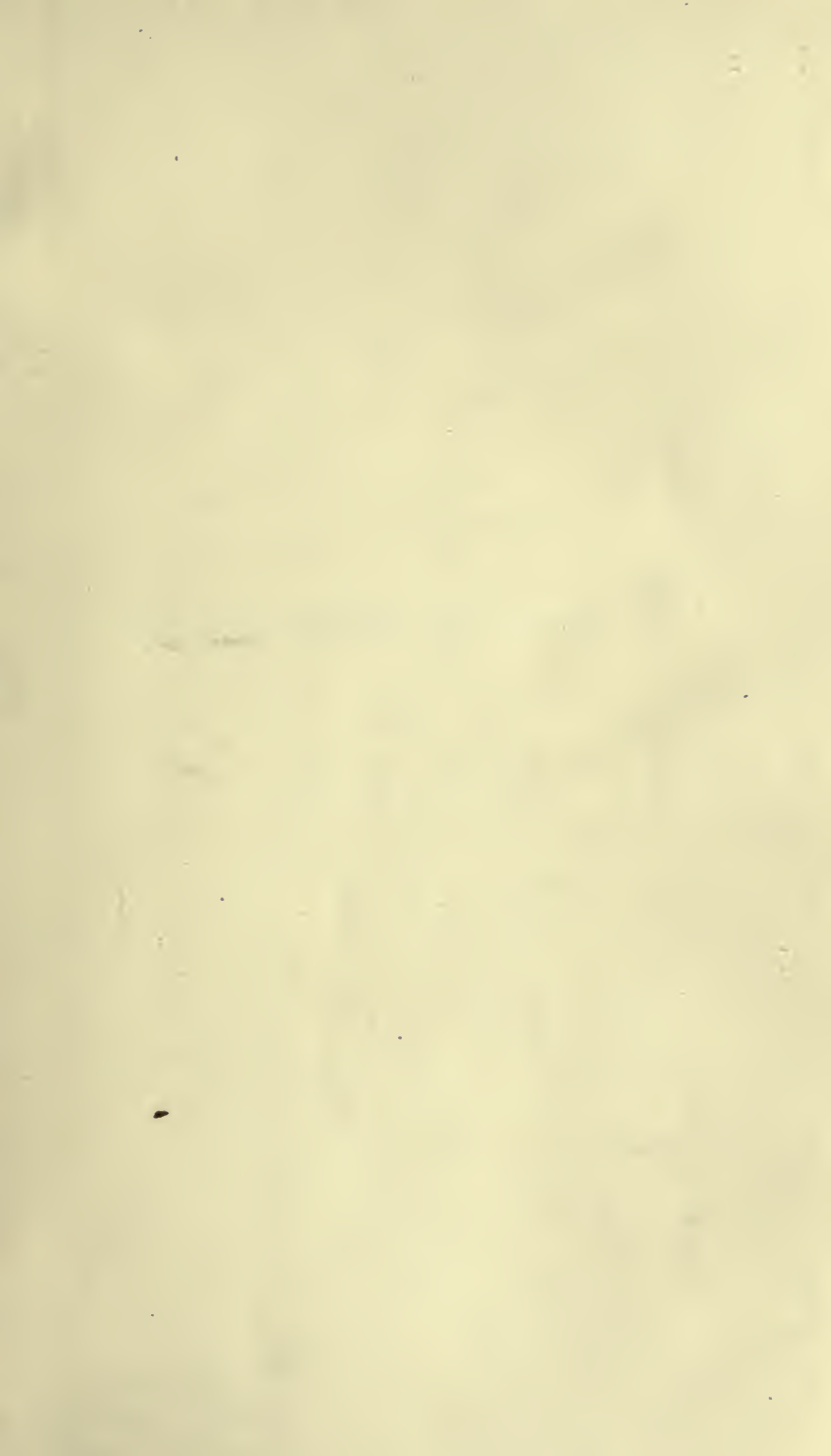


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SICILIAN WAYS AND DAYS



"A SOLITARY BRIDGE." (Page 141.)



"THE ROCK-BOUND SHRINE." (Page 158.)

SICILIAN WAYS AND DAYS

BY

LOUISE CAICO

WITH ONE HUNDRED AND
TWENTY-EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS



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FOREWORD

THE following account of the manners and customs of Sicilians has been written down on the spot from first-hand acquaintance with the people, gained by a long residence amongst them, in the province of Caltanissetta, a region as yet unaffected by travellers or by contact with the outer world.

Many of the scenes and sayings described would be a "sealed book" to anyone not acquainted with Sicilians, and even those who are would not be able to participate in them, unless admitted to the intimacy of Sicilians, who are by nature secretive and suspicious of outsiders.

Liability to brigandage is more than once alluded to. This should not deter visitors from coming to the island. They have nothing to fear. Travellers might pass by the most unfrequented regions with impunity; it is the *residents* whom the lawless aim at, especially persons who have landed property or vested interest in the land. Some private quarrel

or some local political difference or rivalry is usually the motive rather than the ransom demanded. The absence of motive and the difficulty of communicating with the families of strangers gives them their security.

It would not be inappropriate to give a few words of comment about some of the customs described in this work, which will enable the reader to understand and appreciate them better, and, with the help of his own erudition, perceive their analogy with ancient history, or, better still, mythology.

In "Funeral Customs" we see the dead carried in an arm-chair around the village, a custom which is lost now, though an exception is made in the smaller villages in favour of the parish priest when he dies, and we find that this exception is maintained also in Tuscany, at S. Stefano di Calcinaia.

That this is a very old custom can be seen by some sculptures on Greek and Roman tombs, where corpses are carried in this lugubrious manner.

In Palermo, until 1860, the dead were carried to the cemetery sitting up in a *portantina* (sedan-chair).

In "Funeral Customs" we find also that a dinner is always sent in for the bereaved family's use.

We do not think this is an atavic remnant of the banquets which the Romans held by the side of the tombs, mentioned by Cicero, but rather a charitable intention of enabling the family to take food in a time of trouble, when it might be unseemly as well as inconvenient to think about meals.

And the name they give at Montedoro to this meal—the *conzu*, called at Palermo *cunsòlu*—may originate from the verb *consolare*, to console; or, better still, from the Sicilian verb *cunzari*, to set or lay out anything, the dinner-table especially.

The harvest customs are the most poetic we witnessed amongst the peasants at Montedoro, beginning at the Rogation outdoor service, when the parish priest goes out to bless the cornfields.

This reminds us, as it should, of an old Roman custom. In a spot half an hour from Rome, on the Via Campana, there was a wood sacred to the goddess Dia (Nature, also called *Maia*, whence the month of *May*). The *frati Arvali campestris sacerdotes* lived there, and offered sacrifices for the welfare of agriculture, especially during three days of May, when they went out in procession, singing as they walked: "O gods, O Mars! defend us from calamities, from misfortunes!"

We see the Sicilian peasant during harvest-time

toiling under a sky of fire for very little beyond his scant nourishment, but can anything be more touching than his devotion to his favourite saints, his invocations to them before, during, and after work, adorning thus with a halo of solemnity the prosaic reality of his work and expressing his pathetic endurance ?

The quaint and beautiful "Praises of the Lord," sung on the threshing-floor, must have a very ancient origin ; many have traced in them the worship of Demeter and Persephone, and the same pagan origin can be given to the habit of dividing the corn by beginning to count with the words : "In the name of God !" Does not this remind us of the pagan *ab Jove principio* ?

The Lenten dirges are equally ancient, and their name is legion. We give only a short example of them in this work, but they are interminable, and vary from province to province. They are without doubt a remembrance of the lamentations sung at funerals by hired mourners (*preficæ*) long before the Christian era.

And since we have alluded to the Lenten and Easter ceremonies, we should mention the curious outdoor function of the *Incontro* (meeting) between Mary and her Son on Easter morning. In some

places the Virgin alone is carried about in the fields, looking for her son, and we agree with Paton, who, in his *Picturesque Sicily* (p. 252), says that, more than an evangelical image, this is "a reminder of the wanderings of Demeter in search of the lost Persephone. The more one studies the mythology of ancient Trinacria, the more firmly he becomes convinced that the early Christian Fathers founded many ceremonies upon the pagan rites which inspired the devotion of the Greeks and the Romans. We can gain much knowledge from the writings of classic authors concerning the ritual of the worship of Demeter, and it is safe to say that Christian priests have added little to that ritual, have taken little from it, and to-day religious ceremonies practised by the farming communities of Sicily are essentially the same as they were twenty-five centuries ago, with the exception that Christian saints have usurped the honours and dignities of pagan deities."

In fact, can anything more pagan be imagined than the crowd flourishing flaming torches and yelling around the bonfires at Santa Lucia's festival? Is not this a distant reproduction of the old fire-worship?

The big drums, which play such a conspicuous

and noisy part at all religious ceremonies, have a more recent origin, being probably an Arabo-Saracenic importation.

The bond of friendship which unites for life the two *compari* at a christening ceremony can have many distant causes and origins. We incline to give the preference to what the well-known Sicilian writer, Ragusa Moleti, says about the possible origin of this spiritual relationship :

“It is allowable to suppose that the *compare* brotherhood between two men may have originated in their need for reciprocal help, and this need would arise all the more spontaneously in the heart of men who were by nature refractory to all authority above them. Whoever feels he may not suffice to himself in life seeks to give and receive strength in the brotherly friendship of another man. This is the feeling which gave birth to those ancient ties known as *brothers-in-arms* (*fratelli d'armi*) between the knights, of which medieval history is full. Before the times of knighthood in Gallic Brittany, when two men swore friendship to each other, they used to tie themselves together for battle, so as to fight side by side, and when the one died the other often killed himself, so as to join his friend's soul in the other world. Probably

this custom passed over from Brittany to Normandy, and the Normans may have brought it to Sicily, where, degenerating according to times and civilization, the christening of a child became the occasion for sealing with a sacred tie the friendship of two men who would need each other's help during life."

The travelled reader will find much in these Sicilian descriptions which has not come under his observation. He must not, therefore, conclude that the things described did not happen. It simply means that between him and the inner life of the people there was a veil he was unable to lift.

And now, before leaving the volume in the benevolent reader's hand, the author must crave the indulgence of the critical for the illustrations, taken with a small-sized Kodak camera at a time when the possibility of their being published was not even contemplated.

SICILIAN WAYS AND DAYS

HOW WE ARRIVED AT MONTEDORO

A PLEASANT journey by sea from Genoa to Palermo, three days' shopping in Palermo, and then six hours' railway journey in that fraud commonly called *treno diretto* across the solitary interior regions of Sicily, stopping at the lonely little station of Serradifalco, in the province of Caltanissetta, the only Sicilian province not washed by the sea.

Several uncouth-looking men are about us at once; they look picturesque in their brown fustian or velvet, muddy top-boots, skullcaps and cartridge-belts—they all carry firearms. My anxiety—I took them for brigands—is quickly dispelled by the explanation, kindly volunteered, that these are the best friends and trusty servants of the family, called *campieri* (private rural guards and overseers).

They seize on our luggage and on our persons, which are packed into a dismally small canary-yellow box perched on high wheels, pierced with little cage-windows and drawn by three bony creatures, more like skeletons in harness, except that the harness here consists of rope and string. This is the vehicle which will take us to Montedoro, covering the distance of nearly nine miles at the rate of four miles an hour, without counting occasional stoppages to mend the harness or pick up any article of luggage which may bump off from the roof of our box. We arrange our legs and elbows so as to fit in with the least possible inconvenience, and we begin to move. The *campieri*, needless to say, mount their horses, carrying their rifles in front of them across the saddle, and ride after the carriage.

They point out to us Montedoro in the distance, and we screw our heads out of the cage-windows to look at it, as it lies on a distant plateau surrounded by crags and valleys. Its eastern-looking, low, flat-roofed houses smile in the sunshine, mellowed and beautified by the distance. The background is formed by a chain of lofty mountains, with the *Rocca di Sutura* and Mount Cammarata, the latter covered with snow, and giving a very good



"THE CAMPIERI." (Page 19.)



"THE LITTLE STATION OF SERRADIFALCO." (Page 19.)

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APPENDIX

HOW WE ARRIVED AT MONTEDORO 21

idea of the Jungfrau, of which it has the outline.

A good carriage-road, mostly used by sulphur-laden carts, meanders up and about low, rounded hills and broad valleys, where not a tree, not a house, shows the presence of man in these regions—nothing but corn, young green corn, covering with its emerald hue those immense stretches of land which were once the granary of Rome. And we go on, and up, never losing sight of Montedoro on its plateau, at about 500 metres above the sea.

At last, with the usual cracks of the whip and convulsive gallop of the last minute, so dear to the Sicilian driver's heart, we enter Montedoro, turning at a sharp angle of the road, darting through the broad, white piazza, and stopping in a courtyard in front of an old, battered, dilapidated, venerable-looking building which, I am told, is our house.

We are with some difficulty extracted out of the yellow box; more uncouth-looking men come to take the luggage, each grasping a small parcel and carrying it single file into the house; some maids, with large bangles in their ears and broad smiles on their countenances, meet us in the doorway, welcoming us with the usual expression,

“*Ssa benedica*”* and their mistress immediately asks whether we want dinner, at which, one and all, we answer we should dearly like to wash first. . . .

It was then that my early experience of Sicilian ways came as a surprise to me, as will be seen in the following pages, where I have attempted to describe my room such as I found it, what I discovered in it, and what I finally made of it.

* Abbreviation of *Vossia benedica* (Your Excellence, bless us).

MY ROOM

ON the point of beginning a descriptive journey around my room, I can't exactly tell why I thought it more appropriate to begin with my bed.

Is it because I find it as nearly comfortable as anything can be in this uncomfortable house ?

Is it because I spend in it the best part of the twenty-four hours ?

The real reason, I think, is that it is the only bed in the house.

Sicilian beds, especially in the interior of the island, are invariably composed of two iron trestles, on which lie three deal boards painted in sombre green. Upon these are laid some half-dozen mattresses as hard as a miser's heart. This is a Sicilian bed, and a more ungainly object I have never seen, especially when, during the day, these mattresses are rolled up and piled on each other, with the sheets and counterpane neatly folded on the top, conveying thus a vague im-

pression that the owner of the bed has started for a lengthy journey.

My bed is quite different. In fact, it is a bed in the common, accepted, and natural sense of the word, having the usual springs, with only one mattress, though that tolerably hard—a thing which ceased to disturb me when I heard that this mattress had been made some ten years before, and not touched since.

How this unique specimen of a nearly civilized bed came to be found here is a mystery to me. However, here it is. I appropriated it the day we arrived, guessing, when I saw it, that it was the only bed in the house where I might possibly close my eyes in sweet oblivion of life and its dull cares.

The walls of this room have remained in their rustic, unfinished state ever since it was built, some hundred years ago, and no one as yet has had the moral courage to cover them with the paper which was bought for that purpose long ago, and which fills six or eight chests in a lumber-room downstairs.

As a partial and temporary correction of such a dreadful state of affairs, I have covered the walls at the head and along the side of my bed with some gay silk and wool rugs, thus putting in that



"THE MEN WHO LOOK AFTER OUR PROPERTY." (Page 25.)



"A DISMALLY SMALL, CANARY-YELLOW BOX." (Page 20.)

corner a touch of warm colour which looks very bright by the barrenness of the remaining walls.

In close proximity to my bed stands a small table, where a few books and magazines show the bad habit of reading in bed, a thing I am rather given to doing, especially on rainy mornings—fortunately we have very few of them—when depression seems to float in the air, and everything is damp, from the window-panes to our spirits.

Continuing my pilgrimage round my room, I come upon a nice art-serge portière, black-flowered, on red ground. It comes from England, and, I am sure, feels out of sorts here.

This curtain hides a door leading into a back room where I have my washing installation; but it is also a kind of public room where everyone passes, from the *Sindaco* (Mayor) of the place to the men who look after our property, and come at odd hours of the morning and evening, but especially of the morning, to see the Mayor or the mistress of the house, who have their rooms beyond my washing-room, which thus becomes the passage from one part of the house to the other. It is a kind of neutral zone uniting the two apartments.

My courteous reader, who is plentifully endowed

with common-sense, will now ask why I put myself to the inconvenience of washing in such a room when it would be so simple to have my washing-stand and bath brought into my room, which, he guesses, must be very spacious.

Alas! I did try to bring about this *coup d'état* during the first week of my stay here, but had to give it up, for I found I was going against one of the prejudices most cherished by Sicilians.

They think it very bad for one's health to have the washing utensils in one's bedroom, and, loose as they are in their principles about most things, here they are firm. I have been in many Sicilian houses, fine ones and poor ones, but, with very few exceptions, I have never seen a washing-stand in a bedroom (except in hotels). If the houses were large enough to allow every room to have its own bathroom, I should have nothing to say; but what I object to is that in most cases, even with well-to-do families, there is *one* little toilet-room or closet, where—I am speaking the strict truth—a basin on an old chair does for a washing-stand, towels hang on pegs, a few handsome water-jugs stand about, and the dirty water is thrown out of the window!

At Montedoro the house boasts of many such



"A MASSIVE BRASS BASIN." (Page 26.)



"A FEW HANDSOME WATER-JUGS." (Page 26.)

To face page 26.

elementary washing-closets, but I have found that in most houses, and even in the flats at Palermo, there is only *one* such room, where *all* the members of the family, without distinction of sex or of age, in turns go and wash, after they have put on their clothes and been up and about the house any time, from five minutes to several hours.

As soon as I arrived and began to find out things, I declared my back room would be used by myself alone as a washing-room, and suffered it to remain a passage-room the rest of the time, feeling more than grateful at the thought that it was exclusively mine from the point of view of ablutions!

When I enter it in my nightgown, after cautiously peeping to ascertain whether I can do it safely, I make a rush for the door leading to the apartment on the right, and lock and bolt it; then I fly to the door on the left, and do the same there, deeming it fortunate if I do not find myself face to face with the Mayor or with one of our men, though if such a thing happened they would be equal to the occasion, and say gravely, "*Bacio la mano*" (I kiss your hand) before retiring. I have been caught once, so I know.

After I have secured various cumbrous keys,

bars, and bolts, I go through my ablutions serenely, but with a malicious slowness, whilst an angry crowd of impatient people accumulate at both doors.

Sometimes it is one of the maids, who, leaving her milk on the fire—a straw fire—has dawdled into her mistress's room for no apparent reason; now she is anxious to dawdle back to her milk and straw fire, and finding the door closed, talks Sicilian gibberish behind it, of which I am perfectly unconscious, as I don't understand her.

Sometimes it is the local barber—such a good cello-player—who must get through to shave the Mayor, who with characteristic patience has been waiting for him, in his shirt-sleeves, all the morning.

Sometimes it is the Mayor himself who begs to be allowed to pass through, on his way to the town-hall to unite in lawful wedlock two country lovers, who are patiently waiting for him; but I splash away, and take my time.

Then, when I find I have no longer any reason for remaining in that room, I watch my opportunity, unlock one of the two doors, and fly back into my own room, the going and coming being immediately resumed, the public gazing with wonder at my tub, sponges, etc., and wondering

what on earth—or, rather, in the water!—I can do with them; to conclude, finally, that “Continental” women are eccentric, even if they have their good points. (In Sicily, anyone who is not a Sicilian is dubbed “Continental,” whether he is a native of Naples, Milan, London, or St. Petersburg.)

Let us go back now to the door from which I rambled into the washing-passage room: next to this door, against the wall—everything here is placed against the walls, giving one the impression that the room has been cleared for dancing or for blind-man’s buff—stands a good, useful table. I keep upon it books and magazines, and it is covered also with a serge cover, which, as a bit of red in a room sadly wanting in colour, does very well.

Above it, in an appropriate rack, are three or four guns and rifles, very much in harmony with the general atmosphere, as firearms here are ever present, and certainly encumbering, though for my part I cannot in this case say that familiarity breeds contempt, for I feel a kind of thrill whenever I dust them.

Then comes a door leading into the room we use as a sitting-room; this also is covered with red serge curtains. It is an uninteresting, official door,

not half as exciting as the one that leads into the washing-passage room !

The first thing which strikes my eyes now is a tall, hideous mahogany chest of drawers with a marble top. This piece of furniture is not old enough to be worm-eaten and antique, nor yet modern enough to be handy and dainty. The result is an ugly thing. I have been told I ought to be thankful for it, and I try to be.

When I arrived, I found upon it the usual display of cheap, gaudy coffee-pot and cups, the popular ornament of Sicilian bedrooms, to say nothing of a precious posy of crudely-coloured artificial flowers under a glass shade.

I had been here but half an hour when I requested the mistress of the house to adorn some other room with the posy, and to put the coffee-service on someone else's chest of drawers (though it struck me as if its most appropriate place would be in the dining-room cupboard); in their stead I arranged various things, such as a travelling-clock, some photos of the children, and a large, glittering, yellow crystal of pure sulphur from our mines.

Near it stands a jug for drinking-water, no Sicilian room being complete without it; and very queerly-shaped these porous jugs are, with their

two handles and four mouths, and they only cost a penny.

We have now come to an important item in a woman's room—the dressing-table. This one is really nice, of mahogany, with a drawer, marble top, and movable glass.

Out here they have queer ideas as to how a dressing-table should be arranged, starting from the theory that there should be nothing on it, which simplifies matters considerably.

They call them *combing-tables*, thus strictly describing the truth about them, for they only use them for doing their hair, or, rather, *having their hair done*, as every provincial lady's ideal of real gentility is that of having her hair elaborately done up rather late in the day by a sympathizing friend or maid, who delightfully rubs oil into it, and toilet vinegar next, until her head smells for all the world like a highly-seasoned salad !

Then combs—brushes are unknown here—hair-pins, etc., are untidily thrust out of sight in the drawer, and there's an end to it !

As I disliked the feeling of the cold marble, I put upon my dressing-table a toilet-cover ; then I arranged upon it the usual trinket-box, pincushion, hand-mirror, hair and clothes brushes, hairpin-

box, button-hooks, scissors, and photos of the children.

This simple arrangement has become a subject of wonder for all who have come to see it on the sly when I was out of the way, and many times, when I have been known to be a few miles off, relations or friends of the mistress of the house have begged to be shown that wonderful display of mysterious and elegant articles, the use of which some fail to see; whilst they all invariably stare at the photos, the custom here being to bury all the photos you possess out of sight, in the bottom of green wooden chests, with books, pictures, ornaments, and other things of that kind which we, with our eccentric notions, like to have around and about us wherever we go.

Sometimes I look at that dressing-table and wonder what I should do without it.

Upon asking myself whether I had rather do without it, or without my writing-table, I have come to the shameful conclusion that I had rather do without my writing-table, for I could write, but not dress, anywhere.

That settles the matter, and we now come to a chair.

My first mention of a chair may lead you into an

error—namely, that this is the first chair I have met in this journey, and you have wondered that such a well-appointed room should have such a scarcity of chairs; so I will at once tell you that there are in my room sixteen chairs, which will perhaps give an idea of its size, seeing that they are not in the way; only I did not mention them, as I should then have been obliged to speak continually of chairs.

I mentioned this one because it is a self-asserting chair; I mean that I cannot help taking notice of it, as I always pass it on my way from the dressing-table to the window, for, indeed, we have now come to the window.

We shall leave it for the last, and see what comes next.

My working-corner appears now; it is represented by a gipsy-table covered with red cloth—most things are red in my room, perhaps because blue is my favourite colour; my work-basket is on this table, a low chair is near it, and generally a little heap of anything that needs mending is near the work-basket.

Here we come to the end of the third side, and find an iron cot with a pink counterpane.

This is where “Donna Letizia,” as they call her

here, sleeps the placid little slumbers of her five years ; but she begins to be slightly larger than the little cot—so much so that we shall have to pass her on to three green boards, upon which she will expand at her ease.

Passing on to the fourth side, we first of all come to a bookcase, the shelves of which are well filled with books.

When I first placed this bookcase here and arranged books in it people thought me very odd, as it is the custom here to keep books—and everything one possesses, in fact—locked in hideous green boxes, which are mostly kept under the beds, with the result that you never find the book you want at the moment you want it, and finish, of course, by forgetting what books you possess.

Moreover, the key of the particular box you want to open always happens to be lost.

This novel idea of actually displaying books in shelves to please the eye and be easily reached for perusal has made people stare, and wonder where I have learnt such unaccountable ways.

On the top shelf are some photographs, and in the middle stands a marble group of Apollo holding a lyre and sitting on a reclining lion.

This lovely thing used to live—like all pretty



"SICILIAN CHILD." (Page 42.)



"DONNA LETIZIA." (Page 33.)

To face page 34.

things in this house, is old, picturesque, and . . . dirty. It bears a massive brass basin, about twenty inches wide, with two movable handles, and contains a glowing heap of burning almond-shells.

No other cinders are allowed in the braziers, for almond-shells do not produce carbonic acid or smoke. They burn quietly, and yield a pleasant warmth. The custom is to sit around the braziers warming one's hands and feet, and stir the burning heap with a tiny little brass shovel, the size of a spoon, which looks like a toy. These braziers can be carried about from room to room, and are very handy. However, there is something queer about them, something heathenish . . . they put me in mind of the sacred fire watched by the Vestals. . . .

We have now come to the writing-table, which is the best piece of furniture in the room. It is completely shrouded in a dark-red serge cloth—or, rather, it used to be red, but the good Sicilian sun, which I never shut out, has turned it into a faded, meaningless hue with very little red about it.

However, I keep on remembering that it was red once, and that is sufficient for me.

The writing-table is also pleasant, because it has several nice things upon it, which are quite out of



"MY FRIEND LEONE." (Page 40.)



"MY OTHER FRIENDS THE HORSES." (Page 40.)

To face page 36.

keeping with the atmosphere here—a brass ink-stand, a red leather blotter, a bee-clock, a brass tray for pens, a scissor-case, etc.

It has also an olive-wood box, photographs, and a square block of melted sulphur of a rich saffron yellow, which I use as a paper-weight.

Then, in a pretty jug bought at a fair—I greatly admire the local pottery—there is always a bunch of wild-flowers, many of which would delight a botanist, such as orchis of various colours, violet and yellow irises, yellow crocuses, the small pink anemone with narrow petals, and the saffron-flower, which dyes our bare hills with its delicate violet hue.

This writing-table is a friend of mine. I pass a great deal of my time at it ; and here I think best and meditate most, especially when I turn round and look at Apollo. . . .

If it has not bored you to go all round with me, before inspecting the window and its view, I will tell you something about the manner in which they dust a room here, which is novel and original ; at any rate, it is the method followed by the mistress of the house and her maids, and which *I* have not adopted.

You begin by ascertaining whether the window

is shut, and if by chance it happens to be open, you close it carefully, especially if it is a fine day.

Then you grasp a short-handled whip, a harmless kind of cat-o'-nine tails made up of shreds and strips of cloth and flannel. Grasping this instrument, you begin to beat to right and left, on the chairs, on the walls, on the furniture—if there is any—on the green boxes—there are always some—in the air, on the floor, on one side and on the other, and whilst you devote your energy enthusiastically to this domestic war-dance, the dust, disturbed and wondering, rises in a pretty cloud, beyond reach of the avenging cat-o'-nine-tails. When you are tired of this violent exercise, and feel convinced that the room is properly dusted, you carefully close the shutters, leaving the room wrapped in stuffy darkness, and go to beat somewhere else.

I hasten to add that this famous dust-disturber has never entered my room, which I dust according to a slightly different method, and where the window, always wide open, would be enough to frighten it away.

Exactly in front of the writing-table is the window, a poor, rickety little affair, and looking



"AN OLD MAN DRESSED IN A VIOLET ROBE."
(Page 41.)



"CHURCH AT MONTEDORO." (Page 41.)

rather astonished at the red serge curtains hanging on either side.

I am afraid that the points of this window, like most things in this excessive country, go from one extreme to the other. I will explain better: it is very difficult to open it; it objects to being opened; one can see that it had been used to remaining closed for more than sixty years—it is more prudent. But, on the other hand—and I am quite willing to forgive it this fault—when it *is* open, it becomes almost impossible to close it again; it is imperative to call for the help of a vigorous man, of a man gifted with perseverance and strength of will, for it resists. . . .

Another characteristic of it is the mixed view it offers.

To begin with, there is an outhouse just opposite, where our straw is kept.

Here they burn straw for cooking.

I dare say that to the well-balanced mind of a rational cook the idea of roasting, boiling, stewing, or frying with nothing but *straw* will seem not only strange, but utterly impossible.

Still, it is what the person does who presides in the culinary department, and I think it very clever of her.

Perhaps she is specially gifted in that direction ; but, to say the truth, she has only one eye. Her first assistant in the preparation of meals—my pen refuses to call them *dinners*—is her mother, by name *Annidda*, a little old woman with a hump, one hip higher—much higher—than the other, and a wizened countenance covered with wrinkles and smiles ; and a third maid stutters painfully.

But to go back to the straw-house : I wanted to say that the only point of interest about it is that at the beginning of the winter a good many tiles fell in, leaving a large hole in the roof, very convenient for the rain to soak the straw

As it is against the principles of this household ever to mend anything, the hole in the roof has not been repaired yet, which means burning *wet* straw, with smoke *ad lib.*; but I dare say this is none of my business, and I will continue describing what I see from my window.

I see hens stalking about, pecking at each other, and peering with a squint of envy at our pigeons flying about over the roofs.

I see my friend *Leone*, the watch-dog, who generally stands under my window, waiting for a piece of bread.

I see my other friends, the horses, leaving their

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"THE VILLAGE HOUSES." (Page 42.)



"A LITTLE FOUNTAIN." (Page 42.)

To face page 40.

primitive stables to go to drink in the village drinking-trough.

I see an old man dressed in a violet robe, with a pastoral stick in one hand and an oil-can in the other, coming to knock at our door to beg for some oil to keep the lamp burning before St. Joseph's statue in the church.

I see the poor, tumble-down church itself, with its one turret still standing, whilst the other has fallen down, looking for all the world like a dog with one ear cut off, wide cracks in the walls, and the cross bent in a tipsy fashion, because the ground underneath is honeycombed by the adjoining sulphur-mines; and some day a frightful accident will happen, for many of the villagers, the women especially, disobey the Mayor's orders not to crowd the church.

I see, on Sunday mornings, a cluster of the careful ones, those who are afraid to go in, assisting at Mass from the door, the women kneeling on the ground, their heads hidden under their black *mantelline*, the men standing, with heads reverently bowed and uncovered, even under the blazing rays of the midday sun.

What if a stray pig or two saunter leisurely up, and, mixing with the devout worshippers, assist at

a bit of Mass on their own account? Nobody notices them, so why should we? On the other side I see many of the village houses, poor and rustic in appearance, white and low, never more than one story in height, clearly cut against the blue sky, in Oriental fashion.

I see a little fountain where picturesque figures of girls and women, draped in their black cloth head-gear, glide by all day to fetch water in those tall lovely Greek pitchers, which are carried majestically on the head, in a horizontal position when empty, and standing up when full, the black cape always hanging round and partly hiding the expressive, though invariably sad, face.

I often ask myself, Why should everything have a sad conclusion here? Why should the general impression be one of pain, sadness and suffering, from the melancholy melodies in a minor key chanted in the solitary hills by the hard-working labourer to the fatalistic smile of the very children?

Perhaps it is the unconscious and hereditary manifestation of a people who have suffered much in bygone centuries, and, to say the truth, are suffering still.

Or is it, perhaps, the intensity of life here which



"IN A HORIZONTAL POSITION WHEN EMPTY." (Page 42.)



"STANDING UP WHEN FULL." (Page 42.)

produces an instinctive sense of pain and weariness in all things ?

When I am not doing anything, as now, for instance, I gaze before me into space, and see the infinite depth of our blue sky, rarely dimmed by a cloud : it is too blue and too bright to be looked at long.

Then, if I get up and look out, on one side, beyond the poor houses and shattered church, I see outside the village the bare hill with the dull, grey stone terrace they call the Calvary clearly drawn against the pure sky, with its large cross of black wood, which, thus perpetually held up before our eyes, reminds us of Death and of our hopes of eternity, such as we fashion them according to our own personal feelings and creeds.

And finally, looking farther still, I see a part of that noble expanse of plains and undulating hills, now green with thick-growing corn, where I have often roamed, finding deep pleasure in the silent solitude of those wild regions, and in the contemplation of the grand outline of distant mountains, for there, away from the voices of men, the voice of Nature is heard at its best !

THE MADONNA'S ARRIVAL

THE wholesome dulness of our life here was brightened to-day by the arrival of a new Madonna, to be placed in the church on a special altar dedicated to the *Madonna Addolorata* (Our Lady of Sorrows). A collection, it seems, was made in the village some months ago to get this beautiful new one, of painted wood, from Girgenti, where it was made by a special artist.

After a wearying period of anxious expectation, during which time a silk robe was embroidered in gold for her by some of her devotees, her arrival was finally announced, and one of the priests, who bears the poetic name of *Padre Fiorello*, went to Girgenti to fetch her.

Her journey from Girgenti to Serradifalco was humbly effected in the luggage-van, her florid complexion being protected from profane glances by a vulgar packing-case ; but at Serradifalco she appeared in all her glory, for they unveiled her and

placed her in triumph on one of the usual carts, painted all over with historical designs, and drawn by a grey mule cheerful with many red-braid ornaments and tassels, breastpiece studded with shiny bits of glass, and tall, bell-topped pyramids of light red feathers on the head and back.

The priest sat in the cart with the Madonna to keep her from falling, and they began their journey towards Montedoro, where, in the meantime, preparations for a fitting reception of the *Addolorata* were made by beating wildly two big drums in front of the church, firing off sky-rockets—a rather tame affair in the day-time—and ringing the church-bells quickly and anyhow, in sign of joy and excitement.

When the Madonna was about a mile from the village, a crowd of people went to meet her bearing a large yellow canopy supported on four posts; this was carried over her as she sallied along on her cart, and it came in most useful, for rain began to fall, and it prevented her from getting wet.

The procession crossed the village in this fashion, the priest in front—he had alighted from the cart—then the *Addolorata* under her canopy, bearing unconcernedly the bumps of the road, and the

enthusiastic crowd behind, sky-rockets, drums and bells going on wildly all the time.

When she arrived in front of the church, where a triumphant entry was to crown her journey, the rain came down in such torrents that she was seized by eight vigorous arms and made to rush into the church with indecorous haste, the canopy trying to keep up with nothing under it, and the ceremony was over.

It was then that I was made acquainted with a singular feature of Sicilian customs. When the crowd in front of the church broke up in the pelting rain, I noticed that only the men carried umbrellas, the women having nothing but their black cloth *mantellina*, or cape, over the head to protect them from the rain; and when I remarked upon this to Caluzza, the head-maid, she stared wonderingly at me, and said: "Doesn't *Vossia** know that it would be improper for women to use umbrellas?" and she left me, wondering and meditating over this unexpected and curious principle of Sicilian propriety!

* Sicilian abbreviation of *Vostra Eccellenza* (Your Excellence)



"DRAWN BY A GREY MULE." (Page 45.)



"ON HER WAY TO CHURCH." (Page 49.)

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

ONE of the many things that I can't get over here is the youth of the brides, whenever I watch some humble marriage procession pass by as I sit in front of our *casino*,* my usual post of observation; but the *campiere* Alessandro, my general informer of local customs, tells me that formerly, before the new Code of laws came in, which appoints fifteen years as the marriageable age for a girl, it was the custom to marry them at thirteen!

Now that fifteen is the limit, one continually hears of girls being married—in the lower classes, of course—the moment they have reached the legal age.

A great many reasons can be given for this, which are all more forcible than the usual argument of physical precocity in a Southern country.

Owing to the many prejudices of this place, a

* This is the name given to a sitting-room on the ground-floor, the French windows of which open on to the piazza.

girl, from her tenderest age, has no contact whatever with boys and men. She is not allowed to play with little boys when she is a child, nor to look a man in the face when she grows up. None come into her house—her male relatives see their friends at the tavern or at the *casino**—she is never taken to any of the humble christening or marriage entertainments which take place amongst her friends; she is not allowed to go for a day's work to a sempstress or laundress, and thus contribute a little to the maintenance of the family; the only diversion allowed her is fetching water from the fountain—if not too far from her house—and the Sunday Mass, where she is taken by her mother, with her face well hidden under the black *mantellina*, and where she sits far away from the men, in the side appointed for the use of her sex. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, if, the moment she is told that young Turiddu's mother has asked to have her as a wife for her son, she immediately and dutifully agrees to marry him, sometimes after having scarcely seen him!

Very frequently the marriage is arranged with

* In the public *casino* of the village the men collect at all times, but especially in the evening, to meet their friends chat, and play cards. See "The Feast of St. Joseph."



FETCHING WATER. (Page 48.)



GOING TO THE FOUNTAIN. (Page 48.)

a young man of the village who emigrated to America some years before ; he comes back for the wedding, or the girl is taken out to him, escorted by friends or relations.

They tell me, however, that now girls have made themselves so independent that at times a girl is known to have actually fallen in love *before-hand* with the young man who will ask for her hand, after having just glanced at him with one eye, through a chink in the *mantellina*, on her way to church, when her mother was looking the other way, and that often, from her door, she has by signs given him to understand that his suit will be gratefully accepted. And this is what they call becoming independent !

The consequence is that now, very often, two young people are tacitly engaged to each other after simply having had a glimpse of each other in this distant and summary fashion, and if the young man is not in a position to marry, or has to go off to be a soldier for three years, they may remain with this mutual understanding all that time, without the facilities enjoyed by engaged couples in more civilized quarters, who have the comfort of frequent official, or stolen, interviews, or who can write to each other.

A girl here, of course, cannot write—I speak of the lower classes always—and, indeed, if she were acquainted with the uncanny art of writing, she would be looked upon with suspicion by all her people.

Then, again, the houses of poor people consist mostly of one room, where all the family sleep, regardless of age and sex, so it is natural that the girl's parents should be in a hurry to get rid of her, and their poverty is such that one mouth less to feed is a great boon to the family, always a numerous one.

The marriage portion of a girl in that class is always a little house, as, every time a father divides his property amongst his children, he leaves the house or houses to his daughters, the land—if he has any—to his sons.

Besides the house, the girl is expected to bring all that will be needed in her little household, like the sheets and mattresses for the bed, her own linen, and the kitchen utensils—alarming few of them, very often only the big pot to boil the *maccheroni*, and a frying-pan.

If she is at all well off, she brings the house-linen and her clothes in a large dowry-chest of carved or painted wood, according to her means. These

old chests are very artistic, and, when genuinely old, very much sought after by antiquarians.

The bride of the new generation, however, is now provided with a cheap, gaudy chest of drawers instead, as ugly as they make them, with a marble top.

If the young man is a peasant, he is supposed to possess already a mule or a donkey, the tools—very few and elementary!—for working in the fields, also his own personal linen, and the deal boards and iron trestles for the bed.

He is also expected to bring all the earthenware vessels or pottery needed in the house, such as the water-jars and oil-bottles, the plates, and the gaudy coffee-service, which is spread all over the marble top of their tall chest of drawers.

The formality of the engagement is gone through in this fashion: a few relations gather in the girl's house; the young man comes in gravely with his family, and offers to his bashful *fiancée*—it is the first time she sees him so close—a prettily coloured silk handkerchief, a smart apron, perhaps a handsome silk scarf, a pocket-knife—it consists of one blade with a murderous point—a needle-case of wood, and a cheap ring. Sometimes the girl gives him also in exchange a pocket-knife.

After this he is allowed to bring her a rose every day, and to sit near her as she stitches away under the strict supervision of her mother. On summer evenings, instead of sitting indoors, they may saunter out, all together, on the road outside the village.

She is now very busy making him a shirt with elaborate little tucks in front and a waistcoat for him to wear on their wedding-day. She has no trousseau to make, as, when she was ten years old, her mother began to make her work at it, and it is all ready and laid out in the dowry-chest, if she has one. The trousseau consists of chemises and petticoats, sheets, pillow-cases, and towels.

She now receives from her *fiancé* a new dress and a silk handkerchief, and wears them a fortnight before her wedding, when, under cover of the evening shades, she, with all the women of her family, well muffled in their *mantelline* or shawls, go to the Vicar's house, at the door of which her *fiancé*, with *his* relatives, are waiting for her.

They go upstairs and give notice to the parish priest to publish their banns in the church. The same ceremony is gone through, in the day-time, at the town-hall, so that their names may be placed in the public list of forthcoming marriages.



"POTTERY NEEDED IN THE HOUSE." (Page 51.)



"THE BRIDE ESCORTED BY HER WOMENFOLK." (Page 53.)

To face page 52.

Nothing now remains but for the girl's parents to prepare the house—"room" would be a more appropriate word—for the bride and bridegroom.

The bridegroom's wedding-gift to the bride is a smart dress, even in the poorest cases, of silk, always of a delicate colour, and a rich, soft-coloured silk shawl, both to be worn on her wedding-day.

The day before their future dwelling is prepared, their things are all laid out in it and made the most of; the bed is made up, and all the neighbours flock in to gaze at it, criticize the quality of the linen, and admire the hand-made lace on the pillow-cases, comparing them with the lace and linen of some previous bride.

On the morning of the eventful day, the bride, finally decked out in her smart dress, and draped from head to foot in the shiny folds of her silk shawl, goes to the town-hall, escorted by all her women-folk, her mother and nearest female relation walking on either side, and all the others behind. They make such a pretty, silent picture, as they pass like this, the bride's silken shawl glimmering in the sunshine, all the women about her hidden in their own smart shawls or *mantelline* (according to their social position).

After them comes the bridegroom with *his* family

and friends—all men, of course, as his mother and sisters go with the bride. He is dressed decorously in black, with the smart shirt and waistcoat his *fiancée* made him. He and his people thus following solemnly on the steps of the bride always give me the impression of walking in a funeral procession.

At the town-hall the Mayor or a member of the Municipal Council reads out to them the articles of the law concerning the respective duties of man and wife. After each has said “Yes” to the appointed questions, he enters their names in the register.

They now emerge from the town-hall and walk to the church, always in the same order, as the bride and bridegroom are not to be together a moment until it is all over.

After the nuptial benediction, during which the ring also is blessed—not the usual wedding-ring, but a cheap, showy article, sometimes with a sham stone in it—the whole party walk back, always in the same order, to the bride’s home, where an attempt at refreshments is made under the shape of stale bonbons and biscuits, and little glasses of a sweet, sticky liquor called *rosolio*, of a yellowish or greenish colour, generally made at home with certain herbs, sugar, and spirit of wine.

When his means allow him such extravagance, the bride's father offers Marsala wine to the company, but the sickly *rosolio* is inevitable. I have often had to taste it, and been most unwell after it!

As soon as this part of the day's programme is over, they all escort the bride and bridegroom to their house and take leave of them, with many words of encouragement to the little bride.

Next morning it is the duty of the bridegroom's mother to give the *buona levata*, or morning greeting, to the newly-wedded couple by sending them some hot coffee, or, better still, when she can afford it, two cups of steaming chocolate and a few *ciambelle* (local biscuits).

She is also expected to send them in their dinner at midday for a week, since until eight days have passed the bride is not allowed to put a foot out of the house; but in most cases now this dinner, which consists of *maccheroni*, meat, and wine, or, if they are very poor, of *maccheroni*, greens, cheese, and wine only, is sent in for two or, at the most, three days.

* * * * *

I was admiring one day one of these marriage processions as it passed in front of our *casino* when crossing the piazza, the bride, slight and pale,

encircled in her glossy silken shawl, the childish face and expression of a little maid of fifteen.

My friend Alessandro was near me, and I turned rather indignantly to him, and remonstrated against the barbarous custom of marrying off in this blind fashion such young things, before their bodies and characters were ripe for the duties of marriage.

I am sorry to say his answer rather lacked his usual fine tact :

“ Surely this is the proper age for a girl to marry ; a woman is old at twenty !”

THE FEAST OF ST. JOSEPH

“TELL me, Alessandro, how is it that your festas of patron saints occur only from the beginning of spring to the end of summer?”

It was a fine morning in the first fortnight of April, and as I was going out for a ride with him—he often escorts us, though not actually in our service, being a municipal rural guard—I saw they were hammering away at a stand for the band built in the middle of the piazza, and getting ready the wooden scaffolding for a grand display of fireworks opposite the church—all this in preparation for the Feast of St. Joseph—and I could notice that a general excitement pervaded the village.

“We can’t enjoy a festa,” he answered, “unless it all takes place in the open air; and, in fact, St. Joseph’s Feast, which rightfully falls on March 19, is always put off till April, because March is a mad month; and St. Joseph doesn’t mind. The principal attraction of the feast is the

band, or, when we can afford it, the two bands, going round the village and playing most of the day. They could not do it in cold or rainy weather in winter: it would spoil their beautiful uniforms and feathers. Then most large villages have fairs on festa days, principally of cattle, donkeys, mules, and horses; and that also requires warm weather, as all the animals and the men with them have to pass the night outside. From neighbouring villages—which in our instance would be Serradifalco, Racalmuto, Canicattì, and others—it is the custom to come and spend the day here when we have a festa, and we all go to their festas when they have one, a thing which would be impracticable in winter; as also the procession with the saint's figure, which takes place at sunset, and in which all the women of the place appear, since this is the only part of the festa's programme in which they take any part; and *they* wouldn't come out on a cold day, as *Voscenza* (Your Excellence) has done all the winter."

(The people here are beginning to get accustomed to the strange fact that nothing, except a downpour of rain, will keep us from going out daily.)

As we rode slowly along the crest of the quiet, sunlit hills studded with wild-flowers, I made



"THE 'PROCURATORE' OF THE FESTA." (Page 59.)



"A LITTLE MAID OF FIFTEEN." (Page 56.)

To face page 58.

Alessandro explain all about the special organization of these festas. The local authorities, it seems, have nothing to do with them ; they are essentially the result of the people's efforts and offerings. It is sometimes one man in the place, sometimes another, generally a person of some importance in the village, who is placed at the head of a small committee of four or five comrades, and becomes the *procuratore* (provider) of the festa, as he is trusted with the funds, and will have to organize it all. During the year he has collected corn on the threshing-floors through the country, and money as well, and has got together a sum varying from five to eight hundred francs, two hundred of which will be paid to the band of a neighbouring town for coming over here for three days to play continually, in turns with our own band, which gets also a good salary.

“ But why three days ? ” I ask.

“ Because, although the real feast is on the Sunday, all Saturday, the vigil, has to be a feast too, and in order to begin early on Saturday morning, the band from another place always arrives on the Friday afternoon, and begins to play on that day. The rest of the money pays for a grand set of fireworks, balloons, and other pleasures, to say

nothing of special functions in the church, with an unusual display of tapers, and the inside lined with gorgeous red draperies and hung with gilt-paper decorations of dazzling effect: this is done by a man whose trade it is to go from village to village at festa times, to hang these draperies (which belong to him) in the church. He gets thirty francs for this. Then there are the drum-beaters to be paid, and the priests—*they* always get more than their due.”

Alessandro, being an *esprit fort*, and well read—he knows Dante, Ariosto, and Tasso by heart—showed his superior spirit by this sweeping accusation against the priests, with which he ended his speech.

St. Joseph is a favourite saint with the miners, and as ours is a mining district, I have had opportunities of seeing their devotion to this saint by the way in which, on their pay-day, they each drop one or two silver pieces taken from their hardly-earned wages into the slit of the little earthenware amphora held out to each of them by the *procuratore* of the festa, who is always in attendance for that purpose.

He, of course, displays all his activity in order that the feast he organizes should turn out more

successful, and by the whole population declared more brilliant than when it has been organized by another. The feeling of self-importance is very strong here ; add to this the intrigues and the open or covert struggle between the two political sides which divide every town or village into two fierce factions cordially hating each other, and it will be easily understood how many passions and susceptibilities come to the fore in the preparation of these festas.

This year the *procuratore* of the festa belonged to our "side."

I had just come back from our ride, when a good band of about thirty musicians, dressed in grey cloth with white trimmings, arrived from the neighbouring village of Canicattì.

They all collected outside the village, and then entered it, walking briskly in rows of four, playing a bright march ; the *procuratore* walked in front, sending up sky-rockets, the explosion of which was followed by a shower of stars. All the little boys of the place surrounded him, dancing and shouting for joy. They went and stopped in front of the church, the band playing a piece there ; then they came and played in front of our house. This was an act of deference to the local

authority in the person of our cousin, who is Mayor of the place. Then, night having set in, all was quiet once more. But this—Alessandro told me—was only the beginning.

Next morning (Saturday), according to a most barbarous custom, the band began to play at 4.30, thus awaking the whole village with warlike marches. As a compliment to our family, they began at our house, and with refined cruelty began their piece loudly, after silently gathering under our windows. They left us when there could be no possible doubt as to their having awakened us.

After they went on their way to go the round of the village, I thought their distant harmonies most charming, and was beginning to lose all consciousness—to speak plainly, I was about to go to sleep again—when the terrible drums* followed on the band's footsteps with thunder-roll beats; it sounded most promising, as we were only at the vigil as yet.

From that moment until midday, music, drums, and bells were heard continually; then at 12 o'clock the band escorted St. Joseph's staff to the church.

* In Sicily large drums are beaten in front of the church and round the village on feast-days in all small towns and villages.



"THE TERRIBLE DRUMS." (Page 62.)



"THE BAND BEGAN TO PLAY." (Page 62.)

To face page 62.

This requires some explanation. There is in the church here a monumental statue of St. Joseph, holding the hand of a small Child Jesus, dressed in sky-blue. St. Joseph holds in the other hand a lovely staff adorned with a silver lily and bright-coloured ribbons. The silver lily was sent by some Montedoro emigrants now working in the mines at Pittston.

It frequently happens that when an invalid wishes to have the staff brought to his bedside—for, amongst other virtues, it possesses the power of healing—this can be done by paying a sum of money to the guild or brotherhood who owns St. Joseph; but at the solemn time of his feast the miraculous staff must return to his owner, so a priest, escorted by the band, goes in state to the house of the invalid who had the loan of the staff at the time, to fetch it.

I saw them cross the piazza, the priest in front, holding up the staff, the band playing a Neapolitan song which is very popular this year, and a multitude of children dancing round. It was very cheerful.

Towards 9 in the evening the musicians all went up on the wooden stand in the middle of the piazza, which was now brightly lighted up with

coloured paper lanterns and acetylene lamps, and surrounded now by a compact crowd, anxious to hear the pieces played in turns by the two bands—ours and the Canicattì one—and pronounce an opinion on their various merits.

The Canicattì's bandmaster, who had not appeared yet, took his place in the middle, and the concert began—an almost classical concert, the programme of which he had sent us.

We sat with some friends, in front of our *casino*. They call *casino* here a large room with several doors opening out upon the public square, and containing many chairs, a table or two, and some suspended lamps.

Every "side" or party in a village has one, very useful for local politics. We have two, one very large, meant for our "friends"—the electors who belong to our side. They meet in it to talk after their work in the mines, the fields, or the workshop is over, and in the evening they find it lighted, and play cards. Only newspapers would be wanted to make it perfect; but, I am told we are not civilized enough for that yet. Still, in a country where every man's house consists of *one* room, where all the family huddle together, it is quite natural he should need some

place where he can sit and pass the time with his friends.

But to return to our own *casino*. When it is fine, as it generally is on St. Joseph's evening, we put our chairs outside in front of it, and enjoy the fresh night air in full sight of the crowd, who gaze at us from a respectful distance; whilst we, of course, falling into the ways of the place, comment on everything that goes on in the other "side's" *casino*, which stands at the other end of the piazza. It is very funny.

As I was saying, the concert began, and with a few friends we sat before the doors of the *casino*, watching the crowd as it moved about, and the *carabinieri* (military police), who walked slowly up and down. Under primitive tents, at improvised counters, *torrone* and other strictly Sicilian dainties were sold by the light of swinging lanterns, sparkling in the shade, and showing on the counters some graceful, primitive scales of rope and wicker-work.

At 11 o'clock, the concert being over, someone brought the bandmaster and introduced him. We talked of music, of local politics, gossiped a little, and went back into the house for a midnight supper.

Next morning, at 4 o'clock, the terrible musicians

came under our windows to remind us noisily — that the proper time had come for celebrating St. Joseph. . . .

After us, they “did” all the village, and I remember just a confusion of marches and polkas, drum-beating and bell-ringing, succeeding each other ; and they ended by performing all together, in wildest confusion.

“Surely,” I remarked to Alessandro, “your festa consists mostly of *noise*?”

“*Voscenza* * sees,” he answered, “joy is expressed here by noise. The noise of to-day is nothing compared to what used to be done in similar occurrences when I was a boy. They used to arrange in the principal streets of the village, but mostly along the piazza, thousands of large and small mortars (*mortaretti*), connected to each other by a train of gunpowder ; when these were set fire to, frightful reports followed upon each other rapidly, and the whole village was violently shaken for a whole hour sometimes. But so many panes of glass were broken, and so many accidents happened, that the authorities have suppressed these *mortaretti* which were so popular. . . .”

“Still,” I answer, “in spite of their charm, it is

* *Voscenza*, Your Excellence.



"A SACK OF CORN WAS PLACED ON A MULE." (Page 67.)



"THE FEAST OF ST. JOSEPH." (Page 69.)

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quite evident that St. Joseph can be honoured without so much cannonading !”

“I don’t know,” said Alessandro—he was bound to have his joke at the saint. “St. Joseph’s head being of wood, it is not certain that he hears the shouts, and the band, and the *panegirico* that the priest says in the church for him, but the *mortaretti* . . . it is quite sure he heard *them*.”

Towards midday I saw a touching sight: the band, followed by the crowd, crossed the piazza playing a cheerful air; in front of it walked a man in black velvet, with top-boots and a black cotton cap. He carried a child who held a tall taper, over which were pinned numerous bank-notes. This was a sum of money to be offered to St. Joseph. They proceeded on towards the church, where the child laid the taper by St. Joseph’s statue, whilst the band played outside to escort him home again.

A little later another ceremony of the same kind attracted my attention. It was not money that they offered to St. Joseph this time, but a gift in kind. A sack of corn was placed on a mule richly adorned with red-braid ornaments, bows, tassels, and shiny glass decorations. The mule, escorted by the band and enthusiastic crowd, penetrated

right into the church, where the sack of corn was deposited at St. Joseph's feet.

All the afternoon there was an unusual animation on the piazza, swarming with people in festive clothes; the men crowded together, of course, whilst the women only crossed the piazza on their way to church. Closely draped in their black *mantelline*, they went slowly by, veiling their faces still more when they passed some men—only one eye was visible then, in Oriental fashion. These women would have thought themselves dishonoured for life if they had stopped near their men-folk to hear the music.

Towards five o'clock the band went to the church to fetch St. Joseph, who was to go round the village; it was time for the procession, as the excited bell-ringing and furious drum-beating announced to all the village.

When the imposing wooden stand with the statue of St. Joseph left the church, and tottered down the slope, the band struck up the Italian "Royal March" and we went out to see the sight—a strange one indeed!

First came the big drums, beaten with a fierce and comical energy by two tipsy-looking men, arrayed in flowing red robes, much spotted and



"ON THEIR WAY TO CHURCH." (Page 68.)



"THE BAND GOING TO CHURCH." (Page 68.)

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rather the worse for wear. After them a multitude of men preceded the *brothers*, or members of a guild called after the Holy Sacrament, mostly elderly men. They wore robes and hoods of red silk, and a younger member carried an immense red flag, which he skilfully balanced on one hand, on his chest, or on his chin! Another "brother" carried a small wooden crucifix. After them came a few *carabinieri* in full uniform, with their officer they have to attend processions, as squabbles and stabbing amongst the men who carry the saint often disturb these religious functions. Behind them walked the priests in their lace surplices, and immediately after an immense stand of painted wood, upon which a large St. Joseph in red and blue robes held by the hand a small Child Jesus in blue. This large stand was supported on two long poles resting on the shoulders of some eighty men, forty on each side.

This monument proceeded on its way majestically, if with difficulty, and all around it a crowd of excited men shouted now and then with one voice, *Evviva San Giuseppuzzo!* (Hurrah for St. Joseph! *Giuseppuzzo* is the Sicilian diminutive for Joseph). It was more savage than religious.

Next came the band, playing an opera air, and,

lastly, the best part of that primitive procession, a compact crowd of women tightly draped in their black capes, which did not hide their fine eyes, invariably black and full of expression.

The big statue of St. Joseph, who seemed to soar over the roofs, had already turned round the corner with a bearing which lacked stability; the band proceeded slowly after it, still playing, and the packed crowd of veiled women continued passing slowly by in deep religious silence, all heads bowed under the black cloth capes falling below the waist; lower still the bright-coloured skirts gave a charming finish to the costume, and completed the picture in the Oriental scenery of low, white houses, under the purity of a Southern sky.

St. Joseph was restored to his post in the church, which he was made to enter backwards, sky-rockets being sent up in front of him. Night having set in, the bandmaster and his musicians resumed their seats on the stand, and we, in duty bound, went and sat once more in front of the *casino* to listen to the music.

After the first piece, authorization from the *Sindaco* was duly requested and granted to light up a magnificent set of fireworks, the wooden net-

work of which was built on the slope in front of the church ; it lasted a long time, and was silently admired and appreciated by the large crowd which now swarmed on the place, whilst the one or the other of the two bands enlivened it with its most cheerful airs, and the little improvised counters did good business, the dangling lanterns showing off in the gloom the graceful scales of prehistoric shape, and lighting up in the shade some Arab faces with sparkling eyes and dazzling teeth.

The fireworks being over, the concert began. As I found no waltz on the programme, they sent for the *procuratore* of the feast, and despatched him to the bandmaster to ask for one in my name.

It was readily granted, and played to perfection, and was nearly over when some loud reports scared us, and the crowd scattered wildly in all directions.

The *Sindaco*, who in small places is also head of the local police, rushed out of the *casino*, and, followed by his cousins, ran in the direction of the noise, whilst some of our men who stood near came and shut us up in the *casino*, for fear, they said, a stray bullet should come our way ; in the meanwhile women and children flew about screaming in all directions, and the band, of course,

stopped playing. It was most unpleasant, but exciting.

Very soon, however, the noise and confusion subsided a little, especially when a man came breathlessly up to explain that two *foreigners*, natives of Serradifalco, a neighbouring village, had been quarrelling about the music, and had harmlessly fired their revolvers at each other. The *Sindaco* had had them both arrested by the *carabinieri*; and as he appeared upon the scene, looking quite cool and collected, we brought our chairs outside once more, the crowd came confidently back on the piazza, the musicians, who had sat patiently waiting for the little disturbance to be over, began a brilliant piece, and all was once more festive and harmonious.

Towards midnight, the concert being over, the discursive bandmaster from Canicattì came to see us at the *casino*, and received our compliments, and we talked till after midnight; the broad white piazza, a moment before so crowded and noisy, now deserted and silent, lay under the shadows of a mild, starlit night; all was peace and silence once more, and, to say the truth, I was not sorry to think the Feast of St. Joseph was over.



"THE CALVARY." (Page 73.)



"THIS LARGE STAND WAS SUPPORTED ON TWO LONG POLES." (Page 69.)

LENT AND EASTER

ONE of the first signs of Lent is the lamp that some pious person goes to light every Friday evening at the foot of a large black cross which rises on a stone terrace, built on the top of a barren hill outside the village. This hill, at the spot where the cross stands, is called the Calvary, because on Good Friday, after a curious procession, a wooden effigy of our Lord is solemnly carried there and crucified.

This lamp, burning on the height at the foot of the cross in the living silence of our mild spring evenings, has a very striking effect.

Also every Friday evening the best male singers in the place meet in a neighbouring house, or oftener, walk through the village streets, and sing a strange lamentation in a minor key on the Passion, Crucifixion, and Death of Jesus.

The melody consists of a few notes sung slowly, without any metre, in Gregorian fashion, but it is sung in parts, and is perfectly harmonious. One

could not imagine a better, a more impressive, song of sorrow.

Being anxious to become acquainted with the words of these Lenten lamentations, I had the old man who always takes the lead in them brought to me, and during a lengthy interview, and with much difficulty, I was able to transcribe the following verses, which, he said, had never been printed, but had been transmitted from father to son for many generations; his own father had taught them to him many years ago when working in the fields together.

It was rather difficult to write these *lamenti*, as he called them, for he dictated a strange and confusing mixture of Latin, Sicilian, and Italian. This is what I was able to make of it, and a strange piece of folklore it is:

“O my people! what have I done unto thee?
Pray, answer Me!”

“His mother was standing,
And looked on the painful cross
Where hung her Son.”

“O most sweet Jesus!
Thou wast beaten.
Have pity upon us!”

“Oh, the blows my Lord received!
Cease tormenting the beloved Jesus!
Rather, strike my soul, who was the cause of it.”



"LEADER IN THE LENTEN LAMENTATIONS."
(Page 74.)



"THE PALM OF THE 'LAVATORE.'"
(Page 80.)

To face page 74.

“The mother sits at the foot of the painful wood,
And to-day, with her tears, will wash it.”

“Let them take to the holy sepulchre
His holy Body, which to-day was tortured.”

“Oh, royal banners !
Oh, worshipped spears !
Let us wash His hands,
All stained with blood.”

“My Jesus, this my heart is hard as stone ;
Melt it with Thy love.
My dear, good Jesus, I will sin no more.”

“ ‘ Mary,’ thus called the Lord,
‘ O my mother, I want to go !
‘ Where wilt Thou go, Son of my love,
My comfort, and my hope ?
Do not come late.’
‘ I go to the Garden of Gethsemane.’
‘ My Son, what wilt Thou do there ?’
‘ Mother, I go to die.’
‘ Have pity upon my sorrow !
If Thou goest, Son, how shall I fare ?
How canst Thou leave me amongst strangers,
Apple of my eye, my greatest favour ?
To whom shall I turn—to the strangers ?’
‘ Holy mother, I leave John with thee ;
He will worship thee.’
‘ Thou leavest me sorrowful and downcast.
My Son, how shall I fare without Thee ?
Let’s walk together—show me the road ;
Where Thou diest, I also will die.’
‘ It is I who must die, loving mother.
Bless Me, respected mother,
Laden with grief, and sighs, and sorrows !
I bear an immense love to sinners,
And My death will be victorious.’”

This is but a short extract of the many pages of *lamenti* which I was able to write with the old man's help. Before he left me I told him my wish to hear them sung again. So that same evening, towards midnight, he came with his usual singing companions, three or four in number, and, standing at a little distance from the house, they sang the mournful melody, filling the night, with their harmonious voices blending perfectly together; whilst, as they sang the ingenuously pathetic hymn, they turned towards the hill in the distance where the lamp burnt brightly in the darkness, on the Calvary.

* * * * *

Sicilians of the lower classes, especially in the country, are devout worshippers, and conform scrupulously to all the forms and ordinances of the Church—differing much in this respect from their brethren of Northern Italy—and their devotion is seen at its best in Lent, when they follow with fervour all the rites appointed by the Church for this season.

As far as their work in the fields and mines allows them, they attend regularly the morning and evening services in church; they all go through a strict course of mortification, fasting, prayers and



THE "FRATELLI." (Page 80.)



"MEN AND BOYS EACH CARRYING A PALM." (Page 80.)

To face page 76.

penances, to become fit for Confession and Absolution before Easter.

A special preacher, a Franciscan monk, has come here for the Lenten predications ; he daily gives to his ignorant but devout listeners a stirring sermon about sin, repentance, the punishment of sinners, and the reward won by a holy life. And, not content with this, at a given moment he sets to his congregation the example of flagellation by beating himself with wire ropes.

When this Franciscan friar arrived, all the inhabitants of the place, led by the priest, went forth in procession to meet him, and when he arrived on the piazza, the church-bells and big drums rang and beat for joy ; whilst the crowd around him, the women especially, kissed his hands and the hem of his tunic, for he has the reputation of being a saint.

* * * * *

In order, perhaps, to break the continual tension of incessant devotional practices, there is a rather curious institution here, called "Feasts of the Saturdays"—that is to say, on all the Saturdays in Lent a feast is held in honour of the Madonna.

These little festas consist of a High Mass, beating the drums round the village and in front of the

church, sending up sky-rockets, and assisting with gifts of food and clothes some destitute child. When enough money has been collected, the band is paid to play about the village and on the piazza most of the day, and in that case the Saturday feast becomes a very bright one. A certain sum of money is needed for all this, and as each Saturday the festa is organized by a special set of people, it is a deputation of the particular set whose Saturday it happens to be who the day before go collecting money from house to house, one of the party bearing a small tray, on which the money is deposited.

The Saturdays are appointed as follows : priests, artisans, landholders, bachelors, miners, day-labourers, gentlemen.

I was talking with Alessandro, my usual elucidator of things incomprehensible, about these Saturdays, and he explained that every set in the above list is expected to contribute exclusively towards its own festa ; so that a day-labourer never gives towards the Saturday of miners, nor the priests towards the Saturday of gentlemen, and so on.

“ But,” said Alessandro, grinning, “ there is one here who last year had to contribute to all the Saturdays but one.”



"MEN AND CHILDREN CARRYING PALMS." (Page 80.)



"THE WIDE PIAZZA." (Page 81.)

To face page 78.

“Really,” I said; “and who is this universal person?”

“It is Signor F——; the one who works the mines below the Calvary. *Voscenza* knows he works a great deal, and he has so often boasted of doing the work of artisan, peasant, and day-labourer all in one, and has so much fraternized with every one of them, that they all went in turns to collect at his house when their respective Saturdays were coming off, on the plea that he was one of them, and he readily gave to each. Then, as he is unmarried, the bachelors went to him; and, as a matter of course, the miners, because he works several mines; and lastly, as a gentleman, he had to contribute to the gentlemen’s Saturday.”

“But what about the Saturday of the priests, Alessandro? Did he contribute to that also?”

“No, indeed”—with another grin—“they did not consider him as belonging to their set!”

All feast-days have their vigil: every Friday evening, therefore, is the vigil of the Saturday feast; and according to a love of contrast very marked in Sicilians, whilst on the one side the lamp burns at the foot of the cross on the hill, and the Lenten singers go about the village, filling it with their harmonious but mournful *lamenti*

because it is Friday, on the other side sky-rockets are sent spluttering up all the evening, and the drummers beat anywhere and anyhow, because it is the vigil of Saturday.

* * * * *

We have, after many cheerful Saturdays, come to Palm Sunday. A great quantity of palm-branches were brought from the *Lavatore*—a valley below Montedoro—and distributed to all the village.

The benediction of these palms took place to-day in a picturesque fashion. Whilst the women—who in this country always remain in the shade—all gathered in the church, the men and boys, each carrying a palm, met before the Oratory, from whence about twenty men came out. They belong to the Guild of the Holy Sacrament, and are called the *Fratelli*. They each wore a long white silk robe, a red silk cape, and a white hood trimmed with lace. It is not easy to imagine the contrast between the dainty white hoods and the dark, Arab-looking faces they encircled. One of the *Fratelli* carried a crucifix. They started on their way preceded by a few priests and the inevitable drum, and followed by a crowd of men and children carrying palms, and this strikingly

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THE "VIRGINEDDE." (Page 85.)



THE "ADDOLORATA." (Page 86.)

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simple procession proceeded, drum to the fore, down a sloping street ; from the houses on either side more palm-bearers came out and joined the procession, making it look like a moving forest.

At the bottom of the road it turned the corner, and crossed the wide piazza, dazzling with sunshine, surrounded by low, white houses, the red of the capes and the sombre green of the palms giving a pleasant note of colour. The drum alone was not wanted.

We went into the church where the women were all kneeling, bowed under their black capes, the men standing, and the doors were thrown wide open for the procession to come in, with a great rustling of palms. Mass was said, rather hurriedly—for the youthful palm-bearers caused great agitation—and everything was over.

* * * * *

On Maundy Thursday they prepared in the Oratory a meal for the twelve Apostles, chosen amongst the lay-brothers of the Holy Sacrament.

Some women worked all the previous night at the preparation of the table, whilst their babies, whom they could not leave at home, cried or slept in all the corners of the church.

This last piece of information was volunteered by Alessandro, who took me to inspect the table, and very curious indeed I found it.

The places were marked by twelve little trays, six on each side. Each tray contained walnuts, almonds, common sweets, tough-looking biscuits, and other things of that sort. On one side of the tray stood a pretty loaf, surmounted by an orange, in which a stock flower had been stuck. This was of doubtful taste. On the other side of each tray every Apostle found a fennel, with its long, green, hair-like leaves, and a small decanter of wine; and, finally, in front of the tray stood a smart, be-ribboned sugar-lamb, covered with spangles, and holding between its paws a pink satin banner. All this, exactly reproduced twelve times, was a very odd sight.

Some bunches of flowers, tightly pressed together, with no attempt at gracefulness, were placed upon the table, with strict observance of symmetry; and lastly, at one extremity of the table, to crown it all, a magnificent china vase with much gilding about it, out of which rose stiffly an enormous posy of artificial flowers!

It being time for the Paschal Supper to begin—it was 11 a.m.—the twelve Apostles trooped in,



THE "URNA." (Page 86.)



THE "ADDOLORATA." (Page 86.)

To face page 82.

robed in white, with a scarf of coloured silk and a ribbon bow on the left shoulder. By some mysterious means they had stuck on to the back of their heads a gilt cardboard halo, and thus got up these dark, clean-shaven Sicilians looked most queer.

They sat on the twelve chairs at a good distance from the table, and a fat priest *pretended* to wash their feet in a lovely blue china basin—which I recognized as belonging to my washing-room—after which a thin priest made a feint of wiping them.

I then perceived that, in order to facilitate this operation, the Apostles wore slippers, which they had put on in the church, and their wives, who stood in a solemn row behind their chairs, held their boots tied up in a napkin !

These fictitious ablutions happily over, the priest rapidly blessed the table and gave each Apostle his part—he put the loaf, the orange, the contents of the tray, and the sugar-lamb all higgledy-piggledy into a table-napkin he had brought for this purpose, tied it into a parcel, and passed it to his wife behind, keeping under his hand the bottle of wine only.

The twelve happy families and an excited crowd of onlookers now gave way to many exclamations of joy and cheering, which were, to

me, rather startling, since we were in church ; but this, to them, was a secondary matter, and a few men cleared the table in the midst of a general confusion, the twelve happy mortals put on their boots again, took off their finery, and, with their rejoicing wives and children, carried triumphantly home the Paschal Supper.

* * * * *

The Lenten season is drawing to its close ; to-day is Good Friday, and since yesterday the bells are no longer rung, but as there must be some means of calling the faithful to church, before every service a mortar is set fire to in front of it. This warlike thing makes a frightful noise, and as the church is close to us, and something is continually going on in it, I start at every report and live in a state of perpetual emotion, whilst the smell of gunpowder in the air is not at all conducive to a religious train of thought.

Since this morning three black flags float lugubriously in the breeze on the grey stone terrace of the Calvary, around the cross.

At 1 o'clock a few cannon reports called the population to the Oratory to take the wooden effigy of our Lord and carry it up to the Calvary to be crucified.

After the cannon reports I heard the beat of the muffled drums, and went to one end of the piazza to see the procession come down.

The broad, white space was dotted with women in black, their heads bowed under their black *mantelline*, all, or nearly all, kneeling; the men stood, bareheaded and silent, and in their midst the procession, a weird one, advanced slowly, through a silent, awe-stricken crowd.

In front walked about fifty little boys, who now and then, at a given signal, shook all together wooden rattles, those special playthings of the Holy Week in Roman Catholic countries of the South.

Behind them came a man with a long trumpet, from which, at intervals of one minute, when the rattles were hushed, he drew a shrill note, one only; then came the muffled drums, also beating a solitary beat from time to time—they were veiled in black crape, as for a funeral.

Next came a dozen or more little girls from eight to twelve years old, called in Sicilian the *verginedde* (little virgins). They were dressed in black, and over each head flowed a large black veil, under which their hair hung in stiff, shiny curls, the whole arrangement, strange to say, being finished off with

a big wreath of artificial flowers of gaudy colours. Some of the *virginedde* bore with compunction on little trays the one the nails, the other the hammer, another the crown of thorns and other accessories of this mournful travesty.

After them came the priests in their cassocks, and then a large crystal case, called here the *urna*, in which, upon a satin mattress, reclines a wooden effigy of our Lord, painfully realistic, covered with red smears to represent blood. This *urna* was carried on the shoulders of some forty men, and others held over it a red and yellow silk canopy. By the side of it the same number of men carried a wooden statue of the Madonna—always called here the *Bedda Matri* (Beautiful Mother); but to this one who escorts her son to the crucifixion they give the name of *Addolorata* (our Lady of Sorrows). Behind her walked a crowd of women, their heads and faces hidden in their black *mantelline*, all singing a mournful dirge as they went. This procession impressed me painfully as it crossed the piazza slowly under a leaden sky, the muffled drum and the trumpet sending out now and then their funereal note in the midst of all those black, singing figures, some of them kneeling. We went out of the village to see it ascend the bare,

desolate hill which, with its cross, represents so well the hill of Golgotha.

Around us, below, behind, on the hill, women in black were humbly kneeling, some almost prostrate, shrouded in their black capes, and in their midst the procession slowly wended upwards, ascending the steep path in the direction of the Calvary, with its cross and three black flags, under a grey sky, the rattles, muffled drums and shrill trumpet giving out now and then their dismal accompaniment.

Once at the Calvary, the crowd of men and women knelt in picturesque groups all round; the priests took the effigy of our Lord out of the crystal case, and acting the part of the Roman soldiers, truly crucified it, hammering in the nails carried by the *virginedde*, and placing on its head the crown of thorns. It was all dreadfully realistic.

After the crucifixion was over, they all walked down again, carrying the empty *urna*.

It was strange, during the afternoon, to see on the cross this effigy, whose thin body glimmered in the sunshine; a flax-coloured wig on the head and a blue silk scarf around the loins fluttered in the wind. Below, on the grey stone terrace, the little black flags waved about, and lower still the black figures knelt during an unceasing pilgrimage of

women and children, who slowly ascended the hill, knelt down at the foot of the cross, and, before coming away, kissed the feet of the crucified effigy.

“What a strange sight!” I remarked to Peppe, as we were standing a little way off, on the crest of the hill, from where I had watched the whole performance.

Peppe often attends me when I walk out; he is not gifted with Alessandro’s caustic wit, but in spite of this his conversation is not without its charms.

“Ah!” he remarked, “*we*, as you see, have a proper Christ to put on the cross—a Christ of good, solid wood, with paint that will not wash off in the rain; but at Campofranco, now—I saw it myself one year I was there for Easter—they only have a Christ of cardboard;* they can’t afford a wooden one, perhaps. It had been crucified but half an hour, with all the people kneeling round, when rain began to fall, a real spring downpour, and the cardboard figure was threatened with destruction, when fortunately someone thought of hanging on the cross a large, hooded cloak, such as shepherds wear, and so it remained during the whole afternoon, sheltered under the cloak hanging on to the arms of the cross!”

* He probably meant papier mâché.



THE CRUCIFIXION. (Page 87.)



"AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS." (Page 88.)

To face page 88.

“Surely,” I said, “that was the best thing they could do, was it not, to prevent the effigy from melting away?”

“That’s just what it is,” he said: “if he had been of wood, he would have stopped the rain. But what could a Christ of cardboard do? And that’s the way they do things at Campofranco,” he added, with grim irony.

* * * * *

One hour after sunset came the moment of the Deposition from the cross.

The whole population, called by the muffled drum, assembled before the Oratory, from whence they took the empty *urna*, and the funereal procession started in the same order as in the morning, only the effect was more fantastic, for every person in the procession carried a pretty-coloured paper lantern; and these hundreds of coloured lights scattered about the hill, getting gradually nearer the Calvary where the three lamps stood out brightly in the gloom, were extremely artistic.

This time, in front of the *virginedde*, who carried their empty trays, walked a group of five or six men—the Lenten singers—who sang, always in a minor key, and with much feeling, the *lamenti* on the death of Jesus. Their singing, perfectly

harmonious, but exceedingly melancholy, became weaker and weaker as the procession of coloured lights rose higher, and was the best part of the whole performance.

The priests took down the effigy from the cross, folded its movable arms, laid it back on the silk mattress in the crystal case, restored the crown of thorns, hammer, nails, etc., to the *virginedde's* little trays, and they all came down once more, singing mournfully.

As the coloured lights and plaintive singing drew nearer to the village, the shades of a starless night shrouded the hill where the place of the Calvary was shown by the three lamps burning at the foot of the cross.

* * * * *

It is commonly believed that our Lord rose on the third day, but in Sicily it is on the morning of Easter Eve, on the *Saturday*, that they commemorate the Resurrection.

At a given moment of the morning service a great painted wooden effigy of our Lord with a white cloud under its feet and a red flag in one hand is, by means of a pulley, violently thrown into the air from behind the altar, and upon reaching the limit of this precipitous ascension, a set of large

gilt wooden rays along the sides of its back, shoulders, and head opens with a spasmodic click, thus surrounding it with a golden halo in the delighted eyes of the gaping crowd.

At that solemn moment a burst of enthusiasm breaks upon all, the priest sings a triumphant *Te Deum*, the people—the women especially—beat upon their breasts, weeping with joy, and shouting *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, the church-bells ring wildly, and the drum-beaters beat madly, to announce to the whole village that Christ is risen indeed!

In the afternoon another surprise was in store for me. I was familiar with the ceremony of blessing the houses before Easter, but had never seen it done in such a post-haste hurry. A priest dressed in white lace over a red cassock, and followed by a boy who carried a pail of water, came into the house like a whirlwind, and, without knocking, penetrated into all the rooms, which he briskly sprinkled with holy water from the pail; and this was blessing the house!

* * * * *

I thought that, having made Christ “rise” on the Saturday, everything was over, but I was mistaken, for they told me that this morning—

Easter Sunday—there would be the *incontro* (meeting) between our risen Lord and the *Bedda Matri* (Madonna) on the village square, which has the shape of a large rectangle, and at either end of which I found they had erected an arch of branches closed by a red cotton curtain.

A crowd in holiday attire lighted up the square with cheerful bits of colour, the women picturesque with their black capes and their bright-coloured gowns, in many cases of silk, with neatly-stitched flounces; the men grave and stiff, close-shaven, dark-complexioned, many of them in black velvet suits and shiny top-boots. They all sauntered up and down the piazza, but the women stood grouped together, hiding under their black capes some babies whose small brown faces only were visible, adorned with funny caps trimmed profusely with ribbons and conspicuous bunches of artificial flowers.

Soon, from a side-street at one end of the piazza, appeared a feminine crowd escorting a resplendent Madonna of painted wood. Her stand, as usual, was carried by a large number of men. She was dressed in a gorgeous robe of blue silk embroidered with gilt flowers and a lovely cloak of white silk dotted with silver stars. On her head was a monumental silver crown; around her neck were gold



"HE HELD HIS HANDS IN THE ATTITUDE OF PRAYER."
(Page 93.)



"PEPPE." (Page 88.)

To face page 92.

chains, with lockets and watches all over her breast; many bracelets and rings glittered on her outstretched arms and hands.

A black veil had been thrown over all this splendour, and, upon my asking the reason of this, Alessandro explained, with a grin, that "the Madonna wore it in sign of mourning because she had not yet *been told* of the resurrection of her Son!"

They placed her behind the curtain, under the arch of green boughs.

In the meanwhile, at the other extremity of the piazza, arrived a wooden effigy of our Lord, exactly like the one which had "risen" the day before, only much smaller, perhaps for the purpose of carrying it more easily to the *incontro*. It had also the gilt rays all round its body, and held up a red flag.

They placed it under the other arch, behind its curtain, and I was wondering what would happen next, when a serious-faced youth of about eighteen suddenly appeared upon the scene. He wore the dress of the "brothers"—white robe and red silk scarf—and a cardboard halo mysteriously stuck at the back of his well-combed head. He held his hands together in the attitude of prayer, and the crowd having fallen back on the two sides of the piazza,

he rapidly walked down the empty space, in the attitude I have described, in the midst of a religious silence.

When he reached the curtain which hid the Madonna from view, he bowed, put his head behind it as if to speak to her, then suddenly turned back, walked up the piazza again, and did the same thing at the curtain which hid the effigy of our Lord, and then walked down again towards the Madonna. This ceremony was repeated three times in silence, and, naturally, I asked what it all meant. I then learnt that this youth represented St. John, who was the first to meet Jesus after his resurrection. He ran to Mary with the joyful news, but she could not, would not, believe him, and sent him back to Jesus to better ascertain it. St. John ran back to Jesus, then came once more to Mary, to assure her it was indeed He risen, and invited her to come and see for herself.

This is the explanation of St. John's mysterious goings and comings, and of his whispering behind the curtain.

When at last the Madonna was convinced, a subdued thrill of joy floated through the crowd, her black veil was taken off, her arch of verdure was pulled down, and she moved to meet Jesus, who, in

His turn, surrounded by the priests and "brothers," emerged from His arch and walked down towards her, the big drums beating away, one on each side.

In the middle of the piazza the much-expected *incontro* (meeting) took place, the most comical and puerile performance I ever witnessed. When the two wooden figures were face to face, the bearers stopped, and made them bow ceremoniously three times to each other, the crowd looking on enthusiastically—there was joy in every countenance.

The bows were all the more ludicrous from the fact that Mary's effigy was at least three times larger than that of Jesus.

After the bows, they had an attempt at embracing. The effigy of Christ approached its face to the Madonna's, their wooden cheeks knocked against each other, and Christ's little red flag got entangled in the complicated arches of the Madonna's crown, nearly pulling it down; at that solemn moment the crowd, who had looked on in a breathless silence of joyful suspense, all shouted "*Evviva!*" (Hurrah!).

This greeting ceremony happily over, the figures were placed side by side, and walked down together, the drum and priests in front, all the crowd behind,

and the strange couple marched thus all round the village—this being the last and not least heathenish performance of the elaborate Lenten and Easter ceremonies.

I lost sight of them as they turned round the corner, the Madonna leaning perilously over on one side, the lighter and smaller figure of Jesus skipping jauntily up and down, all noises drowned in the deafening drums, all the shrouded women keeping close to their beloved and gaudy Madonna, some of them holding up their babies to look at her as she passed.



"ST. JOHN." (Page 94.)



THE "INCONTRO." (Page 95.)

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CHRISTENING CUSTOMS

WHAT strikes me most in the christening ceremonies and customs out here is the complete elimination of the child *as* the godchild of his godfather, to the advantage of his own father and mother.

On the occasion of his christening—I speak of the lower classes always—the child does not acquire a godfather, but rather his own father enters on a strong bond of friendship with the godfather which will last for their lives.

When a man has asked a friend, a relation, sometimes his own brother, to “christen his child”—this is the right expression—the two become *compari*. The English word *compeer* does not give at all the high meaning of the Sicilian *compare*, to which are always added the words *San Giovanni* in the case of a christening *compare*, to distinguish him from the *cresima* (confirmation) *compare*, when no saint is mentioned.

Thus, if a man says, "I am *compare San Giovanni* with Peppe," this means that they are friends for ever, and will always help and respect each other; indeed, to speak lightly of this *San Giovanni* relationship is considered as little less than a blasphemy.

Another peculiarity of this *San Giovanni* relationship is that the two *compari* henceforth, in speaking to each other, will have to adopt the more respectful form of speech *voi* (you), even if, owing to their previous intimacy, or to the fact of their being brothers or cousins, they had, up to that day, used in speaking to each other the more intimate pronoun *tu* (thou). This is a sign of mutual respect, and it is most comical to hear, for instance, two brothers, when the one has "christened" the other's child, addressing each other no more by their names, but as *compare*, and using the formal *voi* instead of the familiar *tu*.

The compact or bond of friendship which now ties them to each other is very important indeed, and the greatest argument a man can oppose to anyone who urges him to go against another is when he can answer: "Against Peppe? Why, he is my *compare San Giovanni*; impossible!" And sometimes I have heard someone say: "I will ask

this favour of *compare* Turiddu ; he cannot refuse me, for he is my *compare* *San Giovanni*.”

To the child he is, and remains, absolutely nothing ; he does not take any interest in its future welfare, except the general interest he would take in *all* his *compare's* children, and the total absence of relationship between godfather and godchild is also to be found in the choice of the child's name. No one would dream of giving to a child the name of his godfather, there being already an established custom of giving to the first-born the name of its paternal grandfather or grandmother, and to the second-born the name of its maternal grandfather or grandmother ; but if one or both of the latter were already dead at the birth of the first-born, their names—as an exception—would be chosen in this case. I know a family of three brothers and two sisters whose father's name was Enrico. They all married, and all gave to the first boy the name of Enrico ; but what is worse is that the three cousins Enrico, sons of three brothers, all bear the same surname, with a very confusing result.

The christening takes place generally as soon as the mother is up and about again, which happens very often five or six days after the birth.

The father has already asked his best friend, sometimes his own brother or cousin, to become his *compare*, and as a rule the offer is not to be declined on any account.

There is no godmother, for this would imply a free and pleasing state of cordiality between people of different sexes, which is set down as simply sinful here; but in the case of a girl, there is one in the person of the wife, the *fiancée*, or the sister of the godfather, so that *les convenances* are saved.

The child's mother, however, becomes the godfather's *commare*, just as her husband is his *compare*, and she gets the best of the bargain, for the presents are all for her.

In the better classes, when a man has been asked to stand as godfather to a child, he may remember to buy him a silver fork and spoon, and, perhaps, a mug, but this is often overlooked; the first thought is to buy a ring, bracelet, watch, or brooch for the child's mother, his new *commare*, and the present must be as costly as his means will allow him.

In the poorer classes the *compare* offers to his *commare* a cheap article of sham jewellery, five or six pounds of *maccheroni*, biscuits, ground coffee,



"I AM 'COMPARE SAN GIOVANNI' WITH PEPPE." (Page 98.)



"HE AND I ARE 'COMPARI SAN GIOVANNI!'" (Page 108.)

To face page 100.

and three bottles of wine. Any present to the child in this class is an uncommon occurrence, but sometimes, as an exception, if it is a girl, the *compare* brings her a pair of little earrings or a tiny ring.

I have sometimes seen a baby in arms with a little gold ring on her chubby finger, and heard that this was a gift from her godfather.

The christening ceremony takes place as follows : The father and the godfather, with their friends, the two former dressed in their very best clothes, with dazzling white shirts and resplendent ties, collect in front of the church, and there wait for the child and its feminine escort.

By-and-by appears a little girl carrying a spotless towel over her arm, and holding carefully a decanter of water. This will be used for the christening, as the Church is not expected to provide it,* and the towel is to wipe the priest's hands ; a specially soft, lace-trimmed handkerchief is brought by the women to wipe the baby's head.

Half a minute after this little water-and-towel-bearer has passed, the christening procession comes

* I have been at smart christenings in the cathedral at Palermo, and when the carriages drew up in front, saw that one of the party was a white-aproned servant carrying a decanter of water !

majestically round the corner, and as I sit in front of our *casino* to watch all that goes on, I get a full view of it; unfortunately, I have never been able to snapshot one, as christenings always take place at sunset.

The baby is decked out in the smartest robe the parents can afford to buy, often ordering it from the big shops in Palermo; the local ideal of smartness is set forth in the liberal display of little artificial flowers with which the cap and robe are plentifully adorned. Artificial flowers on a new-born babe will sound strange, but they are a fact here.

The baby is supposed to be carried by the midwife, but I have noticed that, as a rule, they make a little girl—sister, cousin, or aunt of the baby—carry it, and she is sometimes so small that she disappears under the baby's gorgeous christening toilette.

She walks in front, looking highly pleased with herself, and, in spite of her voluminous bundle, manages to keep her shawl on her head; behind her walk a compact group of women, the most important of whom—the midwife and the mother, if she is there—walk in front; but very often the mother remains at home, where she is supposed to prepare

the refreshments. If she goes to the church, she wears her beautiful silk wedding-dress and shawl; the midwife is also draped in a gorgeous shawl, and all the women who follow wear over the head a bright silk shawl or black cloth *mantellina*, according to the social position of their husbands, since only tradesmen's wives and daughters wear shawls, the women-folk of peasants and miners being restricted to the black cloth *mantellina*.

I have witnessed a few christenings in church, and, I am sorry to say, have been more amused than edified.

As soon as the procession has entered the church the men who were waiting outside come in too, the two *compari* standing close together.

A friend of the father immediately begins distributing long thin tapers to all present, and this generally causes some confusion, as the crowd of ragamuffins who follow the procession into the church clamour loudly for tapers, too, and try hard to grab at them, in spite of the taper-dispenser holding the bunch high up in the air; he remonstrates with them, however, and in desperate cases administers kicks and boxes on the ear.

In the midst of this confusion and of lighting and holding up of tapers—the richer the family, the

more numerous they are—the priest near the font calmly adjusts his surplice and lace cuffs, and the women crowd gleefully about him, the men forming an outer circle and keeping the ragamuffins at a distance.

After a few dogs have been kicked out of the church, the band—when the father can afford it—begins to play loudly *in* the church, and goes on playing till the end of the ceremony; in most cases, however, the music is provided by the rickety organ, on which the organist shows off the liveliest opera airs he can remember, with his own variations.

The priest, in drowsy, hurried mumbling, reads out the whole service in Latin, to which an acolyte gives the responses in loud, spasmodic tone; the band or organ completely covers their voices, and no one takes any notice or follows it in any way.

He goes through the formality of asking the godfather whether he can say the *Credo* and the *Paternostro*, a question which is always answered in the affirmative, although very often a negative would be more in harmony with truth. Then, as is customary, he puts salt in the child's mouth and palms, and oil on the forehead, which is immediately wiped away by the midwife; then the baby's cap is



THE BLACK CLOTH "MANTELLINA."
(Page 103.)



"TRADESMEN'S WIVES AND DAUGHTERS WEAR SHAWLS."
(Page 103.)

removed, and the priest christens it, taking up the water in the font with a beautiful silver ladle, a real antique; and a great fuss is indulged in next by all the women to wipe the baby's head, for fear of its catching cold.

The priest then wipes his hand with the towel brought for that purpose in a calm, business-like manner, and walks away unconcernedly towards the sacristy, beginning to take off his things before he is out of the church.

In the meantime the christening party sets to putting out each other's tapers; the women tie on the baby's cap again, admire it—the baby—congratulate the mother on its and her good looks, ask her if she has plenty of milk, and so on, whilst the two *compari* stand apart, solemnly silent, looking as self-conscious as they can.

Presently they all leave the church and walk in two processions, the women first, and, a little behind, the men.

In very poor families it is the custom not to provide any refreshments for the women, and the men alone go to a favourite tavern, where the two *compari* vie with each other in offering wine to their friends; but when the family can afford it, they all meet at the father's house, and there partake

of the humble refreshments provided, the men huddling together in one room, the women in the other, or, in the general case of a one-roomed house, the two sexes standing as far apart as the walls will allow !

I have mentioned the refreshments offered at bridal entertainments. The christening ones are just the same : stale biscuits, bonbons tasting of dust, and, to drink, the inevitable sickly liquor called *rosolio*, or the cheapest Marsala that can be got, which is little better.

They go by a strange standard of etiquette here at these entertainments : when the tray goes round, and the guests each take a glass of *rosolio*, it is not supposed to be good manners to drink it all. The correct thing is to take a little sip gingerly, as if you did not care for it—which is always true in my case—and when the tray comes round again, put down on it the glass, still nearly full. The master of the house then calmly fills up all the glasses once more, and sends the tray on a second course round the room, the guests each taking up a glass again at random, to have another gingerly sip, no one dreaming of recognizing his own glass. That, I found, was the most unpleasant part of the business. However, I did not suffer through it, as I never

went in for the second sip, finding the first quite enough.

The newly-christened babe has his own refreshments served out to him by his mother, a crowd of gaping, gushing women standing round and discussing the various incidents and contretemps which characterized its birth. The men whisper to each other, and the two *compari* stand together in dignified silence, steadfast in their resolution to be henceforth all in all to each other, and never neglect an opportunity of serving or assisting each other as long as they live. This thought haunts the *compare's* mind much more than any interest in the baby he has just "christened."

* * * * *

When the municipal elections were forthcoming one year, and my people were canvassing for them, they heard that a man named Carminu, who had always been one of our most loyal electors, was rumoured to have become rather shaky. It was darkly hinted that he had been heard to imply covertly that he would vote for the other side.

This was a very bad look-out, as in a place where the electors do not reach the number of three hundred one defection is an important matter.

I heard my people discussing this serious business

with one of our men, sounding him as to what would be the best means of bringing back the lost sheep to the fold, when my friend Alessandro happened to pass—for of course this discussion was taking place on the piazza, near the *casino*—so they called him.

“Here, Alessandro, do you hear this? Carminu seems not to be too sure of himself just now, and not having had a piece of land granted him, which he had set his heart upon, told his wife he did not know which way the wind would blow this year. What is to be done?”

Alessandro turned away his Dante-like profile, and said with studied indifference :

“Don’t think of it any more ; Carminu will learn which way the wind blows, and will walk arm in arm with me to the election poll.”

My people, used to the ways and imaginative speeches of these men, seemed satisfied, and walked away, but I called back Alessandro and said to him :

“What is your secret power over Carminu that you can make him vote as you like?”

“I should like to see him resist me,” said Alessandro, with a laugh at my innocence ; “he and I are *compari San Giovanni!*”

LUNCH AT SERRADIFALCO

THE other day we drove to Serradifalco on some business ; I was very glad of the opportunity of inspecting that little town, of which I only had a glimpse the day we arrived, as we passed it on our way from the station.

Two men to escort us—for we might have met brigands—followed the carriage on horseback, both interesting and typical Sicilians. The one tall and stout, with a grizzly beard, fustian suit, and top-boots ; his name is *Mastru* Federico. The other was my friend Alessandro, thin, tall, close-shaven, very like Dante's portraits. He is a most intellectual talker, for he has read a good deal, and continually quotes the Italian classics, which he knows by heart.

Both held their loaded rifles in front of them across the saddle and trotted, one on each side of the carriage, thus giving a certain piquancy to the expedition, whilst Alessandro enlivened the mono-

tony of the long drive by quoting Dante and Tasso at every turning, and entering with us upon most interesting philological discussions.

The ten kilometres which separate us from Serradifalco were thus agreeably covered, and upon arriving at that small place, I examined the inn where we put up. Above the entrance was a collection of most heterogeneous articles, hanging in a row from an iron bar. First of all, a dangling decanter of amber-coloured wine showed it was an inn; near it a few potatoes hung close to some *maccheroni* pointed out the fact that eatables were sold here; then a shirt-front and collar floating in the breeze, close to a red scarf, proclaimed the fact of its being a haberdashery; a leather belt ended the row.

After a good look at this strange and novel sign-board, we went in.

On one side was the counter, where eatables and haberdashery were sold; they were displayed in glass cases against the walls.

On a shiny brass counter opposite wine was dispensed, and water, too, for Sicilians drink a great deal of it, and for this purpose use large tumblers containing a pint.

A large, resplendent brass basin served to rinse glasses. Behind it was suspended a savings-bank,



"ALESSANDRO'S DANTE-LIKE PROFILE.
(Page 108.)



SERRADIFALCO. (Page 109.)

To face page 110.

shaped as a small amphora, with a slit in it, where generous drinkers deposited their small offerings to St. Joseph, a most popular saint here, whose picture, in gaudy colours, was stuck against the small amphora.

Near the counter was the large dowry-chest (*cassa dotale*) of carved wood possessed by most Sicilian couples of the lower classes, and which contains the wardrobe of the whole family. Close to it a baby rocked himself in a small rocking arm-chair, in which he was securely fastened.

A door at the back of the shop led into a large room, where cooking went on, where men sat down to eat and drink, and where the innkeeper and family slept at night in a large bed.

The innkeeper, a good-looking, well-shaven, neatly-got-up young fellow, who had the appearance of a smart coachman and the manners of a gentleman, did the honours with his wife, who had black, almond-shaped eyes, a gracious smile, gold rings as large as bangles hanging from her ears, and a black handkerchief gay with red and yellow flowers arranged at the back of her head and floating down her shoulders in artistic folds.

Distinguished people like us could not lunch in the kitchen-bedroom.

They took us upstairs into a very clean room with two beds in it. The mattresses—as usual here—were rolled up at the head, and were covered with the neatly-folded sheets and counterpane, the whole pyramid being finished off with the two pillows, smart with lace and spotlessly white.

The mattresses of Sicilian beds are generally laid upon three green boards, so that when, during the day, they are rolled up, that portion of the boards which remains uncovered does good service as a table. In poor people's houses they make the bread there. As Goldsmith says :

“The bed contrived a double debt to pay—
A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day.”

Further inspection round the room showed me a tall, marble-topped chest of drawers adorned with a grand display of cups—twenty-four, I think—and a grey marble washing-stand and mirror, completely shrouded in a red gauze veil to keep off the flies.

In the middle stood the table with covers laid for us. The innkeeper waited on us with the air of a disguised prince, and put down the dishes on the bed-boards. Lunch was good, but odd. We had several courses, beginning with *salame*, stuffed artichokes, greens, tough chops, French beans,



ALESSANDRO. (Page 109.)



"MASTRU" FEDERICO. (Page 109.)

To face page 112.

lettuce, cheese, all served and eaten at random, without system, but with perfect wine from Syracuse.

After this queer lunch we took a short walk out of the place, ascending the hill on the outskirts of the village, where a stone terrace and black wood cross have given it the name of the Calvary, as on Good Friday the ceremony of the Crucifixion is performed here.

Coming down again, we went to inspect a quaint little shop where, as I passed it, I had had visions of native pottery. There an amateur could have rummaged about, and for a few pence become the happy owner of tall, two-handled, Greek-looking pitchers, of small miners' lamps of antique shape, which all looked as if they had come straight from Pompeii.

I made my choice amongst all these treasures, whilst a small crowd collected around the entrance to enjoy the surprising sight of a lady buying *cose da villani* (things for the peasants), though I must say that the shopkeeper took advantage of my eccentric tastes to charge us prices which were certainly not *peasants' prices*.

On our way back to the inn we passed a quaint old fountain where women were filling their tall

pitchers, and they all stared wonderingly at me as I went about with my companions taking photographs. Their astonishment is not to be wondered at in a country where the most independent action a lady can indulge in is going to church wrapped from head to feet in a large shawl, never alone, but under the strict surveillance of her own servant.

As I was about to get into the carriage with my pottery, the innkeeper drew near and said with dignity, "*Bacio la mano*" (I kiss your hand), and his wife, with a smiling countenance, added, "*Voscenza benedica!*" (Your Excellence, bless us!); and as, thinking of something suitable to say, I expressed a wish to come back soon, she answered, "*Se Dio vuole!*" (God permitting!)

The drive back in the setting sun was charming. Our men, being in a hurry to reach Montedoro before night, did not show any inclination to talk, and almost without speaking we drove back in the deep silence of the wide plains and hills, to which the waning rays gave a warm tint. And in the great solitary peace of those wide cornfields the sky seemed deeper, the light softer, the heart lighter.



"TWO-HANDED, GREEK-LOOKING PITCHERS." (Page 113.)



"WOMEN WERE FILLING THEIR TALL PITCHERS." (Page 113.)

HARVEST

ON Ascension Day, when the noble expanse of rounded hills and broad plains around Montedoro is tinged in one glorious hue of gold, the heavy ears of corn bending their heads under the weight of the ripe grain, a poetic ceremony takes place.

In the fresh, early dawn, before the summer glare has begun to pour torrents of fire on the hills and plains, the Vicar, in his surplice, followed by most of the villagers, walks to the top of a hill, from where, in a sweeping glance, he can see far and near, and look on all the fields of ripe golden corn—the one hope and fortune of these poor people; and there, raising his right arm, whilst an acolyte shakes an incense-burner, he blesses the whole country round, and asks for God's help and protection during the now impending harvest season.

The arcadian beauty and simplicity of this out-

door service cannot be described, and it is one of the most striking of the harvest customs.

At this time the reapers arrive in the village, and stand about in the big piazza, "awaiting to be hired," as in the time of the Gospel parable.

They come from some other province in search of the harvest work, which, comparatively speaking, is well paid.

They are strongly built, dark-complexioned men, all close shaven, with the small scythe over the shoulder, and a red handkerchief tied about the head.

The people whose corn is ready to be reaped hire a certain number of these men, and next morning at daybreak, after an invocation to *San Calogero*, they set to work.

They cut down armfuls of corn, standing in long rows of from twelve to thirty men, according to the width of the field. They all advance together, and when, after three or four cuts, the armful of corn is large enough, it is placed on one of the various heaps scattered about the reaped field; each of these sheaves is next tied firmly round with a long cord of grass specially prepared for this by a workman who does nothing else, and is called the *ligatore*.



THE CALVARY. (Page 113.)



ASCENSION DAY CELEBRATION. (Page 115.)

To face page 116.

I asked for information as to the salary these harvest-men receive for working in the blazing sunshine from daybreak till sunset, and as to their food, and was told that one of the two following arrangements was generally adopted :

By the first, these men get 2 to 3 francs a day—a great deal for a Sicilian peasant—and have to provide their own food.

By the second arrangement they are paid 1.50 francs a day, and their food and wine is found for them by their employer. This food means a short meal every two hours, consisting of bread and cheese, or salt curds and whey, or pickled olives, or boiled potatoes, with a pull at the earthenware wine-bottle. When the day's work is over they get their principal meal at their employer's house, and this is merely a large dish of *maccheroni* or *lasagne*, with wine and bread.

This is the food and salary for which these men will stand the tropical heat of June all through the long summer day under a fiery sky.*

After their evening meal they all gather into the big village square, lie down on the bare ground, and

* Owing to the constant emigration of Sicilians to America, the few workmen now left in the island expect, and receive, a much higher salary during harvest.

sleep there through the short summer night, in the cool starlight, ready to take up their work once more at daybreak.

During the first days of harvest-time, the men who have not yet found work pass the evening dancing to the music of a primitive, arcadian little flute, made of a reed, with a very sweet sound.

Once they have found work they give up the evening dance, being too tired to think of it.

* * * * *

One evening we went into one of our fields to see them reaping, and arrived when the wide hill-top was almost done. The reapers wore a leather apron to protect their clothes, and the usual bright red handkerchief tightly bound about the head.

As they advanced, reaping the tall yellow corn, looking black and sunburnt, they chanted prayers and songs—a most touching practice, meant to shorten the working hours of the never-ending June day.

These are the words of the first part of the chanting, which I was able to jot down as they sang, each reaper singing one verse at a time when his turn came :

“ Let us praise and thank the most holy Sacrament.

“ The most holy Sacrament be praised, with Joseph and Mary.



RIPE, GOLDEN CORN. (Page 115.)



"THEY ALL ADVANCE TOGETHER." (Page 116.)

To face page 118.

“ Look out, comrades, for God is passing, and when He passes, He passes for all.

“ Let hell tremble when it hears Mary, and the Names of Jesus and Mary be blessed.

“ Let us praise St. Joseph immaculate, who must give us grace and strength to live and work through this holy day.

“ Look out, comrade, and prepare harmony, for the Lord is passing me just now.

“ And for ever let His holy Name be praised.

“ Look out, O reaper, for the Lord is passing, and when He passes, He passes for all.

“ Look out, comrades, for the Lord is passing, and when He passes, He leaves us His grace.

“ When the bell rings, Jesus calls us all.

“ Come quickly ; do not delay, for He wants to forgive thee.”

They next sang all together, on a drowsy melody in a minor key, the following stanzas :

“ Holy Barbara, pure little virgin,
Who camest like a banner from heaven.
When the sea was in a storm,
The sailor started praying,
On the Saturday of that beautiful feast,
For the fair name of the much-loved Mary.

“ O consecrated Host, our Redeemer,
Monarch of the holy Passion,
Three fine saints and three fine figures
Are in Paradise ; there is corn and sunshine.
Let us praise the holy Sacrament,
And long live Mary's miracles !

“ O little priest, how worthy you are !
For every morning you communicate,
You divide a wafer in three parts,
And consecrate one of the three ;

And with three holy words that you say,
 The court and the Divinity come down.
 Let us praise the holy Sacrament,
 And long live Mary of the Rosary !

“ I saw a cloudlet on the sea ;
 It made a bridge, and darkened the sun.
 However beautiful is San Pasquale,
 Mary is still more beautiful.
 Three little virgins can do and undo—
 Mary, St. Joseph, and the Lord.
 Let us praise in every moment
 The most holy Sacrament !

“ I raised my eyes to heaven and saw a wood ;
 I saw it when Christ came down.
 I said to him : ‘ Benign little Father,
 What are those nails you hold in your hand ?’
 He said to me : ‘ This is the sign
 That for love I give My blood.’
 Let us praise the holy Sacrament,
 And long live the little virgin St. Lucy !”

After these stanzas they started the third part of their singing, still reaping vigorously. This consisted of a series of versicles with a rhyme in the middle ; the *ligatore* sang one, after him the reapers repeated it in chorus, the *ligatore* sang the next and they all repeated it together, and so on to the end. These are some of the versicles :

“ Let us praise in every hour the most holy Sacrament.

“ Let us praise in every moment the loving heart of Jesus.

“ And let be praised for ever the most pure Virgin Mary.

“ How beautiful are these words : ‘ Long live God and St. Nicholas !’

"How noble is the Lord! He really is the God of Love.

"The true Son of Mary, your mother and my mother.

"He denies nothing to us. Oh, forgive us our sins!

"Every time we praise the Lord we refresh the holy souls.

"Let us praise the Eternal Father, who will save us from hell.

"Let us shout in the air: 'Long live Mary of the Rosary!'

"Let St. Joseph be praised, our protector and advocate.

"Let St. Joseph be praised, the dear spouse of Mary.

"Let us praise frequently the most holy Crucifix.

"When the bell rings, Jesus calls us all.

"Let us praise the Eternal Father, who saves us from hell.

"And let us end with a thanksgiving to Mary, St. Anne, and St. Ignatius.

"The thanksgiving now is made. Long live God and St. Lewis!

"And once more let us praise and thank the name of the most holy Sacrament."

After this, silence reigned in the peaceful landscape as it basked in the slanting shadows of the setting sun; the only noise heard was the rustling of the corn as the men reaped it with their short sickles.

A few minutes later, just as the last rays disappeared behind the distant mountains, leaving behind them that soft light which comes when the summer day is over, the men reaped the last tall ears of corn; this done, they waved triumphantly in the air this last armful of ears, turned to the west, and shouted all together, "*Evviva San Calogero!*" the golden corn against their red

handkerchiefs and bronzed faces forming a striking contrast of colours.

This was an invocation to their favourite saint, who had helped them through their day's work.

"I hope," I remarked to Alessandro, who was by me, leaning on his rifle—"I hope that you will explain to me who is San Calogero. I never heard of this saint before."

"All I know of him," answered Alessandro, "is that he has a black face and an iron head, and that he perspires when he does a miracle, which shows it does not come very easy to him. If *Voscenza* was to ask me about Orlando, now, I could tell all about his duel with Argante, but who cares about San Calogero?"

"The reapers evidently seem to care about him."

"Yes, but, *Voscenza* sees, they are like him in some respects, for they have black faces, and they do not accomplish the miracle of reaping without a good deal of perspiration;" and with this crushing joke at the poor toiling reapers, Alessandro airily put San Calogero away from the conversation.

* * * * *

Religious indifference, so common amongst the lower classes in Northern Italy, has not found its way here yet, and though their religion is entirely



THE REAPERS. (Page 118.)



"EVVIVA SAN CALOGERO!" (Page 121.)

made up of forms, yet the people follow them devoutly. Here is a good example of this : Reapers work on Sundays, and do not think it wrong to do so. But they have been taught it would be a sin to go without Mass on that day, so, in every corn-growing place, as long as reaping goes on, every night preceding Sundays and Saints' days there is the so-called Reapers' Mass. At three o'clock in the morning, when it is still quite dark, the bells are rung loudly during ten minutes, to awake the hard-worked reapers fast asleep on the village square. This noisy bell-ringing when the shades of night still cover the world has a very weird effect.

The reapers all get up, and with their scythe on the shoulder and red handkerchief tied about the head, assist at the Mass in the dimly-lighted church, after which they silently walk off to the different fields where they are bound in the pale light of approaching dawn, and after again exclaiming to each other, "*Evviva San Calogero!*" as a kind of greeting, begin their work long before the appearance of the sun beyond the far-away range of mountains to the east. They do not mind the sacrifice of this hour devoted to the Mass, and take it from their short night's rest with fatalistic resignation.

* * * * *

Thanks to San Calogero, harvest is happily over, and the reapers have all gone away.

About the bare fields, bristling with stumps of straw, lie innumerable sheaves of corn.

The owner of the land chooses the highest and flattest spot in the field, generally a wide, wind-blown hill-top, where all the sheaves are brought and arranged in a goodly pile. Then a wide, circular space is swept and scraped and rubbed until the hard, dry earth, which has not seen rain for several months (for we are now well into the month of July), becomes like a smooth floor. The sheaves are next cut open and spread on this place, forming a thick bed, going up to the knees of the horses or mules which are now brought here for the threshing.

A man stands in the middle, as in a circus, holding the reins and a long whip; the horses trot round and round and across, as the man directs them; and this goes on all through the long burning day, under the blazing July sun, from daybreak till sunset, with short rests, the grain thus separating from the straw, which remains on the top or is carried to one side by the wind.

It takes about four days of treading to completely separate the grain from the straw, most



TOSSING THE STRAW. (Page 128.)



THE THRESHING-PLACE. (Page 125.)

To face page 124.

of which, lifted by the wind, rises from the threshing-floor, and builds a high bank around one side of it.

These threshing-places, once harvest is over, are very numerous, there being one on every breezy hill-top, and it is the custom to go and visit one of them at the close of day, inspect the beautiful layer of corn hidden under the bed of straw, and watch the men at their work.

Accordingly one evening I went with Alessandro to one of our threshing-floors, knowing I should find there some fresh impressions of rural life. The men we found at work there were brothers, both dark and hot and sunburnt. They had been toiling ever since daybreak, and looked absolutely baked; but now that their work was nearly over, they went at it with renewed energy. They wore their shirts flying loose over their linen trousers, for coolness I suppose, and to protect their heads from the sun had the usual picturesque red handkerchief tied over their ears. One of them was resting, but the other stood in the middle of the threshing-place, waved high his whip, and led the mules round and round, exciting them with his voice, his shirt flying about in the breeze, his red handkerchief and dazzling teeth giving the needful touch of colour to the whole scene.

In the shade afforded by the rising wall of hot, dry straw lay, half-buried, a great two-handled amphora of lovely shape, containing the men's drinking-water.

The sun was going down slowly in the west, and silence was over all.

I watched the man as he drove about the mules. Suddenly, after turning to the setting sun, he shouted forth on one note a long sentence in Sicilian, beginning it in drawling fashion and ending it abruptly.

Of course, I turned at once to Alessandro to ask what this meant, and he answered: "This man is praising the Lord because his day's work is over."

Before I had time to speak again, the man again shouted to the winds his wild invocation, the mules gathering courage at the sound, and cantering briskly over the straw; for, as Alessandro pointed out: "*Voscenza* sees how the mules know that when their master praises the Lord they will soon have finished work?"

Then I noticed some wild, distant cries coming from the beautiful circle of hills and valleys about and below us, and learnt that all the men in the various threshing-places were thus "praising the Lord" because the sun was going down.



PLOUGHING. (Page 130.)



"MASTRU" FEDERICO. (Page 130.)

To face page 126.

In the meanwhile, the man before us burst forth every two minutes with his wild, primitive invocation, and at the last verse, sung as the dying rays vanished from the peaceful landscape, the mules left the threshing-place, the peasant threw down his whip, and came towards us with a smile, asking us to sit down on the nice clean straw.

Delighted with this charming pagan custom of mingling worship with work, I asked Alessandro to dictate to me the invocations or litanies chanted by the threshing men, and with a little prompting from them he dictated the following verses in Sicilian dialect, making me first write out the title, thus :

“PRAISES OF THE LORD.

“Let us thank and praise the name of the most holy Sacrament, and long live Mary !

“Mary, conceived without stain of original sin, is pure. Amen.

“Let hell and avarice be destroyed, and long live the Madonna of Grace !

“And, in spite of hell, long live Mary for ever !

“And, in spite of the devil, long live Mary of the Rosary !

“Let us praise St. Simon, who protects us from the kicks of donkeys, mules, and horses.

“Let us praise St. Alò, who guards our cattle.

“Let us praise little Santa Lucia, who protects the sight of our eyes.

“Let us praise St. Onofrio and St. Paul, who deliver us from thunder and lightning, from plague and sudden death.

“Let us praise the purity and chastity of the patriarch St. Joseph, and of all saints and angels in Paradise.

“ Let us praise Santa Fara, who watches over our food.

“ Go round and round gently, my mules, for God is here, and the holy angels and St. Peter, with St. Hyacinth, the Magdalen, and the Holy Ghost.

“ In the sign of the Cross, I place the names of God, Son, and Holy Ghost,

“ Put one foot forward, and the other will follow, lovely mules !

“ Let us praise St. Clement, and let us take up the trident.

“ Let us pray for the rest of the dear souls in Purgatory.

“ And may the Madonna of Gibilmanna save my body and my soul !

“ Go with the wind, good beasts !”

English translation is unable to render the poetic turn of this strange litany, where invocations to the saints are mixed with exhortations to the mules, a charming touch of ingenuity appearing in every line, whilst now and then an elementary rhyme or assonance pleases the ear.

Evening was coming on ; the mules were standing in the cool breeze, resting. The men who had called upon St. Clement took up some wooden tridents or forks, and began to toss the straw up on the wall, when their food—the food over which Santa Fara had watched—appeared under the shape of a caldron on the head of a woman, and a small amphora on the head of a girl.

The caldron contained steaming *maccheroni*, richly seasoned with tomato sauce and cheese,



"NAME OF GOD!" (Page 130.)



"HE FILLED THE MEASURE." (Page 130.)

To face page 128.

and the graceful stone bottle was full of well-earned wine.

Half a dozen children, brown, half-naked little things, had escorted this plain but wholesome dinner; and now men, women, and children all sat down around a clean napkin, and the mother served out a plate to each.

The reason of this outdoor supper was then pointed out to me: the men cannot leave the threshing-floor a moment, for they must watch over the corn hidden under the straw. Some threshing-places have £40 worth and more of corn, and it might easily be stolen if left alone, since the fields are as solitary as a desert; so the men always spend the night there, with their rifles and dogs. No better way of passing the night could be imagined than sleeping on that soft bed of straw under the sparkling canopy of a Southern sky!

We have seen how, with the help and protection of the Lord, San Calogero, the Madonna, and many out-of-the-way saints, the corn has been safely reaped and threshed.

It now stands in the middle of the threshing-floor—a noble heap, the colour of gold—and must be divided in exactly two halves; one goes to the owner of the land, the other to the peasant who

has sustained the work and expense of ploughing, sowing, and reaping.

This is how I saw them go through the ceremony of division in one of our threshing-places.

When I arrived there on horseback, and escorted by Alessandro, I found that the workers were resting and listening to *Mastru* Federico, our overseer, who was reading to them a medieval romance — the heroic feats of Rinaldo, the Crusader.

Our arrival interrupted the reading, and after a little discussion between Alessandro and the overseer as to the merits of the various warriors of Tasso's *Gerusalemme*, a large, iron-bound measure, containing about 28 pounds, and called a *tumolo*, was brought into the threshing-place for the division. The overseer, tall, burly, full of his own importance, came forward and began. He filled the measure rapidly, and poured the corn alternately in our own sacks, held out by the men, and into the peasant's sacks. He counted the *tumoli* loudly, but at the first, instead of calling out "One!" he shouted, "Name of God!" so as not to begin such a solemn function without an invocation to the powers above, in the old pagan way. He filled and emptied the measure very

quickly, beginning to count again after every sixteen *tumoli*, always starting the fresh account with "Name of God!"

The heap was rapidly decreasing, our own sacks of corn being sent to the village on some donkeys under the protection of an armed man, when a monk, leading a handsome black mule, suddenly appeared upon the scene. He looked very picturesque with his bushy white beard and large straw hat.

The mule was smartly decked out with red-braid ornaments and dangling plumes and tassels; a framed image of the Madonna was stuck on its forehead, and it bore some sacks of corn. I was told that this monk went from one threshing-place to another at the solemn moment of the division to beg for corn for his convent at Canicattì, and that it was the custom to give him a *tumolo* of it, and accordingly a *tumolo* was emptied into his sack.

After he had received the corn, the monk took from the mule's forehead the image of the Madonna of the Rosary, and held it out to me.

Not knowing exactly what he expected me to do, I smiled at the picture, but after me he passed it on to the men in turns, who—even Alessandro

the sceptic—touched it with their finger-tips, which they kissed with unconscious grace.

The monk next stuck the image in the heap of corn—to bless it, maybe—and after this last ceremony tied it once more to the mule's forehead, and departed solemnly, whilst I continued watching the division, which was now coming to an end ; and in the peaceful valley now and then sounded the solemn cry, “ Name of God !”

SAN CALOGERO

ALESSANDRO'S mysterious words about San Calogero had fairly puzzled me, but, having gone to the right source for information, I found out curious facts about his legend, and learnt something of the special festival they keep in his honour at Girgenti.

San Calogero, the popular saint of the provinces of Girgenti and Caltanissetta, is the most mysterious of all Sicilian saints, and is always represented as a negro.

Professor Pitrè, the Sicilian folklorist, in his volume, *Feste Patronali in Sicilia*,* says San Calogero was born in Calcedonia, where from his early youth he gave himself up to God, who endowed him with the gift of miracles and prophecy.

After many years of privation he became a priest, and preached Christianity.

But in 303 he was persecuted by Diocletian and

* Alberto Reber, Palermo.

Maximilian, went into exile, and landed at Lillibeo (Sicily), where he sought refuge in a grotto, whence he came out now and then to preach Christ crucified. His disciples, however, were massacred. In 313, when Constantine the Great ascended the throne, Calogero emerged from his grotto once more, and struck the people with his piety and his miracles, until he died of old age in a grotto on Mount Cronio, near Sciacca.

This is a summary of his life; but if we look a little further than the legend of the saint, and examine the etymology of his name—*καλῶς τερον*, beautiful old man—we can easily imagine that this name has been common to men celebrated for their self-sacrifice, heroism, philanthropy, and holiness. And this opinion is confirmed by the devotion offered to San Calogero by innumerable towns in the provinces of Girgenti and Caltanissetta, who each claim for themselves the one the birth, the other the life, another the miracles, of San Calogero. In fact, Girgenti, Sciacca, Naro, Canicattì, Aragona, San Salvatore di Fitalia, all and each boast of their own San Calogero, their protector, for whom they profess a boundless faith which passes all imagination.

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I will now say something (still culling from Pitre's book) about the way San Calogero's festival is kept in Girgenti on the first Sunday in July.

His church, which remains closed the greater part of the year, stands a little way out of Girgenti, at the *Porta Atenea*; it is a very simple one, in Arabo-Norman style.

The people who have made a vow to San Calogero will now go on a pilgrimage to this chapel, barefooted, reciting litanies to themselves as they go.

Silence is not to be broken on any account, but it ends at the church, and the journey back is effected boisterously.

Once in the church, if the vow requires it, the pilgrim will go up to the altar lying on his stomach, and sweeping the floor of the church with his tongue from the door to the altar. He is preceded by a man who, with a handkerchief, sweeps and beats away the dust from that part of the floor which the pilgrim is to lick.

When he does not feel equal to accomplishing this short but trying journey, his admiring relatives tie ropes under his arms and drag him along, his tongue always sweeping the floor. This is the most revolting sight which ever disgusted a normal on-

looker, but the natives all look on with complacency and admiration.

A week before the appointed day the town is filled with rumour and animation, and the large drums practise every day, standing in a circle with the head-drummer, who, with comical energy, directs their wild symphony.

The saint, who has an iron head with copper-coloured varnish, and wears a long black tunic made gay with white flowers, is very heavy, especially as the whole stand is iron-bound on all sides, to resist better the bumping and shaking he receives during his wild race through the town.

At twelve o'clock a crowd of vigorous young men rush to take a place along the poles which sustain the saint; those who do not find a place will be content with just touching the pole, awaiting the privilege of carrying him when any of the eighty bearers have to rest.

The special feature of this procession is that the clergy do not take part in it; the people alone carry the saint round, the people alone surround him, shout and weep and cheer on his passage, and follow him, gambolling and calling upon his name.

Whenever some of the carriers are tired, they

receive food and wine from San Calogero's devotees, and when, in the hottest part of the day, they all go for a rest in the shade, the black saint remains immovable under the scorching July sun, supremely indifferent to all that happens around him.

But they soon lift him up again, and, escorted by a loud band, the inevitable drums, and the yelling population, he rushes through the narrow streets once more, bumping his iron head from side to side against the houses, where, whenever a blow from his head has damaged the plaster, a man, who follows the stand with a bundle of images of the saint, rushes up and sticks one of these images on the spot where the plaster came off, after which the owner of the house becomes a happier man.

Sometimes the quick march of the saint comes to a standstill ; he is set on the ground, and after a minute's rest, when his bearers try to lift him again, they find it impossible, they say, to do so. The saint's stand sticks obstinately to the ground, and will not move, however much they push and drag him.

It is now quite clear that he expects an offering from the inhabitants of the house opposite which he stopped. Nothing less will move him, so, in great haste, a suitable gift in kind or some small

sum of money is brought to him, after which he suffers his bearers to lift him once more and to carry him on, ever shouting and rejoicing.

But there is more to tell ; a chemist or a doctor remains permanently on the stand at the saint's feet, and is carried along with him. When a handbell rings the saint stops, and is set on the ground with a loud bump. Then a woman comes forward with a child who has a rupture.

The chemist or doctor manipulates him a bit without heeding his screams, and lays him at the saint's feet. A minute's anxious silence, and the child is healed ; the miracle is done. The crowd deliriously cheers the saint, drums and band start afresh, the bearers lift the stand, and resume their race around the town.

At a given moment a loud rumour rises in the crowd ; the saint is perspiring. The stand stops, and many young men climb like monkeys upon it to wipe the perspiration which runs down his face, his white beard, his neck.

A thousand hands are now extended to become the proud possessors of these handkerchiefs, or, at the least, to touch them with other handkerchiefs, which will henceforth become family relics.

The perspiration is wiped away, the saint starts

on his way once more ; but something unexpected happens.

Bits and loaves of hard bread thrown out of the windows and levelled at the saint's head fall on the heads of the crowd instead, like a rain of stones. This is only the accomplishment of a vow ; what does it matter if someone in the crowd be injured by receiving one of those bullet-loaves on the head ? This bread is sacred—happy those who can taste of it !—and an awful scuffle, something like a struggle for life, takes place, everyone being madly intent on picking up and appropriating one of these loaves !

Towards sunset, at last, the black saint, still escorted by thousands of enthusiastic admirers, amidst the firing off of *mortaretti* and fireworks, with the never-ceasing thunder-roll of the drums, is taken back to his little church, where he is safely reintegrated with one last uproarious shout of, “ *Evviva San Calogero !* ”

* * * * *

“ Well, Alessandro,” I said, shutting Pitrè's book, “ I know all about San Calogero now, and I know also why his head is made of iron. It is to prevent its breaking when they bump it against the houses in the narrow streets of Girgenti.”

“ Does the book say how our women speak of

San Calogero when they have a pig-headed child ?” asked Alessandro, with a superior smile at my faith in the book.

“ No, it doesn’t,” I answered shortly.

“ Well, when a woman has an obstinate child, she complains of it to the other women, and always adds : ‘ His head is as hard as San Calogero’s ! ’ ”

A CUP OF COFFEE AT RABBIONE

IN the fresh air of early dawn this morning, as the church-bells were ringing the morning chime called *Salve Regina*, I rode out of the silent village with two of our men.

Harvest is nearly over now; the country therefore is safer than it was, as the tall corn, which here often grows higher than a man, and thus affords favourable hiding-places to brigands, is partly cut down, and I take advantage of this to resume my long rides across the country.

We rode down to a solitary bridge which bears the Spanish name of *Ponte Catalano*, and up again, along wide hills covered with thick golden corn, so tall that the horses were up to the shoulders in it.

Now and then we came upon a company of reapers at work, dark-faced, sunburnt, strong-looking fellows, with their red handkerchiefs tied about their heads, saying their litanies as they worked. As no woman here would ever dream of venturing forth

as I do, riding into those wild parts, they must have considered me as an apparition. They left off reaping to watch us pass, putting in their look the cautious expression of the man who will never seem astonished at anything, so characteristic of the Sicilian.

They said to me as I passed, "*Baciamu la manu*" (We kiss your hand), greeted my men with the words, "*Rispettamu*" (We respect you), and resumed their work under the already burning rays of the morning sun.

We rode thus for two hours and more, rising always higher, surrounded by the solitude of those hills and broad vales still partly covered with corn, where the living silence was broken by the songs of the birds, the rustling of the breeze upon the wide, undulating sheets of golden corn, and now and then by a sad chant in a minor key, the lamentation that some distant reaper threw to the winds, desperate like the sigh of a cast-down soul.

And we rose higher still, whilst about us the scope of view widened into a vast, infinite circle of mountains, plains, and valleys.

A tall, yellow cliff of rocks ran along the summit of the mountain, and one of the men, Alessandro, who has explored the country many times, took me

THE SICILIAN 'FATTORIA.'



"THE SICILIAN 'FATTORIA.'" (Page 143.)



"BEGGING FOR CORN FOR HIS CONVENT." (Page 131.)

To face page 142.

to the foot of that cliff and showed me that it was made of sand mixed with fossilized sea-shells.

I would have picked up some, but they were so brittle they broke in my hand.

After minutely inspecting this cliff, which would have interested a geologist, we went to sit on a flat, breezy rock on the slope of the mountain, where the wind blew fresher, and from which we could see the whole province, the others beyond, very few towns, if any, and far away to the east, Etna's white cone.

Not a house was in sight, nor a village, but on our left, at ten minutes' walk from where we sat, rose a big modern building painted pink, with red tiles, looking like something between a country dwelling and a fortress, the result being the Sicilian *fattoria* or farmhouse, where the owner of those vast acres of corn-land called *feudi* comes to live during harvest-time with his *campieri* (rural guards and overseers) to look after the harvest.

This large *fattoria*, called *Rabbione*, interested me as the only sign of the existence of man in those solitary regions where Nature alone seemed to reign.

We had breakfast on that mountain-side in the usual frugal fashion : brown bread, cheese, omelet, celery, cucumbers, pickled olives and oranges.

Alessandro quoted continually Dante, Petrarch,

and his favourite, Ariosto. The other man looked after the provisions, and poured our wine out of a lovely stone flask painted green and yellow, with two flat handles.

About us fluttered blue and yellow butterflies, and far below us lay the wide cornfields ; silence and sunshine were over all. Suddenly we heard the steps of horses, and saw two men on horseback coming towards us through the corn.

My men explained that these were the master of the *feudo*, at present staying at Rabbione for the harvest season, and his overseer.

This gentleman had seen us from a distance, and had ridden over to greet us and ask me to come and rest at his *casina*, as they call here those immense and warlike-looking farmhouses.

He dismounted and walked towards us ; he looked about thirty-five, had a dark complexion, and wore a shooting-suit, with fine top-boots.

As soon as he was near me he said he had recognized me without having ever seen me, for he had heard about my doings (*i.e.*, walks and rides). I answered that the men had told me his name was Don Vincenzo, and that I was happy to meet him. This is all the introduction there was between us, but it was more than sufficient between people

meeting so far from human dwellings and social etiquette ; in a drawing-room it would have been considered as rather too summary.

We exchanged a few polite remarks ; as everyone does here, he expressed his surprise at seeing a woman venture so far into the wilderness of those *feudi* which only last week were haunted by dangerous brigands. I answered that with good marksmen, such as the two who were with me, I was safe everywhere, and that Sicilian women did not know what they lost by not imitating me. He then courteously invited me to the pink, fortified farmhouse, with its round holes by the windows, to facilitate shooting from inside at possible intruders.

We accordingly mounted our horses, our men rode in front, and, looking just like an adventure in a medieval novel, we rode to the big pink building, where, passing through a tall iron gateway into a large yard, any number of fierce-looking men and dogs came to meet us, the men taking our horses into the stables, the dogs growling at me in Sicilian. . . .

Don Vincenzo then asked me to come up to his room for a cup of coffee ; it was at the top of the house, the stairs of which were adorned with images of the Madonna and of St. Joseph. Accord-

ing to custom, his *campieri* and mine followed us there, sat in the room with us, joined pleasantly in the conversation, and were treated to large glasses of wine as black as ink.

There was not a single woman in the establishment, so a *campiere* armed to the teeth made my coffee over a straw fire, and brought me a cup of it, after sweetening it himself according to his own fancy. It was the oddest, most picturesque, and best cup of coffee I have ever taken; and the Rabbione dogs fought fiercely with our own dogs under the table all the time.

After half an hour of general conversation and sundry kicks to the dogs, we all descended into the big yard to mount our horses, but before that Don Vincenzo asked me to take a snapshot of himself and his overseer as a souvenir of my ride to Rabbione.

We then took leave of him and of his staff of *campieri*, exchanging with them all many friendly greetings. He was very anxious I should promise to come again, saying that a woman had never come to Rabbione before. (It is quite certain one will never go there again unless I do so myself.) Alessandro took upon himself to answer for me (he always does if he thinks I don't know what to say—he has so much tact) by promising Don



"DON VINCENZO AND OVERSEER." (Page 146.)



"EVVIVA SAN CALOGERO!" (Page 147.)

To face page 146.

Vincenzo I would certainly ride to Rabbione again *if God would allow it*, which in our case was certainly the safest thing to say !

We returned to Montedoro, crossing once more the sunlit hills and valleys and their sheets of golden corn, greeted at our passage by hard-working reapers, who had been reaping since dawn, and now looked at me with a swift glance of recognition as they touched the red handkerchief about their heads. Then, as it was time for them to stop working and take one of their short meals, they all waved in the air the last armful of corn they had reaped, and shouted : “ *Evviva San Calogero !* ”

FUNERAL CUSTOMS

I FIND that when anyone is seriously ill here, unnecessary haste is shown to make the invalid *confess* and receive the extreme unction; without precautions, therefore, at the risk even of giving a terrible shock to the sick person—who in many cases is not dying at all—the priest is sent for.

He leaves the church carrying the host and walking under a large yellow canopy. Two men walk in front, the one shaking a small bell continually, the other beating on a large drum, which makes a deafening noise, not forgetting the church-bells tolling wildly all the time.

Behind the priest walks a crowd of women veiled in their black cloth *mantelline*, and singing as they walk the following verses to a quaint, quick tune in a minor key:

“ E ludiamu ogni momentu
Chistu santu Sacramintu !
E pur sempri sia ludatu
Nostru Diu Sacramintatu !

These verses, a medley of Sicilian and Italian, run thus in English :

“ Let us praise at all times
This most holy Sacrament .
And still be praised for ever
Our Lord made Sacrament !”

This procession musters stronger as the Sacrament proceeds on its way, so that when the priest arrives at the invalid's house, with the church-bells and hand-bell still ringing and the drum still beating, it is a real crowd which follows the priest into the sick room unimpeded, kneels on the floor, and remains present—out of sheer curiosity—at that solemn function.

All those women who are unable to enter the room kneel on the road outside the house.

The ceremony, which is gone through in quick, business-like fashion, the drum, the bells, the crowd, the foul air, and the shock, often shorten the life of the sick person, who, in most cases, would require only pure air and quiet.

The moment the sick person has ceased to live his women-folk begin to give vent to their sorrow by shrieking and howling in such a way as to be heard at a great distance. If they did not do this, they would be accused of want of feeling ; and, not content with making this frightful noise, they beat

upon their breasts, tear their hair, knock their heads against the wall, and behave altogether more like mad women than afflicted ones.

In some remote parts of Sicily still prevails the pagan custom of paying women to come in the house of death to sob and weep, and cry in a loud voice the praises of the dead !

However, at Montedoro, as soon as the noise subsides a little, which necessarily happens when the shrieking women begin to feel exhausted, with the help of friends the corpse is laid out and dressed, and the house is thrown open to all the villagers, who flock in to see it, whilst a company of women, completely draped in black, sit in a circle around the bereaved family, who now remain mute, with occasional moans and audible sighs.

The Italian law says that at least twenty-four hours must elapse before burying the dead. But the houses of poor people consisting here in most cases of one room only, the family is in a great hurry to get rid of the corpse. It is then that this most barbarous thing is done. Two or three hours after the death they bear the corpse in an uncovered coffin to the church for benediction ; if the family is fairly well off, the band follows the dead, playing funeral marches in the case of an adult, and quick,

merry music in the case of a small child. After the Benediction the corpse is carried, still uncovered, to the cemetery, and left alone in a small room there for the night. The actual burial takes place on the next day.

This winter a girl of fourteen, thus carried to the cemetery a few hours after her death, gave signs of life before reaching it. She had been carried off without the doctor's authorization. He was sent for in great haste, but to no purpose, for it was intensely cold—there was snow on the ground; the poor child was insufficiently covered, and died a second time for good.

Until a few years ago, when a person of consideration died, it was the fashion to dress him—or her—in his smartest clothes, place him *sitting up* in an arm-chair on a raised wooden stand, and the whole village flocked in to see him.

But what was worse, a few hours later he was carried, still sitting up in his arm-chair, to which he was fastened, all round the village in dismal procession, after which he was carried to the church, where the arm-chair was placed on a high stand shrouded in black cloth, and the corpse remained up there, exposed to the flies and to the gaze of the population.

The funerals of my father-in-law and mother-in-law were performed in this way.

This atrocious custom was suppressed by the law fifteen years ago, but as recently as ten years ago, when the parish priest died, the authorities had to give in, and, making an exception in his favour, allowed the dead to be carried, uncovered and sitting up, all round the village, and in that position to sit through the Mass that was said for the rest of his own soul !

* * * * *

When my old brother-in-law died a few months ago, in order to conform to modern customs, the funeral took place twenty-four hours and more after his death.

Shortly after the funeral the mistress of the house donned mourning clothes, put on her head a big black shawl which hid most of her face, and sat down. I sat near her, and the mourning calls began.

First of all the most important people in the place were shown in, such as the members of the Town Council and its secretary, the doctor, the schoolmaster, the postmaster, etc., all with their wives invariably dressed in black, with a black shawl over the head.



"ALESSANDRO'S WEALTH OF CHILDREN." (Page 157.)



A SIGN OF MOURNING. (Page 154.)

To face page 152.

They came in like black phantoms, three, four, six at a time, without bowing, and just sat down in a circle around us, tightly draped in their black shawls, never saying a word, but sighing audibly from time to time, with lowered eyes. The husbands crowded together at the other end of the room (where the men of the family received them) and whispered to each other.

This sort of thing would go on for half an hour—an hour even—and when the room got to be inconveniently full, half a dozen women rose to go, drew near to the mistress of the house, and in turns bent towards her, and rapidly whispered in her ear a few words of sympathy, leaving immediately, followed by their husbands.

The room would then fill again, and during another hour we would be surrounded by mute, black, sighing shadows who never looked up nor stirred, and this went on until evening.

The mistress of the house then took me into another room, and showed me, with some pride, the dinner ready cooked, which had been sent by her cousin and godmother, who lives close by.

When there is a death in a family, for twenty-four hours it would be unseemly to cook, or even think of meals, so the nearest relations, and, failing

them, the most intimate friends, send the necessary provisions all cooked and ready to be eaten. This, in Sicilian, is called the *conzu*.

Next day, at ten in the morning, the procession of callers began all over again. This time it was the shoemakers, the masons, the carpenters, the trades-people, the overseers, etc. I had once more to sit near the mistress of the house, still draped in her black shawl, though I felt like a fish out of water in the midst of all those veiled women with nothing on my head except my hair, and that, even, not black ! I was tortured by those hours of silent, solemn inaction, fidgeted on my chair, and envied the mistress of the house who could sit so quietly, in rigid immobility, shrouded in her black shawl !

The next day was the third and last of these mourning calls, and after that we were left in peace.

In sign of mourning the maidservants went about the house all these days with their heads and faces veiled under the black cloth *mantellina*—which at usual times is worn only for going out—and managed to do their work in spite of that encumbering headgear.

One last detail : upon our big, battered house-door they nailed a strip of black velvet, in sign of

mourning. Our relations and all our people in the place did the same on their doors; these strips are supposed to remain there for a year.

* * * * *

The other day a baby died in a neighbouring house. After making the usual loud lamentations, the crowd of women who had come to offer sympathy to the bereaved young mother laid the baby out on a stretcher and covered him with a veil.

When the men came to carry it away, the mother, with her relations and friends, made such opposition that the stretcher had to be carried out of the room by force amidst the struggles and shrieks of some twenty women, whilst the priest waited in the street, where a small crowd had assembled, and listened to the howls and scuffle within with an impassive countenance.

When at last the little stretcher appeared, carried by some lads, and followed closely by male relatives, the small balcony upstairs was instantly crowded with sobbing women, all black-veiled, upholding in their midst the young mother, who looked about eighteen, and the still young grandmother, who had worked themselves up to such a pitch of hysterical excitement that they seemed insane.

The mother, waving her arms frantically, screamed

“*Addio, addio!*” with many words of endearment, to the little corpse as it was borne away, small and white under the veil, down the narrow, winding street, with the priest and silent crowd behind.

The grandmother, alluding to the fact that this baby had been christened with her deceased husband’s name, now invoked his name, and in a theatrical attitude, with dramatic gestures, called upon his soul in heaven to receive the little child’s spirit!

All this noisy, artificial, and yet sincere display of feeling went on wildly for about two minutes, then, as the little procession silently disappeared round the corner, the young mother, who had leant out, moaning loudly, to see the last of it, fell back in hysterics, and the women carried her in, whilst the grandmother went on calling loudly upon her dead husband’s name, and with tearful, upturned face told him of the little soul who was to join him that day in Paradise!

* * * * *

was discussing one day with Alessandro the various funeral ceremonies I had witnessed since I came here, and told him I thought the *conzu* was their most sensible feature.

“Indeed,” said Alessandro, “*Voscenza* is right

there. With my wealth of children—I have eleven—I am poor enough, as *Voscenza* knows. Well, some time ago my mother-in-law having died, one of my *compari*, who is fairly well off, sent into my house a really grand dinner. There was broth with *maccheroni* in it, sausage, meat, wine, *finocchio* [fennel]—nothing was wanting, and my children enjoyed it, poor things!

“My youngest boy, however, who is of an inquisitive turn of mind, asked me why we were having such a good meal, so I explained to him: ‘Because your granny died.’

“Well, as his mother was putting him to bed that night, I heard him asking her longingly: ‘Will granny die again to-morrow?’”

RACALMUTO AND MOUNT CASTELLUCCIO

“WHERE shall we go to-day?”

The question came from Alessandro as, with a second man, we rode out of Montedoro in the coolness of the early summer morning. It was very early indeed; a few stars were still faintly visible; fresh white mists rose from the valleys below, as from a distant, quiet sea; the country was silent and beautiful, and as we rode briskly along, with many dogs scampering around us, I felt as if I should like to stay out all day. Fortunately, we had taken a little food with us.

I did not answer at once, because we were just passing in front of the rock-bound shrine of the Madonna della Grazia on the roadside, and I knew that both the men—even Alessandro—would turn round and send a grave kiss to the florid Madonna nursing her babe in the shrine, so I waited until this little ceremony was over, and said at last:



"WASHING WAS GOING ON." (Page 159.)



"FILLING THEIR PITCHERS AT A FOUNTAIN." (Page 159)

“Let us go to Racalmuto. It is a lovely road, and I have never been to see the castle there. Do you agree?”

They both agreed, and fell to discussing whether Racalmuto—which has sixteen thousand inhabitants—was better called a *large village* or a *small town*.

At a few miles from Montedoro we crossed the large sulphur-mines of Gibellini, after which the road meanders amongst fields planted with almond, fig, and olive trees, and the landscape becomes very hilly.

As we approached the town, we came to a fountain, where women waited in turns to fill their pitchers, and close by washing was going on in a small wooden tank.

We crossed Racalmuto, meeting a flock of milk-white goats in the principal street, and still riding on through the silent little town, came upon a broad, sunlit square, where, at a turning, the medieval castle appeared as a surprise, with its forbidding towers and humble dwellings clustering around its base.

Alessandro, who knew an old priest here, sent for him in a summary fashion, and introduced him as *Padre Giuseppe*, whereupon I began to interview him about Racalmuto and the castle. He

told me the name of Racalmuto was that of an Arab city which used long ago to stand not far from the actual town. He also told me that this castle was one of the many built by the famous Chiaramonte family in the fourteenth century. Then, seeing how interested I was in what he said, he told me that on the mountain of the Castelluccio above Racalmuto I should see a still older castle, which in the thirteenth century had been a fortress possessed by the same powerful family. The view from up there is splendid, he added, as, with a sympathetic intuition peculiar to Sicilians, he had already understood that the view, added to the other attractions, would induce me to go there.

My retainers showed no objection to the plan, so we took leave of the courteous old priest, and began to ascend the broad flank of Mount Castelluccio, where, by an easy path, hemmed on both sides by wild irises and small Alpine carnations, we arrived at the summit shortly before midday, and found there the enormous building closed in by impenetrable walls, which had been a fortress of the Chiaramonte family in the thirteenth century.

From the height where we stood, in front of the castle, we could see in the fiery east the enormous



"RACALMUTO AND THE CASTLE." (Page 159.)



"A FLOCK OF MILK-WHITE GOATS." (Page 159.)

To face page 160.

mass of snow-covered Etna, the mountains and plains of half Sicily, and to the south, glittering in the sunshine, was the sea, where some white sails glimmered against the horizon towards Africa, in a pure and cloudless sky.

Racalmuto lay in the valley below. We could see Girgenti and a dozen other towns and villages scattered over a billowy succession of barren mountains and plains, without verdure, burnt and dried up by the fierce summer heat, but breathing with a wild and melancholy beauty.

A small chapel belonging to the old castle was in the last stage of abandonment and ruin, and completely deprived of all fittings, except the curious stone altar; but in front of it smiled one of those old-fashioned little gardens such as ancient convents used to have, with a short avenue of thyme and rosemary smelling sweet in the sunshine, and some pale roses, ready to scatter their light petals in the breeze, under the solemn shade of cypresses, in an atmosphere breathing with feudality, which gave me the charming impression of having escaped far away from all the vulgarities and banalities of this conventional life of ours.

The castle, massive and imposing, towering straight above us, was vast enough to have given

shelter to a whole village under the rule and protection of the Prince who was lord of that land centuries ago, when pirates sailed into those smiling bays and attacked the peaceful inhabitants, who lived and worked on the flanks of the mountain, and came up every Sunday to hear Mass in the now disused little chapel.

Some glimpses I had of mysterious steps built in the thickness of the manor walls, and which led no one could tell me where, conjured up all kinds of romantic and medieval adventures ; but the men with me led the horses into the castle stables, large enough to accommodate eighty horses, and then cruelly dispelled my dreams about those mysterious back stairs—there were three different sets—asking me whether I were not hungry.

So I followed them away from the dazzling glare of the midday sun to the shade of the little garden where, under a climbing vine, a rustic stone table, with granite seats, seemed to wait for us.

It was here, at the foot of the old fortress, not far from the ruined chapel, and at the bottom of the little garden, in full view of the immense landscape of Southern Sicily, in sight of the glittering Mediterranean, where the nearest land is the land

of Africa—it was in that exquisite spot that we had our lunch.

Alessandro spread a napkin on the stone table; the other man—Turiddu—took out from his bag an omelet, brown bread, cheese, a small amphora full of wine the colour of Marsala, and arranged on some vine-leaves a few bunches of grapes the custodian of the castle had sent for me.

This was our lunch, which we ate with a good appetite, seasoned for me with a poetic originality arising from the lovely spot and my picturesque companions, who not only seemed in harmony with the surrounding scenery, but with their ease of manner, absence of self-consciousness, and natural, inborn courtesy, appeared in my eyes as the only suitable companions I should have cared to have had that day.

* * * * *

On our way back, as we were riding down the mountain, baked by the heat and blinded by the glare, a rabbit suddenly crossed our path, and, before the men had time to fire, went and hid under a high heap of stones; the dogs, too, taken by surprise, rushed round and round the heap, barking excitedly.

The two men immediately dismounted, and, the

hunter's instinct prompting them, consulted with each other as to the best means of catching the rabbit.

One was for going all the way back to Castelluccio, where the custodian would lend him a ferret; the other put away this plan as involving too much loss of time, and after five minutes lost in useless talk, rolling off stones from the heap, they waited, ready to fire.

Something unexpected happened next. Putting in his hand to pull out a stone, Turiddu grasped the rabbit instead, and pulled it out alive, which was a very tame ending to the adventure.

It was brought to me to be patted, previous to being knocked on the head—which ceremony, at my earnest request, took place behind my back—and then we proceeded on our way homeward, down the barren slope of the mountain, dazzled by the scorching sun, and pleased to think we should soon be back in the cool house at Montedoro.

“That was a very picturesque old priest,” I remarked to Alessandro—“the one who explained to me all about Racalmuto, and the castle, and Mount Castelluccio.”

“If *Voscenza* had seen him in his youth, he



"A SMALL CHAPEL." (Page 161.)



CASTLE OF THE CHIARAMONTE AT RACALMUTO. (Page 160.)

To face page 164.

would have seemed more picturesque still," answered Alessandro, "for in spite of his being a priest, he led a wild, lawless life. He used to call his knife his crucifix, and was the constant friend and companion of brigands; he was arrested as a thief and a murderer more than once, and was condemned to several years' banishment, and even now, in his old age, he is not as quiet as he should be, especially since the Bishop has allowed him once more to celebrate Mass."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, horror-stricken; "why, then, did you send for him? I don't care to know such people."

"I sent for him," replied Alessandro, "because I knew *Voscenza* needed an *intelligent* person to talk to, and he is the only intelligent man in Racalmuto!"

A STABBING FIGHT

YESTERDAY, towards sunset, the last scene of *Cavalleria Rusticana* was played in real earnest on the village square, in a terribly sudden fashion, not even lacking the accessories of scenery, costumes, etc.

Whilst many men were walking up and down the big piazza or talking in the shade, no one took any notice of a group of three or four standing rather apart and talking with animation.

Suddenly their knives flashed out, a short, silent struggle followed, and before anyone had the time to realize what was happening, two men, brothers, fell seriously wounded, and the murderers, three brothers, disappeared.

Then terrible cries and screams were heard in all the village; they were the cries of the family of the wounded brothers who had been carried to their house. These cries were followed by those of all their neighbours and friends, who, screaming

and crowding, rushed towards the house of the wounded from all parts of the village. The piazza was immediately filled with excited people, who, in the midst of a succession of screams, all rushed madly in the same direction, gesticulating frantically, the women—in spite of the suddenness of it all—not forgetting to cover their heads with their black capes. It was an exact reproduction in real life of the cry, “They have killed *compare Turiddu!*” which so dramatically ends *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

Suddenly, at the lower end of the piazza, I saw the crowd fall back on both sides, and the Mayor with one of our men appear. They held between them a young man with black hair and a pale, impassive countenance. It was one of the murderers, whom the Mayor had arrested as he was making off. His fingers were stained with blood.

They drew near, followed by an awed and now silent crowd, and led the murderer into our *casino*, just as a young man came running from the stabbed man's house, and shouted across the crowd to the Mayor:

“Your Excellence, don't let him escape; they are dying!”

In the midst of the confusion someone sent for

the *carabinieri* (military police), who very soon arrived on the spot.

I followed them into the *casino*, already full of a murmuring, hostile crowd, and saw the Mayor give up to them the murderer, who, still pale and impassive, when the Mayor said to him, "Wretch, what hast thou done?" answered violently, "I wish I had hit them still more!"

The *carabinieri* handcuffed him, and took him away amidst the insults and imprecations of the crowd, who now gradually scattered away in the returning quiet, a group of lookers-on still standing before the stabbed men's house, where the two doctors had great difficulty in attending to them, being surrounded and impeded in their work by a pack of weeping, shrieking women, relations, and friends, and a priest reciting prayers for the dying.

As for the cause of this dreadful tragedy, if anyone were to ask me for it, I could only answer with the well-known French words: *Cherchez la femme!*"

All this happened so suddenly and unexpectedly, it was all so quickly over, that when, late in the night, I sat outside our *casino*, I asked myself whether I had not dreamt the fearful scene of the



"THE CARABINIERI." (Page 168.)



"THEY WAITED, READY TO FIRE." (Page 164.)

To face page 168.

afternoon, now the white piazza was dotted with men quietly walking up and down, talking to each other in hushed voices under the clear moonlight, in an atmosphere of coolness, peace, and silence.

SULPHUR MINES AND MINERS

WE have seen the inhabitant of Montedoro take an active part in his village festivals and religious functions ; we have seen him follow his curious christening, nuptial, and funeral customs ; and we have also observed his endurance and his poetical invocations when at work in the fields.

And now, since this is a sulphur-mining district, we shall turn our steps towards the mines, to observe the miners at their work, and examine those convulsions of the ground which usually surround sulphur-mines.

Although we are still on the outskirts of the village, several entrances to the mines are within sight, and there are heaps of sulphur everywhere. If we go round to the south side of Montedoro, we shall see the mining region hemmed in at the top by a row of battered, abandoned little houses—shapeless, shattered buildings, which only increase the forlorn appearance of this place. There are no



"SEVERAL ENTRANCES TO THE MINES." (Page 170.)



"A ROW OF BATTERED, ABANDONED LITTLE HOUSES." (Page 170.)

green cornfields here, no orange or almond groves, only a reddish, stony soil, the remains of melted sulphur.

Wherever some level space is available, we see sulphur heaped up in large square mounds, built according to a certain symmetry to facilitate the operations of measurement and payment.

This sulphur is just as it was brought out of the mine, the entrance of which is closed by a raised wooden gate opening on to the first step leading down. A primitive image of St. Joseph, the protector of miners, is nailed on the gate. Some mines have a pair of horns set above the door against the evil-eye.

All round us the soil, red with the remains of melted sulphur, and cut up into small hills and ravines by the construction of *calcheroni*,* seems to have been rent by continual earthquakes.

The mineral heaped about us displays the yellow colour of the sulphur partly mixed with earth.

Here and there, between us and the horizon, a *calcherone* lifts its round head, slightly flattened at the top, with its broad flanks, from which rises a bluish, vapoury smoke, which stifles and burns the

* Mounds of sulphur to be melted.

eyes of the thoughtless who are so rash as to pass too near.

But where are the workmen who have dug out and brought up all this wealth lying about or melting in the *calcheroni*?

Let us draw near to this door and look in. At the bottom of this black gulf we can just see a miner's lamp, and we begin to hear a distant sound of groans, and at last we see the first of the miner boys—the *carusi*, as they are called—laden with ore, which they carry on their backs inside a coarse sack.

They come up in sad procession, mounting with difficulty the steps dug out in the earth alternately on right and left, stooping under the weight, their faces and breasts covered with perspiration. As they draw near to the top, and from the darkness of the mine emerge into the sunshine, we can see their little thin, sparely-built, half-naked bodies, their pale faces expressive of suffering. But most of all our heart is saddened at the sight of their naked breasts streaming with perspiration, and panting violently at the effort of climbing up the steep stairway of the mine, and at the sound of the painful groan which irresistibly escapes from their mouths at every ascending step which leads them to the top.

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"A PAIR OF HORNS SET ABOVE THE DOOR." (Page 171.)



"A 'CALCHERONE' LIFTS ITS ROUND HEAD." (Page 171.)

To face page 172.

As soon as they are out of the mine they run to empty their sacks, each on his own mound ; then, without taking a minute to breathe, they throw the empty sacks on their shoulders, and with bowed head and downcast expression re-enter the mine, and run nimbly down the steps in silent, single file, disappearing noiselessly down that black gulf, which swallows up their young life, deforms their bodies, and gives rise in their childish hearts to wild instincts of wickedness and immorality.

* * * * *

Let us now descend into the mine, taking care not to slip as we go down. We find after a few steps a little niche dug in the earth on one side ; they have stuck in it a coloured image of the Madonna of the Rosary, who enjoys great fame here, and in front of it burns a little earthenware miner's lamp. What does it matter if the *piconiere* (miner) steals and swears, tortures the *carusi*, gets drunk, and handles his knife too freely ? This does not prevent his expecting the Madonna of the Rosary to lend her protecting aid to the mine and its workmen.

After going down some two hundred steps, our knees, not at all used to this kind of gymnastics, are quite stiff, and we arrive at the *avanzamento*,

the name they give to the spot where the sulphur is being extracted.

By the light of their little acetylene lamps set upon projecting rocks, the *piconieri*, half naked, covered with perspiration, their expression stern and dogged, attack with their pickaxe the sulphur wall before them, which, like an impenetrable sphynx, must have its breast torn open before it yields its secret.

In several directions, some black holes lead into smaller galleries, where one passes with difficulty, and which lead into other places of work; here and there wooden scaffoldings or rude masonry sustain the weak or empty parts. The sepulchral silence of this gloomy place is only broken by the smothered thuds of the pickaxe, and by the groans, weakened by the distance, of the *carusi*, who are reascending out of the mine.

The heartrending sight of this overpowering work preys upon us cruelly as, perplexed, we reascend slowly, to see once more the sun smiling upon the distant fields and upon the desolation of the mining region swarming with sickly-looking *carusi*, and we ponder upon the salary of these humble workers, and of the *piconieri*, upon the influence which this hard work must



"COMING UP IN SAD PROCESSION." (Page 172.)



"RE-ENTERING THE MINE." (Page 173.)

To face page 174.

have on them from a physical and moral point of view. . . .

* * * * *

No man can become a *piconiere** before he is eighteen, but oftener he waits until he has come back from his military service, to which he is called at twenty.

His day's work is of eight hours, during which time he digs out a little more than a cubic metre of sulphur, and his salary varies from 2 francs to 3.25 a day, according to the amount he extracts.

The *piconiere* feeds very sparingly during his working hours, making a few meals composed of bread alone, or with anchovies, cheese, onions, olives, or fruit.

Once his work is done he has at his house his chief meal, generally boiled vegetables seasoned with oil.

On Sundays the *piconiere* eats much better: he gets *maccheroni*, meat, and wine, and then, as if that were not enough, he goes out with his friends, and has various meals at all the taverns in the place, generally ending the day with a tipsy brawl.

As a rule, he marries very young, and upon

* My best thanks to Ingegnere Messina, to whom I am indebted for these items of information.

becoming a widower, he marries again at once, and it must be acknowledged, he prides himself upon his family lacking nothing as regards food and clothing ; but his Oriental blood reappears when he shuts up his wife and daughters in the house, never letting them get out, not even on the occasion of some festival, preferring in this case to amuse himself with his friends after his own fashion, inviting them or being invited by them, to drink in this or that tavern, vieing with each other as to who shall pay most, until one is more drunk than the other.

But even in this state he respects friendship—so much so that he will pride himself upon being arrogant and quarrelsome with a third party who would dare to molest his companion, especially if the latter happens to be his *compare*.

The influence of the special work to which he is subjected leads the *piconiere* towards an ever-increasing lowering of his better self, even to the complete annihilation of his moral sense. We see him in the mine deceive or rob the stern overseer who directs the works ; in the village he is given to drink, to gambling when playing cards, and to squandering all he has earned during the week. He very rarely thinks of putting something aside



"THE CARUSI." (Page 178.)



"THE STERN OVERSEER." (Page 176.)

To face page 176.

for the future ; he leads in the mine such a hard life that he tries, when out of it, to forget its hardships, drinking, eating, and amusing himself after his own fashion. He is very ambitious in his way of dressing, and is often seen on Sundays arrayed in fine black cloth, with patent-leather top-boots and large hooded cloak of fine dark cloth lined with green.

Although very respectful and submissive with his superiors as long as he is in the mine, once he is back in the village he becomes proud and overbearing, quarrelsome, and provocative. If, however, an accident were to happen in the mine, such as the falling in of scaffoldings or stones, or the explosion of gas—a very rare occurrence—we see him turn into a hero, risking his own life to save that of his fellow-workers. A *piconiere* has never been known to desert the mine at the moment of a catastrophe, and in his efforts to save his comrades has often remained a victim to his own courage.

Miners are all religious—after their own fashion, however. A *piconiere* does not miss hearing Mass on Sundays, even if his attention in church be taken up by anything but the religious ceremony. But his faith is limited to the manifestations of

external worship, which bear much resemblance to pagan rites; we find him inclined to religious fanaticism, to liberal gifts of money to the saints, and he always contributes to pompous festivals in honour of the same, generally ending up, however, with some bloody quarrel.

In most mining districts the *piconieri* collect rather high sums amongst themselves, each giving in proportion to his salary, thus contributing largely to the festa of the local patron saint.

* * * * *

And the *carusi*? These forlorn creatures are enrolled as soon as they are ten years old for work outside, and at fourteen for work inside, the mine.

This was brought about by the law—voted on March 30, 1893—before which it was customary to see little boys of seven or eight at work outside the mine, and inside the mine, boys under ten years of age.

But although this law is meant to better the state of things, it has only partly done so, for we still frequently see *carusi* over eighteen no better grown than a boy of twelve, with hollow chest, one shoulder or hip in full deviation, crooked legs, an earthy complexion peculiar to all sulphur-miners, and the most evident signs of a rickety constitu-



"SULPHUR MOUNDS, CALLED 'CALCHERONI.'" (Page 182.)



"ROUGH ORE, BEING CARRIED BY SPECIAL WORKMEN." (Page 182.)

To face page 178.

tion, of consumption and idiocy ; moreover, there are numerous humpbacks amongst them. It is useless to add that they are almost always unfit for military service, as they very rarely attain the regulation height.

The *carusi* depend exclusively upon the *piconiere* who has enrolled them—I was going to say *bought* them—by means of a sum of money called *soccorso* (help) paid by him to the boy's family. This sum varies from 50 to 150 francs for each *caruso*, and is never paid back, except when the *caruso* leaves his *piconiere* to go and work with another, a very rare occurrence.

In exchange for this sum of money, however, the boy is placed at the *piconiere's* disposal, and is treated by him as his own goods and chattels.

The *caruso* is not supposed to part from his *piconiere* without first refunding him the sum paid to his family ; this restitution can only be effected at the end of each month, or rather, at the time of the monthly payment of salary, for the *caruso* cannot leave his *piconiere* in the intervals between one payment and another, not even by refunding the *soccorso*.

The *carusi*—every *piconiere* has three or four—work for the same number of hours as he does, and

at every journey out of the mine carry on their shoulders a sack of mineral weighing from 20 to 65 kilos. They earn from 1.25 to 2.50 francs a day, paid to them by their own *piconiere*, according to the quantity of sulphur they have carried out. The boys who work outside at filling or emptying *calcheroni*, or Gill furnaces, do not belong to any *piconiere*; they are treated like usual workmen, and earn from 80 c. to 1.50 francs a day.

In the mine the *carusi* eat still more scantily than the *piconieri*, having bread alone, and in the village they fare no better, for when they go home in the evening they only get the usual boiled vegetables, and perhaps, from time to time, *maccheroni* and a little wine. They never touch meat, and live chiefly on greens. After being often treated very cruelly by the *piconiere* in the mine, on Sundays he gives them wine and cigars as a sort of compensation.

As we have seen already, *physically*, this sort of life disposes them fatally to become rickety and deformed; but *morally*, the suppression of all good instincts could not be greater, for they grow up with the same bad tendencies as the *piconieri*, only with a more general and complete breakdown of their human nature, on account of their youth and



"LARGE LOAVES CALLED 'PANOTTI.'" (Page 182.)



"LARGE RECTANGULAR WOODEN MOULDS." (Page 183.)

of their life of perpetual slavery. Being thus inexorably deprived of childishness, and accustomed as they are to this unhappy life, many married *carusi* have, as companions in this hard work, their own tender little sons.*

After thirty years of age, the *caruso* remains a *caruso* all his life, either from inability to do the exhausting work of a *piconiere*, or from want of a small capital, necessary to whoever wishes to become a *piconiere*.

It will be seen by this that there are *carusi* of all ages, but the majority is composed of boys—poor unfortunate creatures, ruined in soul and body, to whom a ray of hope never smiles, deprived of the joyful thoughtlessness belonging to their age, living only for that terrible work which overtaxes their tender capacities, and binds them fatally as in fetters of iron, whilst in their hearts rise and grow fierce instincts of rebellion and wickedness, germs of unconscious hatred, perverted tendencies.

Of them one can truly say that they are abandoned by God and by men!

* * * * *

* Now that, in all the most important mines of Sicily, the sulphur is brought out by machinery, the demand for *carusi* has much decreased.

A few words now on the sulphur-melting process such as it takes place in the mining regions of Montedoro, which we are describing, and where the extraction is carried on still in primitive fashion, with no machinery, trolleys on lines, or electric light, all of which are used in the large mines around Caltanissetta.

The rough ore heaped on the ground, and still mixed with stones and earth just as it comes out of the mine, is carried by special workmen to a large circular hole dug out beneath the level of the ground and surrounded, in its lowest parts, by masonry. The solid ore is deposited in this place, but all the rest of the mineral—the *earth* mixed with small sulphur—is moistened with water brought in pitchers on a mule, and made up into thousands of large loaves called *panotti*. They are put to dry in the sun, and as soon as they are sufficiently hard they are heaped in the circular space with all the rest of the ore. It is all built into a high heap, very broad at the base, of the average height of a one-floor house. These large sulphur mounds, thus prepared for melting, are called *calcheroni*.

The smoke of burning sulphur damages the vegetation round, corn and almonds especially ;



WATER BROUGHT IN PITCHERS ON A MULE. (Page 182.)



"PALE YELLOW BLOCKS CALLED 'BALATE.'" (Page 183.)

To face page 182.

for this reason it is forbidden to begin to melt sulphur before July 1, as by then the harvest is well over, and the almonds are ready to be picked.

On that day they set fire to the *calcheroni*—and to the Gill furnaces which are beginning to supplant them—by laying on their summit a burning wreath of dry herbs previously dipped in liquid sulphur.

For several weeks the process of smelting down takes place quietly inside the *calcherone*, but after this time the man who guards it, and who is called *arditore* (burner), makes a slit at the base, and a brown, boiling liquid begins to run out, violently at first, gradually calming down into a slow but steady trickle of liquid sulphur.

The *arditore* receives it in large rectangular wooden moulds called *gavite*, which he draws out, when full, to dry in the sun. When this sulphur has hardened, it comes out of the *gavite* in pale yellow blocks called *balate*, which the *arditore* arranges in long rows.

Now that progress has reached even Montedoro, the *calcherone* is falling into disuse, and sulphur is melted in the Gill furnaces, so called after their inventor, an Englishman ; every mine here has them

now. The melting process goes on quicker in them ; they consist of four cells filled with sulphur, which are ingeniously constructed so as to light each other in succession, and as a comparatively small quantity is burned in each cell, the risks run are less than with the *calcherone*.

The life of the *arditore* is no better than the *piconiere's* as far as hardship is concerned ; being obliged to remain several hours at a time at the furnace-mouth to receive the sulphur in the *gavite*, he continually breathes the hot, pungent sulphuric exhalations, and when leaving his work, he passes from the hot atmosphere of the furnace-mouth into the cold windy air. All this condemns him fatally to chest diseases, and he is almost always affected by chronic cough.

Passing a *calcherone* or a Gill furnace at night, one has glimpses of the beautiful blue flames from which escapes the burning golden fluid under the vigilance of the *arditori* ; they generally wear red handkerchiefs about their heads, and their flushed faces are covered with perspiration ; overcome by that heated atmosphere, some can be heard swearing, and some singing, as they watch over the melting process.

When quite hard, the sulphur squares are



"THE SULPHUR SQUARES ARE WEIGHED." (Page 184.)



"WOODEN MOULD CONTAINING LIQUID SULPHUR." (Page 183.)

weighed on antediluvian scales and carried off in carts to the railway-station of Serradifalco.

One evening, returning from a walk on the surrounding hills, which basked peacefully in the autumn sunset, as we came nearer to Montedoro, we had to cross the mining district which encircles the village in a belt of smoking *calcheroni* and Gill furnaces, convulsions of the soil, shattered, broken-down little houses and desolation, very similar to one of Dante's infernal circles.

We turned our steps towards a piece of ground we have near the village, still virgin of those colourless remains of earth and stones which are the sign of sulphur extraction.

Formerly, every spring, this piece of ground was covered with green corn, and in June, as if proud of its golden raiment, it spread out in the sun undulating waves of tall, ripe corn.

This year, however, it has followed the fate common to most pieces of ground here: it was condemned to become a mine, and some modern Cyclops have dug out the slanting well whence the ore will soon be carried out.

As soon as we came in sight of this new mine, in spite of the waning daylight, we could see the black heaps of stones and earth which the *piconieri*

had extracted, and which the poor *carusi* had thrown about the hole, around which stood a small crowd of men and boys all still and silent, as if horror-stricken.

Irresolute and perplexed, we considered that silent group which under the darkening sky stood out on the barren stretch of land.

I was struck by the silence of these people. If there had been a quarrel, we should have seen signs of animation—indeed, signs of joy—if this crowd had collected there for the first apparition of sulphur in the mine, always an event for the people; but standing still as they did, these men appeared to me in the dusk like mute, mysterious phantoms.

The man who was with us had understood, and said, “An accident has happened.”

When we drew near, and as soon as, in the dim twilight, the group of men recognized us, they greeted us silently, and moved aside to let us see.

I then recognized the oldest of the *piconieri* of this new mine, whom I had often come to watch at his work, stretched on the ground, pale and still, in a dead faint: his leg was broken.

An enormous mass of stones and earth in the upper part of the cavern where he worked, had become loose and fallen over him.



GILL FURNACES. (Page 183.)



"EVERY MINE HAS THESE GILL FURNACES NOW." (Page 183.)

1870
1871
1872
1873
1874
1875
1876
1877
1878
1879
1880

His companion, who with difficulty had carried him out, with his bare chest and face bathed in perspiration, looked at him, an expression of intense anxiety on his face as he bent over him, holding one of their humble miners' lamps, the flame of which oscillated in the evening wind, and cast strange shadows on the white face of the injured *piconiere*. All kept silent; night descended, black and inexorable, on that wildly pathetic scene, and close by, on the Calvary hill, the large, black cross, scarcely visible in the dusk, stretched out its arms over the group, as for a promise of mercy.

SANTA LUCIA'S FESTIVAL

DECEMBER 13 being Santa Lucia's vigil, to commemorate her in a fitting manner, the usual enormous drums were beaten incessantly through the village during the whole day.

I could not but admire the delight with which the villagers heard the loud drumming, and remembered that any kind of rhythmical noise gives pleasure to children and to—savages!

Half an hour after sunset we heard great shouts, and hurried out on the big piazza to see the sight.

A long, disorderly procession of men, boys, and children was rushing down a street in wild confusion.

They each carried a thick bunch of long straws, all afire, brandishing them and waving them about over their heads as they rushed along shouting, scampering, stumbling over each other, hastening along in the wildest disorder, as if escaping from some danger. The darkness of the night was

lighted up by this savage procession of dancing, flaming torches, whilst bonfires in all the side-streets gave the illusion that the whole village was burning.

Whilst this yelling population was passing on in the manner I have described, the dull thunder-beat of the drums approached, and the tail of the procession appeared: the image of Santa Lucia, holding a dish which contains her eyes. This image was nailed on to a pole and carried high by a privileged person, whilst the two fierce-looking drummers drummed away for dear life, one on each side.

The capers, yells, and waving fiery torches went on worse than elsewhere around the saint as she was carried along at a quick pace, the drums keeping up with her, never ceasing to beat wildly.

At the top of the street the moving torches turned round the corner, and we went to see them come down another street, full of bonfires; and the sight of it all—boys fighting with their flaming torches, yelling madly; in the background, women draped in their black *mantelline*, looking on; dark-faced men rushing along, holding their burning faggot anyhow, and shouting hoarsely around the image of the saint, dimly seen through the smoke

—all put me in mind of a heathen festival amongst savage tribes.

In the middle of the wide piazza a mountain of straw as large as a house had been prepared. The excited populace crowded round it, and then, from the other extremity of the piazza, the wild procession began to file down, piercing the blackness of the night with a dancing mass of flames, the air being full of screams which the drumming did not cover.

As the procession approached, everyone threw on the big heap of straw his own burning torch ; this set fire to it, and tall flames began to ascend in the darkness as the procession still came up in a blinding, confusing rush of flames, yells, smoke, and incessant drumming.

Presently the saint marched briskly up with undignified haste, and was held in a suitable spot from where she could best enjoy the gigantic bonfire, which was getting larger and larger, whilst the drummers, one on each side, never ceased beating, and the men and boys never ceased yelling and jumping.

The fire was now so large that all the surrounding houses were lighted up, and the faces in the crowd plainly visible.



"THE YOUNGEST WAS BLIND." (Page 192.)



"BROKEN-DOWN LITTLE HOUSES." (Page 185.)

To face page 190.

Several men who used long sticks to stir up the bonfire had bright red handkerchiefs tied about their faces to keep away the sparks, and as they poked their sticks into the flames and yelled to each other, they made one think of devils mending the fires in the infernal regions.

In the midst of it all, an old man who plays on the bagpipe sat in a dark corner of the piazza, in front of his little house, playing a wheezy tune, dimly heard in the confusion, for Santa Lucia's benefit!

The strange ceremony was not long-lived, however, for the smoke, fire and noise gradually died away, and with the last expiring flame all returned to darkness, the yelling, capering crowd glided away in the gloomy by-streets, the drums accompanied the saint back to church, the piper disappeared into his little house and shut the door—silence and darkness were restored where a minute before a pageant which had something barbaric about it had filled the place with noise, fire, smoke and confusion. Where the glorious bonfire had been nothing remained but a heap of black, smouldering ashes. . . .

CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS at Montedoro is a sad time for anyone new to the ways and general atmosphere of the place, but a year here, with the various impressions the various seasons brought with them, made us feel less despondent at the Christmastide we passed, and two things especially made up for it—the bright, life-giving sunshine and the *novena* singers.

Nine days before Christmas two men came down from a still more remote mountain village to sing the *novena* here, playing their own accompaniment on a cello and a violin. One of these men—the youngest—was blind ; they stopped before every house in the village, and sang a rambling old song of nine stanzas, telling of the journey to Bethlehem and of the birth of the Child Jesus.

It is very much in the style of the old Christmas carols sung in England, but the melody, like most Sicilian ones, is in a minor key, the accompaniment soft, and the general effect pleasing, if sad.

The men went from house to house singing the mournful strain, which—unless you knew, you would never guess it—tells the joyful news of the birth of Jesus.

They began at dawn and went on until sunset, with short rests. All day long the melancholy dirge was sung round the village, house after house, always the same minor tune, the words being different every day, so that in nine days the whole song was sung out, hence its name of *novena*.

The singers were generally followed in their pilgrimage around the village by a crowd of children with shawls on their heads. They did not stop for pennies, but went from house to house ; it was only on Christmas Day that they reaped their reward for having sung to each poor family in the place the old story of Christmas. But everyone is poor here, so that they did not get more than a few pence from every house on Christmas morning. The gentlefolk, however—there are only about three such families here—gave a franc each, which was considered a very generous donation.

I never got tired of hearing, the first thing in the morning, the sad melody and the simple, ingenuous words, and I often looked out of the window to see them at a short distance, grouped

before a house, singing their stanzas, well muffled in shawls, for the air is cold in spite of the bright sunshine; the women and girls at a little fountain close by put down their high pitchers and stopped to listen, in statuesque attitudes, draped in their black-cloth *mantelline*, which go over the head and around the shoulders, and hide half the face. The flat, white houses all round, the pure sky overhead, gave an Oriental setting to the scene.

Another pretty feature of the Christmas season here is the *novena* sung in some of the village houses for nine evenings before Christmas. The women of the family and their neighbours take great pleasure in building up a kind of altar in the room, adorning it in the tawdry fashion which, to their untutored eyes, stands for beauty, everyone, down to the very children, contributing a faded paper flower or a piece of silver-gilt paper. At night the altar is lighted up and the *novena* sung in front of it by as many women as can crowd in.

We went one evening to a house where the *novena* was supposed to be exceptionally good, to witness the whole performance; our appearance was greeted with much rejoicing and friendly smiles, and chairs were at once provided for us



A HUMBLE DWELLING. (Page 193.)



"AN OLD MAN WHO PLAYS ON THE BAGPIPE." (Page 191.)

To face page 194.

in full view of the altar and crowd of kneeling women.

The room's walls and ceiling were black with the smoke of a rudimentary fireplace in one corner; in another corner stood the usual large Sicilian bed with its mattresses rolled up at the head, and from one wall to the other, across the corner, hung the baby's cradle, like something between a suspended berth and a hammock. Against the wall I noticed the monumental dowry-chest of carved, painted wood in which the bride brings her worldly possessions when she marries, and which generally contains all the family clothes. It was now covered with small children, who, from there, enjoyed a good view of the whole performance, and were out of the way besides.

The chief attraction, the altar, towards which all eyes were adoringly turned, was shaped like a pyramid, and bore at the top a small waxen image of the Child Jesus. It was shrouded in a white cloth on which were pinned the decorations, consisting of bits of coloured paper cut into patterns, images of saints with much gilding about them, rosettes and bows of ribbons, spangles, and artificial flowers of gaudy-coloured tissue-paper. About

the top, surrounding the waxen Child, was a garland of wild asparagus interlaced with orange-boughs bearing their golden fruit. Bits of cotton-wool had been stuck here and there in the wild asparagus. Many lighted tapers completed the humble decoration of this altar. Close to it the orchestra was grouped—a cello, two violins, a guitar, and a tambourine. The kneeling women huddled in front of the altar all had on their heads their black *mantelline*. They began at once singing the *novena* stanzas appointed for that day; the tune was primitive and very odd: the first half of the stanza was quick and merry, the second half became a wailing dirge, and dropped into a minor key. These contrasts in the melody and the tambourine accompaniment were very quaint. The voices were good, if shrill, and the few men present sang in parts: Sicilians as a rule have a splendid ear, but no opportunity for cultivating it.

When the *novena* stanzas were sung, a litany was chanted, all the children joining shrilly in the *Ora pro nobis*. This being over, after a moment's silence an old woman requested an *Ave Maria* and a *Paternoster* to be said "for the material and spiritual welfare of everyone present," and these having been briskly disposed of, the same old

dame requested them to be repeated twice, once on behalf of the souls in Purgatory, and next on behalf of the mistress of the house ; and with a last, spirited flourish on cello, violins and tambourine, the *novena* was over for that evening.

I naturally became anxious to know the words of the *novena*, and was able to make a woman dictate them to me one day. I was all the more eager to have these words, knowing that, as a rule, these popular songs on religious subjects have been composed in Sicilian dialect by illiterate poets, generally by one of those improvisers who abound amongst Sicilians of the lower classes.

This was confirmed by the words of the *novena*. An educated poet would have introduced touches of Eastern scenery, and divinized the persons mentioned in the poem ; a Biblical atmosphere would have pervaded the verses. Here, instead, I found that, to the unknown Sicilian poet, St. Joseph, the Virgin Mary, and the Child Jesus are human beings, as familiar to him as the old men, the women, and the babies he sees around him ; the impression of past centuries is not felt, for to him they live to-day, with the thoughts, customs, and speeches of the people of to-day, such as they think, live, and speak in his primitive village ; and,

indeed, the scenery and general ways of Sicilians in the interior of the island are so Eastern that nothing the native poet says in the *novena* jars upon the reader as unlikely or out of place. Even the description of the edict at the beginning falls in naturally here, where, whenever a new tax or ordinance has to be announced to the villagers, a man goes round the village beating a large drum to call attention, and at all street-corners gives out the edict in a loud voice for all to hear. A touching flavour of ingenuous tenderness, very common in Sicilian peasants, runs through all the poem.

I will now endeavour to give the words of the *novena* in English, though Sicilian dialect is still more difficult to translate than Italian, for there are many special expressions and diminutives which have no equivalent in any other language, and sometimes a word, containing a world of colouring, becomes almost meaningless when translated.

FIRST DAY.

1.

Whoever loves the Virgin Mary,
Whoever makes much of St. Joseph,
Who has a heart in his breast,
Come and hear the story
Of the toilsome journey
Of Mary with her spouse.

2.

St. Joseph was one day
On the square of Nazareth,
Looking after his business,
When he heard a trumpet-sound,
And heard an edict read
Which greatly pained his heart.

3.

This edict gave the order
That every man of every age
Was to go and be inscribed
In his own native city.
He was also to pay the tribute
Of a sum of money.

4.

At this most unwelcome news
St. Joseph, much disturbed,
Went at once to Mary's house,
And thus, grieved, spoke to her :
" Oh, what painful news
I bring to you, beloved wife.

5.

" What an edict they have published !
It was heard now, on the square.
A long way I now must go
In order to pay a tribute,
And I, afflicted, must obey,
And to Bethlehem must go.

6.

" I must go to Bethlehem,
I must take this journey ;
But whether with you or alone,
I shall always have much trouble,
Whether alone or with you,
I shall have much pain."

7.

At the sad, tender words
Of her much-beloved spouse,
With very loving words
She affectionately answered :
“ Do not grieve, beloved spouse ;
Let us go where you say.

8.

“ If the Divine Will
Wishes us to go,
I shall come where you will take me ;
It matters not if we suffer.
Let us go, then, both of us :
God will take good care of us.

9.

“ If our Emperor
Commands us to start,
With true love, and promptly,
We must both obey him.
O my heart ! O my spouse !
This is the will of my God.”

SECOND DAY.

1.

At this tenderness of Mary
St. Joseph was o'erjoyed.
He answered : “ O my Lady,
You will come with me ;
To go such a long way
I shall have to find some means.
Allow me now to retire
And seek some providence.”

2.

Joseph then goes away,
All breathless, in a hurry ;
And, to carry the Lady,
Finds a good little ass,
And also makes preparation
To take some provisions.

3.

Thus he goes back to his spouse
And tells her : " I have found,
O my majestic Lady,
This fortunate little ass ;
Being unwell, O my love,
It is not right that you should walk.

4.

" In these saddle-bags I've placed
A few fishes and four loaves,
To restore and comfort us
In those distant parts.
I wish I could do more,
But I have nothing, O my spouse."

5.

Mary, who has recognized
The Divine desire,
Makes her preparations
For her impending travail,
And fills a little chest
With strips and swaddling-clothes.

6.

She had woven, the great Lady,
With her own hands
A fine white piece of linen
Of strangely delicate texture.
With this linen she had made
Little clothes for the Messiah.

7.

Moreover, St. Joseph had earned
 Two pieces of woollen stuff,
 And Mary had made with them
 Two pretty little blankets,
 And, provided with these things,
 She prepared to start.

8.

She is on the point of starting,
 The great Queen of Heaven,
 Offering herself to suffering,
 Hunger, cold and snow, and frost.
 One now marvels, really,
 At those who do not weep for pity.

THIRD DAY.

1.

Being on the point of starting,
 The great Virgin Mary
 To her spouse began to say,
 Kneeling, pious and humble :
 " Do me this great favour—
 Bless me, O my spouse."

2.

St. Joseph, at this sign
 Of matchless humility,
 Much struck in himself,
 Did not know what to do.
 But, forced by her requests,
 With humility he blessed her.

3.

After this act of humility
 St. Joseph spoke, and said :

“ Cheer up now, my spouse :
I am with you, I am happy.
Now we could be setting on
The long way we have to go.

4.

“ When arrived in Bethlehem,
All our anguish will be over,
For certainly, being with you,
Everyone will receive us.
I have there many relations,
Good friends and acquaintances.

5.

“ All my friends and my relations,
When they will see us appear,
All smiling and merry
Will come to meet us ;
They will treat us very nicely,
And will give us a good supper.”

6.

But the wise Virgin Mary,
With a troubled sigh,
Foresaw many woes,
And thus spoke to her spouse :
“ Ah ! my husband, we shall do
The Divine Will.

7.

“ Whatever God disposes
Must be our content,
Without minding woes,
Nor searching for happiness ;
Let us put our confidence
In the Divine providence.

8.

“ Whether we are not received,
 And are unknown to all,
 Or we are respected,
 And have everyone’s goodwill,
 I shall always say, my spouse,
 ‘ My God, I do thank Thee.’ ”

FOURTH DAY.

1.

Having heard her,
 The fond spouse of Mary
 Began to say these words
 (Being filled with fervour):
 “ It is late ; why do we tarry ?
 My dear spouse, let us start.”

2.

The Virgin Mary, to obey,
 Mounted on her donkey,
 Offering her heart to God,
 Giving pleasure to her God.
 St. Joseph went on foot,
 And held the donkey’s bridle.

3.

Ten thousand seraphims
 Honoured with their escort
 These most holy pilgrims
 During this poor journey,
 Cheering on the way
 St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary.

4.

They were strangers everywhere,
 Despised by all the people,

With only God's goodwill,
And honoured by the angels.
They do not mind their hardships
Whilst God helps and loves them.

5.

Modest and respectful
The great Lady travelled—
How beautiful and loving
The Virgin pure, and mother !
She conquered every heart
Of those who, by chance, saw her.

6.

Grave in her demeanour,
Her candour was resplendent ;
From her heart shone out
The great love of Jesus,
And all along the way
She thought of the God-Child.

7.

What tears of affection
Dropped from her sweet eyes !
What flames in her breast
Lighted up as she thought,
And wept as she discovered
That God, her Son, was suffering !

8.

On their way they met
Several sinners,
And the look she gave them
Converted those sad hearts.
“ For pity, Mary, look on me ;
Convert me : I am wicked.”

9.

Every sorrowful one she saw
She compassionately comforted ;
For all the sick she found
She prayed God, full of love.
“ I am poor, O Mary :
Have pity on my soul.”

FIFTH DAY.

1.

They went on their journey,
St. Joseph with the Virgin,
Bearing every discomfort,
Every pain and obstacle.
Oh ! the ungrateful and misled,
Who do not suffer at these complaints !

2.

Five days on the road
They had to go together,
Always on the move,
Without finding any shelter ;
Tired they were, and famished,
Spurned, despised by all.

3.

Think of that old man,
How weary he must be,
Toiling on, poor creature,
Ever on foot, on the road.
He took care of his spouse,
And, out of breath, he sighed.

4.

What a painful journey
Was this journey of Mary,

In the rigorous winter,
In the cold and amongst strangers,
The great Lady of the Heavens,
Amongst mountains, ice, and frost !

5.

Although angels helped her,
Respectfully considered her,
The storms that often raged
Tormented her enough.
She travelled then, all modest,
Feeling cold, and shivering.

6.

Thus, famished and weary,
They went on in the cold ;
They never had a shelter,
Being despised by all.
People saw that they were poor,
And did not consider them.

7.

They are obliged to take refuge
In the stables, in the corners ;
They lodge in public shelters,
These celestial persons.
Oh, what great humility !
Who, for pity, does not weep ?

8.

Who can keep from weeping,
Remembering that Mary
Is obliged to take shelter
Together with the cattle ?
How shy poor Mary feels
To find herself amongst a crowd !

9.

However, bearing with patience
 All that God had willed,
 All the pain and trouble
 Taking cheerfully,
 They bear every inconvenience
 During all the journey.

SIXTH DAY.

1.

Very tired they have arrived
 After such a long way ;
 They have entered the city
 Half dead with the journey ;
 But if thou lovest them at all,
 Oh ! gather them to thy heart.

2.

They walk, as lost, along the streets,
 Having found no house ;
 A shelter, for charity,
 Is denied them by the people ;
 They are insulted by all,
 And driven away despisingly.

3.

After such a long way,
 Having found no shelter,
 They go to enter their names, and pay
 The tribute to the King,
 Continuing afterwards to seek
 Some shelter for the night.

4.

But they ever ask in vain—
 None will listen to them ;

And St. Joseph in his heart
Could not feel at peace,
And repeated, weeping :
“ My love, what must I do ?”

5.

Whilst he wept he remembered
That there was a shelter,
Towards which he went
With Mary, his loved spouse.
Arriving, he saw with grief
That in the inn there was no room.

6.

A small stable was there, empty,
And St. Joseph is content.
There he settles instantly,
With Mary, weary, languishing.
In the dark, tired and bitter,
They threw themselves to rest.

7.

But they are driven away at once,
Because other travellers came ;
They went off, sorrowful,
Really mortified.
St. Joseph, weeping much,
Thus spoke these words :

8.

“ Then they do deny me
Such a miserable shelter.
Oh ! unfortunate Joseph ;
Such misfortune was never heard of !
O my spouse, dear Lady,
Where shall we go for the night ?

9.

“ It is four hours of the night,
 And we are denied a roof ;
 I have done all I could—
 My spouse, have patience.
 No one will have us ? Then
 Let us go out again.”

SEVENTH DAY.

1.

He went out of the city,
 Remembering that he knew
 Of a grotto in the country ;
 So thus he spoke to Mary :
 “ Close by I know a grotto,
 Only it is rough and open.

2.

“ If you will spend the night
 In that grotto, I will take you ;
 I cannot, dear spouse, give you
 Other help and other comfort.”
 Mary then, obedient,
 Shows her good contentment.

3.

Thus together they went off
 Towards those parts, and soon
 They found the grotto.
 That spot is very miserable ;
 But withal they are of good cheer,
 Ever thanking God.

4.

All the blessed angels
 Who escorted them on the way,

With unusual splendour
Surrounded then the grotto.
St. Joseph could perceive them,
And, seeing them, was happy.

5.

Oh, think of the joy
Of that holy couple,
Who, enjoying that splendour,
Are most happy and glorious!
After so much toiling
This sight cheers them up.

6.

In that glorious light
The great Lady shone,
Like a sun of majesty
Which inflames and fascinates,
And St. Joseph, all consoled,
Is cheered and fascinated.

7.

Burning thus in a sweet fire,
St. Joseph, with Mary,
Understood that in this place
Jesus was to be born;
And with tears of affection,
The fire increased in their breasts.

8.

But then Mary, seeing
That the grotto was dirty—
Like a holy, pious mother,
She could not stand it dirty—
Having found a broom there,
She humbly swept it.

9.

At sight of such humility
The loved spouse of Mary
Began also to sweep ;
But the angels help him.
The grotto, in the meantime,
Becomes clean and beautiful.

EIGHTH DAY.

1.

After thus purifying
The grotto, then St. Joseph,
With the things he had brought,
Begins to make a fire.
Then says he : " Enjoy it,
Dear spouse ; warm yourself."

2.

They both sat them down
On the ground near the fire.
Unable to wait longer,
They forthwith ate some food ;
And with great devotion
They did eat their supper.

3.

To obey her husband,
Holy Mary fed herself ;
Some other better food
She also prepared,
Thinking continually
Of her coming travail.

4.

Having finished eating,
They gave thanks to God ;

And with sweetest words
They conversed together,
Talking to each other
Of the love of the God-Man.

5.

Oh, think of the tender
Words that they did say !
They inflamed their hearts
Ever more talking,
Fervently admiring
The great love of Jesus.

6.

Then, as Mary understood
That the happy hour had come
When God was to be born,
To her spouse she said :
“ It is late ; retire—
Go to sleep and rest !”

7.

St. Joseph also prayed
His Lady to go to sleep.
He arranged the manger
With the things he brought ;
Then he went into a corner
Of that miserable grotto.

8.

St. Joseph did not sleep,
But with great devotion
Knelt down, pious and humble,
Began to say some prayers,
And, as in an ecstasy,
He saw Jesus born.

9.

Neither Mary goes to sleep,
 But being called by God,
 Ready, prompt, and pious,
 She kneels and loves and worships Him.
 Oh, the fortunate couple !
 Pray for me, forlorn !

NINTH DAY.

1.

During her orations,
 The great Virgin Mary,
 With much devotion,
 Thought of her Son Jesus,
 And she thought that in the cold
 God's little Child was to be born.

2.

"How is it possible," she wept,
 "That the great God of Majesty,
 The tremendous King of kings,
 Should be born in the cold ?
 How can the Lord of heaven
 Be born in the frost ?

3.

"O my God of riches,
 How art Thou born so poor ?
 Can it be true, my Beauty,
 That I see Thee shivering ?
 That Thou tremblest of cold and diest ?
 No, my heart is failing me.

4.

"If Thou must be born,
 Why not in a palace ?

Why dost Thou not come
With great pomp and splendour?
Thy great, mighty love
Makes Thee born so lowly.

5.

“When, oh! when wilt Thou be born?
When will that hour come?
When wilt Thou console
Unhappy humanity?
When, O my delightful Love,
Shall I press Thee on my breast?”

6.

In this love and this affection
The great, blessed Virgin,
All afire, enraptured,
Was lifted in an ecstasy,
And in the joy of her God
Little Jesus Christ was born.

7.

When the Messiah was born,
He set to crying and lamenting,
And the Virgin Mary
Shed tears once more.
She took Him up with great affection,
And pressed Him to her breast.

8.

St. Joseph then awoke
From his deep ecstasy,
And, with sweet marvel,
Felt astonished, puzzled.
He hurried up, frightened,
And saw Jesus was born.

9.

“ Oh, what fortune, then, is mine !
 Oh, what honour now is mine,
 To adore with Mary
 My God in this place !
 Holy Mary, my great Lady,
 Receive now my greetings !

10.

“ Oh, what Son is yours !
 What a lovely creature !
 How graceful and intact !
 His face draws out love.
 How amiable is His brow !
 He is like His mother.

11.

“ Oh, what lovely eyes !
 And that rosy little tongue !
 You are really lovely ;
 Your person is all beautiful.
 Thou art beautiful, my Son—
 Still more so that Thou art God.”

I cannot resist the temptation of giving the following translation of a very touching rocking-song which is sung by the women from Christmas night to the Epiphany. I thought it might suitably complete the Christmas *novena*, and at the same time give a fair idea of the ingenuous religious spirit of the women here, with the usual flavour of tenderness and resignation to suffering so characteristic of Sicilian women.

ROCKING-SONG FOR THE EPIPHANY.

1.

The Virgin Mary, rocking
Her Son, little Jesus,
Spoke to Him thus, singing :
“ Sleep, my Son, and hush-a-by !
Lovely rose and white lily,
Hush-a-by, Jesus, my Sonny !

2.

“ Jesus, Son ! O Jesus, Son !
How sweet are Thy cheeks !
How loving that little mouth !
How fair those curls !
My heart for Thee goes out.
Hush-a-by, Jesus, hush-a-by !

3.

“ Beautiful Son, my little Son !
This heart with flames is burning.
Really, Thou must be cold ;
Come, hold close to Thy mother,
And get warm at my breast.
Hush-a-by, beloved Son !

4.

“ Everything that was brought here—
The presents of the shepherds—
I would give them all to Thee
With more love and affection.
Sleep, then, sleep, O Son !
Hush-a-by, Son Jesus !

5.

“ Thou for love wast made flesh
For the mad sinners,

And, withal, ungrateful men
Do not weep o'er their sins.
They enjoy life ; my Son suffers. . . .
How ungrateful ! Hush-a-by !

6.

“ But, my Son, it does not matter
If ungrateful men do not weep ;
Thy little mother only
Has compassion on Thy state.
I shall weep for all the others.
Hush-a-by, dear, hush-a-by !

7.

“ All Thy dearest friends
Will, my Son, forsake Thee,
And Thou shalt be sold
By a villain infamous.
Eh, my Son, what wilt Thou do ?
Hush-a-by ! don't think of it.

8.

“ O my Son, my loving Son !
Sleep now without anxiety ;
Later on, beautiful Son,
All pains will be Thine,
Since Thou wilt suffer so.
Hush-a-by, my holy Son !

9.

“ Lovely Son, beloved Son,
Thou wilt have, for too much love,
In the house of Pilate
Many, many, many blows.
I will have Thee in my heart.
Hush-a-by, beloved Son !

10.

“ O my Son, my loving Son !
Thou art most unfortunate ;
For Thy glorious head
Will feel the prick of thorns.
O most painful diadem !
Hush-a-by, my piteous Son !

11.

“ For Thy suffering and my pain,
Thy sacred hands and feet
I shall see on the hard cross
Piercèd by three nails.
O my love, what wilt Thou do ?
Hush-a-by ! don't think of it.

12.

“ Lovely Son and so much loved,
Ah, for Thee my heart is pining !
To put an end to my weeping,
Close Thine eyes and hush-a-by !
No, don't cry, my Sonny ;
Hush-a-by, little Son Jesus !

13.

“ Why criest Thou, sweet Son ?
Come, say it to Thy mammy ;
Make me hear Thy voice ;
Let that small mouth speak.
Why shed tears ? why sobbest Thou ?
Hush-a-by, my Sonny Jesus !

14.

“ Rather, let *me* weep,
Who in grief will see Thee—
Thee, my Son—in agony,
And will see Thee die.
But to think of it I grieve ;
I die, my Son, I die !

15.

“Come, come down, angels and saints !
Make beautiful symphonies ;
With your sweetest singing
Send little Jesus sleeping.
And thou, Sleep, come, oh, come !
Hush-a-by, my Son, my treasure !

16.

“Now has sleep come at last.
After so much weeping,
These small eyes can no more ;
He begins to dose.
There, my Son has gone to sleep ;
Hush-a-by, loved Jesus !

17.

“Now I see Thee fast asleep ;
I see those sweet eyes closed.
In this way shall I see them—
These eyes—closed on the cross.
Sleep, oh, sleep ! but, as for me,
My eyes are drowned in tears.”

A SUMMER DAY AT MONTEODORO

I SLEEP well here, much better than in town (“in town” here means Palermo). The dead silence pervading all things, even after sunrise, may account for this.

I generally open my eyes, not too early in the morning, with the comfortable feeling of having had a very good night.

After meditating over this fact in a somewhat drowsy fashion, I seem to think a cup of coffee would be acceptable, and I ring the bell.

The head-servant here (a pompous name for a very inferior person), called Caluzza, and blessed with one eye only, knows by now—or should know—that I am the only member of the household who rings the bell in the morning ; however, her natural thickness of mind is such that she begins by going round all the other bedrooms, saying discreetly behind each door :

“Did *Vossia** ring?”

* *Vossia*, a derivative of *Voscenza*, Your Excellence.

She generally receives no answer at all, or, in some cases, gets sent about her business rather peremptorily, when it suddenly flashes across her mind that *I* may have rung.

She stalks to my door—I can hear her step from afar—and pronounces the usual :

“ Did *Vossia* ring ? ”

“ Yes,” I answer promptly ; “ bring me my coffee quickly.”

As I am acquainted with her little ways, I know now that she will first put the coffee on the fire to warm it, then she will begin her search through the house for a cup and saucer and little spoon.

Here I must explain one of the eccentricities of this house. It possesses any amount of cups, saucers and little spoons, but it pleases the mistress of the house to keep them scattered in various cupboards placed in various rooms, when it would be so simple and handy to have them all arranged in the dining-room. Hence Caluzza’s search every morning, which causes a certain delay in the appearance of my cup of coffee.

As I am longing for it by now, and listening anxiously to catch every sound, I can hear her coming into the dining-room with everything except

the spoon ; she has a hunt for it there, and finds it after ransacking several drawers.

Here she comes at last, bearing solemnly a little tray with a cup and small coffee-pot.

My morning coffee has not always been brought to me in such correct style. And here comes in another eccentricity. There is quite a collection of trays, large and small, in this house, but it pleases the ruling spirit here to keep them locked up in her green boxes, so that Caluzza used to carry my coffee-pot in one hand, balancing the cup in the other, and holding under her arm a square tin box which contained the sugar. It was all plane-sailing as far as my room, but in front of my door she came to a standstill, let the tin box slide slowly from under her arm down to a table, put down the coffee-pot, opened wide my bedroom door, again put the box under her arm, took up the coffee-pot once more, and entered triumphantly, at last !

I thought this system had its weak points, the strongest of which was that more than once male relatives, inmates of this house, had been known to cross that front room whilst my door was still wide open and my bed in full view ; so I introduced some radical changes in the morning coffee ceremonial.

First I settled a small sugar-basin (which looks like a pill-box) near my bed; then, by dint of intrigue, I possessed myself of a small tray: it was fished out of a green box by the mistress of the house in a moment of unguarded weakness, so that now Caluzza sails into my room with only *one* hand encumbered, and nothing under her arm.

The moment she appears she murmurs, "*Vossia, benedica*" (Your Excellence, bless me), to which I always answer in plain, good Italian, "Good-morning!"

After the little tray is safely deposited near my bed, I say: "Now bring me the hot water for my bath, and quickly."

She penetrates into the back room, takes up a beautiful two-handled jar, made gay with green and yellow daubs meant for flowers, and departs, carrying the jar against her chest as if it were a baby, and dangling with unconscious grace the large gold bangles in her ears.

I sip my coffee, which is good—Caluzza knows how to make it—listening dreamily to the silvery bells of the herd of milk-white goats with immense undulated horns who assemble every morning in the yard to be milked for the benefit of such mem-

bers of the household who favour goat's milk instead of the usual cup of black coffee.

By the time I have finished mine, and the goats have gone away, I begin to think Caluzza is very long in bringing me the hot water. I guess that something, as usual, is the matter, and ring the bell impatiently.

Caluzza loses no time in appearing, and this time does not ask whether my Excellence rang.

“Well, Caluzza, and where is the water?”

“It is on the fire. I was just going to bring it.”
(I know this is a fib.)

“Do you mean to say that at this time of the morning you have no hot water ready?”

“Well, *Vossia* must not be angry, but there is a wind this morning.”

“Why should I be angry about the wind? It's welcome enough here in summer. What do you mean? Why is the water not ready?”

“Well, the wind has prevented my lighting my straw fire on the large fireplace, especially as the straw was damp with the last rain which fell into the straw-house, so I gave it up; the coffee I made on the small charcoal-stove, and now Santo is cutting up wood in the wood-yard to make a good fire.”

“ You mean a good fire for cooking the dinner, I suppose ?”

“ No, a fire for warming the water for the bath for *Vossia*.”

I look at her to see whether she means it for a joke or for an impertinence, but no : her plain, stolid, one-eyed countenance expresses nothing but blind stupidity, so I say shortly :

“ Take away the coffee-things ; I shan't have my bath this morning.”

She departs, and I get up with a ruffled temper.

* * * * *

I have explained elsewhere* that the back room where I have my washing-stand and bath is also a kind of passage-room which all the members of the family, male and female, are supposed to use at their own free will, and, with them, any stray man from the village who happens to be rambling through the house, looking for this or that member of the family.

So I lock the two doors and reign supreme in that room for twenty minutes, whilst people at both doors keep trying to open them, and walk away in high protest.

By the time I am dressed I feel in a happier

* See “ My Room.”



SICILIAN CHILD. (Page 193.)



A VILLAGER. (Page 226.)

To face page 226.

mood, and suddenly remember that I have a small batch of photos to fix, and that this morning would be peculiarly suitable for fixing, since, with the wind there is, the room where I work will be more draughty than usual, the water will be cold, the prints will dry quickly, and everything will go nicely.

I make no mention of breakfast of any sort, for here, as elsewhere in Sicily, breakfast is an unknown quantity, the only thing admitted in the morning being a cup of black coffee, which the women take in their bedrooms or in the kitchen, and the men sip standing about anywhere, with their hats on, before going off to their various occupations.

* * * * *

I now step into the kitchen and say to Caluzza—she has a roaring fire by now: “Tell Annidda to bring me several jars of water up into the fruit-room as usual.”

Annidda (Caluzza’s mother) is a little old dame with a wrinkled face always beaming with smiles, and one hip higher than the other; also an indescribable little hump somewhere in her back. She has a way of always answering “Yes, yes,” at whatever is said to her, which is most silly, as sometimes the right thing would be to say “No, no,” but she does it thinking it pleases.

She makes the bread every morning, feeds the hens, does the baser kind of work in the house, and the rest of the time runs errands, as I shall explain later on.

Hearing her name, she looks up from the pigeons she is depriving of their feathers in a blind, groping fashion, and is ready with a smile and "Yes, yes!"

But Caluzza, who seems determined to thwart me in every way this morning, steps in and says:

"*Vossia* must not be angry, but——"

"Is it the wind again," I interrupt impatiently, "or the fire?"

"No; it is the water. *Vossia* sees, Santo is gone to the *Lavatore* to fetch the almonds, and there is not a drop of water in the house."

Santo is the youth who cuts up the wood for the kitchen-fires, grooms the horses, and the rest of the time sits on the donkey, with two deep panniers on either side, each pannier containing a large water-jar, and rides to and fro between the house and the fountain, thus keeping the row of big water-jars, which stand in a cool back closet appointed for that use, well stocked with water.

The *Lavatore*, which takes its name from a pool of sulphurous water where the grandmothers of the

place go to wash clothes, is a place where we have orchards of almond-trees, and very beautiful they are in spring-time, covered with their delicate white blossoms. It is also very nice in summer to see Santo lead into the village the donkey laden with large bags full of almonds, but all this does not give me the water I am in need of.

However, as I am not easily balked, I say unconcernedly, affecting not to know I shall give Caluzza a shock: "Very well; it does not matter. Annidda will go round *all* the washing-closets in the house, and will bring me up into the fruit-room all the water she finds in them; surely, no one has been capable of using it all this morning."

Annidda departs meekly to do as I told her, Caluzza turns to her cooking with a stormy face, and I ascend majestically to the fruit-room, crossing, to get there, the most unheard-of back-kitchens and back-stairs, the former black with soot and as untidy as they can be, the latter very nearly crumbling down, each stone step full of cracks. It would be so easy to whitewash the back-kitchens and put them in order; it would be so simple to repair the stairs, so that they be safe at least, and take away the cobwebs, but they never do that sort of thing here.

The fruit-room, however, is rather interesting, and positively clean, though very rough and primitive as regards the floor, the ceiling, the walls; as for the door and windows, the least said about them the better. I will only state that they have the failing common to all windows and doors in this astonishing house: the windows dislike being opened, and the door has firm objections to being shut. A struggle, therefore, always follows my entrance into that room, as the first thing I generally do is to open the windows and shut the door, this last not only because I dislike draughts, but to prevent the pigeons who have their place close to this door from coming into the room, where I once caught them drinking out of the fixing-bath and hopping upon my damp prints.

This room is right at the top of the house. It contains many large wooden trays laid on trestles, where fruit from our orchards—pears, oranges and pomegranates—are laid out. Strings are stretched across the room at a certain height, for hanging grapes on.

On the other side is a row of square wooden boxes with lids, where our supplies of flour are kept. Every morning Annidda dives into them



"FEEDING THE HENS." (Page 228.)



HERD OF MILK-WHITE GOATS. (Page 224.)

with a wooden measure, to take the right quantity of flour for making our bread.

It may strike the reader that a room where fruit and flour are kept is not exactly suitable for an amateur photographer to prepare fixing and toning baths, and fix and dry prints. There is something in that, but the room is large, lofty and airy; it has a fine view from the window which towers high over all the village and its cluster of low, grey houses; then, close to it is my own little dark-room, where I keep all my bottles.

Then, again, this room being isolated at the top of the house, I run no risk of being interrupted or bothered during my work. The flour-boxes have nearly the height of a table, and are very convenient for doing my fixing, toning and washing operations.

What if sometimes drops of the fixing liquids leak into the box and soak the flour?

Also, what if, when I shake a print out of the fixing-bath, some drops travel as far as the grapes hanging above, or to the pears on the trestles? I am quite happy up here, and undisturbed, which is the principal thing.

Now that I have introduced the fruit-room, I will add that, when Annidda hobbled in with jars

of water collected from all the closets in the house, I set to work, and worked undisturbed all the morning; I then left my prints to dry on a long deal board, resting at one end on a pear-tray, and at the other on a basket of pomegranates, and descended into the lower regions.

Upon reaching the dining-room, I found it was nearly twelve o'clock, and the table, to my horror, was not set. I immediately travelled back to the kitchen to interview Caluzza about it.

“Caluzza, why has Arcangela not set the table?”

Arcangela is, in a way, my *spécial* servant, for in winter I take her to Palermo, where she cooks for us. When I have her there to myself, safe away from the lowering influence of the Montedoro entourage, I drill her into something like order, and, indeed, I have got her to do things almost properly, and with an appearance of method; but alas! the moment she gets back here, amidst her congenial fellow-servants, she falls sadly back into their plaguy ways.

However, as she is certainly cleaner and more wide-awake than the others, she sets the table, waits at dinner, and irons our clothes, which the laundress—Caluzza's sister—washes according to a special system of her own.

Caluzza begins to mumble at me through her teeth that Arcangela had to go and mind the fields for Nardo, her son-in-law, who is ill with malaria, and that she will stay out there all day, and, maybe, all to-morrow.

This Nardo is a kind of rural guardian of the fruits and vegetables in several fields far away from the village. He is paid by the owners of these fields to look after them night and day, to prevent robberies. He has his dog and gun with him, and very rarely appears in the village. When Nardo happens to be ill, Arcangela, his precious mother-in-law, goes and minds the fields for him; she has a pointed knife in her pocket, and is afraid of nothing. I admire her devotion to her son-in-law, and hold out her conduct as an example to all mothers-in-law, present and future; but what I don't admire is her knack of escaping from the house and her work without so much as asking my leave. After all the pains I have taken with her, it is too aggravating. . . .

Of course, nothing remains for me but to set the table myself, which is rather a business, as we always sit down to dinner eight or ten in number. But before leaving Caluzza, my experience, also something in her face, prompt me to diffidence,

and I ask whether dinner is ready ; for I must here explain that, although we are supposed to dine at twelve, we never sit down before one, because there is always something missing, or something forgotten, or something gone wrong, or unexpected people turning up at the last moment, and some extra cookery to be concocted. But, like my sleep, my appetite here is rather exaggerated, and when twelve o'clock strikes, I fall to tormenting Caluzza until she sets the dinner on the table.

So I ask whether dinner is ready.

She answers : “ Yes, but the wine, *maccheroni* and something else have still to be bought, and Annidda is gone for the wine.”

It is their custom here to have a special servant for running errands—going to buy things for the house, and starting on the principle that she must buy *one* thing at a time. So, when Annidda has made the bread, she sallies forth to buy, say, potatoes. As baskets are unheard of, she brings them home in a napkin hidden under her black cloth *mantellina*, and walks leisurely—she knows she'll be at it all day.

She gives the potatoes into Caluzza's keeping, and departs a second time, to buy two bottles of wine. She brings them home, and goes out



"SANTO GROOMS THE HORSES." (Page 228.)



DONKEY, WITH PANNIERS ON EITHER SIDE. (Page 228.)

To face page 234.

again, to buy *maccheroni*, with which a Sicilian dinner invariably begins, except when there is soup.

Then she trips out once more for the meat—when there is any to be got—or for eggs, then again to get carbur for our acetylene lamps; and so on until evening.

I have tried to point out to the mistress of the house how much easier it would be for all concerned if Annidda were to be given a nice big basket for her shopping, and make two, or at the most three, journeys through the village instead of twenty, which would leave her plenty of time for doing a little cleaning in the house.

However forcible my argument may have been, the mistress of the house has been firm about keeping up the old arrangements, for the very good reason that this is the way the house shopping has always been done here; so I gave it up, especially when she said, as a final and decisive argument: “Annidda would be ashamed of carrying a basket; but even were it not so, how could she keep her *mantellina* on if she had to carry a basket?”

But to go back to our dinner.

“Do you mean,” I say to Caluzza—“do you

mean that you sent Annidda for the wine first, and that she will next have to go for the *maccheroni*, which was needed first? Is not your water for it boiling?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, if you had sent her for the *maccheroni* first, you might have dropped it into the boiling water the moment she brought it, and then she could have gone for the wine whilst we ate the *maccheroni*."

Caluzza does not see the point of this, and calmly goes on stirring the beautiful tomato sauce which will season our *maccheroni*—the *maccheroni* which has still to be bought and cooked, and twelve o'clock struck long ago!

I return sadly into the dining-room and begin to set the table, with, of course, the usual hunt after most of the things, which are scattered all over the house.

In one of my pilgrimages to the kitchen I catch Annidda just delivering into Caluzza's keeping two bottles of wine, and I pack her off to the *maccheroni* shop, taking no notice of her "Yes, yes!"

When I have done setting the table, I give a finishing look at my work, and smile inwardly at the thought of how horrified the whole household



"A GRANDMOTHER OF THE PLACE." (Page 229.)



"A POOL OF SULPHUROUS WATER." (Page 228.)

would be if I were to put a bunch of flowers on the table!

The things upon it are a strange medley, offering strong contrasts. There are silver forks and spoons, but the tumblers are of the commonest glass, and clumsily shaped. The plates are china, with the willow-pattern, but the dishes, of various heterogeneous shapes and designs, are of very inferior quality, and were evidently bought here after the willow-pattern dishes were all broken.

Indeed, I remember that amongst the basins and dishes I use in the developing-room there is a good willow-pattern pie-dish, and feel now that the mistress of the house will never forgive me for appropriating it. I think she lent it me the first time not understanding what I was going to do with it; afterwards, hearing that I had put poisonous stuff in it, I imagine she got frightened at having it back, and left me in undisputed possession of it. What if she knew that I soak the flour and sprinkle the fruit with the fixing liquids?

When I first came here, I found they had a strange mode of setting the table.

It was the fashion to arrange in its centre, in higgledy-piggledy fashion, a heap of plates, a moun-

tain of knives and forks, a cluster of glasses, and other items.

Then, as the family sat noisily down to dinner, each person grasped a plate, appropriated a glass, fished in the heap for a knife and fork, and began eating away, after murmuring vaguely and collectively: "Good appetite!"

I stood it once only. Next day I did what I never do here except when necessity demands it: I asserted myself, and said Arcangela would set the table just as I had taught her to do at Palermo.

Some members of the family approved of this wonderful innovation, but some were made grumpy and uncomfortable by it; they did not seem to enjoy their dinner half as well as when they had the centre-piece heap to fish from.

Now they have got used to it, but I have noticed one thing: a few of the most conservative ones, on sitting down, begin by pushing away to the right their knives and spoons, away to the left their forks, away in front of them their glasses, ending up with a little push to their plates. After thus destroying the beautiful symmetry which I have taken such pains to teach to Arcangela, they give a little sigh of satisfaction and begin eating, certainly more happily than if they had suffered

their covers to remain as they found them. By the time a few of them have thus behaved outrageously the table is a sad spectacle!

When I had set the table satisfactorily I went back into the kitchen to see what progress the *maccheroni* was making, as I expected to find it half cooked by that time.

When Caluzza saw me, she looked guilty and said: "Annidda has not turned up with it yet."

"But why is she such a time?" I remonstrated. "It is only a few steps to the man who makes it."

"Yes," explained Caluzza kindly, "but it may be she is waiting whilst they are making it. . . ."

Thus, to my disgust, I hear that the *maccheroni* is not only uncooked and unbought, but possibly not made!

Before I have had the time to explode, however, Annidda's little wrinkled face, encircled in the black *mantellina*, appears at the door, and seeing me, she promptly smiles and produces the long parcel of *maccheroni*, saying quite needlessly, "Yes, yes!"

"Now, Caluzza," I say sternly, "I shall stand here until I've seen you drop it into the boiling water."

I have to do this because I know it to be her

invariable habit not to put the *maccheroni* to boil until she has been told to do it at least six times. She feels as if it were too solemn an act to be gone through hurriedly or thoughtlessly, or perhaps she nourishes some hope that an earthquake or a thunderbolt may prevent her accomplishing it, or that at the last moment she will be told not to do it—who knows ?

This is the reason why, when I want my dinner very badly, I stand in the kitchen until I've seen her do as she is told.

Now, of course, she sighs, sits down with the bundle on her knees, and slowly unties the knots of the table-napkin, which contains a huge parcel of long, saffron-coloured sticks of *maccheroni*, still damp from the press ; she looks at them lovingly, and breaks the whole parcel in two. She pretends now that she must look into the pot to see if the water is boiling, which is real nonsense, as it is bubbling away most fiercely.

I stand patiently by and watch her anxiously ; after peering into the pot with her one eye, and getting her face well scalded with the steam, she throws a handful of salt into it, takes up the *maccheroni*, and at last drops it into the boiling water, stirring it a little.

By-and-by, everyone having straggled in or been shouted for, we all sit down; but the Mayor is missing—perhaps he is still busy at the town-hall, so Annidda is despatched to fetch him.

He soon arrives, breathless and full of news, and sits down with his hat on, immediately beginning to push off the things about his plate, quite mechanically, as if he did not even know what he was doing.

Dinner is welcome to me because I am blessed with a good appetite here; but, were it not so, I might give more attention to its many weak points—not as regards the cooking: I am easily pleased in that respect—but rather as regards the way it is served and the manner of eating in full vogue here.

Things are eaten all together, or one at a time—not according to a definite standard, but rather according to Caluzza's own sweet will or convenience.

The maids are very willing to bring in the dishes, but they seem to object to taking them away. I have to sustain quite a struggle in order to get them to clear away the meat, vegetables, etc., *before* they put the dessert on the table.

It sets my teeth on edge to see a plate of grapes near an almost empty dish of potatoes, or some

forgotten cutlets close to a pyramid of figs, and I cannot enjoy a slice of melon when the remains of roast pigeons are still in front of me ; but the other members of the family do not seem to mind it, and rather enjoy keeping near their dessert-plate the other plate from which they have eaten their meat and vegetables, so I struggle alone, and generally come off victorious, if exhausted.

The conversation is lively, but easily gets noisy, the men alone taking part in it. *I* first introduced in this house the novelty of a woman conversing with the men on their own subjects, and I must say they have enjoyed the change. Still, I stand alone in that respect : no other woman here would follow my example. Some of them even think me brazen-faced, for their custom is to eat in silence and attend to the wants of the men, getting up continually to wait upon them, even with half a dozen maids in the kitchen.

It would not be inappropriate to say something about the extraordinary way in which places are arranged here at dinner ; it struck me as original when I first came. To begin with, the post of honour for a woman is *not* at the right-hand side of the master of the house, nor is the best place for a man, guest or not, supposed to be at the right-



"A FRIENDLY ENGINEER COMES OVER FOR THE DAY."
(Page 243.)



"CLUSTER OF LOW, GREY HOUSES." (Page 231.)

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hand side of the mistress of the house. All this would give rise to scandal. The established custom is for an honoured guest to sit *at the head of the table*. I was put there once, at a dinner-party in Serradifalco, and very out-of-place I felt indeed.

Then, again, we do not go in for audaciously placing side by side and alternately a man and a woman, as is done at all the dinner-tables out of Sicily; the correct thing, after you have settled the most important person (regardless of sex) at the head of the table, is to file off all the men on one side, and all the women and children higgledy-piggledy on the other, taking care to unite—or divide—the two sexes at the end by some elderly relative—also regardless of sex, as long as the relative is elderly.

I have tried hard to persuade the mistress of the house how very nice it would be if she would sit at the head of the table; and whenever a friendly engineer or family lawyer comes over here for the day and dines with us, I point out to her how modern and fashionable we should be if she, sitting at the head of the table, would let the stranger take his place at her right hand. But all in vain!

And, again, on the rare occasions when I have been inveigled into dining anywhere, I have

struggled hard to be allowed not to sit at the head of the table out of my own house! But also in vain!

* * * * *

When dinner is over, from May to September it is the custom for all to retire to their own rooms, go to bed, and sleep away the hot drowsy afternoon in the silence of the quiet village as it basks in the fierce sunshine.

But before doing like the rest, however, I remember I meant to go for a ride in the late afternoon, and must arrange now about my escort, since it is not "the thing" to ride without a few armed men, as, although the classical brigand has ceased to exist, still our solitary provinces are often infested by starved, unscrupulous tramps, and oftener by *latitanti*.*

Two men generally come with me. One I have here on the premises, but I have to give a short notice to Alessandro, who lives in the village.

Of course, since Arcangela has given me the slip, I must send Annidda, and, going into the kitchen, I find her eating her dinner out of a plate

* Men who, after committing a crime, have run away from justice and live hidden in the country. The modern brigand generally begins by being a *latitante*.

upon her knees. The others seem to be enjoying *maccheroni* and vegetables mixed up together, but, as far as I can tell, *her* plate contains green olives and little crusts of bread swimming in a bath of oil.

“Annidda, do you know if Alessandro is in the village to-day?”

“Yes, yes; I saw his wife this morning.”

“You know I don’t mean his wife. I mean *him*. When you have finished your olives, go to his house, and if he is in, tell him I should like him to ride with me to-day at four o’clock.”

On hearing the words *four o’clock* she looks despairingly at the others, and asks what *four o’clock* means.

Here follows a discussion between Caluzza, the laundress, and Santo as to whether by *four o’clock* I mean the Benediction hour or twenty-two o’clock. To help them out of the difficulty, I tell them *four o’clock* is just after the post comes in. This settles the matter, and they hurry off Annidda, telling her to explain to Alessandro that I shall want him after twenty-one o’clock, but not a minute later than the Benediction. She hobbles off, forgetting, in her bewilderment, to say “Yes, yes!”

As I return to the sitting-room, I find two

members of the family having a game of cards before going off to their slumbers, and I sit down and watch them, so as to give Annidda the time to deliver my message and bring me the answer.

To improve the shining hour, I interview the two card-players about the confusing way they have in reckoning time here, and am told that the old custom of going by the sun and the various daily services in the church still prevails, and is lovingly clung to, in spite of the big clock which adorns the church-tower, and which is still an impenetrable mystery to the people, the women especially.

They count twenty-four hours to the day, including the night, beginning at sunset. The *Ave Maria* is rung at that hour, which is by all simply called the *Ave Maria* hour. An hour later, confirmed by another cheerful peal of bells, is called *one hour of the night*; two hours later, *two hours of the night*, etc. On Thursday evenings the church-bells ring also for two hours of the night to record, so I am told, the visit of Jesus with His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane.

In winter, the sun setting much earlier, the *Ave Maria* is rung at five o'clock, or half an hour earlier



"THE LAUNDRESS." (Page 245.)



WOMEN GOING TO THE BENEDICTION SERVICE. (Page 247.)

or later, and this goes on all the year round, according to the season.

Then, at sunrise, they begin the day with a short, early service called the *Salve Regina*, giving this name to the peal of bells rung at that hour.

The hours are reckoned progressively, since they began the evening before, and at *twenty o'clock*—that is, four hours before sunset—the *Benediction* is rung. I find it a most convenient peal, as it tells you exactly at what part of the day, from an astronomical point of view, you have arrived, and you know then, without looking at the clock, that you can still count on four hours of daylight. The *Benediction* service, falling at that convenient hour, is very much favoured by women and little girls.

But to go back to my ride. I soon hear Annidda's irregular step on the stairs, and go into the entrance-room to meet her. Her brown wrinkles are lighted up by such a smile that my heart fails me, as I know by experience that she never smiles like that except when she is the bearer of bad news.

“Well, Annidda?”

“Yes, yes! Alessandro went off this morning his wife told me, as she was boiling a hen for one

of her children, who has been kicked in the head by their horse."

"Tell me about Alessandro," I interrupt.

"He went off before the *Salve Regina* hour to shoot rabbits and partridges because——"

"I don't want to know why. What a time you make me lose! Now, go at once to Ludovico, and ask *him*, and not his wife, if he can ride with me to-day at the *Benediction* hour, and not a minute later" (I am quite clear this time).

She trots away, bringing well round her face the black cloth *mantellina* to shield herself from the hot sun, and I go back to the game of cards.

At last she brings me word that Ludovico was in, and called upon the *Bedda Matri** to witness that he would certainly appear *before* the *Benediction* with his horse and rifle, and I go to bed satisfied.

It is so hot, and I went to bed so late the evening before, that I soon fall asleep, the room—and, indeed, all the rooms in the house—being darkened and hushed, no one stirring or doing any work, not even the maids, who, leaving their unwashed plates to the flies, are dosing away on chairs (which must be so uncomfortable); and Santo, giving a

* "Beautiful Mother" (Madonna).

rest to the donkey and water-jars, is lying full length in the shade on a stone bench in front of the stables.

My nap is not very long, however, for I can never sleep much when I expect a ride, as I look forward to it with a pleasant anticipation which spoils my sleep.

* * * * *

At half-past three I am up and dressed, and begin to wait impatiently for two things—the arrival of the daily post and my ride.

Post comes in once a day here. It travels by rail as far as Serradifalco Station. There it is met by the Montedoro carriage, which brings it up here, together with any stranded traveller who has been deluded into coming to Montedoro. This carriage is supposed to arrive at 3.30, but it never bumps in before four, which is just the hour when we begin to think our siesta has lasted long enough. It is, therefore, something pleasant to look forward to and to speculate upon during the half-hour and more employed by the postmaster to open the bag and sort and stamp the letters.

They are never impatient about anything here, not even to get their letters and papers. I am the only one who shows any real hurry about receiving

them whilst I watch an undergrown young man with a bronze complexion walk leisurely round the place and leave their letters with various individuals, who begin by being surprised at receiving them, beg him to read them out aloud, and have a little talk with him about them afterwards.

I walked up and down in front of the house, dividing my attention between the slow progress this letter-carrier and letter-reader made towards me and the fact that both the *Benediction* and four o'clock had rung, but still no escort men were visible, nor had Santo saddled the horses yet, though before going to sleep I had told him to do it in good Italian, and reinforced my order by begging someone, who, for a wonder, could speak both languages, to tell him in good Sicilian.

The letter-carrier's arrival somewhat took away my thoughts from Santo's want of punctuality, but after I had glanced through the paper to see what the rest of the world was doing, and skimmed over two letters, I finally grasped the fact that no preparation was being made for my ride, especially when I peeped into the stables and found nothing was going on there, except that the horses turned round and neighed at me, for they know me well.

Suddenly an inner door opened, and Turiddu,

one of my escort men, emerged from some backyard, where he had been sleeping probably. I pounced upon him, and asked him why Santo was not saddling the horses, why he was not ready himself, why Ludovico had not come ?

His answer was that Ludovico would probably come at five if he had been ordered to come at four, but that he would go and call him ; also, he would saddle the horses himself, as he expected Santo was at home, seeing the *Bambino* brought to his little brother's bedside.

I pricked up my ears at this, and made up my mind to find out all about this *Bambino* ; but, to gain time, I told him to call Ludovico first, and then come back to saddle the horses, adding that I would stand in front of the stable-door until he chose to come back. He agreed, flew a parting *bacio la mano* at me, and went off, whilst I sat on the stone bench in front of the stables, and watched the *Sindaco* granting interviews to some villagers, and administering justice in a fatherly, familiar, and most public fashion.

Turiddu soon reappeared. Ludovico, it seems, had just gone off to look after some sulphur in one of our mines, and had left orders at home that one of his children should run and fetch him the moment

I sent for him, and this after calling upon the *Bedda Matri* (Madonna) to witness his readiness to be with me at four o'clock ! It was a quarter to five now, so I hurried Turiddu into the stables, and whilst he composedly hunted out my saddle, and set it on the glossy back of the young but gentle bay mare I ride, I said to him: "Now, quickly, explain about Santo and the *Bambino*."

The men here are accustomed now to my asking for information about all those facts that to them appear absurdly homely and obvious, so he began to explain that there was in Montedoro a miraculous *Bambino* representing the Child Jesus, a large, flaxen-haired doll dressed gorgeously in gold-embroidered robes, made still more showy with the bright-coloured ribbons and gaudy artificial flowers they are so fond of here. This *Bambino* conferred great honour, as well as wealth and happiness, to the family who invited it to stay under their roof for a month.

The only return the family gave for this visit from the *Bambino* was to dress from head to feet some poor orphan or destitute child in the village. Most families in the place were anxious for this monthly visit, so it came to pass that this *Bambino* was always out visiting, with short intervals of rest



"THE YOUNG BUT GENTLE BAY MARE." (Page 252.)



SANTO'S HOUSE. (Page 253.)

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in the parish priest's house. It seems that during one of these rests the *Bambino* had been suddenly summoned to Santo's home, where a small brother of his lay ill, and the family had deemed a visit from the *Bambino* desirable. Now, as the *Bambino* was to be brought in great state to Santo's house, which had been subjected for the occasion to a kind of violent spring-cleaning, it was not to be expected Santo would stay away from his home at such a time, not even to saddle horses or bring water to the house, or any such trivial matter.

"It's all very well, and also very nice," I said, "though it's foolish of them to believe the *Bambino* will do any good. The doctor would be more useful in this case. But why did not Santo tell me of this? If I had known beforehand, I should have arranged for someone else to saddle the horses. If I had not come in here to see, I might still be sitting in the house, awaiting everybody, and nobody turning up."

"Perhaps he was ashamed," says Turiddu, showing two rows of dazzling teeth in a broad and benevolent smile.

This is their great, unanswerable argument here. Whenever someone, especially a young person, wilfully disobeys an order, or is, by some unex-

pected occurrence, prevented from obeying it, the only reason or justification they give is that they were "ashamed."

I was confusedly brooding over Santo's "shame" as the cause of his not giving me notice he would be unable to saddle the horses, when Ludovico appeared with a friendly smile on his countenance, as if he did not realize the fact that he was an hour late. He was leading his horse, and was provided with a rifle and an imposing belt full of cartridges, and two dangerous-looking dogs walked at his heels, both named after famous warriors in Ariosto's "Orlando."

"*Now* let us go," I said, foreseeing the usual contretemps which invariably delay me just when I am in a frenzy to mount and be off.

The men agreed leisurely. One of them helped me to mount; they both mounted, and rode one on each side of me, carrying their rifles across their saddles, and looking very like the brigands from whom their presence was supposed to protect me.

* * * * *

As soon as we had left the village behind us, and I felt as if life was indeed worth living, even at Montedoro, we trotted across a field, and upon reaching the highway they asked me where I

would like to go. I answered I would like to go to Torretta, *if they approved*; for I have found out that, in spite of their respectful ways and expressions, they always end by having their own way rather than letting me have my own, and I have also found out that the best policy is, up to a certain limit, to let them guide me and order me about. They do it so politely, too, that one cannot resent it.

Our road to Torretta wound along the crest of a hilly ridge, from where, to right and left, we enjoyed the usual wide landscape of hills and valleys, golden with ripe corn, very rarely broken by clusters of fig or olive trees, and in the distant horizon ranges of lofty mountains, as blue as the sky overhead.

The warm air played about my face as I rode, and, feeling pleasantly forgetful of all the cares of life, I asked my companions to tell me about the Baron of Torretta, to whose country-house we were bound, as I knew there were dark stories afloat about him.

In breathless, excited whispers they gave me the following details about him: He was now well over forty; in his youth he had been the wildest and least respectable of noblemen. He and his

cousin, both bachelors, lived alone in that solitary country-house at Torretta, surrounded by acres of corn-land—a *feudo*, as they say—all belonging to them. Close to the house rose a rocky hill swarming with rabbits. The Baron enjoyed shooting them now and then with his friends from the neighbouring town of M——. It was not shut in by walls or hedges, but lay open to all, and the Baron did not allow shooting on his grounds. It was well known, however, that rash persons, anxious to have a little sport, had infringed the order, and, being caught in the act, had been shot by the Baron's *campieri*, and buried under a cluster of cypresses which rose close to the house. Then again, the men implied darkly that the Baron had in those times, out of pure perversity, made friends and associated with brigands, who then infested the country, helping them with his protection and money, and giving them, in hard times, a shelter in his own house, where the local police would not have dared to come after them.

All this seemed to me delightfully medieval, but became positively thrilling when I was told—as I had vaguely heard already—that this estimable Baron had been arrested and called to account for the disappearance of the various amateur



"MY ESCORT." (Page 254.)



"THE CREST OF A HILLY RIDGE." (Page 255.)

To face page 256.

rabbit-shooters who lay buried under the cluster of cypresses near his house. He had spent more than a year in prison, and at the Assizes had been acquitted because no proof could be brought against him, and now, slightly cowed by this last experience, he was known to live more quietly, but he still kept fierce keepers on the premises.

“I suppose no one in M—— associates with him now?” I asked.

The men laughed inwardly—as they have a way of doing—at my innocence, and declared that he was now *Pretore* (Magistrate) of the town, and at the next election would be elected *Sindaco* (Mayor) without the shadow of a doubt.

All this excited my curiosity immensely, especially as we were now in sight of the house, which gave me the impression of a cemetery, as it was completely closed in and surrounded by high, white walls, and the dismal cluster of cypresses rose dark and gloomy at one corner, just where the land sloped up to the bare, rocky hill which, it is well known, swarms with rabbits. Not another house was in sight to break the lonely solitude around that white building, which stood on a hilly crest, with bare, dried-up land stretching in front of it down to the valley below, far away, where a

ribbon of water was just visible in the waning sunlight.

After going round those impenetrable walls, we suddenly came to a wide doorway, from where we saw a large yard, on which gave the three sides of the house. A few sullen-looking men in top-boots, with red handkerchiefs twisted about their heads, stood near the gate and watched us silently as we rode up and stopped before them; indeed, two of them, who had their backs turned towards us, did not even look round when Turiddu spoke out and said: "*Rispettamu*,* is the Signor Baron here?"

Of course, the best policy for the Baron's retainers was to find out who we were and what our business was before answering whether he was at home or not, though they were rather staggered—but did not show it—at my apparition. So one of them mumbled some words purposely in such a low voice that my men, quick as they are, did not catch them; but Turiddu, who understood all about it, pretended to have heard, and gave as an answer: "Yes, we come from Montedoro, and this lady is——" And here followed a flourishing description of my family, with the male members of which the Baron, I knew, was well acquainted.

* We respect you.

The name acted as magic. One of the men in top-boots disappeared in a groping, mysterious fashion through a dark, arched passage across the yard, whilst the others, in sign of dawning hospitality, drove away two mastiffs who were trying to murder Ludovico's dogs, in spite of their formidable names.

We all sat on our horses, just outside the gateway, and waited.

Presently some people emerged from the dark passage; it was the Baron himself, with more retainers.

He was a tall, square-shouldered man, with a short, grizzly beard, black eagle eyes, with a now piercing, now sleepy look in them, and a chocolate-hued complexion. I was disappointed in him. I had expected to see a bloodthirsty villain, and I found instead the usual type of the Sicilian country gentleman.

He hurled stormy reproaches at his people for not having invited me and my men to dismount—reproaches which they took with silent indifference, for they knew they were only meant for my ears—and declared himself immensely honoured by my visit, wishing he had known of it beforehand, to make suitable preparation.

I said I had heard so much of the beautiful view one enjoyed from the summit of his shooting-grounds that I had come all the way from Montedoro to see it.

He immediately proposed walking there, and ordered our horses to be taken into the stables in the meantime.

He then took me along a narrow, stony path up the hill, which was covered with rocks and prickly shrubs. A few of his men followed in silence with my men, who, out of politeness, had left their rifles at the house.

When we reached the breezy top, I found that the view, which extended as far as Girgenti and the sea, was truly magnificent, with the hush of the waning summer day resting on hill and valley. Peace and silence reigned far and near, and I forgot in that moment the dark stories I had heard about the master of the place as he stood by and courteously pointed out to me this mountain and that village. Going back to the house, however, I caught sight of the cluster of cypresses, and remembered. . . .

When we came to the gateway, I wished to say good-bye, and go, but he would not hear of it. I was to come in and have a glass of the sweet wine

they make in Lipari Island—"real wine for a lady," he said, with one of his rare smiles.

I had to give in and follow him, not being sorry to contemplate the bear in his den, but I was very glad to see my two faithful followers come in with me and stand near the open door of the lofty but bare and comfortless room where I sat down with the Baron, whilst a man in muddy top-boots, and with his long cotton cap sticking out of his pocket, brought a tray with glasses, and poured out the sweet wine from Lipari Island, which, said the Baron, was like bottled sugar and sunshine. He insisted upon my men tasting it too, which they did with immense gravity. Then I had a bit of conversation with the Baron, all the men huddling together near the door, and drinking in every word I said.

The Baron harped upon the fact that I, being a foreigner, must be astonished at many things in Sicily—he was right there—and that there must be many more which I probably did not understand. This was quite true, as I told him, and I further explained that I enjoyed going about and finding out all the strange things for myself.

He certainly approved of this, and added that, now I had found *him* out, he hoped I would come

again, and bring the men of my family to have a shot at the rabbits. He was so very easy-mannered and unconscious-looking that anyone would have thought he believed me to be ignorant of his life and reputation, whilst, as a fact, he knew I had been told all about him, and guessed I had ridden all that way out of pure curiosity to have a look at him—which was the plain truth.

I finally rose to go, and through a suite of bare, whitewashed rooms, with nothing but mouldy chairs and consoles in them, and old, gilt-framed mirrors dimmed with age, we suddenly emerged into the courtyard, where our horses stood ready for us.

One of the Baron's *campieri* had brought a chair, thinking I would need it to mount my horse, but when the Baron saw me mount it with the help of Ludovico's hand only, he sighed, and remarked what a pity Sicilian women were not more like English ones. I took this as a nice compliment, and expressed, as courteously as I could, my thanks for his hospitality. He answered, expatiating upon the great honour I had done him, and bowed low.

As we rode out of the gateway the last rays of the setting sun glimmered through the tall cypresses, which rose, gloomy and mysterious, against the clear sky, and the thought of the deeds



"THE DISMAL CLUSTER OF CYPRESSES." (Page 257.)



"MONTEDORO, WHICH LOOKED WHITE AND PEACEFUL." (Page 263.)

of horror which had happened on that very spot not many years ago made me ride away shuddering.

Instinctively I turned round, and there was the Baron, standing bareheaded in front of his dilapidated gateway. I felt that he watched us with his eagle eye until we had turned the corner, when, indeed, I breathed more freely, but remained wrapped in thought until we reached Montedoro, which looked white and peaceful in the soft summer twilight.

* * * * *

As we rode into the village square I noticed a small crowd of reapers, and went nearer to see what was going on there, and came upon a lovely scene.

The reapers—easily distinguishable by their red handkerchiefs about their heads—and some villagers pressed round two men, who, from a distance, seemed to be engaged in a lively discussion. One of them was a native of Montedoro—a poor devil, weak and sickly in appearance, who follows the humble calling of a road-sweeper; the other was a reaper from another province. His coat and short sickle were thrown upon his shoulder; he was as dark as an Arab, with splendid features; a tuft of

black curls fell below his red handkerchief and lay across his broad forehead.

The two men, I at once understood, were *improvising* a dialogue, in metrical rhymes, in Sicilian. The subject was religious—the mercy of God, the love of Jesus, the greatness of St. Joseph and St. Calogero, the miracles of faith, resignation to suffering and poverty. All this was expressed in five stanzas of six rhymed verses each, without hesitation, without a defective verse, and it was only when one of the two improvised poets stopped to take breath that the other took up his cue and started afresh, unfalteringly, with a play of expression and gesture which would have done credit to the best actor.

The crowd of men and children listened attentively, as if entranced. To say the truth, I did the same; and opposite, the parish priest of Montedoro, leaning upon his balcony with a monk, listened, he also attentive and delighted, thus completing the picturesque and medieval scene, which took place in the centre of the wide piazza, surrounded by low, white houses, in the waning light of the summer evening.

* * * * *

This arcadian scene dispelled the gloomy im-

pressions I had received from my visit to the Baron of Torretta, and I dismounted, feeling on the whole rather satisfied with my ride, and sat down in front of our *casino* with a few male relatives whom I found there, some reading the papers, some discussing the everlasting local politics, and some saying and doing nothing.

Twilight had now waned into night, a large star in the clear sky shone just above the church-tower opposite, the reapers had laid themselves down to sleep in various corners of the piazza, and several miners who had finished work and eaten their frugal supper walked up and down, talking to each other in low voices.

I enjoyed the perfect beauty and quiet of the night for nearly two hours, watching the men of my family conversing now with the one and now with the other of such of the villagers who had some request to make, some State secret to dispose of, as we are here very much absorbed in local politics, the village being divided into two "sides," one of which, the ruling one just now, depends on our family for advice and guidance.

* * * * *

When eleven struck, breaking the silence of the still summer night, we gave up interviewing, and

came back into the house, where everything was quiet and gloomy, though, according to the invariable custom, there was a glaring, shadeless lamp in every room.

Two of my relatives sat down to a game of cards, and I began to hunt about for Caluzza and make her prepare our supper, as, if I did not do this every evening, we should have to go to bed supperless.

All the other servants have a way of disappearing in the evening. Some go home, some fall asleep on chairs in the vague, distant back regions where I never go.

As I started on my round through the house, I found two men standing in the entrance-room waiting for more interviews, but they had nothing to say to me except "*Bacio la mano*," so I went on.

I wandered through more rooms, and found in a distant one the mistress of the house engaged in a sleepy gossip with the missing Caluzza.

My appearance interrupted the conversation, and Caluzza followed me back into our part of the house, and turned off towards her dear kitchen regions, where the darkness was made gloomier still by the feeble glimmer of a small earthenware miner's lamp nailed to the wall.

I stopped on the door and watched her groping about in the dark, feeling for bundles of small wood and straw with which she was to cook our late supper.

“What are you going to give us this evening, Caluzza?”

Her answer comes in a sort of desperate stammer, because, according to *her* views, *one* item of food should be sufficient for our supper ; but she knows by experience that I always expect her to put at least *three* things on the table, to pick and choose from, or in most cases, to be able to eat of *one*, as the other two are often not worth looking at, let alone eating ; so she begins :

“Eggs, olives, cold pigeon, anchovies, cheese, spinach, tomato salad.” She stops abruptly and stares vaguely at me with her one eye, as if to say, “Isn’t this a magnificent supper !”

I approve of the salad and cold pigeon. I know the others will enjoy all the rest, so I express my satisfaction, and ask her whether the table is set, though I know it is not, because she never does it until she is told. She has behaved like that every evening of her life during the ten years she has served in this house, and will continue even were she to remain in it for fifty years !

“Never mind,” I say kindly, “I will set it myself on condition you hurry up cooking your spinach ; and *pray* shut all the doors, so as not to have more smoke than can be helped. You know how your master scolds when the smoke comes into our rooms. . . .”

Caluzza has several masters, which accounts, perhaps, for her waywardness ; but when I say *your master* she knows which of them I mean.

I find, on coming back into the other part of the house, that two of her masters are still at one of their usual games of cards, that the two men in the entrance-room, tired of waiting for their interview, are interviewing each other in low whispers, and that the mistress of the house, for whom they are probably waiting, has fallen asleep in her clothes in her distant bedroom. So I try to give an appearance of comfort to our dining-room by shutting the shutters, clearing away all that is in the way, and setting the table nicely.

We shall only sit down three or four, as the children had supper at eight o'clock, and are in bed, and all the rest of the family are out of sight and hearing, except the two who are playing cards in the next room.

At last, just as the melancholy chimes of mid-

night are sending out their message of rest and peace over the hushed village, Caluzza brings in the steaming spinach, and we sit down.

“Go and tell your mistress supper is ready,” I say to Caluzza, as I season the salad of fresh tomatoes and cucumbers sent up that same evening from our *Lavatore*, whilst one of my companions begins pouring oil over his vegetables, and the other divides a cold pigeon in two.

Caluzza comes back to say her mistress will not have any supper because she is “sleepy.”

“Asleep” would have better expressed it, but I keep this to myself, and tell Caluzza to fry us a few eggs and to *shut the door*, this with a meaning glance at one of her masters. She understands, and slams it, very nearly cutting off the tip of the tail of our best cat, who is just coming in.

When she brings the eggs and sets them on the table, there follows a rather stormy discussion between her and one of her masters about the bread, which is stale.

It should have been still warm from the oven, where Annidda takes it every afternoon to be baked.

It seems that the bread *was* taken to the oven towards the *Ave Maria*, but owing to some misfortune, a funeral in the baker's family or a

wedding—I do not exactly follow them here, as the dialogue is kept up in pure and glib Sicilian—it was not baked at all, nor, indeed, will be until to-morrow morning at the *Salve Regina* hour (sunrise).

“I suppose,” remarks her master with scathing irony, “that since our loaves will remain all night at the baker’s, they will cover them up with the family blanket?”

“I dare say,” answers Caluzza, not catching the bitterness of this remark; “they are sure to cover them up with their blanket: they would not be using it in summer.”

This little difficulty being peacefully disposed of, we proceed through our supper, and, the night being very warm, I open the windows wide, and enjoy, as I eat cold pigeon and salad, the sight of the starlit sky, whilst the silence abroad is only broken by the distant, mournful singing of some threshing-floor guardian alone on the hill.

My companions talk quietly to each other of the usual local affairs, and Caluzza comes in with a big dish of red and yellow prickly pears (called here *fichidindia*—Indian figs), which she is to cut out of their thorny skins with her own sharp-pointed pocket-knife, when two loud gun-reports, following

close upon each other, startle us, and re-echo all over the village. They sound so loud that they must have been fired not far from our house.

A short spell of silence, heavy with meaning, follows the reports, and then loud shrieks startle us out of our anxious expectation.

My companions, who, at the report, had rushed to the windows and closed them, one of them expostulating with me for my unreasonable wish for fresh air, now wildly look about for their caps, and rush downstairs and out of the house with the two men, who are still waiting in the entrance-room.

The loud banging of the front-door brought me back to my senses, just as the mistress of the house, who had been called by the frightened Caluzza, came in rubbing her eyes and asking who had been killed.

I told her what I had heard, and we opened the window a little. Caluzza, behind, listened too, and we heard the village was full of excited rumours, and everyone was calling out of the windows to inquire what had happened. Just then, as I looked up at the brilliant stars, one o'clock struck.

We had not long to wait, however ; a loud knock at the front-door startled us, as if we were guilty,

and Caluzza went to the window over the door, and looked out, saying, "Who is it?"

It was Alessandro, who had been sent to tell us what had happened.

A young and well-known lawyer of this place, by name Don Pietrino, was crossing a side-street to go home, when he was shot by some unknown ruffian from behind a wall. The murderer had not been caught yet, though already he was being searched for, the Mayor having sent some *carabinieri* after him.

Don Pietrino had been carried dying to his house, where his wife, sister and mother-in-law were shrieking over his lifeless body, and the doctor had been sent for, though it was not expected he could do much, for Don Pietrino had a bullet in his loins and another in his lungs.

The mistress of the house and Caluzza listened impassively, and did not say anything.

"But, Alessandro," I exclaimed, "*who* could have done it?"

"God knows," answered Alessandro, with the look of a prophet.

"But had he any enemies?" I went on, and his answer was characteristic:

"And who has not got enemies in this world?"

Another knock at the door, and another of our men, Turiddu, appeared with a very grave face.

“What news do you bring?” I asked. “Have they caught the murderer?”

“No, he got clean away; but they have arrested the person who is supposed to have prepared the crime.”

“Indeed!” cried the mistress of the house, “and who is that? Answer at once, Turiddu,” she added, when she saw him hesitate.

“They have arrested the Mayor!”

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