' replied Camilla. 'He is the tailor. Many *senhores* take their meals there ; few of our neighbours cook in their own houses. Come, father, make haste, and do not be too late, for I will sit up till you return. *Adeos, senhores*, and good appetites.'

She bustled us out of doors. The last glimpse we had of her was as she stood on the doorsteps, the lamp raised above her head to light our first steps down the darkened street.

CHAPTER XXXV

A SUPPER PARTY

The Baron still retained his hold of our arms. We were the most 'personally-conducted party' it is possible to imagine. The night wind was cool, but the smell of manure and other garbage was overpoweringly unpleasant. We stumbled forwards.

'Trust to me, dear senhores,' murmured our guide in tones of gentle encouragement. 'I know every stone in the village, and could find my way to Senhor Sarto's blindfold.'

We were glad to hear it, for what with the darkness and the gaps in the badly-paved streets and the manure-heaps—arranged, apparently, with a view to constructing an obstacle race for benighted travellers—it would have gone hard with us to have found our way alone.

Hadow, unsupported by the baronial arm, stumbled after us, punctuating his adventures with curses. The lane along which we were led was barely of sufficient width to permit of three people walking abreast; to include a fourth in the first line of advance was out of the question. The houses lay in impenetrable shadow. The outlines of the roofs and chimneys stood out, black as carven ebony, against the starlit beauty of the sky.

'Here we are, senhores!' exclaimed the Baron, wheeling us unexpectedly into a dark entrance.

All very well! but *where* were we? The gloom of our surroundings imparted a sinister sensation to the 'night within a night' in which we found ourselves. Had we not had implicit confidence in the trustworthiness of our guide we would have felt anxiety. Dropping our arms,

he knocked at some invisible door. A hoarse voice within bade him enter. The door opened, a rush of light streamed out to welcome us, and we followed him into the dwelling of Senhor Sarto.

The interior of the tailor's shop looked inviting after the loneliness and darkness of the outer world. A large lamp of Moorish design swung from a rafter overhead; immediately below it was a circular deal table, around which a number of men were seated. Evidences of the tailor's art in the shape of garments in all stages of construction were to be observed littered about the room. The atmosphere was appalling. Half a dozen ill-trimmed wicks reeked into the air, tobacco-smoke floated from as many mouths; from an inner door came the fumes of a charcoal-stove, mingling with the pungent odours of Portuguese cookery. Our eyes smarted, and it was with difficulty that we drew breath.

The Tailor came forward to welcome us. He was a wizened man with a most melancholy cast of countenance. He shook hands with us as though he were lamenting the decease of a friend.

The ceremony of our introduction to the other members of the coterie proceeded. The Baron conducted it with his usual courtly grace. We made the acquaintance of the Padre, of several farmers, of a horse dealer, and of an individual who, it appeared, combined in his one person the various duties of carrier, baker, grave-digger, etc.; in fact, everything useful that did not come under the immediate supervision of his friend the Tailor. Never before had we found ourselves in the company of such a thoroughly representative body of men. Nine gentlemen were present, and including our contingent, thirteen. Fatal number for a supper party, but fortunately, save myself, no one noticed it.

The Padre questioned us courteously. Where did we come from? where did we go to? what object had we in visiting Portugal? and what impressions did we carry home as the result of our trip? His curiosity had so much kindness and personal interest mingled with it that we answered his questions gladly, and such was the good feeling

engendered thereby that all the room applauded our replies. It was in the midst of the like friendly intercourse that the doleful voice of the Tailor made itself heard.

‘Senhores,’ said he, ‘supper is now ready; shall I serve it?’

‘But certainly, Senhor Sarto,’ responded the Padre in a magnificent bass voice. ‘We are quite ready for it. Are we not, my friends?’

‘Yes, yes,’ assented a chorus of voices. The entire company seated themselves round the deal table. In front of each person was a plate, a hunch of black bread, and a pewter fork with two prongs. Bottles of wine and dishes of olives ornamented the table at regular intervals.

In less than a minute the Tailor, who had run into the inner room, reappeared, carrying in both hands a large and deep tureen, from which ascended a dense steam of appetizing odour. He placed the dish in the middle of the table, and forthwith took his place amongst us.

‘What have we here, Senhor Sarto?’ questioned the Padre.

‘Goat’s flesh, an it please your reverence.’

‘A dish fit for a king,’ cried Warden gaily.

‘*Hoch ! hoch !*’ applauded Hadow.

The Padre rose to his feet and intoned a simple grace. I sniffed the steam and blessed the creator of goats. The goat would have felt flattered could he have heard the deep-mouthed ceremony of his introduction. A moment of polite hesitation, then every fork attacked the contents of the tureen. Pieces of meat bobbed up and down in the soup-like gravy; to harpoon them was a matter requiring no little skill. The eye selected the morsel; the hand directed the downward thrust; the twin prongs, if successful, bore off the capture in triumph, and landed it, all dripping, on the plate. There were many misadventures. Thirteen forks hovering like so many vultures over the body of one fragmentary goat was an awe-inspiring spectacle; it required courage and hunger to enter the *mêlée*, for the contest had its dangerous as well as its humorous side. The steam rising from the dish added not a little to the excitement of the sport; it imparted to it an element of chance that almost raised it to the dignity of a game.

Occasionally two forks would swoop simultaneously upon the same piece of goat, and, discovering their rivalry, would soar upwards with cries of mutual apology. The excitement culminated in an episode that verged on the tragic. Hadow, throwing himself into the sport with characteristic enthusiasm, flourished his fork with much success. He even went the length of jeering good-naturedly at me when I failed to secure my prey. Pride goeth before a fall. Diving into the stream in pursuit of some coveted morsel, he harpooned the hand of the Tailor. A shrill and indignant cry made him aware of his mistake. His apologies were profuse ; but he only made matters worse by saying that he had naturally mistaken the Tailor for a morsel of goat. The depression on the Tailor's face became almost painful to witness.

My neighbour on the right was a burly red-faced farmer of the most genial and good-humoured disposition. He was full of unexpected courtesies, such, for example, as spearing some choice morsel of goat and passing it to me on his own fork with assurances of undying affection. I returned the compliment. We swore eternal friendship.

It must not be inferred that the wine was content to repose idly while the goat monopolized attention. By no means. It circulated freely. It wooed the silent into speech, and encouraged the talkative to still greater exertions ; it made eyes sparkle and cheeks glow ; it fanned the fires of friendship in every heart. It was good wine, the excellent and pure juice of the grape that we had come to know so well during the days passed in our cave-life. It could not be called light, being of the character of burgundy, and it was apt to take its revenge upon the inexperienced drinker who treated it like the *vin ordinaire* of other nations. The pig-skin receptacle in which it had been confined had imparted to it a peculiar but not unpleasant flavour, an aroma which I have never tasted elsewhere, and which I am convinced I have but to taste again to be carried back bodily to the Sierra de Monchique Mountains and the sunny travel-memories which they will ever contain for me.

The England of yesterday is the Portugal of to-day.

Many Old-World customs which found a home among our ancestors, but which have passed away with knee-breeches and silk stockings, are to be encountered still among the Portuguese. They cling to the race as plants to congenial soil—and long may they do so in a land where hospitality is more than a name, and where gentlemen are not ashamed to address each other in phrases of old-fashioned courtesy.

There was, however, one relic of a by-gone custom that caused me considerable inconvenience that evening. I refer to the habit of health-drinking. The Portuguese are inveterate health-drinkers. In theory it is a graceful ceremony, and springs, I doubt not, from a sincere solicitude for your well-being, but in practice it is the very devil! Their efforts are all but certain to overthrow their desires: they are much more likely to drink you into an ill than a good health by pledging you in repeated bumpers, to which, of necessity, you are forced to respond.

My burly right-hand neighbour was the first to toast me.

‘*A sua saúde, meu senhor!*’ cried he, filling our glasses to the brim.

I made the customary acknowledgment. Our glasses clicked in time-honoured fashion, and the wine trickled to its long home.

My left-hand neighbour was no whit behindhand in the matter of drinking. He was the grave-digger—to give him but one of his rightful titles—but *such* a grave-digger! so plump and jovial, so full of life, with an eye so rollicking and merry that you would swear that grave-digging was the jolliest occupation in the world. Time and again he cracked a jest that ‘set the table on a roar,’ and though the point at times escaped me, owing to my imperfect knowledge of the language, yet the mere sight of his whimsical face forced me to join heartily in the laughter.

‘To you, senhor,’ he cried, holding high his glass. ‘Portugal greets England; may health and happiness be yours!’

Together we drained the flowing bowl. The Baron, seated opposite, caught my eye. He leant forward.

‘Senhor,’ he shouted, ‘permit me to have the honour of

drinking a glass of wine with you. I am overjoyed to see you here. It is a pleasure we all appreciate. Senhor, your very good health !'

The Baron uttered the above speech in his most grandiloquent manner—he looked every inch a baron. There was a confidence, an assurance, in his tone that took me altogether by surprise, until I reflected that Baron Bemafim under the shadow of a domestic petticoat was one man, and Baron Bemafim fortified by good wine and seated in the midst of congenial masculine society was another ! In vulgar phrase, the Baron was 'coming out strong.' We bowed to each other over the bones of the goat, and drained the toast to the last drop. Last drop ? Ay, there you have my difficulty in a nutshell. The wine was beginning to affect me. Was it necessary that I should drain the *last drop* ? Would not a gentlemanly sip meet the requirements of the case ? I determined to make the attempt. The Tailor was the next to address me. The prongs of Hadow's fork still rankled in his soul, for nothing could exceed the intense melancholy with which the little man requested the honour, etc. He evidently regarded my health as the saddest phenomenon to be observed in a peculiarly miserable world. He drained his glass sadly and set it down with a sigh. I sipped mine cheerfully and set it down with a smile. But the smile faded when I caught sight of the Tailor's face. It expressed horror and indignation.

'You do not drink, senhor ?' he questioned in a tragic voice, fixing glassy eyes upon my half-emptied wineglass.

'I am drunk—I mean I *have* drunk,' I said cheerfully.

The Tailor's hands rose in remonstrance.

'But that is not the way gentlemen drink a health in Portugal !' He grew more and more excited. 'No, indeed ! What fine manners ! (*Que bella cortesia !*) Never have I seen such a thing ! Never ! What have I done ? (*Que tenho feito ?*) To affront me thus !' (*Affrontar-me deste sorte !*)

His voice rose to a scream. Portuguese ejaculations struck my astonished ears like stones from a sling. The attention of the entire table was aroused ; every voice was hushed ; every eye gazed in my direction. I was

covered with confusion. Better an ocean of 'last drops' than to be chief actor in such a 'scene.'

'I—I didn't know. I really didn't mean——' I began in a low voice. But I got no further. My knowledge of Portuguese excuses deserted me in distinct ratio as the need for them increased. The Baron—all blessings rest on his tactful heart—came at once to my rescue.

'*Basta ! basta !* Senhor Sarto'—and he raised a dirty but eloquent hand. 'You go too far. Please to remember that the senhor is my guest. He is a distinguished English traveller devoted to repti—— Ahem ! scientific pursuits. It is impossible that he should wish to insult anyone, more especially a gentleman of sentiment and honourable emotions like yourself.'

The Baron bowed. The Tailor, visibly soothed, returned his bow. I—painfully desirous of conforming to any national custom, however beyond my comprehension—bowed likewise.

'And what,' continued the Baron, 'was the cause of this little disagreement, senhores ?'

'It was a mistake,' said the Tailor generously. 'I am sure the noble English senhor did not intend to slight me.'

'Never !' I exclaimed.

'That is well,' continued my late adversary. "'So many countries, so many customs," as our proverb hath it. The senhor did not know that to drink a health politely one must drain the glass.'

'Who doubts it ?' (*Quem duvida disso ?*) assented the Baron. 'Now, my friends, drink again, and may all differences be drowned in a bumper !'

The Tailor and I pledged each other to the *last drop*.

The central dish having been by this time removed, the company assumed attitudes of greater freedom. Chairs were pushed back, and cigarettes sent their smoke circling into the air. The roar of many-voiced conversation filled the room. Wine circulated continuously. The cry, 'A glass of wine with you, senhor,' caught the ear at frequent intervals. The Horse-dealer drank to Hadow ; the Tailor pledged Warden ; the Gravedigger again toasted me. Never in the memory of man have our good healths been so

joyously and satisfactorily provided for. If but one fraction of their good wishes come true the vineyards of Portugal rear themselves like a rampart between us and all ills our flesh is heir to. My friends, warned by my slip, drank in the manner approved by Portuguese etiquette. Needless to mention, I followed their example.

It was a scene to live long in the memory. The Moorish lamp looked down on the circle of festive faces; it was without doubt a Mohammedan, and by principle an enemy to wine drinking, but it smiled upon the dissipation with a broad-minded tolerance that would have set an example to many a Christian. It even shared in our festivities, for it drank its oil and smoked its six wicks with the best of us.

Everyone did his best to swell the volume of sound. Even the Tailor talked persistently, for holding Warden captive by the lapel of his coat he related to him a long and melancholy history of some grievance connected with the remote past, the recitation of which so moved the little man that he was forced to seek relief in tears. Two farmers embarked upon a long bucolic discussion; their voices were loud, their clenched fists smote the table. My immediate neighbours also were talkative fellows. The wine had brought out a sentimental vein in the burly Farmer, for he confided to me the history of his bygone lady-loves, to which I must have proved an indifferent listener, for my other ear was receiving at the same time a series of humorous episodes taken from the autobiography of the gravedigger. The effect would have proved sufficiently confusing had I been sober, but suffering as I undoubtedly was from a conspiracy of 'last drops' it was simply kaleidoscopic! I tried to revolve the matter in my brain, but as everything else within that heated chamber was revolving at the same time and precisely at the same rate, I gave it up as a bad job.

I think it was at this point in the night's festivities that Warden's whistle was descried protruding from one of its owner's pockets. The entire company clamoured for music. Warden good-naturedly allowed himself to be persuaded, and, after a prelude or two, treated us to 'Home, sweet Home.' He put an immense amount of feeling into the

familiar melody. The very whistle appeared to mourn its wandering fate.

‘That is a sad tune; it renders me melancholy,’ sighed the Baron, when the last wail had died away. ‘What may be its doleful name? Is it a dirge?’

Warden endeavoured to translate, but his translation of the untranslatable met with but scant approval, ‘Home, sweet Home’ in Portuguese resolving itself into something akin to *Chez soi, O douce chez soi!*

‘A singular title,’ murmured the Baron; ‘no wonder the tune is so sad. But, my friend, why *sweet*? Surely that is not appropriate to the house in which one sleeps? If it were the house in which one *eats*, now, I could understand it!’

His eyes rested benignly on the circle of friendly faces, then clouded over, for his thoughts had wandered to the gloom of his dwelling, endeared to him by none of the tender ties we are accustomed to associate with the word ‘home.’ He sighed deeply, and drained Warden’s glass in a fit of melancholy abstraction.

Other items in the programme quickly followed. The Gravedigger sang a song. It was about a beautiful girl whom he had loved, lost, and buried in the days of his youth. I was much affected, and to cover my emotion joined lustily in the chorus. Hadow interrupted me rudely. I demanded an explanation; he said there was no chorus. I found to my astonishment that I had been singing a solo. I apologized; the Gravedigger forgave me; we embraced.

The Baron made a long speech; it sounded incoherent, but, as it was beautiful and baronial, we applauded heartily; the very glasses jumped for joy.

Through the smoke I caught a glimpse of the Tailor’s face gazing at Warden with such an expression of grief that I gave a shout of laughter. My neighbours, who had resumed their confidences, were differently affected. The Farmer resented my merriment: he was in the middle of relating a sad but tender adventure connected with a widow; from his point of view my laughter was little short of an insult. The Gravedigger, on the contrary, accepted my mirth as a

compliment to a comical story he had just finished, and over which he himself was laughing heartily. It is impossible to please everyone.

Ah, well! even supper-parties come to an end. Hadow was the first to make a move. The Professor carried his liquor well. His Heidelberg training—at which University he had, I understand, taken the degree of ‘The Beer King’—stood him in good stead.

‘Come, dear boys!’ he cried, consulting his old silver watch, ‘it must be late. *Herr Gott!* it is midnight, and we start at the crowing of the cocks. Warden, you animal, get up; Watson, you reptile, come on.’

A chorus of disapproval arose. The Tailor clung to Warden’s coat. The Gravedigger enfolded me in his arms.

‘It is not possible that you leave us already!’ shouted the Horse-dealer, voicing the general regret.

But Hadow was firm, and even the Baron, who, more than anyone present, objected to the breaking up of so joyous a party, was obliged to bow to his decision. We left the Tailor’s shop, speeded on our homeward way by loud shouts of farewell, and, looking back ere we turned the corner, I saw a crowd of figures dark against the light waving to us from the doorway.

Then began our midnight march. The order for the homeward cruise was similar to the arrangements made for the outward voyage. The Baron played the part of tug, Warden and I were merchantmen, laden—ay, to the very scuppers—with the crimson produce of Portugal. The machinery of the tug was slightly disabled; circles and acute angles it understood, but straight lines were far beyond its comprehension—the convoy tacked and tacked again.

Dear old Baron! he was the life and soul of the party. He had discarded much of his dignity, and for the nonce was all joviality and high spirits. The Portuguese rendering of ‘We won’t go home till morning’ awoke the echoes. Never, I feel convinced, has Bemafim seen its one nobleman so metamorphosed as on that joyous occasion. To listen to him, you would have sworn he was a dashing young blade seeing life in the dawn of his twenties.

Hadow, alternatively swearing and laughing, brought up the rear. A dog barked at us from out the darkness. The Baron proposed a dog-hunt. Englishmen, he said, squeezing us affectionately with both arms, were mighty hunters. This dog he knew well ; it would afford us capital sport, especially in the darkness, where it would puzzle even Englishmen to find him. There was also a cat : it was probably asleep ; we would wake it up and hunt it too. Hurrah !'

We reached the cottage and the second verse of a drinking-song at one and the same time ; the Baron showed no desire to stop at either. The door, however, opening suddenly and Camilla pouncing upon him, he was hustled into his home in a manner sadly derogatory to his dignity. Even under these trying circumstances, he was by no means the oppressed individual he had appeared at an earlier part of the evening. The effects of the supper-party were still hot upon him ; he was full of Dutch courage, or shall we say Portuguese pluck ? He defied Camilla in snatches of unpremeditated song ; he welcomed us to his hovel, as though it were indeed a palace ; and, last stage of all, he attempted to show us the steps of a country dance, in the midst of which performance he missed his footing and fell into one of the beds that his daughter had prepared upon the floor. He lay laughing for a minute, then we heard an unmistakable snore, and behold ! the Baron was asleep.

I occupied a rug laid beside the fireplace in the middle of the floor ; Warden laid himself down upon the threshold, the step of which made a convenient pillow ; Hadow, rolling his blanket around him, stretched himself in the street underneath the broad eaves of the dwelling ; Camilla took possession of the bed.

That young lady was not burdened by an exaggerated sense of modesty. She undressed as calmly and composedly as though she were the sole occupant of a virginal chamber situated far from the eye of man. It is true, however, that when decency rose in arms she extinguished the lamp, thus finishing her toilet in semi-darkness.

I watched her drowsily. She already seemed to be one of the shadowy vanguard of dreams—unreal, evanescent, a

presence betrayed only by the starlight and the rustle of falling garments.

Silence descended. The stars twinkled through the doorway ; the night breeze wandered in, and, taking my senses prisoner, bore me on its wings outwards, upwards, into the land of sleep.

CHAPTER XXXVI

‘ DIVERS DISCOURSES NOT VULGAR ’

SLEEP was impossible after 4.30 a.m. The little brown pigs, who, along with their mother, occupied the inner room, were astir even before this matutinal hour. Curiosity to see the strangers appeared to possess their juvenile minds, and the first thing of which I was conscious was the warm breath proceeding from their snouts as I lay wrapped in my rug upon the floor. They regarded me as a species of truffle, and made energetic attempts to dig me out of my covering. Did I, in drowsy protest, shake a fist in their direction, a chorus of squeals and a scamper of hoofs told me that they were conveying the news to their mother. A cock and his harem also paid us a visit. Chanticleer led the way, followed at a discreet interval by the ladies of his household. With many a cluck they explored the floor in search of possible crumbs. One of the hens chaperoned a brood of chickens—the ‘peep, peep, peep’ of the tiny intruders sounded now near, now far. One of them climbed to my shoulder ; he seemed mightily proud of his achievement. I watched him out of the tail of my eye, not daring to move lest he should take fright. The anxious mother warned him of his danger, but, in no way alarmed, he paused to scratch his head before he began the descent—a performance that I cannot but think was a sheer piece of bravado.

Camilla and the Baron were the first to leave their beds ; Hadow, Warden and I were not long in following their example. Our morning ablutions were performed in a pail lent us by the Baron. We washed in the street. To judge by the interest it created, such an event had never before taken

place in Bemafim. A crowd of semi-naked and appallingly dirty children watched our movements with awestruck excitement. When Hadow, disappearing head foremost into the pail, emerged with red and dripping countenance, their delight knew no bounds; shouts of '*Que maravilha!*' '*He possível?*' rent the air. Nor were the grown-up community far behind the youngsters in their appreciation of our performance. Two peasants herding swine left the animals to take care of themselves, while they stared open-mouthed at our eccentricities. Loafers, too, strolled on to the scene. A washing tour through Southern Portugal could, without doubt, be made to pay its expenses. It was barely five o'clock when Pedro put in an appearance. His face was long, and betokened anxiety.

'*Que he isto, Pedro?*' we inquired.

'*Ah, senhores! Mão, mão!* (Bad, bad!) In an evil hour a stallion belonging to that *embusteiro* (cheat) of an inn-keeper broke loose, and kicked one of the mules, the gray one, so as to lame him seriously. Isodoro sent me to tell you that we cannot start before nine o'clock. He has gone to seek another mule from a cousin who lives at a considerable distance.'

This was a disappointment; however, we were more vexed on account of the poor animal than for ourselves, as we were by no means averse to spending an extra hour or so at Bemafim. Warden, Hadow, and Pedro, guided by a score of urchins, started for a neighbouring glen, where Hadow had captured a number of reptiles upon his previous visit. The Baron, excusing himself to me in his usual princely manner—nothing, he said, of less importance than the sale of a pig to a neighbour could drag him from the pleasure of my society—wandered away up the narrow street. Camilla and I were left alone.

The crude light of the morning had not enhanced her attractions. Her complexion was sallow, her hair untidy, the discontented and almost sullen character of her face was pitiful to see. There was no denying, however, that she possessed a fine figure—a figure that gave you the impression of symmetry, of grace, of strength; a figure the beauty of whose outlines even ill-fitting garments were powerless to

conceal. She moved to and fro with lithe and gliding steps. I watched her for some time in silence. She was intent upon household duties—coaxing a fire to burn in the open fireplace, making the bed, scouring a pan, and sweeping the floor. The latter occupation afforded me much amusement. Her broom carried all before it—not only dust and dirt, of which there was no lack, but such miscellaneous objects as pigs and hens. It was an endless labour, worthy of a second Sisyphus. No sooner had she succeeded in banishing them with a vigorous sweep than in they came again, more numerous than ever.

‘ This,’ said I to myself, ‘ is an excellent opportunity to write up my diary.’

Seating myself upon a stone under the broad eaves, I was soon in the agonies of retrospection. Odours from manure-heaps filled the air ; the climate of Bemafim might be salubrious, but it was certainly not agreeable. I wrote for two minutes.

‘ Do you like bacon and eggs ?’ questioned a voice.

I looked up with a start. Camilla’s head appeared at a little window.

‘ Do I *like* bacon and eggs !’ I answered with enthusiasm ; ‘ why, I love them !’

Camilla’s head disappeared. I wrote for two minutes more, when a succession of squeals recalled me again to Bemafim, and, looking up, I was in time to see five little pigs swept violently into the street. Camilla’s face, wearing an expression of sombre satisfaction, appeared in the doorway.

‘ The brutes !’ she said, shaking the broom at them, ‘ they worry my life out ; I wish they were dead.’

‘ And surrounded by poached eggs,’ I added cheerfully.

She did not take my meaning, but after eyeing me for some time asked :

‘ What are you doing, senhor ?’

‘ I am writing a diary.’

‘ A diary ! What is a diary ?’

‘ Oh, well, it’s—it’s a sort of attempt to remember what you’ve forgotten.’

‘ Oh !’ She relapsed into silence. After a minute, appar-

ently passed in deep thought, she spoke again : ‘ You must be clever, senhor !’

I shrugged my shoulders in protest.

‘ Yes, indeed,’ she continued, ‘ *very* clever !’

‘ No, no, Camilla.’

‘ But I am sure of it,’ she insisted ; ‘ to write at all is clever, but to write what you’ve forgotten is wonderful !’

I looked up at her hastily. Was she guilty of humour ? No, her expression was stern and sad ; leaning on her broom-handle, she gazed at me with the utmost gravity.

‘ You have written a great deal, senhor,’ she continued—‘ all these many pages, and such small writing ; when I write a letter I write much larger than that.’

‘ Ah, you write letters sometimes ?’

‘ Once or twice,’ she replied shortly.

‘ Now, I wonder which of the young men is fortunate enough to get a letter from the Senhora Camilla ?’

Her face clouded over, she bit her lip, and, without a word, re-entered the dwelling. I gazed after her with astonishment ; letters were evidently a forbidden subject—or was it young men ? I resumed my writing, but before I had written many words I became conscious of being again watched from the doorway. This unaffected and, I may say, quite unusual interest in my diary touched my heart.

‘ Tell me what you are writing now, senhor ?’ She resumed the conversation as though no interruption had taken place.

‘ I am writing about Bemafim.’

‘ About Bemafim !’

Her eyes strayed from the manure-heaps to the pigs, and from the pigs back once more to the manure-heaps. What thoughts could even an Englishman extract from these objects worthy of being recorded in a diary ?

‘ About Bemafim !’ she repeated in tones of wonder.

‘ I am saying how kind I have found all my new friends ; how beautiful I think your mountains ; how I like your village ; and, lastly, how much I am interested in a young lady called Camilla, who has done her best to make us feel at home.’

‘ You have put *all* that in there ! Oh, senhor !’

‘ Every word of it,’ I said solemnly.

GILBERT JAMES



HER BROOM CARRIED ALL BEFORE IT.

Camilla, much impressed, came nearer to me, and after a moment of hesitation sat down on a stone by my side. I sharpened a pencil, and for a moment or two no one spoke. ‘It is evident,’ said I to myself, ‘that Camilla is “hipped”; she takes a painfully jaundiced view of life, which, after all, is hardly a matter for surprise, seeing that she is forced to be the companion of pigs, and that her horizon is bounded by manure-heaps. Let me see if I cannot cheer her up.’

So thinking, I began to talk about myself; it was a congenial subject, and I waxed eloquent, sharing my remarks between my diary, Camilla, and the pigs with the utmost impartiality. I refrained from looking at the lady, but I could feel that she was listening, though with what degree of interest I was unable to tell. I alluded to several episodes in my past life which I thought might combine amusement with instruction—of loneliness illuminated by the consolations of hope; of clouds, dark in appearance, but which upon a closer examination I had discovered to be lined throughout with silver. A Solomon come to judgment! Philosophy falling from the lips of Inexperience! The very pigs were edified!

Fortunately for me, Camilla was herself young, dogmatic, and not overcritical. She listened with attention. At times she uttered an ejaculation, such as ‘*Sinto isso!*’ (I am sorry for it!), or ‘*Que contentamento he meu!*’ (How pleased I am!), or, feeling that the recital called for even stronger expressions, she murmured, ‘*O Jesus Christo! O Esperito Santo!*’

‘And so, Camilla’—it was thus I finished my speech—‘you see, we have all our troubles; some have them in England, and some in Portugal, but I think if we try to make the best of things our troubles almost disappear.’

‘I don’t agree with you,’ she muttered half resentfully; her mind had returned to the morbid and self-centred circle it was accustomed to tread.

‘Why not, Camilla?’

She moved uneasily, and drew a deep breath.

‘I—I don’t know; what I say is true. It’s no use trying—that’s all I know.’

‘But if it makes things easier it must be of use?’

She shook her head.

‘They never get any easier, senhor; they get worse.’

‘Come, now,’ I remonstrated, ‘not *worse!*’

‘Yes, they do; the longer I live here the worse they get. At Mertola, where I lived for ten years, it was different. I had friends; but here—*here!*’ She gave a mirthless laugh. ‘*Deos!* there is not a soul who cares for me. I wish I were dead.’

‘Your father——’ I began, but she stopped me with a gesture.

‘My father would not miss me; we quarrel often. He did not even miss mother when she died, and God knows she was a good wife to him!’

‘Is not the Padre a friend to you?’

‘He is a good man,’ she said slowly. ‘Yes, *he* is good; but he is not a friend. How can I tell you what I mean? I am not my best self with him; do you understand?’

‘Yes, I understand; it is want of sympathy, I suppose.’

‘Yes, yes, that is the word, senhor; how well you express my meaning! Sympathy—it is everything in life; when we look for it it is not there, and when we don’t look for it it comes, quite unexpectedly sometimes. How strange that is!’

We sat silent awhile. A woman came to the door of a neighbouring cottage, and eyed us curiously; the hen and chickens pecked the ground at our feet; the sunshine, gaining in intensity, flooded the street.

‘Mertola is a fine place; you would meet many people there,’ I said at length.

‘Oh yes, senhor! I lived with my uncle; he was rich, and had many friends. I had a fine time, especially the last year, when I was not obliged to go to school. Yes, it was gay in Mertola. Many gentlemen came to see us; some of them were very nice.’

‘Ah, and was there not one who was—well, nicer than all the others?’

‘Yes,’ she said softly, tracing patterns in the dust with the points of her naked toes—‘yes, much nicer.’

‘Ah!’ I ejaculated, nodding my head.

She raised her eyes to mine with a questioning look.

‘It is but what I expected, Camilla,’ I continued, with the air of one profoundly versed in all matters of the heart ; ‘but you must not lose courage—all will be well one day. I speak from experience : I have felt the same thing myself many times.’

‘*Many* times, senhor ?’

‘On different occasions, I mean.’

‘And they all came right in the end ?’

‘Every one of them.’

Camilla gasped.

‘You—you married them *all* !’

‘God forbid ! You mistake my meaning, Camilla. I only wished to prove to you that one must never lose hope. But do not let us talk further of my affairs ; yours will, I am positive, end happily.’

‘I wish I could think so, senhor.’

‘You *must* think so. Have courage. The gentleman who is so much nicer than all the other gentlemen will come back, and there will be a wedding in Bemafim. I only wish I could be here to dance at it. But you must not forget me on that occasion.’

‘No, indeed, senhor,’ and for the first time her eyes met mine with happiness shining within them.

‘And now for the bacon and eggs,’ I cried. ‘You have no idea how hungry I am.’

With a sound that might almost be mistaken for a laugh Camilla disappeared into the cottage.

I turned again to my diary in the hope that I might be permitted to finish one page before breakfast, but I was doomed to be again interrupted.

A little man strode singing down the street ; his voice was gay and bright as the morning sunshine, which by this time had joined me beneath the eaves. He was a remarkable little man, and my eyes rested upon him with interest. His sombrero, a relic of bygone respectability, was cocked jauntily over his left ear ; his attire was ragged and of peculiar mouldiness ; a green coat, out at elbow, the colour of mildew ; knee breeches and stockings, much frayed, of an earthy brown ; canvas shoes with soles of plaited

hemp—such was the costume of the musical intruder. Over his right shoulder he carried a spade—grim badge of office. I knew him at once—he was the gravedigger! The recognition was mutual. I rose to greet him.

‘*Carramba!*’ he cried. ‘*Que gosto!* (What pleasure!) it is my English friend!’

Dropping his spade, he darted towards me, and, enfolding me in his arms, embraced me on both cheeks. Together we sat down on the stone.

‘*Que felicidade!*’ (What happiness!) he reiterated, jumping up repeatedly to shake me by the hand. ‘This is a joy I did not expect. I thought you would already be far on the road. Another handshake, my dear friend.’

I explained the cause of our delay. I also related the surly reception we had met with at the hands of the inn-keeper on the preceding evening.

‘*Que animal!*’ he ejaculated with indignation. ‘Such brutes are a slander to the nation. *Deos!* he does not deserve a grave. To turn you out at so late an hour! *Que diabo!* See how angry I am!’ He twisted his face into the most horrible scowl. ‘But, *meu amigo*, had it not been for the brute I would not have seen you at all. I will forgive him, eh? He has unintentionally done me a service.’

He elevated one eyebrow and depressed the other, making at the same time a pun upon inn-keepers that escaped me altogether.

He chattered gaily. His vivacity and high spirits kept me in a state of constant laughter. Not that I understood his jests, for he delighted in the turns and twists of verbal quibbles, and his skipping wit lent itself but rarely to translation. It was his manner of relating anecdotes, his inimitable drollness, and the grotesque play of facial expression with which he accompanied his whimsical sentences that drew merriment in their train, as inevitably as the music of the piper drew after it the children of Hamelin.

‘But I am perhaps keeping you from your work?’ said I, indicating by a gesture his spade that lay in the sunshine.

‘By no means, *senhor*; I can do it in half an hour. It is only a very little grave, not longer than your arm. I am

the finest house builder in the world ; my dwellings last to all eternity !’ He paused, and his face twisted itself into a humorous melancholy. ‘*Deos, senhor!* I have need of jests to drown my tears. I would bury myself else with my own spade. Look you, I loved this little one. I carried her on my shoulder only last week. *Carramba!* I pray you let us talk of something else.’

‘We had a very pleasant evening last night,’ said I, endeavouring to give a more lively turn to the conversation.

My companion made a pretence of drinking wine.

‘Ho, ho!’ laughed he, holding an imaginary glass upside down. ‘You will not forget this, I take my word. But Senhor Sarto is too comical with his melancholy air ; *he* should have been the gravedigger and I the tailor. Would you believe it, I once ordered a pair of trousers from him, and because he took offence at some joke of mine, he kept me waiting a year ; and the worst of it was that when I did get them they were so stained that I hardly knew them ! He had dried his tears so often on my trousers that I swear to you, senhor, they were the saddest-looking breeches in Bemafim.’

‘To return to the habit of health-drinking,’ said I. ‘It is a foolish custom ; it can be overdone. I assure you my head aches from the instruction I was obliged to go through last night.’

‘Is that the case, senhor?’ *Sinto isso* (I regret it), but I suppose Englishmen—— You are an Englishman, are you not?’

‘I am a Scotchman.’

‘No, no, senhor!’ raising his hand in humorous protest. ‘That I cannot believe for one moment.’

‘No! Why not?’

‘Because I know better. I have seen a Scotchman—a *real* Scotchman—in a coloured picture in Faro. You are not in the least like him. He had red hair, and moreover he was dressed in a *saya* (little petticoat). Now, if you are indeed a Scotchman, where is your petticoat? Ha!’

‘I leave it at home when I travel in foreign lands,’ I answered gravely.

He darted a suspicious look at me, but I managed to keep my countenance.

‘A Scotchman is a sort of Englishman?’ was his next remark.

‘Well—yes, a superior sort.’

‘Really, senhor!’

He gazed at me with respect. I drew myself up.

‘But you were going to say something about Englishmen?’ I questioned.

‘To be sure. I was going to say that for Engli—Scotchmen, I mean, our Portuguese wine is too strong.’

I smiled.

‘Oh no; not at all. We are accustomed to much stronger wine than that.’

‘*Deos, senhor!* What is that you say? The wine of your country is stronger than ours?’

I laid my hand impressively on his arm.

‘*Meu amigo*, your wine is coloured water compared to ours. If you drank but one bottle of our Scottish wine it would—it would make your hair curl.’

A peculiar smile stole into his face. He removed his sombrero. Then the humour of my simile flashed across me—the Gravedigger was bald! Together we laughed and laughed again. The pigs and hens stared at us in surprise, and in the doorways I caught sight of several heads whom the noise of our merriment had summoned into the sunshine.

‘I would much like to taste this wonderful wine,’ said the Gravedigger at last, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand. His tone, though slightly incredulous, was full of longing.

‘And so you shall!’ cried I, springing to my feet. ‘Wait for me here; I’ll be back in a moment.’

Within the dwelling Camilla was bending over a pan, from which there proceeded a delightful and appetizing odour; an equally delightful noise of frizzling filled the air.

‘Breakfast will be ready in five minutes, senhor,’ she called out.

‘And I am more than ready for it now,’ I returned.

Searching in a little parcel of personal belongings that I had brought with me from the inn, I found a flask. Previous to our departure from England I had filled it with whisky against an emergency—the emergency had arrived.

The Gravedigger was carolling lustily when I rejoined him—some song in praise of good wine, for the words *vinho* (wine) and *bom* (good) were repeated in a rollicking refrain. He eyed my flask with comical disapproval.

‘Is it a sample of this precious liquid?’ asked he in bantering tones. ‘It will suffice, I trust, to wet our tongues, but we must taste it quickly before the wind dries them again. *Deos, senhor!* What a mighty wine-skin you carry with you! We must not drown ourselves! Ho, ho!’

He accompanied this speech with so many gestures and grimaces that it was with difficulty that I could keep from laughter. The flask had a silver cup; I filled it to the brim.

‘Scotland must be a rich country to afford each of her sons so large a wine-cellar!’ continued my companion, cutting a caper on the sunlit road.

‘The Scotch are poor,’ said I gravely, pausing in the act of pouring out the whisky—‘poor, *but proud.*’

His mirth sobered on the instant. Laying his hand upon his heart he bowed low.

‘These are qualities I have learned to respect, senhor.’

Not even the Baron could have turned the compliment with a better grace.

‘Drink, then, to our friendship,’ said I, offering him the cup.

He raised it with a steady hand, and, murmuring my name, tossed the entire contents down his throat. The effect was instantaneous. Clapping his hand to his mouth, he stared at me with eyes that started from their sockets. Poor little Gravedigger! My heart reproached me. How he gasped! how he choked! how I pounded him on his mildewed back until he was constrained to cry for mercy! One of his sentences alone remains in my memory—the outcome of his introduction to our national beverage.

Turning to me as soon as he found breath to speak—the tears still streaming from his eyes—he exclaimed in tones of awestruck admiration:

‘Ah, senhor! The Scotch *are* a hardy race! *Carramba!*’

CHAPTER XXXVII

A PLEASANT RECEPTION

THE sun was high in the heavens by the time we again took to the road. Our new mule was but a poor substitute for the animal we had been forced to leave behind us, for it kicked and bit so persistently that our muleteers were obliged to keep up a continual bastinado upon its mouse-coloured and wedge-like rump. The other mules were the objects of its hatred equally with the human portion of our party, and great was the indignation of my steed when it felt the teeth of the stranger vindictively embedded in its tail.

‘The Baron gave me this,’ remarked Warden, as we jogged forward side by side. He produced a card from his pocket. ‘It is an introduction to a nephew of his who lives at Alte. It’s really quite a curiosity,’ he continued with a chuckle. ‘Listen to this :

‘ “ BELOVED NEPHEW,

‘ “ At last I find myself able to do you a service. I introduce to you three Englishmen from Scotland. You will hasten to place yourself and all your belongings at their disposal. They have condescended to accept my hospitality. If you can obtain for them a number of small frogs do so ; they are also not too proud to accept snakes. Hoping this finds you in good health,

‘ “ Your affectionate Uncle,

‘ “ FERNANDO VIEYRA.” ’

At that moment the baggage-mule made a rush, and, colliding with the animal that Warden bestrode, came near to overturning man and steed into the ditch.

‘Confound it!’ roared Warden. ‘Hi, Isodoro! for Heaven’s sake, keep that brute in order.’

‘It is possessed of the devil, senhor,’ muttered the muleteer, crossing himself. ‘Saw you ever an animal so full of wickedness?’

‘He speaks the truth,’ acquiesced Anselmo. ‘I have heard of a mule so full of devils that it would do no work. It was spoken of everywhere for its obstinacy. They beat it for weeks and weeks; they even starved it without any good result. At last one day the Padre showed it a small piece of the true cross. And what do you think happened, senhores? Out of sheer obstinacy the cursed animal fell down dead upon the spot, and the devils, everyone of them, escaped through its mouth in flames of red fire.’

As though moved by the recital of this terrible tale, the baggage-mule lifted up its head and sent its discordant voice braying over the hill-sides.

‘Holy Mother of God!’ ejaculated Isodoro. ‘I believe it understands you, Anselmo!’

‘I am convinced of it,’ answered Anselmo in awestruck tones.

‘How far is it to Alte?’ I inquired of Isodoro, as the cavalcade fell once more into line.

‘A matter of three hours, senhor; but to-day we may be even longer upon the road.’

Our track lay along a narrow defile, or pass, hedged by precipitous hills. At times a grove of eucalyptus or an isolated cork-tree relieved the nakedness of the land; but for the most part the scenery was wild and lonely in the extreme. An uncouth figure herding swine and a couple of carriers with their mules were the only people passed upon our march.

We had not proceeded far before a bank of clouds that had for some time darkened the west advanced rapidly to meet us; in less than half an hour it had covered the entire face of the sky. The air was hot and oppressively sultry, a breathless silence prevailed, even the chatter of the grasshoppers died away. A wind arose and moaned among the hills. Gazing over my shoulder into the quarter of the storm, I saw a vulture poised in mid-air, its broad wings

outstretched, sailing down the stream of the wind; it neared us, passed overhead, and vanished in the indistinguishable blackness of the heavens. Darker and ever darker grew the air, the hills loomed—a frowning rampart—against the obscurity of the west; and all the while the hush of solemn expectancy appeared to increase, till, to my ears, the clatter of the many feet made an insufferable noise, strangely at variance with the spirit of the scene.

‘We’re in for it now,’ said Warden in a low voice.

The words had barely passed his lips when a flash of the most terrible brightness leapt upon us; it literally fell within a dozen yards of Hadow, for it struck a cork-tree that stood at some little distance from our track. A roar, resembling the discharge of heavy artillery, immediately followed, and in the blackness that intervened the air was full of sulphuric fumes.

‘Holy Mother of God!’ ejaculated Isodoro.

‘It is all the fault of this cursed mule,’ cried Anselmo.

The mountains caught at the tumult; ‘from peak to peak leapt the live thunder,’ while ever and anon, lit by the blue flashes, the entire chain of the Sierra de Monchique shone white against the face of the storm.

Terrified by the first awful flash, our mules, trembling in every limb, refused to proceed. I think they were for the moment blinded by the lightning; and, indeed, I sympathized with them, for my own eyes ached for long afterwards. It was with the utmost difficulty that we at length induced them to continue the march.

Down came the rain—a tropical deluge, continuous, vertical—blotting out the landscape with a screen of falling drops. Its noise was as the sound of many waters, a steady roar that drowned all rival voices. Again the lightning flashed, again the thunder roared, and still the rain descended as though the heavens had opened and the reservoirs of the sky had broken loose.

In a short space of time we were drenched to the skin. Hadow, striding ahead, as was his custom, presented a comical appearance: the water poured from all parts of his person; his elbows were converted into spouts, the broad and upturned brim of his sombrero was transformed

into a lake; but to the Professor these discomforts were as the salt of life. He rejoiced in the warring of the elements; he loved to pit his strength against the storm.

All awash in the rain, the track speedily became a danger to the mules. The poor animals slipped and slipped again, and it was only by dint of sheer force that I was enabled to keep my mount upon his incompetent legs. Innumerable rivulets sprang into being; they babbled merrily beside us; they joined hands and sang together; they raced along channels which but an hour before had been parched as the thirsty ravines of a desert. Every hollow in the hills discoursed music—the murmur of their voices filled the air. Then suddenly, as if by magic, the rain ceased, and the sun shining from behind the fringes of the last cloud deluged the scene with glory.

Alte came into sight at noonday, a rude village very similar to Bemafim or Salir. Without difficulty we found the nephew of the Baron, a stout man with a black beard. Warden presented our 'letter of introduction.' As he read it, an expression of surprise came into his face, and I saw him eyeing us with evident consternation.

'This is an honour, senhores,' he began, playing the while in a nervous manner with the Baron's card. 'I am overpowered, delighted; you will consider all I have as yours. You will perhaps condescend to break your fast at my house, but—but——'

'We consider ourselves honoured,' said Warden, as our new friend hesitated long over the words.

'But we have no small frogs in the house. I am deeply grieved; had I only known of your coming!' He waved his arms.

'We do not eat frogs,' said Warden with gravity.

'Nor snakes,' added I.

'But, senhores, my uncle says on this card that you——'

'The Senhor Vieyra means only that we are interested in such animals. We collect them for scientific purposes. But regarding the matter of food, our tastes lie, I assure you, in quite another direction. *Deos!* senhor, we are no eaters of reptiles!'

'I rejoice to hear it!' exclaimed the Baron's nephew,

much relieved. 'I confess it gave me a shock, for although I have heard of people who eat frogs, still, to eat snakes is, to my mind, an unnatural and horrible proceeding. But, senhores, forgive me. I did not see before how wet you were! Come in, come in; you must take off these dripping garments at once. Dorothea! Dorothea!' he called aloud. A pretty servant-maid answered the summons. 'You must light a great fire in the kitchen, Dorothea, and dry the clothes of the senhores. Bring also some of my garments from the oak chest—my green coat and my velveten jerkin, and my two pairs of cloth pantaloons, and—— *Hola*, Dorothea! don't go away while I am speaking. We will take chocolate and sweet cakes in the veranda in half an hour.'

As he spoke our host ushered us into his house. It was a comfortable and commodious dwelling, in every way superior to that of his uncle the Baron. It resembled an English farmhouse, with low ceilings and homely furniture; it boasted also of a number of farm buildings, red-tiled and in good repair, that clustered around the main structure. Above this collection of outhouses a date-palm drooped its feathery fronds—a tropical touch that, to my mind, added not a little to the foreign charm of the scene.

Having changed into dry garments, we were entertained in the veranda with chocolate and cakes, fruit and wine.

That afternoon remains in my memory—a delightful experience. Acting on the advice of his uncle, our host organized a reptile hunt, in which Hadow and Warden took part. I remained behind.

The contrast between the eventful days in the immediate past and the absolute quiet of the hours spent in that vine-roofed veranda was very pleasant. At times our host, solicitous for my welfare, peeped at me from the darkened interior, but on finding me occupied with reading or writing, he invariably withdrew and left me to myself.

The sunlight shifted from pillar to pillar; the air was warm and murmurous with the hum of bees; the sense of peace was deep, universal. Checkered light and shade flung a tremulous patchwork across the table and flickered over the stone floor. Overhead, bunches of grapes ripened

in the genial warmth, while from the canopy of leaves came the subdued twitter of birds. Outwards, upwards, I could see the fronds of the palm motionless against the intense blue of the sky.

No sound came from the village. In distant cities life might pant and strain, but here, in little Alte, it dozed the hours away, as oblivious to the march of time as the very dogs that slept in the deserted streets.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

WANDERINGS IN THE NIGHT

NIGHT had fallen by the time we reached Bartolomea. Our first care was to find the gentleman to whom our friend at Alte had given us an introduction. Anselmo volunteered to be our guide, and led us, after a long ramble, to a passage terminating in a blank wall. We came to an unexpected halt. Several suspicious-looking characters lurked in the vicinity; the light from Isodoro's lantern fell on a dark cavity bordering the road from which came the sound of rushing water, and, what with the darkness and the sinister surroundings, I could not but think that no fitter spot for a murder existed in all Portugal.

'It cannot be here, Anselmo,' remonstrated Warden; 'you must have taken a wrong turning.'

'*Carramba!* It would appear so, senhor; it is so dark, and it all looks so different to when I was here before.'

Attracted by the unusual appearance we presented, a number of onlookers had gathered around us. One of them volunteering to be our guide, we set off once more upon our adventures.

Occasionally out of the surrounding gloom a light fell on us from some open doorway, but for the most part the narrow streets were plunged in profound obscurity. We stumbled forward, following each other closely for fear of being lost in the maze of invisible turnings, avoiding the loose stones and deep holes more by good fortune than skilful guidance. Overhead a narrow slit between overhanging gables showed us a streak of starlit sky. Two cats quarrelling on an adjacent roof, a dog barking at us from

out the darkness, and once the tinkle of a guitar accompanying a chorus of hoarse voices, were the only sounds that reached us. The clatter of our mules woke the echoes of the benighted town.

‘This is the house, senhores,’ said our guide, stopping suddenly in front of a dark entrance.

Anselmo strode forward, and out of the gloom we heard him knocking loudly. A deep silence ensued. Anselmo knocked again, louder than before, a persistent hammering that broke upon the stillness of the night. The creak of ill-fitting woodwork grated upon our ears, a window opened overhead.

‘Who are you, and what do you mean by disturbing honest folk in their beds at this hour?’ demanded a querulous voice.

‘We are travellers, and bring an introduction to Senhor Lopez,’ answered Warden courteously.

‘And could you not have waited till morning?’ continued the voice, still more querulously. ‘This is no hour to knock thus loudly at closed doors. The Senhor Lopez sleeps from home to-night. He returns to-morrow. If you call back then you may possibly find him.’

The window creaked anew as the owner of the voice shut it in our faces.

‘All this trouble for nothings,’ growled Hadow.

‘We must find an inn,’ said Warden. ‘Hi, Anselmo! is there a good *estalagem* in the town?’

‘Yes, senhor; I have put up at it many times, but may the good saints confound me if I can find my way there from this place in the dark. Let us again obtain the assistance of this gentleman, who is, I take it, a resident of Bartolomea.’

The individual referred to again consented to be our guide. Again we started, and again, after a series of ramblings along divers and dirty lanes, stopped before a house which we were informed was a celebrated and palatial inn. In answer to our repeated shouts an old man, carrying a horn-lantern in one hand and a long staff in the other, made his appearance. His hair was long and white; his eyes squinted most villainously. His beard was tangled, and descended

nearly to his waist, being of a yellowish-gray colour. His dress consisted of but one garment tied with a rope round his loins. This apparition blinked at us for a full minute in silence, yawning from time to time in the most audible manner.

‘Can you give us beds for the night, also stabling for our mules?’ demanded Warden.

The man shrugged his shoulders.

‘For your mules—yes; but beds! No. I am sorry, senhores, for I see you are gentlemen of high degree, but the thing is impossible. To-night my house is quite full. There arrived before dusk ten carriers and six merchants, so that not only is every bed occupied, but every floor as well, for they sleep side by side like sardines.’

‘We will sleep very nice in some comfortable street,’ said Hadow. ‘I cannot think, dear boys, why you must always have beds. So foolish! The night is fine; it is a positive luxury to sleep in such air;’ and he sniffed the questionable odours that roamed the streets of Bartolomea.

‘Stay one moment, senhores,’ entreated the old man; ‘an idea occurs to me. There will still be two stalls empty in our large stable after your mules are accommodated. They make but one at present, for the partition between them was kicked down by a black fiend of a stallion belonging to a Spaniard last year—may the devil take both the horse and his master! With plenty of clean straw this will make a fine bedroom for all your party. What think you of the plan?’

‘Excellent!’ we cried, and, encouraged by our approval, he led the way to the stable.

It was a long and low building in bad repair, for looking upwards I caught sight of the stars, and through many a gap in the walls the air wandered in and out. By the light of the lantern which the old man still carried, fifteen or sixteen animals—horses, mules, and donkeys—were to be seen in the dilapidated stalls. The air was rank with the stench from accumulated filth, for the place, despite its many occupants, gave us the impression of not having been cleaned for months.

‘Here is the stall,’ cried the old man, but hardly had

he put foot within it than a savage growl made him spring hastily back.

‘Holy Mother of God!’ he ejaculated. ‘What have we here?’

He raised his lantern, and we all peered into the interior. A great dog, of the species known as wolf-hound, crouched in one corner; his eyes gleamed ominously, his fangs were bared, the hair upon his neck and shoulders bristled with fury, and even as we watched him a long hoarse snarl told us to beware.

‘I cannot think how he came here,’ said the old man in a tone of annoyance. ‘Wait but one moment and I will ask. *Ola!* Juan! Juan! lazy beast, where are you?’

‘Here, master,’ grumbled a sleepy voice from a neighbouring stall.

‘What is this brute doing in my stable?’ asked his master.

‘*Deos!*’ answered Juan; ‘it belongs to a carrier who has gone to visit a friend for the night. Before he left he put the beast in charge of some of his belongings. It is my opinion that he will tear anyone to pieces who enters that stall. He is a devil for ferocity *Que animal!* only listen to him!’

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

‘I own, senhores, I do not like to interfere with him, but’—turning to his servant—‘you, Juan, are young and strong; take my staff and turn him out.’

Juan drew back.

‘Not for a golden moidore would I do such a thing,’ he answered with an oath.

‘Will the senhores permit me to make the attempt?’ murmured a voice at our elbows.

We turned in our surprise to behold Isodoro.

‘But he may kill you!’ we expostulated

‘I do not think so, senhores. I have had much experience with animals, and once for two months I assisted my brother-in-law, who owns a small travelling menagerie. I learned many tricks there, one of which I propose to show you now.’

Saying this he divested himself of his coat and hat, and,

collecting an armful of straw, proceeded to bind it into the form of a large torch with the aid of sundry pieces of string.

‘Stand on one side, senhores, so as to allow the brute room to escape.’

The hint was scarcely necessary, our one idea being to avoid so dangerous an animal.

‘*Guardai vos* (Have a care), Isodoro!’ cried Juan, in great excitement.

Lighting the torch at the lantern, Isodoro again addressed us.

‘When the brute comes out, senhores, do you all cry aloud, as if you saw the devil himself, for nothing alarms such savage animals as the sound of many human voices all crying loudly and at the same time.’

Uttering a particularly inhuman shriek, Isodoro sprung with one bound into the stall and dashed the lighted end of his torch full in the face of the dog. The animal gave vent to a loud yell of mingled alarm and pain. A small heap of straw on which he was lying caught fire, and the poor brute, surrounded on all sides by flames, and stunned by the ferocity of Isodoro’s shrieks, which never for one moment abated, sprang for the opening that led into the stable. Here he was met by such a chorus of yells—German, Portuguese, and English—as would have terrified the soul of the bravest dog that ever drew breath. Uttering responsive cries he fled for the open air. Isodoro appeared, smoke-begrimed, but radiant. The fire was stamped out, fresh straw was littered over the floor, and at length we were at liberty to go to bed.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE FIGHT

ALL night long the horses and mules kept up a perpetual kicking and stamping, which effectually banished sleep of a satisfactory nature from my eyelids. It is true that I dozed at intervals, but being awakened several times by rats running over my body, and having a horror of these rodents, I lay awake in order, if possible, to keep them from touching my face.

Neither the muleteers nor my friends were disturbed by our objectionable visitors, for they all snored loudly. In the middle of the night, however, the entire party was awakened by the curses of Anselmo. It came out that he had captured a rat in the act of biting his neck. In his indignation he threw the animal with all his force into the adjoining stall. We heard it squeal as it struck the woodwork, an alarming sound in the darkness that set the startled occupant of the stall kicking violently.

The cocks in the neighbourhood heralded in the gray promise of the dawn. Cats, dogs, and pigs wandered in and out. The latter were numerous and of enormous size. Two of them found their way to the door of our impromptu bed-chamber. There they stood, grunting at us, their small pink eyes filled with no recognisable emotion—too stupid even to feel surprise. It was not until someone had thrown half a brick at them that they vanished with squeals of indignation.

The last contingent of muleteers was leaving the inn courtyard as we issued from the stable. It wanted yet an hour to sunrise; the air was chill, and the light wan and

gray. The long train of mules, each laden with merchandise, over which an oil-skin covering had been strapped, stood ready to take the road. Their bells—musical when distance lent them sweetness—sounded at so close a proximity dissonant and monotonous. The muleteers were picturesque fellows. Their faces, tanned by long exposure to sun and rain, were swarthy as those of Arabs; and, indeed, in their nomadic habits and restless open-air life they bore a strong resemblance to those children of the desert. Their heads were covered with broad slouched hats; capes, originally brown in colour, but so ingrained with the dust and travel-stains of years that the brown had merged into a bleached and nondescript gray, hung from their shoulders. Their feet were encased in shoes of hemp. Kings of the road, they feared no one, and were accustomed to boast and swagger in the inn courtyards, to bully and to browbeat, as though the inn were their property and the innkeeper their slave. And so to a certain extent he was, for he knew well that much—nay, all—of his custom would melt away were he to lose the haughty patronage of the muleteer fraternity. He treated them therefore with respect, and when they condescended to unbend in his presence, he laughed at their jests and drank to them with the greatest alacrity and good-humour.

Anselmo and Isodoro were hail-fellow-well-met with all and sundry. It was '*Hola! Isodoro; adeos, até ver-nos.*' '*Hola! Anselmo; boa fortuna, meu amigo!*' with many other expressions of greeting and farewell.

Then with a cracking of whips and hoarse shouts of encouragement to the mules, the cavalcade jangled off into the sunless streets.

'And now for breakfast,' cried Warden.

'*Hi! mein herr!*' shouted Hadow, 'what have you for breakfast?'

The innkeeper fixed one of his green eyes on Hadow and the other on me. His smile was insinuating.

'The noble senhores would perhaps like eggs, with a slice or two of bacon, and coffee of the best, and a loaf of maize bread? It is not much, but——'

'Splendid, *recht schön!* Go and prepare it at once.'

Thus encouraged, the old fellow hobbled off, and we heard him shouting to his minions to bestir themselves over the preparations for our repast.

Our muleteers were requested to join us at breakfast—a request with which they very readily complied. There was no formality or stiffness in our relations towards each other ; none of the wall of etiquette which custom rears between master and man in other parts of the world, and which is so deadly an enemy to intimacy and affection. They looked upon us as their friends, and treated us throughout the long march with unwavering geniality and good-humour. And we were pleased to be so treated. What though we paid them a little of our ‘filthy lucre,’ did they not repay us a thousand times with song and jest, lightening the long road with merry companionship, and showing us somewhat of the inner life of Portuguese muleteers ? Yes ; to my mind we remained their debtors to the end. Other travellers have fallen in with unsatisfactory guides, whose one aim has been to cheat and to deceive, so we may consider ourselves doubly fortunate in having nothing but good to relate of our friends Isodoro and Anselmo. May the sun of Portugal shine on them to a ripe old age, and may the good wishes of the English travellers bring them the good luck they so well deserve !

We did ample justice to the breakfast that was laid before us. Bacon and eggs, coffee and bread vanished as if by magic.

Anselmo, slashing at the great loaf with his knife, caused us amusement.

‘A very deadly-looking weapon,’ said I, taking it out of his hand.

The long pointed blade opened out of a black horn handle ; a powerful catch prevented it closing unawares. I ran my finger along the edge—it was keen as a razor.

‘It is a good knife,’ said Anselmo simply.

‘*Carramba !* Yes,’ joined in Isodoro, ‘it has done its work ; it has tasted blood—eh, Anselmo ?’ and he nudged his comrade with a chuckle.

Anselmo shrugged his shoulders.

‘Blood !’ we repeated. ‘What sort of blood ?’

‘*Deos!* the blood of a man, of course. Anselmo, tell the senhores of your fight with Black Antonio.’

‘No, no ; it would not interest them,’ returned the other.

‘Not interest them ! By the saints ! it was a rare fight. It would interest a corpse. Ask him, senhores !’

‘Come, tell us of it, Anselmo,’ we entreated.

The Muleteer drained his cup of coffee, wiped his mouth on the back of his hand, and, after a little hesitation, began the following story :

‘The affair, senhores, is truly not worth repeating, but as you desire it, I will tell it in as few words as possible. I am no talker, as you may have perceived, and a man must not set up for a baker if his head is made of butter. It happened here, senhores, at this inn, many months ago. Isodoro and I were travelling the road with merchandise and many mules, and we put up here for the night. We were a large gathering, for many gentlemen of our acquaintance had arrived also. At supper much wine and *aqua vitæ* were drunk, and, I give you my word, we were all very jovial.’

‘*Em consciencia!* Yes, it was a great occasion,’ corroborated Isodoro, puffing out a tobacco cloud with a sigh of regret.

‘Among the gentlemen,’ continued Anselmo, ‘was one called Black Antonio ; his father is a shoemaker at Espirito Santo, a dark and sulky devil of a man. No one likes him ; he is always quarrelling, his hand is never off his knife. Strong as a bull, I have seen him bend a bar of iron with his two hands, and often, when angry, he will bite a piece out of a wineglass and chew it till his mouth is full of blood.’

‘A pleasant sort of man to meet !’ said Warden, taking the pipe out of his mouth.

‘Senhores,’ continued Anselmo, leaning towards us and striking the table with his fist, ‘that man hated me ; and why ? Because, forsooth, Maria came to me and refused to go back to him. She never loved him ; I swear it ! She was always afraid of him. And what wonder ? She told me that once he put both his great powerful hands

round her throat—Maria has a beautiful neck, as slender as a queen's—and said to her with a terrible smile: "Maria, my girl, if you ever love anyone but me, I will wring this pretty neck of yours as joyfully as I'd wring a chicken's." *Christo!* senhores, that is not the sort of man to make a woman love him! Maria never forgets that smile and the touch of those fingers—she dreams of them at times, and starts up in the black night and screams aloud.'

Anselmo gazed out at the door; a melancholy expression came into his dark eyes.

'Continue, my brother,' prompted Isodoro.

'Yes, yes. All this happened, senhores, after Antonio murdered his wife.'

'Murdered his wife!' we ejaculated.

'It is as I say: he stabbed her to the heart. She may have given him cause—I do not deny it—but he gave her no time for excuses. It was——' And Anselmo lunged forward as one who strikes a deadly blow.

'Did they not bring him to justice for the crime?' we asked.

He shrugged his shoulders and snapped his fingers in the air.

'Bah! they do not garrotte a man for a little family affair like that. They did, indeed, try him for the murder, but the jury acquitted him to a man, and he was at once released. But to my story. Supper was no sooner over than Antonio, who had drunk much wine, began to say insulting things about me—not to my face, but to the others, you understand. I stood this ill-mannered talk for some time, but as he did not stop I began to lose my temper. *Deos!* senhores, I do not pretend to be a saint, and when I am angry I see blood as soon as any man. Yes, it is true; I got savage as a goaded bull, and when at last he saw fit to sneer at the virtue of Maria, I could stand it no longer, and shouting, "*Maldito sejas tu!*" (A curse on thee!), flung my tumbler of wine straight in his face.'

'*Carramba!*' cried Isodoro, rubbing his hands; 'that was a sight I shall never forget. How I laughed! To see the wine trickling down his face and pouring from his beard was as

good as a play. But go on, Anselmo; you tell it well. Does he not, senhores?’

Anselmo shrugged his shoulders, and continued :

‘As soon as he could see—for his eyes were full of wine—he sprang at me, but my friends held him back.

“A ring! a ring!” they shouted, and every one jumping up, the table was pushed to one side, and Antonio and I found ourselves in the middle of a circle.

‘I took off my jerkin and felt the edge of my knife. Antonio followed my example. Then, naked to the waist, we faced each other without a word. You could have heard a pin drop. Our right hands were clenched on our knife-handles, while round our left hands we had wound our sashes. You doubtless know the way, senhores. I looked at him, as I had not seen him naked before, and, *Deos!* he *was* a man! I have never seen a finer figure—no, nor more magnificent muscles. His teeth were clenched, and all the devils of hell glared out of his eyes; but I did not pay much attention to that—I was wondering where to strike him. Warily we circled round each other, and I was on the point of making a feint to draw him within my reach, when a cry startled me. I turned round: it was the innkeeper. May God confound him! for, as I turned, that black devil took me unawares and pinned me with his knife. Luckily for me, it struck a rib and glanced along my side, otherwise I had been a dead man.’

‘Why did the innkeeper interrupt you?’ asked Warden.

‘The son of a dog!’ growled Anselmo, ‘he thought only of his own worthless hide. “For God’s sake, gentlemen,” he shouted, “no bloodshed, I pray you; it will give my inn a bad name!” I was bleeding like a pig, and more savage than many bulls, but my friends decided that the innkeeper had a right to guard the good name of his miserable inn.’

‘You fought no more, then?’ asked Hadow.

‘Did we not? By all the saints, *yes*. We fought it out in that courtyard’—and he pointed through the open door—‘by the light of two torches. My knife drew blood twice—once on the shoulder and once in the chest, a beautiful hit; it laid Antonio by the heels for three weeks.’

‘He says truth,’ observed Isodoro; ‘never have I enjoyed a fight more. But, senhores, it grows late; we had better pay this old rascal of an innkeeper and be on the road. *Vamos!* the sun shines, and the little mules ring their bells. Of a surety there is no life like that of a muleteer!’

CHAPTER XL

WE LOSE OUR WAY

TOWARDS afternoon we penetrated deeply between the mountain-spurs. Rain fell heavily, and a blustering wind swept the passes. Masses of rock frowned down upon us ; for the most part they took the form of serrated ridges, with here and there some bold peak standing alone against the gray of the sky. Descending a natural staircase, where the track literally dropped into a ravine, we came suddenly upon a party of muleteers who had taken refuge on the lee side of an overhanging rock. There were perhaps a dozen in all ; the mules stood patiently without, while their masters made merry within. The shelter was so effectually roofed over that it formed an admirable shield against the inclemencies of the weather.

‘Let us join these gentlemen,’ suggested Isodoro. ‘I know them well, and I would willingly ask some questions concerning our road, for, of a truth, I am none so sure of it.’

The strangers invited us to join their party. We accepted without hesitation. They were discussing a large bottle of *aqua vitæ*, drinking ‘not wisely, but too well,’ for it was evident that more than one of their number were intoxicated. We were each presented with a glass of the fiery liquor, and found it warm and comforting on so raw a day. Isodoro failed to obtain the necessary information, for none of his acquaintances would pay heed to him. They shouted and sang, laughed and quarrelled, and it was plain that they were in no humour for serious talk.

Bidding them farewell, we took once more to the road. As we proceeded, the exacting nature of the path necessitated my entire attention.

It is easy to write lightly upon the subject sitting in my armchair, surrounded by nothing more terrifying than a square of horizontal carpet, but I assure you that clinging to my slippery saddle with a cliff on one side and a precipice upon the other was a very different affair. To look immediately over my left knee, perpendicularly downwards, to where, several hundred feet below, the rocks invited disaster, was a sensation too exciting to be pleasant. My knowledge of mules was destined to be considerably augmented during the course of that afternoon, and, alas! my pride was to have a fall. Warden had warned me of what was likely to occur.

‘Should the path overhang a precipice,’ said he, ‘you will find that your mule will balance herself on the extreme outer edge; so look out.’

‘Nonsense!’ I ejaculated. ‘Do you mean to tell me that Saccharin’ (I had christened my mule Saccharin on account of her concentrated sourness of disposition) ‘will endanger our valuable lives in so foolish a manner! As if I didn’t know her character better than you! Why, man, she’s the most cautious mule in Portugal!’

Severely was my incredulity punished. Not only did Saccharin fail in caution, she even went the length of premeditated suicide long drawn-out—that is to say, she risked our necks on every possible opportunity; she courted annihilation, like one who is weary of life; she poised herself on the fine edge of each abyss, as though, by profession, a rope-dancer. Even her drenched door-mat of a body was canted over the ravines, as though—in Anselmo’s words—she was calculating the distance of our probable fall. I clenched my teeth, and, leaning violently towards safety, wished myself well out of the adventure.

At times we passed a solitary wayfarer. Isodoro invariably questioned him as to our road, but the replies he received were contradictory: one would say that the nearest village was not far distant, while another would be of opinion that to reach shelter before nightfall was im-

possible. To my great relief our path debouched on to more open ground.

Darkness surprised us, still wandering among the mountains. For long we stumbled onwards, feeling our way, as it were, among boulders that appeared, more than ever before, to strew the track.

'Halt!' shouted Hadow. 'Dear boys,' came his voice out of the gloom ahead, 'I see no path. We must have lost it.'

'Let Isodoro go ahead,' I suggested. 'You have your lantern, Isodoro?'

'Yes, senhor, if I can only manage to light it in this accursed rain.'

The feeble glow soon revealed Isodoro's swarthy face bending over it; then it swayed forward, casting dancing gleams on the wet hillside. The point of light but made the surrounding blackness more opaque.

'There is no sign of this miserable path, senhores,' he called at length, 'but we cannot be far from it. It is my opinion that if we climb higher we are certain to find it.'

We followed his advice. The darkness, the wild and desolate mountains, the falling rain, the chaos of boulders that lay above, below, and around us, all combined to make the scene one of extreme and melancholy loneliness.

Warden and I dismounted and led our mules. Higher and ever higher we climbed, stumbling and slipping incessantly. My one fear was lest, in the black night, I should get separated from my companions. To obviate this danger we had recourse to frequent halts to collect stragglers. Once my mule fell, and dragging me with her in her fall, we rolled for some distance down the hillside.

At length the top of the spur or saddle, I know not which, was reached, and we halted awhile to consider the situation.

'There is no sign of a path,' growled Hadow. 'What for a guide are you, Isodoro?'

'*Deos!* senhor, I am not to blame,' expostulated the muleteer.

‘*Donnerwetter!* Have done with this blind leading the blind. Let us camp here.’

‘By Jove, no!’ I remonstrated. ‘The rocks are dripping wet, and we are all starving.’

‘Bah! animal! You think only of your pampered stomach.’

‘We’d better go on,’ said Warden; ‘only, for goodness’ sake, let’s keep together; it’s beastly dark. Are you there, Pedro?’

No one answered. The wind moaned over the hill-top, the rain fell on us from out the darkness.

‘He was here a minute ago,’ said Warden. ‘I gave him a helping-hand up a boulder.’

‘Pe-dro!’ shouted Anselmo, with the full strength of his lungs.

‘*Ho-la!*’ came back Pedro’s shrill falsetto. In another moment he had joined us.

‘I have found it, senhores, *que gloria! que gloria!*’ and we heard the small imp dancing in the darkness.

‘Found what, Pedro?’

‘The path, and a village, too, for I see lights over the next hill as plainly as possible.’

The little urchin led us down a short but steep incline to a level piece of ground, from which a narrow path conducted the wayfarer in the direction of a village.

‘However did you find it, Pedro?’ asked Warden.

‘It was my hat,’ answered Pedro simply. ‘It fell off, and I followed it as well as I could in this darkness, and when I picked it up, behold! it lay on a path.’

In less than half an hour we had reached the village. Through the murky night we could just distinguish a few hovels huddling under the blackness of a hill. Lights twinkled from half a dozen windows. Towards one of these we directed our steps. At the sound of our approach several people came to the door: an elderly man, a middle-aged woman, and two little girls. Never before or since have I seen people with a more poverty-stricken air.

The cottage interior was dimly lighted by a wick floating in a saucer of oil. By its unsatisfactory aid I could see the

tattered garments, the pinched and woe-begone appearance of the occupants.

A number of people had collected. They formed a crowd that stared at us in silence.

'Good-evening, senhora,' said Warden, addressing himself to the woman.

She muttered unintelligibly by way of answer.

'Can you give us something to eat?' continued Warden.

'No,' replied the man curtly.

'Bread, meat, or eggs? Anything you have. We will gladly pay you a good price for it.'

'We can give you nothing. We have not bread sufficient to feed our own children. We have no eggs; and as for meat, we never see it from one year's end to another.'

'Then perhaps you can give us shelter for the night?'

'No.'

'A barn, an outhouse—anything.'

'We have none.'

The replies were sullen, dejected; they held no hope of warming into friendliness. Hadow smothered a curse. The wind rising into a gust lashed us with fine rain. The inhabitants of the inhospitable hamlet continued to stare at us in silence.

'Listen, my friends,' said Warden desperately. 'We are wet through. We have come far and are tired; it is dark, we can go no further. You would not drive a dog from your doors on such a night as this! For the love of God, give us a dry corner in which we can sleep till morning.'

'It is no use asking, senhor; I cannot do it. We have no outhouses, we have no food to spare. Perhaps some of the neighbours will accommodate you. *Ola!* Carrasco! are you there? Can you take in the senhores?'

'Not I,' responded a gruff voice from the crowd.

'Well, then, will *any* of you do it?'

No one answered.

'You see, senhores,' continued the man, turning to us—'you see how it is: we are unused to strangers; in fact, we do not want them. Take my advice and go away.'

We faced each other in the darkness. The man and

woman barred the doorway. The little crowd of villagers watched us with silent hostility, or, to be more exact, with utter indifference. We might die from exposure on the hill-sides for aught they cared. One by one they grew weary of watching us, and returned to their homes. We heard the doors bang, and the bolts shoot in the darkness. Even the man and women retired—only the little girls remained constant.

‘We must try diplomacy,’ whispered Warden, producing his tin-whistle. The curiosity of the children was at once aroused. What was the strange man going to do? He sat down on the door-step; they retreated precipitately into the interior. He played a little prelude—they peeped at him from round a corner. He filled the air with merry notes; they tiptoed forward with finger on lips. He took one on each knee; they drank in Scotch reels with faces of awful solemnity. The neighbours might spurn us from their doors, their parents might turn a deaf ear to our entreaties, but from that moment we had two firm allies. Warden’s diplomacy was successful—the conquest of the little girls was complete!

The mother was dragged by the skirt and made to listen to the music; the man even reappeared in the background, and until the close of the concert the entire family stood spellbound, listening with rapt and even awe-struck attention.

‘*Deos!* how cold and hungry I am!’ exclaimed Warden, laying down his whistle, his teeth chattering audibly.

‘Mother, mother!’ cried the elder girl in great excitement, ‘did you hear that? The nice man says he is very cold and very hungry!’

‘Indeed I did, *minha alma*; it is a shame!’ and she conversed in an undertone with the man.

The fellow scratched his head; but she continued to talk with many gesticulations. At last he shrugged his shoulders.

‘You may come in, senhores,’ he said at length, speaking in a more genial voice. ‘My wife says she will light a fire by which you may dry your clothes; she will also boil you some potatoes. It is all we can offer you; and—and——’ he shuffled from one leg to the other—‘there is a little

loft above this room, where, if you can put up with bare boards, you may sleep for the night.'

Upon receipt of this news the little girls at once seized Warden by the hand and dragged him into the cottage. We followed with thankful hearts, and turned our backs for the night upon the hills, and the darkness, and the rain.

CHAPTER XLI

ON THE ROAD TO SAN PEDRO

OUR condition after a night passed in the loft would require to be seen to be credited. We resembled a gathering of chimney-sweeps. And what wonder? The loft *was* a chimney! The smoke from the cottage fire filtered itself through the rafters that composed the floor of our bed-chamber, filled the tiny space to suffocation, then wandered into the outer world through a hole in the roof. Everything was an inch deep in grime; the very spiders had long since been fumigated to a better land. Now, as we had taken possession of the loft in the darkness—with not even a candle to light us to bed—it was not until dawn that we became aware of our condition. Our faces, hands, and clothing were black as soot could make them!

We enjoyed the luxury of a bath—in a brook that babbled hard by the hamlet—as perhaps we never before had done to quite the same extent. It all but compensated for the absence of breakfast. Yes, it is a sad truth, no breakfast was forthcoming! The cottagers were too poor. We could not in conscience rob them of another meal; we could not take the last potato out of the mouths of the friendly little girls. And it is strange, but true, that money possessed apparently no value in their eyes. They lived too retired from the busy world that buys and sells to attach much importance to the handful of coins we left behind us. The children, attracted by their brightness, played with them unreprieved.

Our mules had passed the night under the broad eaves of the cottage—a cold and comfortless stable they must have

found it ; but, hardy little animals ! they appeared no whit the worse for the experience. We found them awaiting us in attitudes of inimitable patience.

The morning dawned with every promise of a fine day. Rocks and scanty herbage glittered with moisture. Away to the east the sunrise flamed over dark hills. Seen by the light of day, the hamlet appeared even more poverty-stricken than we had imagined. Many of the hovels were falling into ruin ; some were already abandoned. Great stones had been laid upon the roofs to better enable the little dwellings to withstand the gales of winter. Gray and weatherworn, they partook of the character of the hills, and at a little distance were hardly to be distinguished from the boulder-strewn mountain-side against which they were built.

The sun being well above the horizon, we took to the road with light hearts, and, alas ! equally light stomachs.

At noon we halted before a cottage surrounded by a square of farmyard. An old man surveyed us grimly from the open door. To him we appealed, but his replies to our entreaties for food were curt and uncivil. Poverty had drained him of the last drop of hospitality, for he bade us begone ; he had no food, he said, to waste upon strangers. With despair in our hearts we were about to turn away, when a boy who had been listening intently to our conversation suggested that there might be eggs. A search of ten minutes was rewarded by six eggs. We devoured them raw, standing in the little farmyard, and then, our hunger stayed to the extent of a solitary egg apiece, we again rode away into the sweltering sunlight.

It was nine o'clock, and twilight had already fallen before San Pedro came into sight. Our first care was to find some hospitable soul willing to house us for the night. Fortunately we experienced no difficulty—a cousin of Isodoro's invited us to his house. It was a comfortable dwelling, and boasted of two rooms. No door separated them, so that there was an entire absence of privacy, the occupants of one room being not only able to hear, but also to see everything that took place in the other.

The family among whom we found ourselves consisted

of our host and his pretty wife, three children, and a female servant.

Cooking is always a laborious process in the house of a Portuguese peasant, and this occasion was no exception to the rule. A fire had to be lighted, eggs had to be searched for, a pan had to be borrowed from a neighbour, and it was eleven o'clock before we eventually sat down to supper. The entire family collected to watch us eat, and our deeds of gastronomic valour elicited frequent expressions of astonishment.

At length even our abnormal appetites were satisfied, and, leaning back in our chairs, we beamed upon our audience through clouds of tobacco-smoke.

Our host, it appeared, was the barber of San Pedro, and in his professional capacity eyed our untrimmed hair and ragged beards with disapproval.

'Senhores,' said he at length, 'it goes to my heart to see your uncared-for appearance. You are too rich in the matter of hair! Will you do me the honour of placing yourselves under my razor?'

We were in that blissful condition that any request, not entirely unreasonable, would have met with our consent, and as the worthy fellow was longing to lay hands on us, we told him that he could set about the business as soon as he pleased. To see him skipping from one room to another, collecting soap, razors, scissors, and all the paraphernalia of his profession, you would have imagined that hair-cutting was the one serious passion of his life, as indeed it was. A bit of a wag in his way, he amused us with a continual stream of small-talk; the gossip of the neighbourhood was related with many quaint additions that emanated, I am certain, from his imagination.

'You seem fond of your profession,' said Warden.

'Senhor,' cried the barber, pausing in the act of sharpening his razor, 'I love it. It is the occupation of an artist; in what other will you find the same nicety and discretion, the same necessity for skill and judgment? A moment's hesitation, a shake of the hand, and an enraged customer is the result. Senhor, do not be anxious; I can circumnavigate a pimple with the most artful touches. *Deos!*

it is a profession for a gentleman. What variety there is in it !’

‘One beard is much like another,’ argued Warden.

‘Do not believe it,’ said the barber with great earnestness. ‘There are as many sorts of beards as of customers ! The rough, the smooth, the silky, the bristly ; the beard quiescent, and the beard pugnacious. Everyone of them requires different treatment ; it is the study of a lifetime. Now, if the *senhor* will kindly be seated, I will at once begin.’

‘I’ll warrant this is the first time you have shaved an Englishman,’ said Warden, as the barber paused in his task.

‘Indeed, no, *senhor* ; I once had the honour of shaving one of your compatriots at Mertola.’

‘What took you there ?’

‘It was before I became a regular barber. I used to clip mules. I did it so dextrously that all who saw my work were filled with delight. They said, “What wasted talent !” So I forsook mules for men, and by my father’s beard ! I have profited but little by the exchange. A man, after all, is only an inferior sort of mule, for hair grows only upon a small portion of his body. *Deos !* a chin ! What is it ? Two sweeps of such a razor as mine, and it is as bare as a hand. But the body of a mule ! Ah, *senhor*, *that* occupies a man for an afternoon !’

‘Do you get many customers here ?’ inquired Warden.

The barber shrugged his shoulders, and his voice assumed a melancholy tone.

‘Few, *senhor*, few. That is my one sorrow, for, as you see, I am a man of an energetic disposition ; I am never so happy as when I am at work. I love hair. Theresa will tell you that.’

‘Indeed he does, *senhores*,’ said his wife, who, seated in a low chair, was engaged in feeding her baby. ‘He married me because my hair was very long and thick, and at times I fear he will cut it off just to keep himself in practice.’

‘Nonsense, wife, nonsense !’ said the barber, laughing.

It was after midnight before we retired to rest. The barber and his wife and baby slept in the inner room ;

Hadow, Warden, and I occupied the outer apartment ; the servant and three elder children made their beds in the street. The latter part of this arrangement was by no means to our taste.

‘We cannot think of depriving them of this room,’ said we.

‘Senhores, I pray you, do not trouble yourselves ; my children are accustomed to sleep out of doors. And, moreover, the night is warm ; they will come to no harm.’

He added many other arguments in favour of his plan, and appeared so hurt at our suggesting to relinquish the apartment that we judged it wiser to abide by his decision. The undressing was very public ; the laws that govern Portuguese hospitality appear to admit the privileged stranger into the most intimate scenes of domestic life. Our tongues are tied, but Modesty still turns her back on Memory with a blush.

CHAPTER XLII

FAREWELL

‘SENHORES ! senhores !’ The voice of the barber disturbed the dream that monopolized my slumbering senses. ‘Senhores ! senhores ! wake up !’

‘Go away,’ grumbled Warden from beneath his blanket.

‘But you *must* get up,’ persisted the voice.

‘*Donnerwetter !* What mean you by disturbing us at this hour of the night ? Animal !’

‘It is half-past three, and I——’

‘Half-past three !’ shouted Hadow. ‘What for a God-forsaken hour is that to awake us ? Know you not that we went to bed at half-past twelve ?’

I sat up and rubbed my eyes. There stood the barber already dressed, a candle in his hand, the very image of perplexity. Through the open door the village lay enshrouded in darkness—stars sparkled in the sky ; the breeze had a chill breath, the presage of the dawn.

‘I cannot help it, senhores. I forgot to tell you last night that I take my wife and children to Almodovar. As you doubtless know, the annual fair begins to-day. We have far to go, and I wish to arrive early to secure customers.’

‘Well, for God’s sake go ; only leave us in peace.’

‘How *can* I go and leave you here ?’ cried the barber in despair. ‘I must lock up my house. I always lock up my house when we go from home. Oh, senhores ! forgive me for disturbing you. I would not willingly turn you out of doors, I swear it ; but on a great occasion like this you can surely understand.’

There was no help for it. The man had, after all, a right

to lock up his house at any hour of the twenty-four that took his fancy ; but in our sleep-bemuddled brains the action awoke only black and ungrateful thoughts. We dressed silently, punctuating our packing with yawns. No one offered us breakfast ; the barber and his family looked upon the meal as an unnecessary luxury, and through the open doorway we could see them already on their mules, only awaiting our departure to be off to Almodovar and the village fair.

A faint haze of light streaked the eastern horizon, but in the village night lay encamped in full force. The hoofs of our mules resounded along the silent street. All was wrapped in gloom and loneliness. We were the only souls awake. We bade farewell to the barber and his family at a turning of the road, and then pursued our way along a dusky valley.

The sunrise was beautiful, but we were in no humour to appreciate sunrises. To make matters worse, the day proved to be one of the hottest we had experienced, and when, after a few hours' ride, the inhabitants of Quintan—a small and objectionable village—refused to supply us with food, we were the most dejected party it is possible to conceive. We broke our fast upon a stale cucumber found by chance in Warden's saddle-bags. Think of it, O ye who sit down daily to a comfortable breakfast ! One stale cucumber divided into six microscopic portions and washed down with neat whisky ! It was a repulsive meal, and has effectively damned cucumbers for me to all eternity. I never see one now but that scene rises to my mind—Hadow carving the sodden vegetable, the circle of dejected faces, the fierce sunlight, the weary and despondent attitudes of the mules !

Forward we marched. The mules drooped their long ears ; the very tin-whistle was silent, its owner justly remarking that he could not be expected to provide music sustained by no more substantial refreshment than the sixth part of a cucumber.

Warden informed us that Esperito Santo was the name of the next village marked upon our line of route ; but although unwilling to disbelieve in the existence of the

'Holy Spirit,' our souls longed for proofs of his assertion. Like Christian and Faithful, we questioned every wayfarer we encountered. The answers we received were invariably the same: '*Una legua, senhores.*' Still we advanced, and still the Holy Spirit remained at the same fixed distance—a more elastic league or a more disembodied Spirit it would be hard to imagine.

I could with difficulty keep my eyes from closing; time and again I was on the point of falling asleep, when a jerk from Saccharin recalled me to the world of reality. Warden shared my sensations. Pedro slept profoundly upon the top of the baggage-mule. Hadow alone appeared to be wide awake.

At last Esperito Santo straggled into sight, a mere huddle of houses, heralded by shouts from our men. We welcomed its appearance with thankful feelings, for we were both exhausted and famishing. There was a humble *estalagem* at which we baited the mules. A meal was served to us in a veranda. We did full justice to it, and when every crumb had disappeared, settled ourselves for a smoke; but no sooner had Warden lighted his pipe than he fell fast asleep—his briar rolled unheeded to the floor. I remember laughing at the incident, but even as I laughed my eyes closed, and the next thing of which I was conscious was Hadow shaking me by the arm.

'Wake up, dear boy; come with me, and we shall see if the mules are ready to start.'

I yawned loudly.

'Why did you wake me up?' I grumbled. 'You might have let me sleep for ten minutes.'

'You have been snoring like a pig for forty minutes, lazy animal! Come, I say!' and he dragged me forcibly into the sunlight.

The mules were standing where we had left them, but no muleteers were to be seen.

'Isodoro! Anselmo! where are you?' bellowed Hadow.

No answer was returned. Again he called, and again he waited in vain for a reply. At the sound of his voice a crowd collected. They appeared to take the greatest interest in our affairs.



A HUMBLE *ESTALAGEM*.

‘If you seek your muleteers, senhor,’ said an old man, ‘you will find them asleep in that shed’—and he pointed in the direction of an outhouse that adjoined the inn.

‘*Donnerwetter!* Lazy good-for-nothings!’ ejaculated Hadow, and away he sped in high indignation.

I sat down in the street, and, leaning my back against a cottage wall, gave myself up to thought. The crowd dispersed. Everything appeared to be soaked in unreality. The muleteers, Warden, even Hadow, drifted away into the land of phantoms—Hadow, I remember, occurring to me as an especially unpleasant phantom, and one to be avoided at all costs. I had come to this conclusion, and I may have possibly closed my eyes for one minute, but no more, when a weighty object fell on my shoulder. Before I could summon my scattered senses I was shaken with the force of an earthquake.

‘*Herr Gott!* you are again asleep, animal!’

I sat up and gazed around. The muleteers were adjusting the harness in sleepy silence. Warden was to be seen yawning in the doorway. I had friends in adversity. The thought consoled me, and, picking myself up, I took my place in the cavalcade with all cheerfulness at my command.

Refreshed by a meal and snatches of sleep, I was in the humour to appreciate our last ride. The thought that it was our ‘last ride’ saddened me, and lent a melancholy charm to every incident of the afternoon. An unaccustomed tenderness took possession of me; a wave of affection that even went the length of embracing the eccentricities of Hadow and Saccharin. The Professor had regained his good-humour—no very difficult task, I take pleasure in recording—and joined from time to time in the conversation. His manner was unusually hearty; his successful campaign against sloth warmed his inner man into a glow that was all but friendly.

‘Hadow,’ said I, lured into confidence by the geniality of his behaviour, ‘this is our last ride.’

‘*Ja wohl*, dear boy.’

‘Our last one, Hadow. In spite of cucumbers and

evolution, I will look back upon this trip with feelings of regret.'

'What! are you sad that you have come, Hein?'

'No, no, Professor; you mistake me. My regret is that it is over.'

'*Ach so!* but that is foolish.'

I eyed him in perplexity.

'Can you not understand regretting that a happy period of your life is done with for ever? Do you never feel affection for some place, let us say, where you have thoroughly enjoyed yourself?'

Hadow roared with laughter.

'Never have I heard such foolishness, dear boy; to be affectionate over a place! *Herr Gott!* It is as bad as to be in love with a woman! No, I never regret anything—life is too short.'

'Not even mammoths?' I said thoughtlessly.

Hadow became serious at once. He laid his hand upon the neck of Saccharin—we were walking side by side.

'Do not make jokes upon such a subject, dear boy. To me it is my life. I would give ten years to have been successful in these caves; but, *donnerwetter!* I am not beaten—do not think it for a moment. Oh no! When Hans Hadow makes up his mind, no need of words, I assure you.'

The afternoon sun was by this time low on the horizon; day was dying in a blaze of splendour.

'We ought to see the Guadiana soon,' said Anselmo.

'Yes,' assented Warden; 'I know this part of the country well. That is the village of Mosquito over there to the left. In my opinion we should take this path to the right. I am almost certain it comes out opposite Pomarão.'

His advice was taken, and for some time we followed a track that climbed a steep hill in long serpentine coils.

'How will we cross the river?' I inquired.

'There is a ferry-boat,' replied Warden. 'If the man is there we can easily signal to him to come to our assistance.'

We wended our way upwards. Higher and higher we climbed, without being rewarded by the sight of which we

were in search. Nothing was to be seen save rolling hills, sinking and swelling on every side. At last as we neared a summit that promised to overlook its neighbours, Pedro, who had run ahead, gave a shrill cry and flung his hat into the air.

‘The Guadiana, senhores ! the Guadiana !’

In another minute we stood beside him. It was a noble prospect. Far beneath us the Guadiana rolled her waters along—a dark and stately stream, flowing majestically between wild and precipitous hills. Directly below us on a stretch of level ground, close to where a little waterfall gleamed in the sunlight, was a mill, and from our lofty position we could see the miller and his men enjoying their evening meal in the open air. On the further bank of the river lay Pomarão, its roofs aglow in the evening light. It was a beautiful but, to my mind, a melancholy scene. The gradual and solemn retirement of day accorded well with the feelings that dominated my thoughts. The waning light symbolized our wanderings—now so nearly over—the mustering shadows stood for the coming years that would pass the finger of oblivion over all but recollection. Following a downward path, we soon reached the water’s edge.

Our parting from the muleteers was affecting. That they should show unfeigned sorrow at our departure did not come to us entirely in the light of a surprise. I have already dwelt upon their character. I knew them to be independent and proud, courteous and considerate ; I suspected also that they were capable of attaching themselves to their employers. The chain that binds servants to masters is in other lands forged from baser metal, but little of the gold of friendship refines the mercenary character of its composition. But in this case it was otherwise. Anselmo and Isodoro were our friends ; we had shared the pleasures as well as the vicissitudes of travel ; they had smoked our cigarettes, we had accepted their snuff ; side by side we had sat at the same table and lain on the same apology for a bed ; confidences had passed between us : Isodoro had related to me much of his private affairs—of his pretty wife in Salir, and of his one child, a little girl, who was so ill that

he feared she would never recover. What marvel, then, that when the time arrived for us to part we were loth to bid them farewell ; what marvel that they revealed a warmth of affection that did honour to their hearts ? They embraced us repeatedly ; Isodoro especially was deeply moved. Again and again he returned to clasp me in his arms. With vehement gestures he pressed me to accept a bowl hollowed out of a single piece of cork which I had admired, and which was used indiscriminately by master and by mules. He had fashioned it himself with infinite labour ; it was the most interesting of his belongings, and I could see that it possessed great value in his eyes.

‘Take it, senhor,’ said he, the tears rolling down his cheeks ; ‘it will recall me to your mind. When far away you will look at it and say : “*Deos !* I got that from my friend Isodoro the muleteer.”’

Despite my lessons in Portuguese etiquette, I accepted the gift at once. I wrung his hand silently ; he dashed a tear from his eyes, and thus we parted.

We embarked—the oars dipped simultaneously—we shot into midstream. The dying sunlight sparkled upon the waters of the Guadiana with the same brightness with which it had smiled upon our wandering days, yet—it was different ; and again, as on the occasion of my parting with Colomba, I realized that the difference lay in me. The hills, the track, the cavalcade of mules and muleteers had not changed, yet they were no longer *our* hills, *our* track, *our* cavalcade ; they had already receded into the past ; they—like the caves and Colomba—had already become but a part of bygone experience, to be revisited only through the medium of recollection.

And so it was really all over ! I drew a deep sigh, and, turning towards the little party we were rapidly leaving behind us, paid them the tribute of a last farewell. The muleteers still waved to us, and once, twice, and again Saccharin raised her voice in—what it pleased me to imagine was—a friendly and final valediction.

As I watched, and as the distance that separated us momentarily increased, Isodoro and Anselmo turned to other occupations—they appeared to be readjusting the

harness of the mules ; and as I continued to watch the lashes of their whips spoke out, the cavalcade started into motion, the bells jangled faintly, the dust rose in a golden cloud, and the little company wended its way into the hollows of the hills. Once again we saw it reappear—a tiny band dwarfed into miniature—and then again the hills took it to themselves, and we saw it no more.

THE END.

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