

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen  
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall Willis  
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche  
Stockton Turgenev Balzac  
Burroughs Vatsyayana Crane  
Curtis Tocqueville Verne  
Homer Tolstoy Gogol Busch  
Darwin Thoreau Twain  
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott  
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Burton Harte  
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# **The Isle of Unrest**

Henry Seton Merriman

# Imprint

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## GOING TO THE WARS

Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind  
That from the nunnery  
Of thy chaste breast, and quiet mind,  
To war and arms I fly.

True: a new mistress now I chase,  
The first foe in the field;  
And with a stronger faith embrace  
A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such  
As you too shall adore;  
I could not love thee, dear, so much  
Lov'd I not honour more.

**RICHARD LOVELACE.**



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## THE ISLE OF UNREST

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE MOVING FINGER.

"The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,  
Moves on: nor all thy piety nor wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,  
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it."

The afternoon sun was lowering towards a heavy bank of clouds hanging still and sullen over the Mediterranean. A mistral was blowing. The last yellow rays shone fiercely upon the towering coast of Corsica, and the windows of the village of Olmeta glittered like gold.

There are two Olmetas in Corsica, both in the north, both on the west coast, both perched high like an eagle's nest, both looking down upon those lashed waters of the Mediterranean, which are not the waters that poets sing of, for they are as often white as they are blue; they are seldom glassy except in the height of summer and sailors tell that they are as treacherous as any waters of the earth. Neither aneroid nor weather-wisdom may, as a matter of fact, tell when a mistral will arise, how it will blow, how veer, how drop and rise, and drop again. For it will blow one day beneath a cloudless sky, lashing the whole sea white like milk, and blow harder tomorrow under racing clouds.

The great chestnut trees in and around Olmeta groaned and strained in the grip of their lifelong foe. The small door, the tiny windows, of every house were rigorously closed. The whole place had a wind-swept air despite the heavy foliage. Even the roads, and notably the broad "Place," had been swept clean and dustless. And in the middle of the "Place," between the fountain and the church steps, a man lay dead upon his face.

It is as well to state here, once for all, that we are dealing with Olmeta-di-Tuda, and not that other Olmeta—the virtuous, di Capocorso, in fact, which would shudder at the thought of a dead man lying on its "Place," before the windows of the very Mairie, under the shadow of the church. For Cap Corse is the good boy of Corsica, where men think sorrowfully of the wilder communes to the south, and raise their eyebrows at the very mention of Corte and Sartene—where, at all events, the women have for husbands, men—and not degenerate Pisan vine-snippers.

It was not so long ago either. For the man might have been alive to-day, though he would have been old and bent no doubt; for he was a thick-set man, and must have been strong. He had, indeed, carried his lead up from the road that runs by the Guadelle river. Was he not to be traced all the way up the short cut through the olive terraces by one bloody footprint at regular intervals? You could track his passage across the "Place," towards the fountain of which he had fallen short like a poisoned rat that tries to reach water and fails.

He lay quite alone, still grasping the gun which he had never laid aside since boyhood. No one went to him; no one had attempted to help him. He lay as he had fallen, with a thin stream of blood running slowly from one trouser-leg. For this was Corsican work—that is to say, dirty work—from behind a rock, in the back, at close range, without warning or mercy, as honest men would be ashamed to shoot the merest beast of the forest. It was as likely as not a charge of buck-shot low down in the body, leaving the rest to hemorrhage or gangrene.

All Olmeta knew of it, and every man took care that it should be no business of his. Several had approached, pipe in mouth, and looked at the dead man without comment; but all had gone away

again, idly, indifferently. For in this the most beautiful of the islands, human life is held cheaper than in any land of Europe.

Some one, it was understood, had gone to tell the gendarmes down at St. Florent. There was no need to send and tell his wife—half a dozen women were racing through the olive groves to get the first taste of that. Perhaps some one had gone towards Oletta to meet the Abbé Susini, whose business in a measure this must be.

The sun suddenly dipped behind the heavy bank of clouds and the mountains darkened. Although it lies in the very centre of the Mediterranean, Corsica is a gloomy land, and the summits of her high mountains are more often covered than clear. It is a land of silence and brooding quiet. The women are seldom gay; the men, in their heavy clothes of dark corduroy, have little to say for themselves. Some of them were standing now in the shadow of the great trees, smoking their pipes in silence, and looking with a studied indifference at nothing. Each was prepared to swear before a jury at the Bastia assizes that he knew nothing of the "accident," as it is here called, to Pietro Andrei, and had not seen him crawl up to Olmeta to die. Indeed, Pietro Andrei's death seemed to be nobody's business, though we are told that not so much as a sparrow may fall unheeded.

The Abbé Susini was coming now—a little fiery man, with the walk of one who was slightly bow-legged, though his cassock naturally concealed this defect. He was small and not too broad, with a narrow face and clean, straight features—something of the Spaniard, something of the Greek, nothing Italian, nothing French. In a word, this was a Corsican, which is to say that he was different from any other European race, and would, as sure as there is corn in Egypt, be overbearing, masterful, impossible. He was, of course, clean shaven, as brown as old oak, with little flashing black eyes. His cassock was a good one, and his hat, though dusty, shapely and new. But his whole bearing threw, as it were, into the observer's face the suggestion that the habit does not make the priest.

He came forward without undue haste, and displayed little surprise and no horror.

"Quite like old times," he said to himself, remembering the days of Louis Philippe. He knelt down beside the dead man, and perhaps

the attitude reminded him of his calling; for he fell to praying, and made the gesture of the cross over Andrei's head. Then suddenly he leapt to his feet, and shook his lean fist out towards the valley and St. Florent, as if he knew whence this trouble came.

"Provided they would keep their work in their own commune," he cried, "instead of bringing disgrace on a parish that has not had the gendarmes this — this —"

"Three days," added one of the bystanders, who had drawn near. And he said it with a certain pride, as of one well pleased to belong to a virtuous community.

But the priest was not listening. He had already turned aside in his quick, jerky way; for he was a comparatively young man. He was looking through the olives towards the south.

"It is the women," he said, and his face suddenly hardened. He was impulsive, it appeared — quick to feel for others, fiery in his anger, hasty in his judgment.

From the direction in which he and the bystanders looked, came the hum of many voices, and the high, incessant shrieks of one who seemed demented. Presently a confused procession appeared from the direction of the south, hurrying through the narrow street now called the Rue Carnot. It was headed by a woman, who led a little child, running and stumbling as he ran. At her heels a number of women hurried, confusedly shouting, moaning, and wailing. The men stood waiting for them in dead silence — a characteristic scene. The leading woman seemed to be superior to her neighbours, for she wore a black silk handkerchief on her head instead of a white or coloured cotton. It is almost a mantilla, and marks as clear a social distinction in Corsica as does that head-dress in Spain. She dragged at the child, and scarce turned her head when he fell and scrambled as best he could to his feet. He laughed and crowed with delight, remembering last year's carnival with that startling, photographic memory of early childhood which never forgets.

At every few steps the woman gave a shriek as if she were suffering some intermittent agony which caught her at regular intervals. At the sight of the crowd she gave a quick cry of despair, and ran forward, leaving her child sprawling on the road. She knelt by the

dead man's side with shriek after shriek, and seemed to lose all control over herself, for she gave way to those strange gestures of despair of which many read in novels and a few in the Scriptures, and which come by instinct to those who have no reading at all. She dragged the handkerchief from her head, and threw it over her face. She beat her breast. She beat the very ground with her clenched hands. Her little boy, having gathered his belongings together and dusted his cotton frock, now came forward, and stood watching her with his fingers at his mouth. He took it to be a game which he did not understand; as indeed it was—the game of life.

The priest scratched his chin with his forefinger, which was probably a habit with him when puzzled, and stood looking down out of the corner of his eyes at the ground.

It was he, however, who moved first, and, stooping, loosed the clenched fingers round the gun. It was a double-barrelled gun, at full cock, and every man in the little crowd assembled carried one like it. To this day, if one meets a man, even in the streets of Corte or Ajaccio, who carries no gun, it may be presumed that it is only because he pins greater faith on a revolver.

Neither hammer had fallen, and the abbé gave a little nod. It was, it seemed, the usual thing to make quite sure before shooting, so that there might be no unnecessary waste of powder or risk of reprisal. The woman looked at the gun, too, and knew the meaning of the raised hammers.

She leapt to her feet, and looked round at the sullen faces.

"And some of you know who did it," she said; "and you will help the murderer when he goes to the macquis, and take him food, and tell him when the gendarmes are hunting him."

She waved her hand fiercely towards the mountains, which loomed, range behind range, dark and forbidding to the south, towards Calvi and Corte. But the men only shrugged their shoulders; for the forest and the mountain brushwood were no longer the refuge they used to be in this the last year of the iron rule of Napoleon III, who, whether he possessed or not the Corsican blood that his foes deny him, knew, at all events, how to rule Corsica better than any man before or since.

"No, no," said the priest, soothingly. "Those days are gone. He will be taken, and justice will be done."

But he spoke without conviction, almost as if he had no faith in this vaunted regeneration of a people whose history is a story of endless strife—as if he could see with a prophetic eye thirty years into the future, down to the present day, when the last state of that land is worse than the first.

"Justice!" cried the woman. "There is no justice in Corsica! What had Pietro done that he should lie there? Only his duty—only that for which he was paid. He was the Perucca's agent, and because he made the idlers pay their rent, they threatened him. Because he put up fences, they raised their guns to him. Because he stopped their thieving and their lawlessness, they shoot him. He drove their cattle from the fields because they were Perucca's fields, and he was paid to watch his master's interests. But Perucca they dare not touch, because his clan is large, and would hunt the murderer down. If he was caught, the Peruccas would make sure of the jury—ay! And of the judge at Bastia—but Pietro is not of Corsica; he has no friends and no clan, so justice is not for him."

She knelt down again as she spoke and laid her hand on her dead husband's back, but she made no attempt to move him. For although Pietro Andrei was an Italian, his wife was Corsican—a woman of Bonifacio, that grim town on a rock so often besieged and never yet taken by a fair fight. She had been brought up in, as it were, an atmosphere of conventional lawlessness, and knew that it is well not to touch a dead man till the gendarmes have seen him, but to send a child or an old woman to the gendarmerie, and then to stand aloof and know nothing; and feign stupidity; so that the officials, when they arrive, may find the whole village at work in the fields or sitting in their homes, while the dead, who can tell no tales, has suddenly few friends and no enemies.

Then Andrei's widow rose slowly to her feet. Her face was composed now and set. She arranged the black silk handkerchief on her head, and set her dress in order. She was suddenly calm and quiet. "But see," she said, looking round into eyes that failed to meet her own, "in this country each man must execute his own justice. It has

always been so, and it will be so, so long as there are any Corsicans left. And if there is no man left, then the women must do it."

She tied her apron tighter, as if about to undertake some hard domestic duty, and brushed the dust from her black dress.

"Come here," she said, turning to the child, and lapsing into the soft dialect of the south and east—"come here, thou child of Pietro Andrei."

The child came forward. He was probably two years old, and understood nothing that was passing.

"See here, you of Olmeta," she said composedly; and, stooping down, she dipped her finger in the pool of blood that had collected in the dust. "See here—and here."

As she spoke she hastily smeared the blood over the child's face and dragged him away from the priest, who had stepped forward.

"No, no," he protested. "Those times are past."

"Past!" said the woman, with a flash of fury. "All the country knows that your own mother did it to you at Sartene, where you come from."

The abbé made no answer, but, taking the child by the arm, dragged him gently away from his mother. With his other hand he sought in his pocket for a handkerchief. But he was a lone man, without a housekeeper, and the handkerchief was missing. The child looked from one to the other, laughing uncertainly, with his grimly decorated face.

Then the priest stooped, and with the skirt of his cassock wiped the child's face.

"There," he said to the woman, "take him home, for I hear the gendarmes coming."

Indeed, the trotting of horses and the clank of the long swinging sabres could be heard on the road below the village, and one by one the onlookers dropped away, leaving the Abbé Susini alone at the foot of the church steps.

## CHAPTER II.

### CHEZ CLÉMENT.

"Comme on est heureux quand on sait ce qu'on veut!"

It was the dinner hour at the Hotel Clément at Bastia; and the event was of greater importance than the outward appearance of the house would seem to promise. For there is no promise at all about the house on the left-hand side of Bastia's one street, the Boulevard du Palais, which bears, as its only sign, a battered lamp with the word "Clément" printed across it. The ground floor is merely a rope and hemp warehouse. A small Corsican donkey, no bigger than a Newfoundland dog, lives in the basement, and passes many of his waking hours in what may be termed the entrance hall of the hotel, appearing to consider himself in some sort a concierge. The upper floors of the huge Genoese house are let out in large or small apartments to mysterious families, of which the younger members are always to be met carrying jugs carefully up and down the greasy, common staircase.

The first floor is the Hotel Clément, or, to be more correct, one is "chez Clément" on the first floor.

"You stay with Clément," will be the natural remark of any on board the Marseilles or Leghorn steamer, on being told that the traveller disembarks at Bastia.

"We shall meet to-night chez Clément," the officers say to each other on leaving the parade ground at four o'clock.

"Déjeuner chez Clément," is the usual ending to a notice of a marriage, or a first communion, in the *Petit Bastiais*, that greatest of all foolscap-size journals.

It is comforting to reflect, in these times of hurried changes, that the traveller to Bastia may still find himself chez Clément—may still have to kick at the closed door of the first-floor flat, and find that door opened by Clément himself, always affable, always gentle-

manly, with the same crumbs strewed carelessly down the same waistcoat, or, if it is evening time, in his spotless cook's dress. One may be sure of the same grave welcome, and the easy transition from grave to gay, the smiling, grand manner of conducting the guest to one of those vague and darksome bedrooms, where the jug and the basin never match, where the floor is of red tiles, with a piece of uncertain carpet sliding hither and thither, with the shutters always shut, and the mustiness of the middle ages hanging heavy in the air. For Bastia has not changed, and never will. And it is not only to be fervently hoped, but seems likely, that Clément will never grow old, and never die, but continue to live and demonstrate the startling fact that one may be born and live all one's life in a remote, forgotten town, and still be a man of the world.

The soup had been served precisely at six, and the four artillery officers were already seated at the square table near the fireplace, which was and is still exclusively the artillery table. The other *habit-ués* were in their places at one or other of the half-dozen tables that fill the room—two gentlemen from the Prefecture, a civil engineer of the projected railway to Corte, a commercial traveller of the old school, and, at the corner table, farthest from the door, Colonel Gilbert of the Engineers. A clever man this, who had seen service in the Crimea, and had invariably distinguished himself whenever the opportunity occurred; but he was one of those who await, and do not seek opportunities. Perhaps he had enemies, or, what is worse, no friends; for at the age of forty he found himself appointed to Bastia, one of the waste places of the War Office, where an inferior man would have done better.

Colonel Gilbert was a handsome man, with a fair moustache, a high forehead, surmounted by thin, receding, smooth hair, and good-natured, idle eyes. He lunched and dined chez Clément always, and was frankly, good naturedly bored at Bastia. He hated Corsica, had no sympathy with the Corsican, and was a Northern Frenchman to the tips of his long white fingers.

"Your Bastia, my good Clément," he said to the host, who invariably came to the dining-room with the roast and solicited the opinion of each guest upon the dinner in a few tactful, easy words—"your Bastia is a sad place."

This evening Colonel Gilbert was in a less talkative mood than usual, and exchanged only a nod with his artillery colleagues as he passed to his own small table. He opened his newspaper, and became interested in it at once. It was several days old, and had come by way of Nice and Ajaccio from Paris. All France was at this time eager for news, and every Frenchman studied the journal of his choice with that uneasiness which seems to foreshadow in men's hearts the approach of any great event. For this was the spring of 1870, when France, under the hitherto iron rule of her adventurer emperor, suddenly began to plunge and rear, while the nations stood around her wondering who should receive the first kick. The emperor was ill; the cheaper journals were already talking of his funeral. He was uneasy and restless, turning those dull eyes hither and thither over Europe—a man of inscrutable face and deep hidden plans—perhaps the greatest adventurer who ever sat a throne. Condemned by a French Court of Peers in 1840 to imprisonment for life, he went to Ham with the quiet question, "But how long does perpetuity last in France?" And eight years later he was absolute master of the country.

Corsica in particular was watching events, for Corsica was cowed. She had come under the rule of this despot, and for the first time in her history had found her master. Instead of being numbered by hundreds, as they were before and are again now at the end of the century, the outlaws hiding in the mountains scarce exceeded a score. The elections were conducted more honestly than had ever been before, and the Continental newspapers spoke hopefully of the dawn of civilization showing itself among a people who have ever been lawless, have ever loved war better than peace.

"But it is a false dawn," said the Abbé Susini of Olmeta, himself an insatiable reader of newspapers, a keen and ardent politician. Like the majority of Corsicans, he was a staunch Bonapartist, and held that the founder of that marvellous dynasty was the greatest man to walk this earth since the days of direct Divine inspiration.

It was only because Napoleon III was a Bonaparte that Corsica endured his tyranny; perhaps, indeed, tyranny and an iron rule suited better than equity or tolerance a people descended from the most ancient of the fighting races, speaking a tongue wherein occur