

## THE TAORMINA NOTE-BOOK.



WHAT should there be in the glimmering lights of a poor fishing-village to fascinate me? Far below, a mile perhaps, I behold them in the darkness and the storm like some

phosphorescence of the beach; I see the pale tossing of the surf beside them; I hear the continuous roar borne up and softened about these heights: and this is night at Taormina. There is a weirdness in the scene—the feeling without the reality of mystery; and at evening, I know not why, I cannot sleep without stepping upon the terrace or peering through the panes to see those lights. At morning the charm has flown from the shore to the further heights above me. I glance at the vast banks of southward-lying cloud that envelop Etna, like deep fog upon the ocean; and then, inevitably, my eyes seek the double summit of the Taorminian mountain, rising nigh at hand a thousand feet, almost sheer, less than half a mile westward. The nearer height, precipice-faced, towers full in front with its crowning ruined citadel, and discloses just below the peak, on an arm of rock toward its right, a hermitage church among the heavily hanging mists. The other horn of the massive hill, somewhat more remote, behind and to the old castle's left, exposes on its slightly loftier crest the edge of a hamlet. It, too, is cloud-wreathed—the lonely crag of Mola. Over these hilltops, I know, mists will drift and touch all day; and often they darken threateningly, and creep softly down the slopes, and fill the next-lying valley, and roll, and lift again, and reveal the flank of Monte d'Oro northward on the far-reaching range. As I was walking the other day, with one of these floating showers gently blowing in my face down this defile, I noticed, where the mists hung in fragments from the cloud out over the gulf, how like air-shattered arches they groined the profound ravine; and thinking how much of the romantic charm which delights lovers of the mountains and the sea springs from such Gothic moods of nature, I felt for a moment something of the pleasure of recognition in meeting with this northern and familiar element in the Sicilian landscape.

One who has grown to be at home with na-

ture cannot be quite a stranger anywhere on earth. In new lands I find the poet's old domain. It is not only from the land-side that these intimations of old acquaintance come. When my eyes leave, as they will, the near girdle of rainy mountain-tops, and range home at last upon the sea, something familiar is there too,—that which I have always known,—but marvelously transformed and heightened in beauty and power. Such sudden glints of sunshine in the offing through unseen rents of heaven, as brilliant as in mid-ocean, I have beheld a thousand times, but here they remind me rather of cloud-lights on far Western plains; and where have I seen those still tracts of changeful color, iridescent under the silvery vapors of noon; or, when the weather freshens and darkens, those whirlpools of pure emerald bright in the gray expanse of storm? They seem like memories of what has been, made fairer. One recurring scene has the same fascination for my eyes as the fishers' lights. It is a simple picture: only an arm of mist thrusting out from yonder lowland by the little cape, and making a near horizon, where, for half an hour, the waves break with great dashes of purple and green, deep and angry, against the insubstantial mole. All day I gaze on these sights of beauty until it seems that nature herself has taken on nobler forms forever more. When the mountain storm beats the pane at midnight, or the distant lightnings awake me in the hour before dawn, I can forget in what climate I am; but the oblivion is conscious, and half a memory of childhood nights: in an instant comes the recollection, "I am on the coasts, and these are the couriers, of Etna."

The very rain is strange: it is charged with obscure personality; it is the habitation of a new presence, a storm-genius that I have never known; it is born of Etna, whence all things here have being and draw nourishment. It is not rain, but the rain-cloud, spread out over the valleys, the precipices, the sounding beaches, the ocean-plain; it is not a storm, but a season. It does not rise with the moist Hyades, or ride with cloudy Orion in the Mediterranean night; it does not pass like Atlantic tempests on great world-currents: it remains. Its home is upon Etna; thence it comes and thither it returns; it gathers and disperses, lightens and darkens, blows and is silent, and though it suffer the clear north wind, or the west, to divide its veils with heaven, again it draws the folds together

about its abode. It obeys only Etna, who sends it forth; then with clouds and thick darkness the mountain hides its face: it is the Sicilian winter.

## II.

BUT Etna does not withdraw continuously from its children even in this season. On the third day, at farthest, I was told it would bring back the sun; and I was not deceived. Two days it was closely wrapped in impenetrable gray; but the third morning, as I threw open my casement and stepped out upon the terrace, I saw it, like my native winter, expanding its broad flanks under the double radiance of dazzling clouds spreading from its extreme summit far out and upward, and of the snow-fields whose long fair drifts shone far down the sides. Villages and groves were visible, clothing all the lower zone, and between lay the plain. It seemed near in that air, but it is twelve miles away. From the sea-dipping base to the white cone the slope measures more than twenty miles, and as many more conduct the eye downward to the western fringe—a vast bulk; yet one does not think of its size as he gazes, so large a tract the eye takes in, but no more realizes than it does the distance of the stars. High up, forests peer through the ribbed snows, and extinct craters stud the frozen scene with round hollow mounds innumerable. A thousand features, but it remains one mighty mountain. How natural it seems for it to be sublime! It is the peer of the sea and of the sky. All day it flashed and darkened under the rack, and I rejoiced in the sight, and knew why Pindar called it the pillar of heaven; and at night it hooded itself once more with the winter cloud.

## III.

WOULD you see this land as I see it? Come then, since Etna gives a fair, pure morning, up over the shelving bank to the great eastern spur of Taormina, where stood the hollow theater, now in ruins, and above it the small temple with which the Greeks surmounted the highest point. It is such a spot as they often chose for their temples; but none ever commanded a more noble prospect. The far-shining sea, four or five hundred feet below, washes the narrow, precipitous descent, and on each hand is disclosed the whole of that side of Sicily which faces the rising sun. To the left and northward are the level straits, with the Calabrian mountains opposite, thinly sown with light snow, as far as the Cape of Spartivento, distinctly seen, though forty miles away; in front expands the open sea; straight to the south runs the indented coast, bay and beach, point after point, to where, sixty miles distant,

the great blue promontory of Syracuse makes far out. On the land-side Etna fills the south with its lifted snow-fields, now smoke-plumed at the languid cone; and thence, though lingeringly, the eye ranges nearer over the intervening plain to the well-wooded ridge of Castiglione, and, next, to the round solitary top of Monte Maestra, with its long shoreward descent, and comes to rest on the height of Taormina overhead, with its hermitage of Santa Maria della Rocca, its castle, and Mola. Yet further off, at the head of the defile, looms the barren summit of Monte Venere, with Monte d'Oro and other hills in the foreground, and northward, peak after peak, travels the close Messina range.

A landscape of sky, sea, plain, and mountains, great masses majestically grouped, grand in contour! Yet to call it sublime does not render the impression it makes upon the soul. Sublime, indeed, it is at times, and dull were he whose heart from hour to hour awe does not visit here; but constantly the scene is beautiful, and yields that delight which dwells unwearied with the soul. One may be seldom touched to the exaltation which sublimity implies, but to take pleasure in loveliness is the habit of one who lives as Heaven made him; and what characterizes this landscape and sets it apart is the permanence of its beauty, its perpetual and perfect charm through every change of light and weather, and in every quarter of its heaven and earth, felt equally whether the eye sweeps the great circuit with its vision, or pauses on the nearer features, for they, too, are wonderfully composed. This hill of my station falls down for half a mile with broken declivities, and then becomes the Cape of Taormina, and takes its steep plunge into the sea. Yonder picturesque peninsula to its left, diminished by distance and strongly relieved on the purple waves, is the Cape of Sant' Andrea, and beside it a cluster of small islands lies nearer inshore. On the other side, to the right of our own cape, shines our port, with Giardini, the village of my fishers' lights, the beach with its boats, and the white main road winding in the narrow level between the bluffs and the sands. The port is guarded on the south by the peninsula of Schiso, where ancient Naxos stood; and just beyond, the river Alcantara cuts the plain and flows to the sea. At the other extremity, northward of Sant' Andrea, is the cove of Letojanni, with its village, and then, perhaps eight miles away, the bold headland of Sant' Alessio closes the shore view with a mass of rock that in former times completely shut off the land approach hither, there being no passage over it, and none around it except by the strip of sand when the sea was quiet. All this ground, with its sev-

eral villages, from Sant' Alessio to the Alcantara, and beyond into the plain, was anciently the territory of Taormina.

The little city itself lies on its hill, between the bright shore and the gray old castle, on a crescent-like terrace whose two horns jut out into the air like capes. The northern one of these is my station, the site of the old temple and the amphitheater; the southern one opposite shows the façade of the Dominican convent; and the town circles between, possibly a mile from spur to spur. Here and there long broken lines of the ancient wall, black with age, stride the hillside. A round Gothic tower, built as if for warfare, a square belfry, a ruined gateway, stand out among the humble roofs. Gardens of orange- and lemon-trees gleam like oblong parks, principally on the upper edge toward the great rock. If you will climb, as I have done, the craggy plateau close by, which overhangs the theater and obstructs the view of the extreme end of the town at this point, from its level face, rough with the plants of the prickly-pear, you will see a cross on an eminence just below, and the gate toward Messina.

The face of the country is bare. Here beneath, where the main ravine of Taormina cuts into the earth between the two spurs of the city, are terraces of fruit-trees and vegetables, and, wherever the naked rock permits, similar terraces are seen on the castle hill and every less steep slope, looking as if they would slide off. Almond- and olive-trees cling and climb all over the hillsides, but their boughs do not clothe the country. It is gray to look at, because of the masses of natural rock everywhere cropping out, and also from the substructure of the terraces, which, seen from below, present banks of the same gray stone. The only color is given by the fan-like plants of the prickly-pear, whose flat, thick-lipped, pear-shaped leaves, stuck with thorns, and often extruding their reddish fruit from the edge, lend a dull green to the scene. This plant grows everywhere, like wild bush, to a man's height, covering the otherwise infertile soil, and the goats crop it. A closer view shows patches of wild candytuft and marigolds, like those at my feet, and humble purple and blue blossoms hang from crannies or run over the stony turf; but these are not strong enough to be felt in the prevalent tones. The blue of ocean, the white of Etna, the gray of Taormina—this is the scene.

Three ways connect the town with the lower world. The modern carriage-road runs from the Messina gate, and, quickly dropping behind the northern spur, winds in great serpentine loops between the Campo Santo below and old wayside tombs, Roman and Arabic, above, until it slowly opens on the southern outlook,

and, after two miles of tortuous courses above the lovely coves, comes out on the main road along the coast. The second way starts from the other end of the town, the gate toward Etna, and goes down more precipitously along the outer flank of the southern spur, with Mola (here shifted to the other side of the castle hill) closing the deep ravine behind; and at last it empties into the torrent of Selina, in whose bed it goes on to Giardini. The third, or short way, leaps down the great hollow of the spurs, and yet keeps to a ridge between the folds of the ravine which it discloses on each side, with here and there a contadino cutting rock on the steep hillsides, or a sportsman wandering with his dog; or often at twilight, from some coign of vantage, you may see the goats trooping home across the distant sands by the sea. It debouches through great limestone quarries on the main road. There, seen from below, Taormina comes out—a cape, a town, and a hill. It is, in fact, a long, steep, broken ridge, shaped like a wedge; one end of the broad face dips into the sea, the other, high on land, exposes swelling bluffs; its back bears the town, its point lifts the castle.

This is the Taorminian land. What a quietude hangs over it! How poor, how mean, how decayed the little town now looks amid all this silent beauty of enduring nature! It could not have been always so. This theater at my feet, hewn in the living rock, flanked at each end by great piers of massive Roman masonry, and showing broken columns thick strewn in the midst of the broad orchestra, tells of ancient splendor and populousness. The narrow stage still stands, with nine columns in position in two groups; part are shattered halfway up, part are yet whole, and in the gap between the groups shines the lovely sea with the long southern coast, set in the beauty of these ruins as in a frame. Here Attic tragedies were once played, and Roman gladiators fought. The inclosure is large, much over a hundred yards in diameter. It held many thousands. Whence came the people to fill it? I noticed by the roadside, as I came up, Saracenic tombs. I saw in the first square I entered those small Norman windows, with the lovely pillars and the round arch. On the ancient church I have observed the ornamentation and moldings of Byzantine art. The Virgin with her crown, over the fountain, was paltry enough, but I saw that this was originally a mermaid's statue. A water-clock here, a bath there; in all quarters I come on some slight, poor relics of other ages; and always in the faces of the people, where every race seems to have set its seal, I see the ruins of time. These echoes are not all of far-off things. That lookout below was a station of English can-

non, I am told; and the bluff over Giardini, beyond the torrent, takes its name from the French tents pitched there long ago. The old walls can be traced for five miles, but now the circuit is barely two. I wonder, as I go down to my room in the Casa Timeo, what was the past of this silent town, now so shrunken from its ancient limits; and who, I ask myself, was Timeo?

## IV.

I THOUGHT when I first saw the inaccessibility of this mountain-keep that I should have no walks except upon the carriage-road; but I find there are paths innumerable. Leap the low walls where I will, I come on unsuspected ways broad enough for man and beast. They run down the hillsides in all directions, and are ever dividing as they descend, like the branching streams of a waterfall. Some are rudely paved, and hemmed by low walls; others are mere footways on the natural rock and earth, often edging precipices, and opening short cross-cuts in the most unexpected places, not without a suggestion of peril, to make eye and foot alert, and to infuse a certain wild pleasure into the exercise. The multiplicity of these paths is a great boon to the lover of beauty, for here one charm of Italian landscape exists in perfection. Every few moments the scene rearranges itself in new combinations, as on the Riviera or at Amalfi, and makes an endless succession of lovely pictures. The infinite variety of these views is not to be imagined unless it has been witnessed; and besides the magic wrought by mere change of position, there is also a constant transformation of tone and color from hour to hour, as the lights and shadows vary, and from day to day, with the unsettled weather.

Yet who could convey to black-and-white speech the sense of beauty which is the better part of my rambles? It is only to say that here I went up and down on the open hillsides, and there I followed the ridges or kept the cliff-line above the fair coves; that now I dropped down into the vales, under the shade of olive and lemon branches, and wound by the gushing streams through the orchards. In every excursion I make some discovery, and bring home some golden store for memory. Yesterday I found the olive slopes over Letojanni — beautiful old gnarled trees, such as I have never seen except where the nightingales sing by the eastern shore of Spezzia. I did not doubt when I was told that these orchards yield the sweetest oil in the world. It was the lemon harvest, and everywhere were piles of the pale yellow fruit heaped like apples under the slender trees, with a gatherer here and there; for this is always a landscape of solitary figures.

To-day I found the little beach of San Nicolo, not far from the same place. I kept inland, going down the hollow by the Campo Santo, where there is a cool, gravelly stream in a dell that is like a nook in the Berkshire hills, and then along the upland on the skirts of Monte d'Oro, till by a sharp turn seaward I came out through a marble quarry where men were working with what seemed slow implements on the gray or party-colored stone. I passed through the rather silent group, who stopped to look at me, and a short distance beyond I crossed the main road, and went down by a stream to the shore. I found it strewn with seaside rock, as a hundred other beaches are, but none with rocks like these. They were marble, red or green, or shot with variegated hues, with many a soft gray, mottled or wavy-lined; and the sea had polished them. Very lovely they were, and shone where the low wave gleamed over them. I had wondered at the profusion of marbles in Italian churches, but I had not thought to find them wild on a lonely Sicilian beach. Once or twice already I had seen a block rosy in the torrent-beds, and it had seemed a rare sight; but here the whole shore was piled and inlaid with the beautiful stone.

I have learned now that Taormina is famous for these marbles. Over thirty varieties were sent to the Vienna Exhibition, and they won the prize. I got this information from the keeper of the Communal Library, with whom I have made friends. He recalls to my memory the ship that Hieron of Syracuse gave to Ptolemy, wonderful for its size. It had twenty banks of rowers, three decks, and space to hold a library, a gymnasium, gardens with trees in them, stables, and baths, and towers for assault, and it was provided by Archimedes with many ingenious mechanical devices. The wood of sixty ordinary galleys was required for its construction. I describe it because its architect, Filea, was a Taorminian by birth, and esteemed in his day second only to Archimedes in his skill in mechanics; and in lining the baths of this huge galley he used these beautiful Taorminian marbles. My friend the librarian told me also, with his Sicilian burr, of the wine of Taormina, the Eugean, which was praised by Pliny, and used at the sacred feasts of Rome; but now, he said sadly, the grape had lost its flavor.

The sugar-cane, which flourished in later times, is also gone. But the mullet that is celebrated in Juvenal's verse, and the lampreys that once went to better Alexandrian luxury, are still the spoil of the fishers, the shrimps are delicate to the palate, and the marbles will endure as long as this rock itself. The rock lasts, and the sea. The most an-



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN

GREEK THEATER. ETNA IN THE DISTANCE

ENGRAVED BY C. SCHWARZBURGER

cient memory here is of them, for this is the shore of Charybdis. It is stated in Sallust and other Latin authors, as well as by writers throughout the middle ages, that all which was swallowed up in the whirlpool of the straits, after being carried beneath the sea for miles, was finally cast up on the beach beneath the hill of Taormina.

The rock and the sea were finely blended in one of my first discoveries in the land, and in consequence they have seemed, to my imagination, more closely united here than is common. On a stormy afternoon I had strolled down the main road, and was walking toward Letojanni. I came, after a little, to a great cliff that overhung the sea, with room for the road to pass beneath; and as I drew near I heard a strange sound, a low roaring, a deep-toned reverberation, that seemed not to come from the breaking waves, loud on the beach: it was

a more solemn, a more piercing and continuous sound. It was from the rock itself. The grand music of the rolling sea beneath was taken up by the hollowed cliff, and reëchoed with a mighty volume of sound from invisible sources. It seemed the voice of the rock, as if by long sympathy and neighborhood in that lonely place the cliff were interpenetrated with the sea-music, and had become resonant of itself with those living harmonies heard only in the Psalmist's song. It seemed a lyre for the centuries; and I thought over how many a conqueror, how many a race, that requiem had been lifted upon it as they passed to their death on this shore. I came back slowly in the twilight, and was roused from my reverie by the cold wind breathing on me as I reached the top of the hill, pure and keen and frosted like the bright December breezes of my own land. It was the kiss of Etna on my cheek.

v.

WILL you hear the legend of Taormina?—for in these days I dare not call it history. Noble and romantic it is, and age-long. I had not hoped to recover it; but my friend the librarian has brought me books in which patriotic Taorminians have written the story celebrating their dear city. I was touched by the simplicity with which he informed me that the town authorities had been unwilling to waste on a passing stranger these little paper-bound memorials of their city. "But," he said, "I told them I had given you my word." So I possess these books with a pleasant association of Sicilian honor, and I have read them with real interest. As I turned the pages I was reminded once more how impossible it is to know the past. The past survives in human institutions, in the temperament of races, and in the creations of ideal art; but only in the last is it immortal. Custom and law are for an age; race after race is pushed to the sea, and dies; only epic and saga and psalm have one date with man, one destiny with the breath of his lips, one silence at the last with them. Least of all does the past survive in the living memories of men. Here and there the earth cherishes a coin or a statue, the desert embalms some solitary city, a few leagues of rainless air preserve on rock and column the lost speech of Nile; so the mind of man holds in dark places, or lifts to living fame, no more than ruins and fragments of the life that was. I have been a diligent reader of books in my time; and here in an obscure corner of the Old World I find a narrative studded with noble names, not undistinguished by stirring deeds, and, save for the great movements of history and a few shadowy figures, it is all fresh to my mind. I have looked on three thousand years of human life upon this hill; something of what they have yielded, if you will have patience with such a tract of time, I will set down.

My author is Monsignore Giovanni di Giovanni, a Taorminian, who flourished in the last century. He was a man of vast erudition, and there is in his pages that Old World learning which delights me. He was born before the days of historic doubt. He tells a true story. To allege an authority is with him to prove a fact, and to cite all writers who repeat the original source is to render truth impregnable. Rarely does he show any symptom of the modern malady of incredulity. *Scripta litera* is reason enough, unless the fair fame of his city chances to be at stake. He was really learned, and I do wrong to seem to diminish his authority. He was a patient investigator of manuscripts, and did important service to Sicilian history. The simplicity I have alluded

to affects mainly the ecclesiastical part of his narrative. A few statements also in regard to the prehistoric period might disturb the modern mind, but I own to finding in them the charm of lost things. In my mental provinces I welcome the cave-man, the flint-maker, the lake-dweller, and all their primitive tribes to the abode of science; but I feel them to be intruders in my antiquity. I was brought up on quite other chronologies, and I still like a history that begins with the flood. I will not, however, ask any one of more serious mind to go back with Monsignore and myself to the era of autochthonous Sicily, when the children of the Cyclops inhabited the land, and Demeter in her search for Proserpina wept on this hill, and Charybdis lay stretched out under these bluffs watching the sea. It is precise enough to say that Taormina began eighty years before the Trojan War. Very dimly, it must be acknowledged, the ancient Sicani are seen arriving and driven, like all doomed races, south and west out of the land, and in their place the Siculi flourish, and a Samnite colony voyages over the straits from Italy and joins them. Here for three centuries these sparse communities lived along these heights in fear of the sea pirates, and warred confusedly from their mainhold on Mount Taurus, or the Bull, so called because the two summits of the mountain from a distance resemble a bull's horns; and they left no other memory of themselves.

Authentic history begins toward the end of the eighth century before our era. It is a bright burst; for then, down by yonder green-foaming rock, the young Greek mariners leaped on the strand. This was their first land-fall in Sicily; that rock, their Plymouth; and here, doubtless, the alarmed mountaineers stood in their fastness and watched the bearers of the world's torch, and knew them not, bringing daybreak to the dark island forevermore, but fought, as barbarism will, against the light, and were at last made friends with it—a chance that does not always befall. Then quickly rose the lowland city of Naxos, and by the river sprang up the temple to Guiding Apollo, the earliest shrine of the Sicilian Greeks, where they came ever afterward to pray for a prosperous voyage when they would go across the sea, homeward. They were from the first a fighting race; and decade by decade the cloud of war grew heavier on each horizon, southward from Syracuse and northward from Messina, and swords beat fiercer and stronger with the rivalries of growing states—battles dimly discerned now. A single glimpse flashes out on the page of Thucydides. He relates that when once the Messenians threatened Naxos with overthrow, the mountaineers rushed down from the heights in great numbers to the relief



DRAWN BY A. F. JACCACI.

A GIRL OF THE OLD GREEK TYPE.

of their Greek neighbors, and routed the enemy and slew many. This is the first bloodstain, clear and bright, on our Taorminian land. Shall I add, from the few relics of that age, that Pythagoras, on the journey he undertook to establish the governments of the Sicilian cities, wrought miracles here, curing a mad lover of his frenzy by music, and being present on this hill and at Metaponto the same day—a thing not to be done without magic? But at last we see plainly Alcibiades coasting along below, and the ill-fated Athenians wintering in the port, and horsemen going out from Naxos toward Etna on the side of Athens in the death-struggle of her glory. And then, suddenly, after the second three hundred years, all is over, the Greek city betrayed, sacked, destroyed, Naxos trodden out under the foot of Dionysius the tyrant.

Other fortune awaited him a few years later when he came again, and our city (which, one knows not when, had been walled and fortified) stood its first historic siege. Dionysius arrived in the dead of winter. Snow and ice—I can hardly credit it—whitened and roughened these ravines, a new ally to the besieged; but the tyrant thought to betray them by a false security in such a season. On a bitter night, when clouds hooded the hilltop, and mists rolled low about its flanks, he climbed

unobserved, with his forces, up these precipices, and gained two outer forts which gave footways to the walls; but the town roused at the sound of arms and the cries of the guards, and came down to the fray, and fought until six hundred of the foe fell dead, others with wounds surrendered, and the rest fled headlong, with Dionysius among them, hard pressed, and staining the snow with his blood as he went. This was the city's first triumph.

Not only with brave deeds did Taormina begin, but, as a city should, with a great man. He was really great, this Andromachus. Do you not remember him out of Plutarch, and the noble words that have been his immortal memory among men? "This man was incomparably the best of all those that bore sway in Sicily at that time, governing his citizens according to law and justice, and openly professing an aversion and enmity to all tyrants." Was the defeat of Dionysius the first of his youthful exploits, as some say? I cannot determine; but it is certain that he gathered the surviving exiles of Naxos, and gave them this plateau to dwell upon, and it was no longer

called Mount Taurus, as had been the wont, but Tauromenium, or the Abiding-place of the Bull. A few years later Andromachus performed the signal action of his life by befriending Timoleon, as great a character, in my eyes, as Plutarch records the glory of. Timoleon had set out from Corinth, at the summons of his Greek countrymen, to restore the liberty of Syracuse, then tyrannized over by the second Dionysius; and because Andromachus, in his stronghold of Taormina, hated tyranny, Plutarch says, he "gave Timoleon leave to muster up his troops there and to make that city the seat of war, persuading the inhabitants to join their arms with the Corinthian forces and to assist them in the design of delivering Sicily." It was on our beach that Timoleon disembarked, and from our city he went forth to the conquest foretold by the wreath that fell upon his head as he prayed at Delphi, and by the prophetic fire that piloted his ship over the sea. The Carthaginians came quickly after him from Reggio, where he had eluded them, for they were in alliance with the tyrant; and from their vessels they parleyed with Andromachus in the port. With an insolent gesture, the envoy, raising his hand, palm up, and turning it lightly over, said that even so, and with such ease, would he overturn the little city; and Andromachus, mock-

ing his hand-play, answered that if he did not leave the harbor, even so would he upset his galley. The Carthaginians sailed away. The city remained firm-perched. Timoleon prospered, brought back liberty to Syracuse, ruled wisely and nobly, and gave to Sicily those twenty years of peace which were the flower of her Greek annals. Then, we must believe, rose the little temple on our headland, the Greek theater where the tongue of Athens

torian whom Cicero praises as the most erudite in history of all writers up to his time, most copious in facts and various in comment, not unpolished in style, eloquent, and distinguished by terse and charming expression. Ninety years he lived in the Greek world, devoted himself to history, and produced many works, now lost. The ancient writers read him, and from their criticism it is clear that he was marked by a talent for invective, was given to sharp censure, and loved the bitter part of truth. He introduced precision and detail into his art, and is credited with being the first to realize the importance of chronology and to seek exactness in it. He never saw again his lovely birthplace, and I easily forgive to the exile and the son of Andromachus the vigor with which he depicted the crimes of Agathocles and others of the tyrants. In our city, meanwhile, the Greek genius waning to its extinction, Tyn-darion ruled; and in his time Pyrrhus came hither to repulse the ever-invading power of Carthage. But he was little more than a shed-der of blood; he accomplished nothing, and I name him only as one of the figures of our beach.

The day of Greece was gone; but those two clouds of war still hung on the horizon, north and south, with ever darker tempest. Instead of Syracuse and Messina, Carthage and the new name of Rome now sent them forth, and over this island they encountered. Our city, true to its ancient tradition, became Rome's ever-faithful ally, as you may read in the poem of Silius Italicus, and was dignified by treaty with the title of a confederate city; and of this fact Cicero reminded the judges when in that famous trial he thundered against Verres, the spoiler of our Sicilian province, and with the other cities defended this of ours, whose people had signalized their hatred of the Roman pretor by overthrowing his statue in the market-place and sparing the pedestal, as they said, to be an eternal memorial of his infamy. From the Roman age, however, I take but two episodes, for I find that to write this town's history were to write the history of half the Mediterranean world. When the slaves rose in the Servile War, they intrenched themselves on this hill, and in their hands the city bore its siege by the Roman consul as hardily as was ever its custom. Cruel they were, no doubt, and vindictive. With horror Monsignore relates that they were so resolved not to yield that, starving, they ate their children, their wives, and one another; and he rejoices when they were at last betrayed and massacred, and this disgrace was wiped away. I hesitate. I cannot feel regret when those whom man has made brutal answer brutally to their oppressors. I have enough of the old Taorminian spirit to



DRAWN BY A. F. JACCACI.

THE CATANIA GATE.

lived, the gymnasium where the youths grew fair and strong. Then Taormina struck her coins: Apollo with the laurel, with the lyre, with the grape; Dionysus with the ivy, and Zeus with the olive; for the gods and temples of the Naxians had become ours, and were religiously cherished; and with the rest was struck a coin with the Minotaur, our symbol. But of Andromachus, the founder of the well-built and fairly adorned Greek city that then rose, we hear no more—a hero, I think, one of the true breed of the founders of states.

But alas for liberty! A new tyrant, Agathocles, was soon on the Syracusan throne, and he won this city by friendly professions, only to empty it by treachery and murder; and he drove into exile Timæus, the son of Andromachus. Timæus? He, evidently, of my Casa Timeo. I know him now, the once famed his-



remember that the slaves, too, fought for liberty. I am sorry for those penned and dying men; their famine and slaughter in these walls were least horrible for their part in the catastrophe, if one looks through what they did to what they were, and remembers that the civilization they violated had stripped them of humanity. After the slave, I make room—for whom else than imperial Augustus? Off this shore he defeated Sextus Pompey, and he thought easily to subdue the town above when he summoned it. But Taormina was always a loyal little place, and it would not yield without a siege. Then Augustus, sitting down before it, prayed in our temple of Guiding Apollo that he might have the victory; and as he walked by the beach afterward a fish threw itself out of the water before him—an omen, said the diviners, that even so the Pompeians, who held the seas, after many turns of varied fortune, should be brought to his feet. Pompey returned with a fleet, and in these waters again the battle was fought and Augustus lost it, and the siege was raised. But when a third time the trial of naval strength was essayed, and the cause of the Pompeians ruined, Augustus remembered the city that had defied him, sent its inhabitants into exile, and planted a Roman colony in its place. Latin was now the language here. The massive grandeur of Roman architecture replaced the old Greek structures. The amphitheater was enlarged and renewed in its present form, villas of luxury bordered the coasts as in Campania, and coins were struck in the Augustan name.

The Roman domination in its turn slowly moved to its fall; and where should the new age begin more fitly than in this city of beginnings? As of old the Greek torch first gleamed here: here first on Sicilian soil was the Cross planted. The gods of Olympus had many temples about the hill-slopes, shrines of venerable antiquity even in those days; but if the monkish chronicles be credited, the new faith signalized its victory rather over three strange idolatries—the worship of Falcone, of Lissone, and of Scamandro, a goddess. I refuse to believe that the citizens were accustomed to sacrifice three youths annually to Falcone; and as for the other two deities, little is known of them except that their destruction marked the advent of the young religion. Pancrazio was the name of him who was destined to be our patron saint through the coming centuries. He was born in Antioch, and when a child of three years, going with his father into Judea, he had seen the living Christ; now, grown into manhood, he was sent by St. Peter to spread the gospel in the isles of the sea. He disembarked on our beach, and forthwith threw Lissone's image into the waves, and with it a holy dragon which was coiled about it like a gar-

ment and was fed with sacrifices; and he shattered with his cross the great idol Scamandro: and so Taormina became Christian, welcomed St. Peter on his way to Rome, and entered on the long new age. It was here, as elsewhere, the age of martyrs—Pancrazio first, and after him Geminiano, guided hither with his mother by an angel; and then San Nicone, who suffered with his one hundred and ninety-nine brother monks, and Sepero and Corneliano with their sixty; the age of monks—Luca, who fled from his bridal to live on Etna, with fasts, visions, and prophecies; and, later, simple-minded Daniele, the follower of St. Elia, of whom there is more to be recorded; the age of bishops, heard in Roman councils and the palace of Byzantium, of whom two only are of singular interest—Zaccaria, who was deprived, evidently the ablest in mind and policy of all the succession, once a great figure in the disputes of East and West; and Procopio,



DRAWN BY A. F. JACCACI.

A NORMAN RUIN—THE "BADIA VECCHIA."

whom the Saracens slew, for the Crescent now followed the Cross.

The ancient war-cloud had again gathered out of Africa. The Saracens were in the land, and every city had fallen except Syracuse and Taormina. For sixty years the former held out, and our city for yet another thirty, the sole refuge of the Christians. Signs of the impending destruction were first seen by that St. Elia already mentioned, who wandered hither, and was displeased by the manners and morals of the citizens. I am sorry to record that Monsignore believed his report, for only here is there mention of such a matter. "The citizens," says my author, "lived in luxury and

pleasure not becoming to a state of war. They saw on all sides the fields devastated, houses burnt, wealth plundered, cities given to the flames, friends and companions killed or reduced to slavery, yet was there no vice, no sin, that did not rule unpunished among them." Therefore the saint preached the woe to come, and, turning to the governor, Constantine Patrizio, in his place in the cathedral, he appealed to him to restrain his people. "Let the philosophy of the Gentiles," he exclaimed, "be your



DRAWN BY A. F. JACCACI.  
A TYPE OF OLD TAORMINIAN WOMAN.

shame. Epaminondas, that illustrious *condottiere*, strictly restrained himself from intemperance, from every lust, every allurements of pleasure. So, also, Scipio, the Roman leader, was valorous through the same continence as Epaminondas; and therefore they brought back signal victory, one over the Spartans, the other over the Carthaginians, and both erected immortal trophies." He promised them mercy with repentance, but ended threateningly, "So far as in me lies I have clearly foretold to you all that has been divinely revealed to me. If you believe my words, like the penitents of Nineveh, you shall find mercy; if you despise my admonitions, bound and captive you shall be reduced to the worst slavery." He prophesied yet more in private. He went to the house of a noble citizen, Crisone, who esteemed him as a father, and, lying in bed, he said to him: "Do you see, Crisone, the bed in which I now lie? In this same bed shall Ibrahim sleep, hungry for human blood, and the walls of the rooms shall see many of the most distinguished persons of this city all together put to the edge of the sword." Then he left the house and went to the square in the center of the city, and, standing there, he lifted his garments above the knee. Whereupon simple Daniele, who always followed him about, marveling asked, "What does this thing mean, father?" The

old man had his answer ready: "Now I see rivers of blood running, and these proud and magnificent buildings which you see exalted shall be destroyed even to the foundations by the Saracens." And the monk fled from the doomed city, like a true prophet, and went overseas.

The danger was near, but perhaps not more felt than it must always have been where the prayer for defense against the Saracens had gone up for a hundred years in the cathedral. The governor, however, had taken pains to add to the strength of the city by strong fortifications upon Mola. Ahulabras came under the walls, but gave over the ever unsuccessful attempt to take the place, and went on to ruin Reggio beyond the straits. When it was told to his father Ibrahim that Taormina, as the Saracens called it, had again been passed by, he cried out upon his son, "He is degenerate, degenerate! He took his nature from his mother and not from his father; for, had he been born from me, surely his sword would not have spared the Christians!" Therefore he recalled him to the home government, and came himself and sat down before the city. The garrison was small and insufficient, but, says my author, following old chronicles, "youths, old men, and children, without distinction of age, sex, or condition, fearing outrage and all that slavery would expose them to, all spontaneously offered themselves to fight in this holy war even to death: with such courage did love of country and religious zeal inspire the citizens." Ibrahim had other weapons than the sword. He first corrupted the captains of the Greek fleet, who were afterward condemned for the treason at Byzantium. Then, all being ready, he promised some Ethiopians of his army, who are described as of a ferocious nature and harsh aspect, that he would give them the city for booty, besides other gifts, if they would devote themselves to the bold undertaking. The catastrophe deserves to be told in Monsignore's own words:

This people, accustomed to rapine, allured by the riches of the Taorminians and the promises of the king, with the aid of the traitors entered unexpectedly into the city, and with bloody swords and mighty cries and clamor assailed the citizens. Meanwhile King Ibrahim, having entered with all his army by a secret gate under the fortress of Mola, thence called the gate of the Saracens, raged against the citizens with such unexpected and cruel slaughter that not only neither the weakness of sex, nor tender years, nor reverence for hoary age, but not even the abundance of blood that like torrents flowed down the ways, touched to pity that ferocious heart. The soldiers, masters of the beautiful and wealthy city, divided among them the riches and goods of the citizens according as to each one the lot fell; they leveled to the ground the magnificent buildings,

public or private, sacred or profane, all that were proudest for amplitude, construction, and ornament; and that not even the ruins of ancient splendor should remain, all that had survived they gave to the flames.

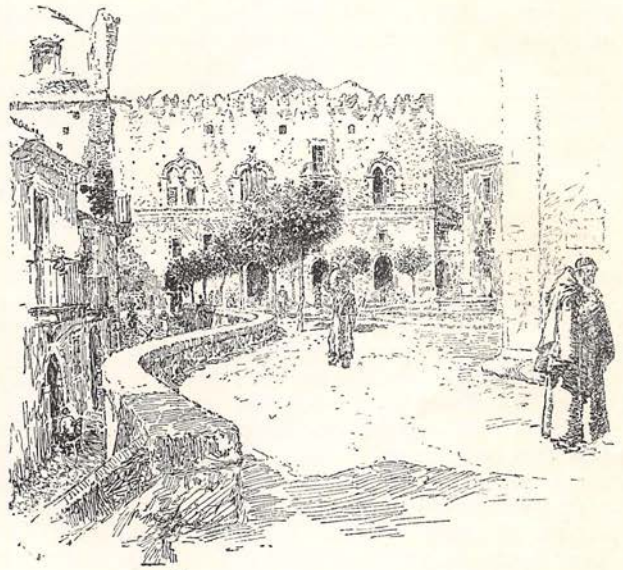
This city, which the Saracens destroyed, is the one the Taorminians cherish as the culmination of their past. In the Greek, the Roman, and the early Christian ages it had flourished, as both its ruins and its history attest, and much must have yet survived from those times; while its station as the only Christian stronghold in the island would naturally have attracted wealth hither for safety. In this first sack of the Saracens, the ancient city must have perished, but the destruction could hardly have been so thorough as is represented, since some of the churches themselves, in their present state, show Byzantine workmanship.

There remains one bloody and characteristic episode to Ibrahim's victory. The king, says the Arab chronicler, was pious and naturally compassionate, but on this occasion he forgot his usual mildness. In the midst of fire and blood he ordered the soldiers to search the caverns of the hills, and they dragged forth many prisoners, among whom was the bishop Procopio. The king spoke to him gently and nobly: "Because you are wise and old, O Bishop, I exhort you with soft words to obey my advice, and to have foresight for your own safety and that of your companions; otherwise you shall suffer what your fellow-citizens have suffered from me. If you will embrace my laws, and deny the Christian religion, you shall have the second place after me, and shall be more dear to me than all the Agarenes." The prelate only smiled. Then, full of wrath, the king said: "Do you smile while you are my prisoner? Know you not in whose presence you are?" "I smile truly," came the answer, "because I see

you are inspired by a demon who puts these words into your mouth." Furious, the king called to his attendants, "Quick, break open his breast, tear out his heart, that we may see and understand the secrets of his mind." While the command was being executed, Procopio reproved the king and comforted his companions. "The tyrant, swollen with rage, and grinding his teeth," says the narrative, "barbarously offered him the torn-out heart that he might eat it." Then he bade them strike off the bishop's head (who, we are told,

was already half dead), and also the heads of his companions, and to burn the bodies all together. And as St. Pancrazio of old had thrown the holy dragon into the sea, so now were his own ashes scattered to the winds of heaven; and Ibrahim, having accomplished his work, departed.

Some of the citizens, however, had survived, and among them Crisione, the host of St. Elia. He went to bear the tidings to the saint; and being now assured of the gift of prophecy possessed by the holy man, asked him to foretell his future. He met the customary fate of the curious in such things. "I foresee," said the uncomfortable saint, "that within a few days you will die." And to make an end of St. Elia with Crisione, let me record here the simple Daniele's last act of piety to his master. It is little that in such company he fought with devils, or that after he had written with much labor a beautiful Psalter, the old monk bade



DRAWN BY A. F. JACCACI.

THE PIAZZA CAVOUR.

him fling it and worldly pride together over the cliff into a lake. Such episodes belonged to the times; and, after all, by making a circuit of six miles he found the Psalter miraculously unwet, and only his worldly pride remained at the lake's bottom. But it was a mind singularly inventive of penance that led the dying saint to charge poor Daniele to bear the corpse on his back a long way over the mountains, merely because, he said, it would be a difficult thing to do. Other survivors of the sack of Taormina, more fortunate than Crisione,

watched their opportunity, and, at a moment when the garrison was weak, entered, seized the place, fortified it anew, and offered it to the Greek emperor once more. He could not maintain war with the Saracens, but by a treaty made with them he secured his faithful Taorminians in the possession of the city. After forty years of peace under this treaty it was again besieged for several months, and fell on Christmas night. Seventeen hundred and fifty of its citizens were sent by the victors into slavery in Africa. Greek troops, however, soon retook the city in a campaign that opened brilliantly in Sicily only to close in swift disaster; but for five years longer Taormina sustained continual siege, and when it fell at last, with the usual carnage of its citizens and the now thrice-repeated fire and ruin of Saracenic victory, we may well believe that, though it remained the seat of a governor, little of the city was left except its memory. Its name even was changed to *Moezzia*.

The crescent ruled undisturbed for a hundred years, until the landing of Count Roger, the Norman, the great hero of medieval Sicily, who recovered the island to the Christian faith. Taormina, true to its tradition, was long in falling; but after eighteen years of desultory warfare Count Roger sat down before it with determination. He surrounded it with a circumvallation of twenty-two fortresses connected by ramparts and bridges, and cut off all access by land or sea. Each day he inspected the lines; and the enemy having noticed this habit, laid an ambush for him in some young myrtles where the path he followed had a very narrow passage over the precipices. They rushed out on him and, as he was unarmed and alone, would have killed him, had not their cries attracted one Evandro, a Breton, who, coming, and seeing his chief's peril, threw himself between, and died in his place. Count Roger was not forgetful of this noble action. He recovered the body, held great funeral services, and gave gifts to the soldiers and the church. The story appealed so to the old chronicler Malaterra, that he told it in both prose and verse. After seven months the city surrendered, and the iron cross was again set up on the rocky eminence by the gate. It is a sign of the ruin which had befallen that the city now lost its bishopric and was ecclesiastically annexed to another see.

Taormina, compared with what it had been, was now a place of the desert; but not the less for that did the tide of war rage round it for five hundred years to come. It was like a rock of the sea over which conflicting billows break eternally. I will not narrate the feudal story of internecine violence, nor how amidst it all every religious order set up monasteries upon

the beautiful hillsides, of whose life little is now left but the piles of books in old bindings over which my friend the librarian keeps guard, mourning the neglect in which they are left. Among both the nobles and the fathers were some examples of heroism, sacrifice, and learning, but their deeds and virtues may sleep unawakened by me. The kings and queens who took refuge here, and fled again, Messenian foray and Chiaramontane faction, shall go unrecorded. I must not, however, in the long roll of the famous figures of our beach forget that our English Richard the Lion-hearted was entertained here by Tancred in crusading days; and of notable sieges let me name at least that which the city suffered for its loyalty to the brave and generous Manfred when the Messenians surprised and wasted it, and that which with less destruction the enemies of the second Frederick inflicted on it, and that of the French under Charles II., who, contrary to his word, gave up the surrendered city to the soldiery for eight whole days—a terrible sack, of which Monsignore has heard old men tell. What part the citizens took in the Sicilian Vespers, and how the Parliament that vainly sought a king for all Sicily was held here, and in later times the marches of the Germans, Spaniards, and English—these were too long a tale. With one more signal memory I close this world-history, as it began, with a noble name. It was from our beach yonder that Garibaldi set out for Italy in the campaign of Aspromonte; hither he was brought back, wounded, to the friendly people, still faithful to that love of liberty which flowed in the old Taorminian blood.

I shut my books; but to my eyes the rock is scripted now. What a leaf it is from the world-history of man upon the planet! Every race has splashed it with blood; every faith has cried from it to heaven. It is only a hill-station in the realm of empire; but in the records of such a city, lying somewhat aside and out of common vision, the course of human fate may be more simply impressive than in the story of world-cities. Athens, Rome, Constantinople, London, Paris, are great centers of history; but in them the mind is confused by the multiplicity and awed by the majesty of events. Here on this bare rock there is no thronging of illustrious names, and little of that glory that conceals imperial crime, the massacre of armies, and the people's woe. Again I use the figure: it is like a rock of the sea, set here in the midst of the Mediterranean world, washed by all the tides of history, beat on by every pitiless storm of the passion of man for blood. The torch of Greece, the light of the Cross, the streaming portent of the Crescent, have shone from it, each in its time; all



DRAWN BY A. CASTAIGNE.

ENGRAVED BY C. STATE.

A PUBLIC FOUNTAIN.

governments, from Greek democracy to Bourbon tyranny, have ruled in turn; Roman law and feudal custom had it in charge, each a long age: yet civilization in all its historic forms has never here done more, seemingly, than alleviate at moments the hard human lot. And what has been the end? Go down into the streets; go out into the villages; go into the country-side. The men will hardly look up from their burdens, the women will seldom stop to ask alms, but you will see a degradation of the human form that speaks not of the want of individuals, of one generation, or of an age, but of the destitution of centuries stamped physically into the race. There is, as always, a prosperous class, men well to do, the more fortunate and better-born; but the common people lead toilsome lives, and among them suffering is wide-spread. Three thousand years of human life, and this the result! Yet I see many indications of a brave patriotism in the community, an effort to improve general conditions, to arouse, to stimulate, to encourage—the spirit of free and united Italy awakening here, too, with faith in the new age of liberty and hope of its promised blessings. And for a sign there stands in the center of the poor fishing-village yonder a statue of Garibaldi.

## VI.

THE rain-cloud is gone. The days are bright, warm, and clear, and every hour tempts me forth to wander about the hills. It is not spring, but the hesitancy that holds before the season changes; yet each day there are new flowers—not our delicate wood flowers, but larger and coarser of fiber, and it adds a charm to them that I do not know their names. The trees are budding, and here and there, like a wave breaking into foam on a windless sea, an almond has burst into blossom, white and solitary on the gray slopes, and over all the orchards there is the faint suggestion of pale pink, felt more than seen, so vague is it—but it is there. I go wandering by cliff or sea-shore, by rocky beds of running water, under dark-browed caverns, and on high crags; now on our cape, among the majestic rocks, I watch the swaying of the smooth deep-violet waters below, changing into indigo as they lap the rough clefts, or I loiter on the beach to see the fishers about their boats, weather-worn mariners, and youths in the fair strength of manly beauty, like athletes of the old world: and always I bring back something for memory, something unforeseen.

I have ever found this uncertainty a rare pleasure of travel. It is blessed not to know what the gods will give. I remember once in other days I left the beach of Amalfi to row away to the isles of the Sirens, farther down the

coast. It was a beautiful, blowing, wave-wild morning, and I strained my sight, as every headland of the high cliff-coast was rounded, to catch the first glimpse of the low isles; and there came by a country boat-load of the peasants, and in the bows, as it neared and passed, I saw a dark, black-haired boy, bare breast and dreaming eyes, motionless save for the dipping prow—a figure out of old Italian pictures, some young St. John, inexpressibly beautiful. I have forgotten how the isles of the Sirens looked, but that boy's face I shall never forget. It is such moments that give the Italy of the imagination its charm. Here, too, I have similar experiences. A day or two ago, when the bright weather began, I was threading the rough edge of a broken path under the hill, and clinging to the rock with my hand. Suddenly a figure rose just before me, where the land made out a little farther on a point of the crag, so strange that I was startled; but straightway I knew the goatherd, the curling locks, the olive face, the garments of goatskin and leather on his limbs. It came on me like a flash—*eccola* the country of Theocritus!

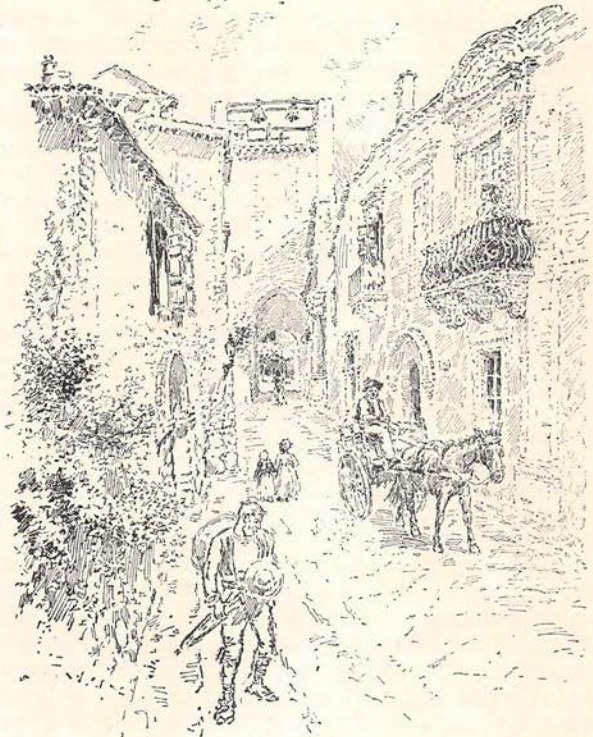
I have never seen it set down among the advantages of travel that one learns to understand the poets better. To see courts and governments, manners and customs, works of architecture, statues and pictures and ruins—this, since modern travel began, is to make the grand tour; but though I have diligently sought such obvious and common aims, and had my reward, I think no gain so great as that I never thought of, the light which travel sheds upon the poets; unless, indeed, I should except that stronger hold on the reality of the ideal creations of the imagination which comes from familiar life with pictures, and statues, and kindred physical renderings of art. This latter advantage must necessarily be more narrowly availed of by men, since it implies a certain peculiar temperament; but poetry, in its less exalted forms, is open and common to all who are not immersed in the materialism of their own lives, and whatever helps to unlock the poetic treasures of other lands for our possession may be an important part of life. I think none can fully taste the sweetness, or behold the beauty, of English song even, until he has wandered in the lanes and fields of the mother country; and in the case of foreign, and especially of the ancient, poets, so much of whose accepted and assumed world of fact has perished, the loss is very great. I had trodden many an Italian hillside before I noticed how subtly Dante's landscape had become realized in my mind as a part of nature. I own to believing that Virgil's storms never blew on the sea until once, near Salerno, as I rode back from Pæstum, there came a storm over the wide gulf that

held my eyes enchanted—such masses of ragged, full clouds, such darkness in their broad bosoms broken with rapid flame, and a change beneath so swift, such anger on the sea, such an indescribable and awful gleaming hue, not purple, nor green, nor red, but a commingling of all these—a revelation of the wrath of color! The waves were wild with the fallen tempest; quick and heavy the surf came thundering on the sands; the light went out as if it were extinguished, and the dark rain came down; and I said, "T is one of Virgil's storms." Such a one you will find also in Theocritus, where he hymns the children of Leda, succorers of the ships that, "defying the stars that set and rise in heaven, have encountered the perilous breath of storms. The winds raise huge billows about their stern, yea, or from the prow, or even as each wind wills, and cast them into the hold of the ship, and shatter both bulwarks, while with the sail hangs all the gear confused and broken, and the wide sea rings, being lashed by the gusts and by showers of iron hail."

I must leave these older memories, to tell, so far as it is possible in words, of that land of the idyl which of all enchanted retreats of the imagination is the hardest for him without the secret to enter. Yet here I find it all about me in the places where the poets first unveiled it. Once before I had a sight of it, as all over Italy it glimpses at times from the hills and the campagna. Descending under the high peak of Capri, I heard a flute, and turned and saw on the neighboring slopes the shepherd-boy leading his flock, the music at his lips. Then the centuries rolled together like a scroll, and I heard the world's morning notes. That was a single moment; but here, day-long is the idyl world. I read the old verses over, and in my walks the song keeps breaking in. The idyls are full of streams and fountains, just such as I meet with wherever I turn, and the water counts in the landscape as in the poems. It is always tumbling over rocks in cascades, brawling with rounded forms among the stones of the shallow brooks, bubbling in fountains, or dripping from the cliff, or shining like silver in the plain. The run that comes down from Mola, the torrent under the olive and lemon branches toward Letojanni, the more open course in the ravine of the mill down by Giardini, the simitar of the far-seen Alcantara

lying on the campagna in the meadows, and that further *fiume freddo*, the cold stream,— "chill water that for me deep-wooded Etna sends down from the white snow, a draught divine,"—each of these seems inhabited by a genius of its own, so that it does not resemble its neighbors. But all alike murmur of ancient song, and bring it near, and make it real.

On the beach one feels most keenly the actuality of much in the idyls, and finds the continuousness of the human life that enters into them. No idyl appeals so directly to modern



DRAWN BY A. F. JACCACI.

THE CORSO UMBERTO.

feeling, I suspect, as does that of the two fishermen and the dream of the golden fish. Go down to the shore; you will find the old men still at their toil, the same implements, the same poverty, the same sentiment for the heart. Often as I look at them I recall the old words, while the goats hang their heads over the scant herbage, and the blue sea breaks lazily and heavily on the sands.

Two fishers, on a time, two old men, together lay and slept; they had strewn the dry sea-moss for a bed in their watted cabin, and there lay against the leafy wall. Beside them were strewn the instruments of their toilsome hands, the fishing-creels, the rods of reed, the hooks, the sails bedraggled with sea-spool, the lines, the weels,

the lobster-pots woven of rushes, the seines, two oars, and an old cobble upon prows. Beneath their heads was a scanty matting, their clothes, their sailors' caps. Here was all their toil, here all their wealth. The threshold had never a door nor a watchdog. All things, all, to them seemed superfluous, for Poverty was their sentinel; they had no neighbor by them, but ever against their narrow cabin gently floated up the sea.

This is what the eye beholds; and I dare not say that the idyl is touched more with the melancholy of human fate for us than for the poet. Poverty such as this, so absolute, I see everywhere at every hour. It is a terrible sight. It is the physical hunger of the soul in wan limbs and hand, and the fixed gaze of the unhoping eyes—despair made flesh. How long has it suffered here? and was it so when Theocritus saw his fishers and gave them a place in the country of his idyls? He spreads before us the hills and fountains, and fills the scene with shepherds, and maidens, and laughing loves, and among the rest are these two poor old men. The shadow of the world's poverty falls on this paradise now as then. With the rock and sea it, too, endures.

A few traces of the old myths also survive on the landscape. Not far from here, down the coast, the rocks that the Cyclops threw after the fleeing mariners are still to be seen near the shore above which he piped to Galatea. Some day I mean to take a boat and see them. But now I let the Cyclops idyls go, and with them Adonis of Egypt, and Ptolemy, and the prattling women, and the praises of Hiero, and the deeds of Herakles: these all belong to the cities of the pastoral, to its civilization and art in more conscious forms; but my heart stays in the campagna, where are the song-contests, the amorous praise of maidens, the boyish boasting, the young, sweet, graceful loves. Fain would I recover the breath of that springtime; but while from my foot "every stone upon the way spins singing," make what speed I can, I come not to the harvest-feast. Bees go booming among the blossoms, and the flocks crop their pasture, and night falls with Hesperus; but fruitless on my lips, as at some shrine whence the god is gone, is Bion's prayer: "Hesperus, golden lamp of the lovely daughter of the foam—dear Hesperus, sacred jewel of the deep blue night, dimmer as much than the moon as thou art among the stars preëminent, hail, friend!" Dead now is that ritual. Now more silent than ever is the country-side, missing Daphnis, the flower of all those who sing when the heart is young. Sweet was his flute's first triumph over Menalcas: "Then was the boy . . . glad, and leaped high, and clapped his hands over his victory, as a young fawn leaps about his mother"; but sweeter was the unwon victory

when he strove with Damœtas: "Then Damœtas kissed Daphnis, as he ended his song, and he gave Daphnis a pipe, and Daphnis gave him a beautiful flute. Damœtas fluted, and Daphnis piped; the herdsmen, and anon the calves, were dancing in the soft green grass. Neither won the victory, but both were invincible." And him, too, I miss who loved his friend, and wished that they twain might "become a song in the ears of all men unborn," even for their loves' sake; and prayed, "Would, O Father Cronides, and would, ye ageless immortals, that this might be, and that when two generations have sped, one might bring these tidings to me by Acheron, the irremovable stream: the loving-kindness that was between thee and thy gracious friend is even now in all men's mouths, and chiefly on the lips of the young." Hill and fountain and pine, the gray sea and Mother Etna, are here; but no children gather in the land, as once about the tomb of Diocles at the coming in of the spring, contending for the prize of the kisses—"Whoso most sweetly touches lip to lip, laden with garlands he returneth to his mother. Happy is he who judges those kisses of the children." Lost over the bright furrows of the sea is Europa riding on the back of the divine bull as Moschus beheld her—"With one hand she clasped the beast's great horn, and with the other caught up the purple fold of her garment, lest it might trail and be wet in the hoar sea's infinite spray"; and from the border-land of mythic story, that was then this world's horizon, yet more faintly the fading voice of Hylas answers the deep-throated shout of Herakles. Faint now as his voice are the voices of the shepherds who are gone, youth and maiden and children; dimly I see them, vaguely I hear them; at last there remains only "the hoar sea's infinite spray." And will you say it was in truth all a dream? Were the poor fishermen in their toil alone real, and the rest airy nothings to whom Sicily gave a local habitation and a name? It was Virgil's dream and Spenser's; and some secret there was—something still in our breasts—that made it immortal, so that to name the Sicilian muses is to stir an infinite, longing tenderness in every young and noble heart that the gods have softened with sweet thoughts.

And here I shut in my pages the one laurel leaf that Taormina bore. She, too, in her centuries has had her poet. Perhaps none who will see these words ever gave a thought to the name and fame of Cornelius Severus. Few of his works remain, and little is known of his life. He is said to have been the friend of Pollio, and to have been present in the Sicilian war between Augustus and Sextus Pompey. He wrote the first book of an epic poem on that



subject, so excellent that it has been thought that, had the entire work been continued at the same level, he would have held the second place among the Latin epic poets. He wrote also heroic songs, of which fragments survive, one of which is an elegy upon Cicero, which Seneca quotes, saying of him, "No one out of so many talented men deplored the death of Cicero better than Cornelius Severus." Some dialogues in verse also seem to have been writ-

cattle and men gathered on the distant beach of Letojanni and darkening the broad bed of the dry torrent that there makes down to the sea, and I wished I were among them, for it is their annual fair; and still I dwell on every feature of the landscape that familiarity has made more beautiful. The afternoon I have dedicated to a walk to Mola. It is a pleasant, easy climb, with the black ancient wall of the city on the left, where it goes up the face of



DRAWN BY A. F. JACCACI.

SCENE IN AN OLD CASTLE NOW USED AS A WOOLEN-MILL

ENGRAVED BY M. HAIDER.

ten by him. These fragments may not be easily obtained. But take down your Virgil; and, if it be like this of mine which I brought from Rome, you will find at the very end, last of the shorter pieces ascribed to the poet, one of the length of a book of the "Georgics," called "Etna." This is the work of Cornelius Severus. An early death took from him the perfection of his genius and the hope of fame; but happy was the fortune of him who wrote so well that for centuries his lines were thought not unworthy of Virgil, whose name still shields this Taorminian verse from oblivion.

## VII.

It is my last day at Taormina. I have seen the sunrise from my old station by the Greek temple, and watched the throng of

the castle-rock, and on the right the deep ravine closed by Monte Venere in the west. All is very quiet; a silent, silent country! There are few birds or none, and indeed I have heard no bird-song since I have been here. Opposite, on the other side of the wall of the ravine, are some cows hanging in strange fashion to the cliff, where it seems goats could hardly cling; but the unwieldy, awkward creatures move with sure feet, and seem wholly at home, pasturing on the bare precipice. I cannot hear the torrent, now a narrow stream, deep below me, but I see the women of Mola washing by the old fountain which is its source. There is no other sign of human life. The fresh spring flowers, large and coarse, but bright-colored, are all I have of company, and the sky is blue and the air like crystal. So I go up, ever up, and at last am by the gate of

Mola, and enter the stony-hearted town. A place more dreary, desolate to the eye, is seldom seen. There are only low, mean houses of gray stone, and the paved ways. If you can fancy a prison turned inside out like a glove, with all its interior stone exposed to the sunlight, which yet seems sunlight in a prison, and silence over all—that is Mola. The ruins of the fortress are near the gate on the highest point of the crag. Within is a barren spot—a cistern, old foundations, and some broken walls. Look over the battlement westward, and you will see a precipice that one thinks only birds could assail; and observing how isolated is the crag on all sides, you will understand what an inaccessible fastness this was, and cannot be surprised at its record of defense.

Perhaps here was the oldest dwelling-place of man upon the hill, and it was the securest retreat. Monsignore, indeed, believes that Ham, the son of Noah, who drove Japhet out of Sicily, was the first builder; but I do not doubt its antiquity was very great, and it seems likely that this was the original Sicilian stronghold before the coming of the Greeks, and the building of the lower city of Taormina. The ruins that exist are part of the fortress made by that governor who lost the city to the Saracens, to defend it against them on this side; and here it stood for nigh a thousand years, like the citadel itself, an impregnable hold of war. It seldom yielded, and always by treachery or mutiny; for more than once, when Taormina was sacked, its citadel and Mola remained untaken and unconquerable on their extreme heights. I shall not tell its story; but one brave man once commanded here, and his name shall be its fame now, and my last tale of the Taorminian past.

He was Count Matteo, a nobleman of the days when the Messenians revolted against the chancellor of Queen Margaret. He was placed over this castle; and when a certain Count Riccardo was discovered in a conspiracy to murder the chancellor, and was taken captive, he was given into Matteo's charge, and imprisoned here. The Messenians came and surprised the lower city of Taormina, but they could not gain Mola nor persuade Matteo to yield Riccardo up to them. So they thought to overcome his fidelity cruelly. They took his wife and children, who were at Messina, threw them into a dungeon, and condemned them to death. Then they sent Matteo's brother-in-law to treat with him. But when the count knew the reason of the visit he said: "It seems to me that you little value the zeal of an honest man who, loyal to his office, does not wish, neither knows how, to break his sworn faith. My wife and children would look on me with scornful eyes

should I be renegade; for shame is not the reward that sweetens life, but burdens it. If the Messenians stain themselves with innocent blood, I shall weep for the death of my wife and sons, but the heart of an honest citizen will have no remorse." Then he was silent. But treachery could do what such threats failed to accomplish. One Gavaretto was found, who unlocked the prison, and Riccardo was already escaping when Matteo, roused at a slight noise, came, sword in hand, and would have slain him; but the traitor behind, "to save his wages," struck Matteo in the body, and the faithful count fell dead in his blood. I thought of this story, standing there, and nothing else in the castle's legend seemed worthy of memory in comparison, from its mystic beginning until that night, near two centuries ago, when the thunderbolt fell on it, igniting its store of powder, and blew it utterly to fragments with a great explosion.

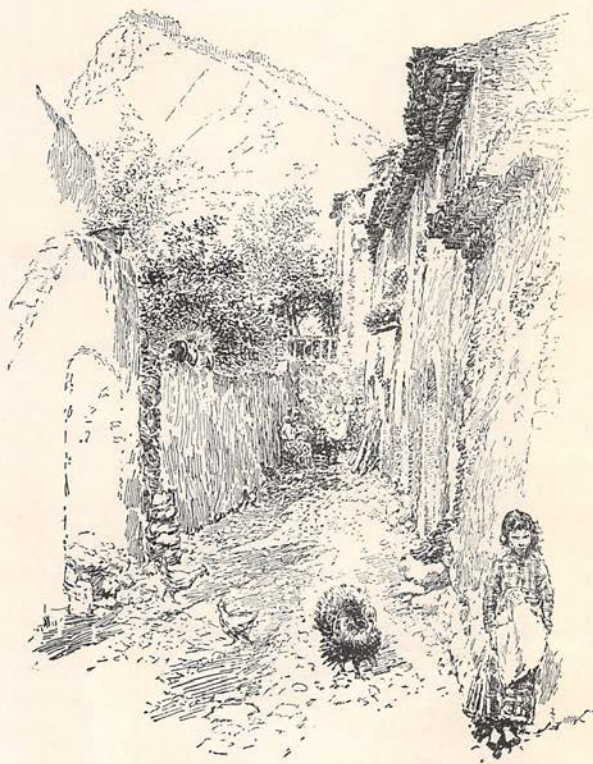
The castle of Taormina on the eastward height is easily reached by a ridge that runs toward it on the homeward track. Along the way are seen the caves so often mentioned in the records of the city as the refuge of the people in times of disaster. The castle itself, much larger and more important than Mola, is wholly in ruins. The walls stand, with some broken stairways, and a room or two, massive and desolate remains. Of its history I have found no particular mention, but here must always have been the citadel. Once more from its open platform I gazed on the fair country it had guarded, while the snows of Etna began to be touched with sunset; and as my hand lay on the ruined battlement, for which how many thousand died bloody deaths, again the long past rose from the rock. I saw the young Greeks raising Apollo's altar by the river-bank. I saw Dionysius in the winter night, staining the snow from the wound in his breast as he fled down the darkness, and the Norman soldier dying for Roger beneath the simitars by the young myrtles. I saw the citizens in the market-place overthrowing Verres's statue, the monk Elia with his lifted garment, the bishop in his murder before Ibrahim. I wondered at the little port that was large enough to hold the fleets of Athens, of Carthage, and of Augustus, and at the strip of beach trodden by so many famous men on heroic enterprises. There the fishers were drawing up their boats, coming home at the day's close from that toil of the sea which has outlived gods and martyrs and empires. The snows of Etna were now aflame with sunset, and the high clouds trembled with swift and mighty radiance, and league after league the sea took on the pale rose-color. Descending, I passed through the dark cleft between the castle and the silent, deserted church of the hermitage by its side, and, in a moment, again

the vision burst on me, and in its glow I went down the rock-face by the terraces under almond blossoms. Softly the sea changed through every tender color, bathing beach and headland, and strange lights fell upon the crags from the mild heaven, and all the Taorminian land was filled with bloom; then the infinite beauty, slowly fading, withdrew the scene, and sweetly it parted from my eyes.

slaughter, the murder, the infinite pain here suffered at the hands of man. O Etna, it is not thou that man should fear! He should fear his brother-man.

## VIII.

YET once more I step out upon the terrace into the night. I hear the long roar of the breakers; I see the flickering fishers' lights, and Etna pale under the stars. The place is full of ghosts. In the darkness I seem to hear vaguely arising, half sense, half thought, the murmur of many tongues that have perished here, Sicilian and Sicilian and the lost Oscan, Greek and Latin and the hoarse jargon of barbaric slaves, Byzantine and Arabic confused with strange African dialects, Norman and Sicilian, French and Spanish, mingling, blending, changing, the sharp battle-cry of a thousand assaults rising from the low ravines, the death-cry of twenty bloody massacres within these walls ringing on the hard rock and falling to silence only to rise more full with fiercer pain—century after century of the battle-wrath and the battle-woe. My fancy shapes the air till I see over the darkly lifted castle-rock the triple crossing swords of Greek, Carthaginian, and Roman in the age-long duel, and as these fade, the springing brands of Byzantine, Arab, and Norman, and yet again the heavy blades of France, Spain, and Sicily; and ever, like rain or snow, falls the bloody dew on this lone hillside. "Oh, wherefore?" I whisper; and all is silent save the surge still lifting round the coast the far voices of the old Ionian sea. I have wondered that the children of Etna should dwell in its lovely paradise, as I thought how often, how terribly, the lava has poured forth upon it, the shower of ashes fallen, the black horror of volcanic eruption overwhelmed the land. Yet, sum it all, pang by pang, all that Etna ever wrought of woe to the sons of men, the agonies of her burnings, the terrors of her living entombments, all her manifold deaths at once, and what were it in comparison with the blood that has flowed on this hillside, the



DRAWN BY A. F. JACCACI.

THE CASTLE, SEEN FROM A TAORMINIAN STREET.

## IX.

THE stars were paling over Etna, white and ghostly, as I came out to depart. In the dark street I met a woman with a young boy clinging to her side. Her black hair fell down over her shoulders, and her bosom was scantily clothed by the poor garment that fell to her ankles and her feet. She was still young, and from her dark, sad face her eyes met mine with that fixed look of the hopeless poor, now grown familiar; the child, half naked, gazed up at me as he held his mother's hand. What brought her there at that hour, alone with her child? She seemed the epitome of the human life I was leaving behind, come forth to bid farewell; and she passed on under the shadows of the dawn. The last star faded as I went down the hollow between the spurs. Etna gleamed white and vast over the shoulder of the ravine, and, as I dipped down, was gone.