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Homer Tolstoy Whitman Twain
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New Italian sketches

John Addington Symonds

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NEW
ITALIAN SKETCHES.

BY
JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS,
AUTHOR OF "SKETCHES IN ITALY," ETC.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1884.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

This volume of New Italian Sketches has been made up from two books published in England and America under the titles of "Sketches and Studies in Italy" and "Italian Byways." It forms in some respects a companion volume to my "Sketches in Italy" already published in the Tauchnitz Collection of British Authors. But it is quite independent of that other book, and is in no sense a continuation of it. In making the selection, I have however followed the same principles of choice. That is to say, I have included only those studies of places, rather than of literature or history, which may suit the needs of travellers in Italy.

John Addington Symonds.

Davos Platz, *Dec. 1883.*

TO

CHRISTIAN BUOL AND CHRISTIAN PALMY

MY FRIENDS AND FELLOW-TRAVELLERS

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK.

NEW ITALIAN SKETCHES.

[Pg 11]

AUTUMN WANDERINGS.

I. — *Italiam Petimus.*

Italiam petimus! We left our upland home before daybreak on a clear October morning. There had been a hard frost, spangling the meadows with rime-crystals, which twinkled where the sun's rays touched them. Men and women were mowing the frozen grass with thin short Alpine scythes; and as the swathes fell, they gave a crisp, an almost tinkling sound. Down into the gorge, surnamed of *Avalanche*, our horses plunged; and there we lost the sunshine till we reached the *Bear's Walk*, opening upon the vales of *Albula*, and *Julier*, and *Schyn*. But up above, shone morning light upon fresh snow, and steep torrent-cloven slopes reddening with a hundred fading plants; now and then it caught the grey-green icicles that hung from cliffs where summer streams had dripped. There is no colour lovelier than the blue of an autumn sky in the high Alps, defining ridges powdered with light snow, and melting imperceptibly downward into the [Pg 12] warm yellow of the larches and the crimson of the bilberry. *Wiesen* was radiantly beautiful: those aerial ranges of the hills that separate *Albula* from *Julier* soared crystal-clear above their forests; and for a foreground, on the green fields starred with lilac crocuses, careered a group of children on their sledges. Then came the row of giant peaks—*Pitz d'Aela*, *Tinzenhorn*, and *Michelhorn*, above the deep ravine of *Albula*—all seen across wide undulating golden swards, close-shaven and awaiting winter. Carnations hung from cottage windows in full bloom, casting sharp angular black shadows on white walls.

Italiam petimus! We have climbed the valley of the Julier, following its green, transparent torrent. A night has come and gone at Mühlen. The stream still leads us up, diminishing in volume as we rise, up through the fleecy mists that roll asunder for the sun, disclosing far-off snowy ridges and blocks of granite mountains. The lifeless, soundless waste of rock, where only thin winds whistle out of silence and fade suddenly into still air, is passed. Then comes the descent, with its forests of larch and cembra, golden and dark green upon a ground of grey, and in front the serried shafts of the Bernina, and here and there a glimpse of emerald lake at turnings of the road. Autumn is the season for this landscape. Through the fading of innumerable leaflets, the yellowing of larches, and something vaporous in the low sun, it gains a colour not unlike that of the lands we seek. By the side of the lake at Silvaplana the light was strong and warm, but mellow. Pearly clouds hung over the Maloja, and floating overhead cast shadows on the opaque water, which may literally be compared to chrysoprase. The [Pg 13] breadth of golden, brown, and russet tints upon the valley at this moment adds softness to its lines of level strength. Devotees of the Engadine contend that it possesses an austere charm beyond the common beauty of Swiss landscape; but this charm is only perfected in autumn. The fresh snow on the heights that guard it helps. And then there are the forests of dark pines upon those many knolls and undulating mountain-flanks beside the lakes. Sitting and dreaming there in noonday sun, I kept repeating to myself *Italiam petimus!*

A hurricane blew upward from the pass as we left Silvaplana, ruffling the lake with gusts of the Italian wind. By Silz Maria we came in sight of a dozen Italian workmen, arm linked in arm in two rows, tramping in rhythmic stride, and singing as they went. Two of them were such nobly-built young men, that for a moment the beauty of the landscape faded from my sight, and I was saddened. They moved to their singing, like some of Mason's or Frederick Walker's figures, with the free grace of living statues, and laughed as we drove by. And yet, with all their beauty, industry, sobriety, intelligence, these Italians of the northern valleys serve the sterner people of the Grisons like negroes, doing their roughest work at scanty wages.

So we came to the vast Alpine wall, and stood on a bare granite slab, and looked over into Italy, as men might lean from the battlements of a fortress. Behind lies the Alpine valley, grim, declining slowly northward, with wind-lashed lakes and glaciers sprawling from storm-broken pyramids of gneiss. Below spread the unfathomable depths that lead to Lombardy, flooded with sunlight, filled with swirling vapour, but never wholly hidden from our sight. For the blast kept [Pg 14] shifting the cloud-masses, and the sun streamed through in spears and bands of sheeny rays. Over the parapet our horses dropped, down through sable spruce and amber larch, down between tangles of rowan and autumnal underwood. Ever as we sank, the mountains rose—those sharp embattled precipices, toppling spires, impendent chasms blurred with mist, that make the entrance into Italy sublime. Nowhere do the Alps exhibit their full stature, their commanding puissance, with such majesty as in the gates of Italy; and of all those gates I think there is none to compare with Maloja, none certainly to rival it in abruptness of initiation into the Italian secret. Below Vico Soprano we pass already into the violets and blues of Titian's landscape. Then come the purple boulders among chestnut trees; then the double dolomite-like peak of Pitz Badin and Promontogno.

It is sad that words can do even less than painting could to bring this window-scene at Promontogno before another eye. The casement just frames it. In the foreground are meadow slopes, thinly, capriciously planted with chestnut trees and walnuts, each standing with its shadow cast upon the sward. A little farther falls the torrent, foaming down between black jaws of rain-stained granite, with the wooden buildings of a rustic mill set on a ledge of rock. Suddenly above this landscape soars the valley, clothing its steep sides on either hand with pines; and there are emerald isles of pasture on the wooded flanks; and then cliffs, where the red-stemmed larches glow; and at the summit, shooting into ether with a swathe of mist around their basement, soar the double peaks, the one a pyramid, the other a bold broken crystal not unlike the [Pg 15] Finsteraarhorn seen from Furka. These are connected by a snowy saddle, and snow is lying on their inaccessible crags in powdery drifts. Sunlight pours between them into the ravine. The green and golden forests now join from either side, and now recede, according as the sinuous

valley brings their lines together or disparts them. There is a sound of cow-bells on the meadows; and the roar of the stream is dulled or quickened as the gusts of this October wind sweep by or slacken. *Italiam petimus!*

Tangimus Italiam! Chiavenna is a worthy key to this great gate Italian. We walked at night in the open galleries of the cathedral-cloister—white, smoothly curving, well-proportioned logge, enclosing a green space, whence soars the campanile to the stars. The moon had sunk, but her light still silvered the mountains that stand at watch round Chiavenna; and the castle rock was flat and black against that dreamy background. Jupiter, who walked so lately for us on the long ridge of the Jacobshorn above our pines, had now an ample space of sky over Lombardy to light his lamp in. Why is it, we asked each other, as we smoked our pipes and strolled, my friend and I;—why is it that Italian beauty does not leave the spirit so untroubled as an Alpine scene? Why do we here desire the flower of some emergent feeling to grow from the air, or from the soil, or from humanity to greet us? This sense of want evoked by Southern beauty is perhaps the antique mythopœic yearning. But in our perplexed life it takes another form, and seems the longing for emotion, ever fleeting, ever new, unrealised, unreal, insatiable.

[Pg 16]

II.—Over the Apennines.

At Parma we slept in the Albergo della Croce Bianca, which is more a bric-à-brac shop than an inn; and slept but badly, for the good folk of Parma twanged guitars and exercised their hoarse male voices all night in the street below. We were glad when Christian called us, at 5 A.M., for an early start across the Apennines. This was the day of a right Roman journey. In thirteen and a half hours, leaving Parma at 6, and arriving in Sarzana at 7.30, we flung ourselves across the spine of Italy, from the plains of Eridanus to the seashore of Etruscan Luna. I had secured a carriage and extra post-horses the night before; therefore we found no obstacles upon the road, but eager drivers, quick relays, obsequious postmasters, change, speed, perpetual movement. The road itself is a noble one,

and nobly entertained in all things but accommodation for travellers. At Berceto, near the summit of the pass, we stopped just half an hour, to lunch off a mouldy hen and six eggs; but that was all the halt we made.

As we drove out of Parma, striking across the plain to the *ghiara* of the Taro, the sun rose over the austere autumnal landscape, with its withered vines and crimson haws. Christian, the mountaineer, who at home had never seen the sun rise from a flat horizon, stooped from the box to call attention to this daily recurring miracle, which on the plain of Lombardy is no less wonderful than on a rolling sea. From the village of Fornovo, where the Italian League was camped awaiting Charles VIII. upon that memorable July morn in 1495, the road strikes suddenly aside, gains a spur [Pg 17] of the descending Apennines, and keeps this vantage till the pass of La Cisa is reached. Many windings are occasioned by thus adhering to arêtes, but the total result is a gradual ascent with free prospect over plain and mountain. The Apennines, built up upon a smaller scale than the Alps, perplexed in detail and entangled with cross sections and convergent systems, lend themselves to this plan of carrying highroads along their ridges instead of following the valley.

What is beautiful in the landscape of that northern water-shed is the subtlety, delicacy, variety, and intricacy of the mountain outlines. There is drawing wherever the eye falls. Each section of the vast expanse is a picture of tossed crests and complicated undulations. And over the whole sea of stationary billows, light is shed like an ethereal raiment, with spare colour—blue and grey, and parsimonious green—in the near foreground. The detail is somewhat dry and monotonous; for these so finely moulded hills are made up of washed earth, the immemorial wrecks of earlier mountain ranges. Brown villages, not unlike those of Midland England, low houses built of stone and tiled with stone, and square-towered churches, occur at rare intervals in cultivated hollows, where there are fields and fruit trees. Water is nowhere visible except in the wasteful river-beds. As we rise, we break into a wilder country, forested with oak, where oxen and goats are browsing. The turf is starred with lilac gentian and crocus bells, but sparsely. Then comes the highest village, Berceto, with keen Alpine air. After that, broad rolling downs of yellowing grass and russet beech-scrub lead onward to

the pass La Cisa. The sense of breadth in composition is continually satisfied through this ascent by [Pg 18] the fine-drawn lines, faint tints, and immense air-spaces of Italian landscape. Each little piece reminds one of England; but the geographical scale is enormously more grandiose, and the effect of majesty proportionately greater.

From La Cisa the road descends suddenly; for the southern escarpment of the Apennines, as of the Alpine, barrier is pitched at a far steeper angle than the northern. Yet there is no view of the sea. That is excluded by the lower hills which hem the Magra. The upper valley is beautiful, with verdant lawns and purple hill-sides breaking down into thick chestnut woods, through which we wound at a rapid pace for nearly an hour. The leaves were still green, mellowing to golden; but the fruit was ripe and heavy, ready at all points to fall. In the still October air the husks above our heads would loosen, and the brown nuts rustle through the foliage, and with a dull short thud, like drops of thunder-rain, break down upon the sod. At the foot of this rich forest, wedged in between huge buttresses, we found Pontremoli, and changed our horses here for the last time. It was Sunday, and the little town was alive with country-folk; tall stalwart fellows wearing peacock's feathers in their black slouched hats, and nut-brown maids.

From this point the valley of the Magra is exceeding rich with fruit trees, vines, and olives. The tendrils of the vine are yellow now, and in some places hued like generous wine; through their thick leaves the sun shot crimson. In one cool garden, as the day grew dusk, I noticed quince trees laden with pale fruit entangled with pomegranates—green spheres and ruddy amid burnished leaves. By the roadside too [Pg 19] were many berries of bright hues; the glowing red of haws and hips, the amber of the pyracanthus, the rose tints of the spindle-wood. These make autumn even lovelier than spring. And then there was a wood of chestnuts carpeted with pale pink ling, a place to dream of in the twilight. But the main motive of this landscape was the indescribable Carrara range, an island of pure form and shooting peaks, solid marble, crystalline in shape and texture, faintly blue against the blue sky, from which they were but scarce divided. These mountains close the valley to south-east, and seem as though they belonged to another and more celestial region.

Soon the sunlight was gone, and moonrise came to close the day, as we rolled onward to Sarzana, through arundo donax and vine-girdled olive trees and villages, where contadini lounged upon the bridges. There was a stream of sound in our ears, and in my brain a rhythmic dance of beauties caught through the long-drawn glorious golden autumn-day.

III. — Fosdinovo.

The hamlet and the castle of Fosdinovo stand upon a mountain-spur above Sarzana, commanding the valley of the Magra and the plains of Luni. This is an ancient fief of the Malaspina House, and still in the possession of the Marquis of that name.

The road to Fosdinovo strikes across the level through an avenue of plane trees, shedding their discoloured leaves. It then takes to the open fields, bordered with tall reeds waving from the foss on either [Pg 20] hand, where grapes are hanging to the vines. The country-folk allow their vines to climb into the olives, and these golden festoons are a great ornament to the grey branches. The berries on the trees are still quite green, and it is a good olive season. Leaving the main road, we pass a villa of the Malaspini, shrouded in immense thickets of sweet bay and ilex, forming a grove for the Nymphs or Pan. Here may you see just such clean stems and lucid foliage as Gian Bellini painted, inch by inch, in his Peter Martyr picture. The place is neglected now; the semicircular seats of white Carrara marble are stained with green mosses, the altars chipped, the fountains choked with bay leaves; and the rose trees, escaped from what were once trim garden alleys, have gone wandering a-riot into country hedges. There is no demarcation between the great man's villa and the neighbouring farms. From this point the path rises, and the barren hill-side is a-bloom with late-flowering myrtles. Why did the Greeks consecrate these myrtle-rods to Death as well as Love? Electra complained that her father's tomb had not received the honour of the myrtle branch; and the Athenians wreathed their swords with myrtle in memory of Harmodius. Thinking of these matters, I can-

not but remember lines of Greek, which have themselves the rectitude and elasticity of myrtle wands:

καὶ προσηπῶν ἔκλαυσ' ἑρμῖας τυχῶν
οἰονδᾶς τε λύσας ἄσκον ὄν φέρω ζένοις
ἔσπεισα τύμβῳ δ' ἀμφέθηκα μυρσίνας.

As we approach Fosdinovo, the hills above us gain sublimity; the prospect over plain and sea – the fields where Luna was, the widening bay of Spezzia – [Pg 21] grows ever grander. The castle is a ruin, still capable of partial habitation, and now undergoing repair – the state in which a ruin looks most sordid and forlorn. How strange it is, too, that, to enforce this sense of desolation, sad dishevelled weeds cling ever to such antique masonry! Here are the henbane, the sow-thistle, the wild cucumber. At Avignon, at Orvieto, at Dolceacqua, at Les Baux, we never missed them. And they have the dusty courtyards, the massive portals, where portcullises still threaten, of Fosdinovo to themselves. Over the gate, and here and there on corbels, are carved the arms of Malaspina – a barren thorn-tree, gnarled with the geometrical precision of heraldic irony.

Leaning from the narrow windows of this castle, with the spacious view to westward, I thought of Dante. For Dante in this castle was the guest of Moroello Malaspina, what time he was yet finishing the "Inferno." There is a little old neglected garden, full to south, enclosed upon a rampart which commands the Borgo, where we found frail canker-roses and yellow amaryllis. Here, perhaps, he may have sat with ladies – for this was the Marchesa's pleasure; or may have watched through a short summer's night, until he saw that *tremolar della marina*, portending dawn, which afterwards he painted in the "Purgatory."

From Fosdinovo one can trace the Magra work its way out seaward, not into the plain where once the *candentia mœnia Lunæ* flashed sunrise from their battlements, but close beside the little hills which back the southern arm of the Spezzian gulf. At the extreme end of that promontory, called Del Corvo, stood the [Pg 22] Benedictine convent of S. Croce; and it was here in 1309, if we may trust to tradition, that Dante, before his projected journey into France, appeared and left the first part of his poem with the Prior. Fra Ilario, such was the good father's name, received commission to

transmit the "Inferno" to Ugucione della Faggiuola; and he subsequently recorded the fact of Dante's visit in a letter which, though its genuineness has been called in question, is far too interesting to be left without allusion. The writer says that on occasion of a journey into lands beyond the Riviera, Dante visited this convent, appearing silent and unknown among the monks. To the Prior's question what he wanted, he gazed upon the brotherhood, and only answered, "Peace!" Afterwards, in private conversation, he communicated his name and spoke about his poem. A portion of the "Divine Comedy" composed in the Italian tongue aroused Ilario's wonder, and led him to inquire why his guest had not followed the usual course of learned poets by committing his thoughts to Latin. Dante replied that he had first intended to write in that language, and that he had gone so far as to begin the poem in Virgilian hexameters. Reflection upon the altered conditions of society in that age led him, however, to reconsider the matter; and he was resolved to tune another lyre, "suited to the sense of modern men." "For," said he, "it is idle to set solid food before the lips of sucklings."

If we can trust Fra Ilario's letter as a genuine record, which is unhappily a matter of some doubt, we have in this narration not only a picturesque, almost a melodramatically picturesque glimpse of the poet's [Pg 23] apparition to those quiet monks in their seagirt house of peace, but also an interesting record of the destiny which presided over the first great work of literary art in a distinctly modern language.

IV. — La Spezzia.

While we were at Fosdinovo the sky filmed over, and there came a halo round the sun. This portended change; and by evening, after we had reached La Spezzia, earth, sea, and air were conscious of a coming tempest. At night I went down to the shore, and paced the sea-wall they have lately built along the Rada. The moon was up, but overdriven with dry smoky clouds, now thickening to blackness over the whole bay, now leaving intervals through which the light poured fitfully and fretfully upon the wrinkled waves; and ever and

anon they shuddered with electric gleams which were not actual lightning. Heaven seemed to be descending on the sea; one might have fancied that some powerful charms were drawing down the moon with influence malign upon those still resisting billows. For not as yet the gulf was troubled to its depth, and not as yet the breakers dashed in foam against the moonlight-smitten promontories. There was but an uneasy murmuring of wave to wave; a whispering of wind, that stooped its wing and hissed along the surface, and withdrew into the mystery of clouds again; a momentary chafing of churned water round the harbour piers, subsiding into silence petulant and sullen. I leaned against an iron stanchion and longed for the sea's message. But nothing came to [Pg 24] me, and the drowned secret of Shelley's death those waves which were his grave revealed not.

"Howler and scooper of storms! capricious and dainty sea!"

Meanwhile the incantation swelled in shrillness, the electric shudders deepened. Alone in this elemental overture to tempest I took no note of time, but felt, through self-abandonment to the symphonic influence, how sea and air, and clouds akin to both, were dealing with each other complainingly, and in compliance to some maker of unrest within them. A touch upon my shoulder broke this trance; I turned and saw a boy beside me in a coast-guard's uniform. Francesco was on patrol that night; but my English accent soon assured him that I was no *contrabbandiere*, and he too leaned against the stanchion and told me his short story. He was in his nineteenth year, and came from Florence, where his people live in the Borgo Ognissanti. He had all the brightness of the Tuscan folk, a sort of innocent malice mixed with *espièglerie*. It was diverting to see the airs he gave himself on the strength of his new military dignity, his gun, and uniform, and night duty on the shore. I could not help humming to myself *Non più andrai*; for Francesco was a sort of Tuscan Cherubino. We talked about picture galleries and libraries in Florence, and I had to hear his favourite passages from the Italian poets. And then there came the plots of Jules Verne's stories and marvellous narrations about *l'uomo cavallo*, *l'uo-*

mo volante, l'uomo pesce. The last of these personages turned out to be Paolo Boynnton (so pronounced), who had swam the Arno in his diving dress, passing the several bridges, and when he came to the [Pg 25] great weir "allora tutti stare con bocca aperta." Meanwhile the storm grew serious, and our conversation changed. Francesco told me about the terrible sun-stricken sand shores of the Riviera, burning in summer noon, over which the coastguard has to tramp, their perils from falling stones in storm, and the trains that come rushing from those narrow tunnels on the midnight line of march. It is a hard life; and the thirst for adventure which drove this boy—il più matto di tutta la famiglia—to adopt it, seems well-nigh quenched. And still, with a return to Giulio Verne, he talked enthusiastically of deserting, of getting on board a merchant ship, and working his way to southern islands where wonders are.

A furious blast swept the whole sky for a moment almost clear. The moonlight fell, with racing cloud-shadows, upon sea and hills, the lights of Lerici, the great *fanali* at the entrance of the gulf, and Francesco's upturned handsome face. Then all again was whirled in mist and foam; one breaker smote the sea-wall in a surge of froth, another plunged upon its heels; with inconceivable swiftness came rain; lightning deluged the expanse of surf, and showed the windy trees bent landward by the squall. It was long past midnight now, and the storm was on us for the space of three days.

V.—Porto Venere.

For the next three days the wind went worrying on, and a line of surf leapt on the sea-wall always to the same height. The hills all around were inky black and weary.

[Pg 26] At night the wild libeccio still rose, with floods of rain and lightning poured upon the waste. I thought of the Florentine patrol. Is he out in it, and where?

At last there came a lull. When we rose on the fourth morning, the sky was sulky, spent and sleepy after storm—the air as soft and tepid as boiled milk or steaming flannel. We drove along the shore to Porto Venere, passing the arsenals and dockyards, which have

changed the face of Spezzia since Shelley knew it. This side of the gulf is not so rich in vegetation as the other, probably because it lies open to the winds from the Carrara mountains. The chestnuts come down to the shore in many places, bringing with them the wild mountain-side. To make up for this lack of luxuriance, the coast is furrowed with a succession of tiny harbours, where the fishing-boats rest at anchor. There are many villages upon the spurs of hills, and on the headlands naval stations, hospitals, lazzaretti, and prisons. A prickly bindweed (the *Smilax sarsaparilla*) forms a feature in the near landscape, with its creamy odoriferous blossoms, coral berries, and glossy thorned leaves.

A turn of the road brought Porto Venere in sight, and on its grey walls flashed a gleam of watery sunlight. The village consists of one long narrow street, the houses on the left side hanging sheer above the sea. Their doors at the back open on to cliffs with drop about fifty feet upon the water. A line of ancient walls, with medieval battlements and shells of chambers suspended midway between earth and sky, runs up the rock behind the town; and this wall is pierced with a deep gateway above which the inn is piled. We had our lunch in a room opening upon the [Pg 27] town-gate, adorned with a deep-cut Pisan arch enclosing images and frescoes—a curious episode in a place devoted to the jollity of smugglers and sea-faring folk. The whole house was such as Tintoretto loved to paint—huge wooden rafters; open chimneys with pent-house canopies of stone, where the cauldrons hung above logs of chestnut; rude low tables spread with coarse linen embroidered at the edges, and laden with plates of fishes, fruit, quaint glass, big-bellied jugs of earthenware, and flasks of yellow wine. The people of the place were lounging round in lazy attitudes. There were odd nooks and corners everywhere; unexpected staircases with windows slanting through the thickness of the town-wall; pictures of saints; high-zoned serving women, on whose broad shoulders lay big coral beads; smoke-blackened roofs, and balconies that opened on the sea. The house was inexhaustible in motives for pictures.

We walked up the street, attended by a rabble rout of boys—*diavoli scatenati*—clean, grinning, white-teethed, who kept incessantly shouting, "Soldo, soldo!" I do not know why these sea-urchins are so far more irrepressible than their land brethren. But it is always

thus in Italy. They take an imperturbable delight in noise and mere annoyance. I shall never forget the sea-roar of Porto Venere, with that shrill obbligato, "Soldo, soldo, soldo!" rattling like a dropping fire from lungs of brass.

At the end of Porto Venere is a withered and abandoned city, climbing the cliffs of S. Pietro; and on the headland stands the ruined church, built by Pisans with alternate rows of white and black marble, upon the site of an old temple of Venus. This is a [Pg 28] modest and pure piece of Gothic architecture, fair in desolation, refined and dignified, and not unworthy in its grace of the dead Cyprian goddess. Through its broken lancets the sea-wind whistles and the vast reaches of the Tyrrhene gulf are seen. Samphire sprouts between the blocks of marble, and in sheltered nooks the caper hangs her beautiful purpleal snowy bloom.

The headland is a bold block of white limestone stained with red. It has the pitch of Exmoor stooping to the sea near Lynton. To north, as one looks along the coast, the line is broken by Porto Fino's amethystine promontory; and in the vaporous distance we could trace the Riviera mountains, shadowy and blue. The sea came roaring, rolling in with tawny breakers; but, far out, it sparkled in pure azure, and the cloud-shadows over it were violet. Where Corsica should have been seen, soared banks of fleecy, broad-domed alabaster clouds.

This point, once dedicated to Venus, now to Peter—both, be it remembered, fishers of men—is one of the most singular in Europe. The island of Palmaria, rich in veined marbles, shelters the port; so that outside the sea rages, while underneath the town, reached by a narrow strait, there is a windless calm. It was not without reason that our Lady of Beauty took this fair gulf to herself; and now that she has long been dispossessed, her memory lingers yet in names. For Porto Venere remembers her, and Lerici is only Eryx. There is a grotto here, where an inscription tells us that Byron once "tempted the Ligurian waves." It is just such a natural sea-cave as might have inspired Euripides when he described the refuge of Orestes in "Iphigenia."

[Pg 29]

VI. — Lerici.

Libeccio at last had swept the sky clear. The gulf was ridged with foam-fleeced breakers, and the water churned into green, tawny wastes. But overhead there flew the softest clouds, all silvery, dispersed in flocks. It is the day for pilgrimage to what was Shelley's home.

After following the shore a little way, the road to Lerici breaks into the low hills which part La Spezzia from Sarzana. The soil is red, and overgrown with arbutus and pinaster, like the country around Cannes. Through the scattered trees it winds gently upwards, with frequent views across the gulf, and then descends into a land rich with olives—a genuine Riviera landscape, where the mountain-slopes are hoary, and spikelets of innumerable light-flashing leaves twinkle against a blue sea, misty-deep. The walls here are not unfrequently adorned with bas-reliefs of Carrara marble—saints and madonnas very delicately wrought, as though they were love-labours of sculptors who had passed a summer on this shore. San Terenzio is soon discovered low upon the sands to the right, nestling under little cliffs; and then the high-built castle of Lerici comes in sight, looking across the bay to Porto Venere—one Aphrodite calling to the other, with the foam between. The village is piled around its cove with tall and picturesquely-coloured houses; the molo and the fishing-boats lie just beneath the castle. There is one point of the descending carriage road where all this gracefulness is seen, framed by the boughs of olive branches, swaying, wind-ruffled, laughing the many-twinkling smiles of ocean back from their grey [Pg 30] leaves. Here *Erycina ridens* is at home. And, as we stayed to dwell upon the beauty of the scene, came women from the bay below—barefooted, straight as willow wands, with burnished copper bowls upon their heads. These women have the port of goddesses, deep-bosomed, with the length of thigh and springing ankles that betoken strength no less than elasticity and grace. The hair of some of them was golden, rippling in little curls around brown brows and glowing eyes. Pale lilac blent with orange on their dress, and coral beads hung from their ears.

At Lerici we took a boat and pushed into the rolling breakers. Christian now felt the movement of the sea for the first time. This