

THE HIGHROAD FROM SALERNO TO SORRENTO.



OUR route lay from Salerno on the Gulf of Salerno to Amalfi, twelve miles away, thence three miles by boat to Prajano, and thence on to Sorrento by twenty-five miles of the wildest of wild roads. The country below Salerno was flat and uninteresting; southward stretched the dreary waste on which twenty miles away one could fancy that he saw the famous ruined Grecian temples of Pæstum, while beyond was *terra incognita* of the truest type, an insignificant marsh that presented no allurements to the most enthusiastic traveler. But to the north and west rose the mountains of St. Angelo, running out into the Sorrentine peninsula, and dividing the Bay of Naples from the Gulf of Salerno. These picturesque mountains, dotted with romantic villas and charmingly situated little hamlets, look down on the soft and dazzling blue waters of the Mediterranean, making that peculiar mystic union where perfect land meets perfect water.

Beginning at Salerno, and skirting this scene from fairy-land, is the famous highroad cut into the surface of the rock for miles, crossing deep ravines by artistic spans of heavy stone that show no suggestion of modern cantaliver, but seem as much a part of the scenery around them as though made by the hand of God. In

this land of fine roads it is superlatively fine; broad, sweeping, and as clean and hard as a marble floor. Built in 1852, modern improvements and devices can show no road to excel it; like the scenery, it is perfection.

As we rolled out of Salerno, we could see the road running from promontory to promontory as far as the eye could reach. Occasionally it disappeared up some rocky gorge; but if the eye was keen, a faint, ribbon-like effect could be seen in the solid rock, which betrayed its course. Now the road climbed the mountain-side to Capo Tumolo, where the whole scene unfolded like a map at our feet; again it dived down to the water's edge to skirt Capo d' Orso, or crept along the edge of some precipice, from which the village of Cetara could be seen below, stretched along the bottom of a narrow ravine. Now the road penetrated the picturesque towns of Minori, Majori, or Atrani, where it ran between the high white walls of the peasants' houses, under the shadow of which lingered a decided chill and gloom, while for hundreds of feet above the road were the whitest of white houses, hanging to their terraces like overgrown white goats. Everywhere that the eye could see were these terraces; no rock was too barren, no ledge too narrow, no gorge too deep to escape being covered to the very edge with terraces of orange- and lemon-trees. These

groves are watched most tenderly, each orange and lemon being frequently tied up in a little paper bag to protect the fruit from insects and the sudden winds, which, notwithstanding the sunniness of the climate, occasionally blow up from the sea.

This region is one of beauty, but not of fertility; a paradise for the rich, but a purgatory to the poor man. The natives must eke out their scanty crops with their fishing-boats. Looking down over the edge of the road in any gorge wide enough to hold some sand and a fishing-smack, one can see the dark houses, and the gaily painted sails and sides of the boats. Human beings live down there, away from sunshine and contact with their fellows, and yet they are light-hearted, sunny children, easily pleased, easily angered, and easily satisfied. It will not do to look below the surface in one of these picturesque villages; disease and ignorance need not be sought far. The houses are dark, damp, and unclean; the inhabitants are miserably poor; the children are rachitic and white-faced. Taxes are certainly the curse of Italy, especially of this southern country. The Italian peasant is taxed fully fifty per cent. of his labor and products; his beds are taxed, his furniture, his windows, his very movements to town and back cost him money—money, to be sure, that builds beautiful roads and holds Italy together as a nation, but still a grievous tax.

Picturesque scenery is hard to farm; fishing with mediæval apparatus is slow and poor, especially with no near market to consume the catch. Nature has followed her usual course: to the visitor who has she gives more; but from the native who has not she is taking away his little. But we did not think of this as we whirled along; it is easy enough to moralize when our ride is done, but while we breathed this glorious air, and saw these inspiring sights, we could not conceive that misery could exist in such a country. These people are an uncomplaining race; they are not particularly obtrusive with their woes, although they see possible soldi for miles, and are willing to run as many more to get them.

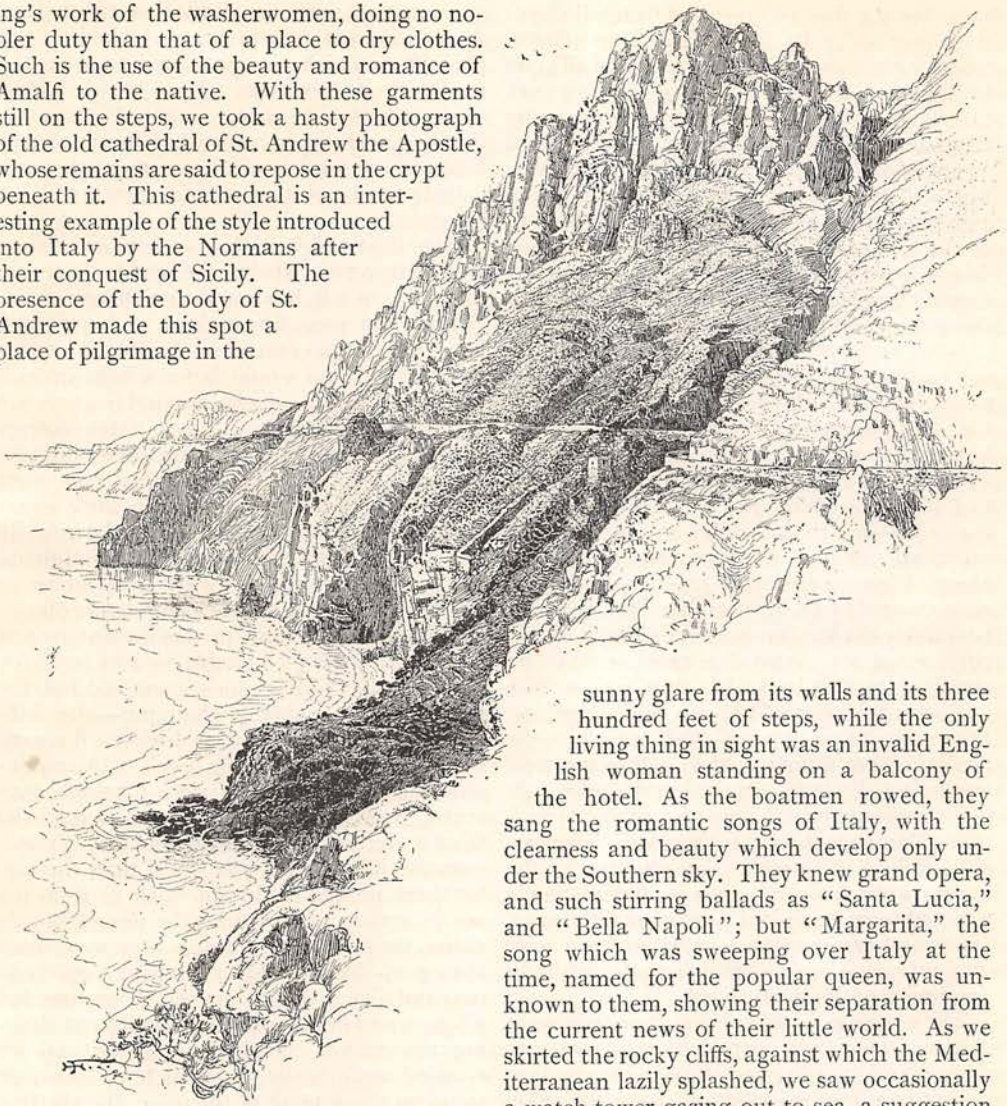
Our plan, which was the best of many, included a stop at Amalfi over-night; staying there as long as we desired, and then pushing on to Sorrento. Our driver kept up his gait through town after town, through ravine after ravine, past wayside shrine and bubbling fountain, until at last we rolled in triumphant state into that painter's paradise, the world-renowned Amalfi. The first and last impression of this ride to Amalfi was that of sunshine—of sunshine so warm, so unremitting, and so absorbing of energy, that cold and snow seemed utter impossibilities: in this stimulus life had no

sorrow or death; beauty and pleasure controlled the senses in this medley of sea and mountain, villa and ravine. This impression was the chief charm of the trip and its brightest legacy, for it increased as the petty annoyances of the avaricious Italian were forgotten; for even here we were reminded of the contemptible human element, although any business and profit-getting seemed strangely out of touch with the place.

There are two Hotels dei Cappuccini at Amalfi, one being the *dépendance* of the other, belonging to the same family. This is another exhibition of the wiliness of the Italian landlord, who is far too bright for the American traveler. The first hotel of this name is down in the town of Amalfi, on a narrow, dark street, shut in from any view except seaward; it is the first one reached by the traveler, however, and unless he has been there before, or is very wary and determined, he will be persuaded by both driver and porter that this is the far-famed Hotel dei Cappuccini of his dreams. But the real Hotel dei Cappuccini is half a mile beyond, as the driver will suddenly remember if one flatly refuses to stop at this little one-horse village inn. He will be amply repaid for making this stand, for here, perched three hundred feet above the road, unapproachable except by a series of white stone steps, stands this unique hotel. In America there would be a huge Kaaterskill perched on such a spot, but the Italians, far more in sympathy with the artistic demands of the surroundings, have turned the one-time famous old Capuchin monastery into a well-appointed home, for home it is for the traveling world. The guests sleep in the cells of the old monks, and dine in the old whitewashed chapel. There is the customary orange- and lemon-grove on a narrow terrace alongside the hotel, flanked by a broad, sweeping path, which afforded the only cloister for the monks, while on the other side of this walk stands a row of white, plastered pillars supporting a roof of arching vines; from here a superb view of Amalfi and the blue Gulf of Salerno lies before the eye. The stairs to the dining-room come down into the room from the sleeping-rooms without intervention of hall or wall, and as we descended these massive whitewashed stone steps, we could see the dining-table stretched along, covered with bright lamps and dainty flowers, while the high-arched roof betrays the old chapel. It was as attractive to the hungry traveler as the mountains on the outside had been to the other senses.

We left Amalfi at three o'clock on a bright, sunny afternoon, in late April. The theatrical little town was sound asleep; its bird-box houses were deserted; its streets were vacant and quiet. The cathedral steps were covered with the morn-

ing's work of the washerwomen, doing no nobler duty than that of a place to dry clothes. Such is the use of the beauty and romance of Amalfi to the native. With these garments still on the steps, we took a hasty photograph of the old cathedral of St. Andrew the Apostle, whose remains are said to repose in the crypt beneath it. This cathedral is an interesting example of the style introduced into Italy by the Normans after their conquest of Sicily. The presence of the body of St. Andrew made this spot a place of pilgrimage in the



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN.

ROAD BETWEEN SORRENTO AND AMALFI.

middle ages. "The manna of St. Andrew," oily droppings from his casket, enjoyed a high reputation in southern Europe for its miraculous power in curing disease. Its efficacy has been sung even by the great Tasso.

Our rowboat, which was to carry us from Amalfi to Prajano, three miles away along the coast of the Gulf, lay close to the shore, but no wharf or board to reach its side was in sight. Our wonder was short-lived, however, for suddenly the ladies of the party gave sudden screams, as each was clasped by waist and feet by two sturdy, barefooted boatmen, and before they could protest, they were safe in the little craft.

As we looked back, the little town slept on; the old monastery hotel reflected a dazzlingly

sunny glare from its walls and its three hundred feet of steps, while the only living thing in sight was an invalid English woman standing on a balcony of the hotel. As the boatmen rowed, they sang the romantic songs of Italy, with the clearness and beauty which develop only under the Southern sky. They knew grand opera, and such stirring ballads as "Santa Lucia," and "Bella Napoli"; but "Margarita," the song which was sweeping over Italy at the time, named for the popular queen, was unknown to them, showing their separation from the current news of their little world. As we skirted the rocky cliffs, against which the Mediterranean lazily splashed, we saw occasionally a watch-tower gazing out to sea, a suggestion of the days of Barbary pirates and their sudden swooping charges on the hapless peasant of the middle ages. Under the shadow of the rocks grows the bright red "vegetable coral," the "apples of the sea," a curious form of growth, which attracts the traveler's eye so constantly that the boatmen have learned its English names and habits.

In the year before our journey the road was extended from Positano to Prajano; in a year or so it will be cut through from Prajano to Amalfi, and then the traveler will miss this beautiful trip by boat, which makes a unique part of the journey from Salerno to Sorrento. It will be another instance where improvement in travel will destroy some of its picturesqueness. As we approached the opening ravine in which lies the sheltered fishing-hamlet of Prajano, we

saw, dashing down to meet us from all directions, over the rocks and crags, swarms of bare-footed women and girls. The men had all gone to Naples or America, looking for steadier work than landing chance passengers. Down came this barefoot, dirty, motley crew, as sure-footed as goats, and running as rapidly. They overwhelmed the passengers, seized the luggage, and made themselves nuisances. No words, gestures, or blows from the boatmen could drive them away. They were as patiently persistent as a swarm of mosquitos; the moment one stopped his expostulation, back they came.

Now we found ourselves in a dilemma, for our carriages, which were to come from Sorrento, had not arrived. In vain did we search the place; the town of Prajano boasted neither an inn nor a horse; we must patiently wait. Five o'clock came, and then six; dusk began to settle on the hills, and we were just deciding to go back to Amalfi, when over a distant point we saw two small carriages traveling along. We were anxious to reach Sorrento, and were assured by the drivers that the ride would be quickly made. Our horses, driven at break-neck speed for twenty-five miles, were in no condition to start back; but start back we did, and soon the town of Prajano was a memory. In ten minutes we reached Positano, where the landings were formerly made before the road was built to Prajano. In the weird, dusky light that appears early under the edge of these precipices, Positano was a ghostly place. No peasants walked the streets; the windows of the houses were knocked out; it looked like a haunted town, or a place dead with the plague. Its oppressiveness was terrible, and we were glad to leave it, and to get out into the healthier desolation of the next ravine.

The road was far wilder than from Salerno to Amalfi. The rocks were higher, the ravines deeper, and after leaving the outskirts of Positano there were no villages. Soon the moon came up, and, while we could not see it, for we were a thousand feet below the upper edge of the cliff, it threw a ghastly light over the sea, which was thrown back into our faces, and made them seem blanched and careworn. We remembered with sudden distinctness that Baedeker speaks of one road in this region which by some good authorities is scarcely regarded as free from brigands; we believed that this was the one. It was a happy, inspiring thought, and we tried to reassure ourselves of it by looking into the guide-book; but the wind blew too hard to keep a match going, and we would not stop our driver for worlds. So on we went, dipping into ravine

after ravine, until the road seemed endless. As we rounded each point, we looked for the place from which we must bend to cross the mountains to Sorrento. Time crawled from seven to half-past seven, to eight. We saw out in the dim distance in the bay the uncertain forms of the Islands of the Sirens, as they are called; we knew that a long stretch still lay before us.

At half-past eight we had settled down to our fate, whatever it was to be, when suddenly we saw the gleam of a light around a neighboring cliff. We had not passed man, bird, or beast since leaving Positano two hours before. This was interesting; who would have a light on this lonely, forsaken road with honorable purpose? But before we could conclude as to the motives of our rapidly approaching friends, we ran into a band of soldiers, tax-collectors, who were looking for peasants smuggling their wares to Sorrento untaxed. They glanced carelessly into our carriage, and allowed us to pass, giving us the first opportunity of our lives of being heartily glad to welcome a custom-house officer. This sudden visitation in this desolation was a pleasant break; it brought life and law back to us again. Nine o'clock came on; but the scenery was gradually changing—the hills grew lower, the vegetation higher. We were evidently approaching the break in the mountains through which we were to reach Sorrento. Soon we left the sea, and pierced the thick underbrush, and started on a dreary climb over the hills. This was worse than the sea, for there no one could approach us from the sea in ambuscade, or from the mountain-side either, for that matter, unless they were more than goat-like in agility. But here were darkness and silence doubly intense. Every tree hid a figure, and the moonlight brought out slinking movements in every bush. Up, up we crawled, until, finally, at nearly ten o'clock, we stood on the summit of the ridge, and the Bay of Naples, glorious in the moonlight, lay at our feet five miles away. In the distance the lights of Naples gleamed, each light with a welcome in it, while closer, under our feet almost, lay the twinkling lamps of Sorrento.

Now came merry work; down the steep hills we bowled, through high-walled roads, past silent villas, until the famous road from Castellammare to Sorrento was reached. Now we laughed our fears to scorn, and when we drove into the yard of the famous Hotel Tramontano at Sorrento, our heads were held up boldly, as though wild drives like this were of daily occurrence.

J. Howe Adams.