

GEORGE GISSING

BY THE IONIAN SEA:
NOTES OF A RAMBLE IN
SOUTHERN ITALY

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a Ramble in Southern Italy**

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CHAPTER I FROM NAPLES

This is the third day of sirocco, heavy-clouded, sunless. All the colour has gone out of Naples; the streets are dusty and stifling. I long for the mountains and the sea.

To-morrow I shall leave by the Messina boat, which calls at Paola. It is now more than a twelvemonth since I began to think of Paola, and an image of the place has grown in my mind. I picture a little *marina*; a yellowish little town just above; and behind, rising grandly, the long range of mountains which guard the shore of Calabria. Paola has no special interest that I know of, but it is the nearest point on the coast to Cosenza, which has interest in abundance; by landing here I make a modestly adventurous beginning of my ramble in the South. At Paola foreigners are rare; one may count upon new impressions, and the journey over the hills will be delightful.

Were I to lend ear to the people with whom I am staying, here in the Chiatamone, I should either abandon my project altogether or set forth with dire misgivings. They are Neapolitans of the better class; that is to say, they have known losses, and talk of their former happiness, when they lived on the Chiaia and had everything handsome about them. The head of the family strikes me as a typical figure; he is an elderly man, with a fine head, a dignified presence, and a coldly courteous demeanour. By preference he speaks French, and his favourite subject is Paris. One observes in him something like disdain for his own country, which in his mind is associated only with falling fortunes and loss of self-respect. The cordial Italian note never sounds in his talk. The *signora* (also a little ashamed of her own language) excites herself about taxation—as well she may—and dwells with doleful vivacity on family troubles. Both are astonished at my eccentricity and hardiness in undertaking a solitary journey through the wild South. Their geographical notions are vague; they have barely heard of Cosenza or of Cotrone, and of Paola not at all; it would as soon occur to them to set out for Morocco as for Calabria. How shall I get along with people whose language is a barbarous dialect? Am I aware that the country is in great part pestilential?—*la febbre!* Has no one informed me that in autumn snows descend, and bury everything for months? It is useless to explain that I only intend to visit places easily accessible, that I shall travel mostly by railway, and that if disagreeable weather sets in I shall quickly return northwards. They look at me dubiously, and ask themselves (I am sure) whether I have not some more tangible motive than a lover of classical antiquity. It ends with a compliment to the enterprising spirit of the English race.

I have purchases to make, business to settle, and I must go hither and thither about the town. Sirocco, of course, dusks everything to cheerless grey, but under any sky it is dispiriting to note the changes in Naples. *Lo sventramento* (the disembowelling) goes on, and regions are transformed. It is a good thing, I suppose, that the broad Corso Umberto I. should cut a way through the old Pendino; but what a contrast between that native picturesqueness and the cosmopolitan vulgarity which has usurped its place! "*Napoli se ne va!*" I pass the Santa Lucia with downcast eyes, my memories of ten years ago striving against the dulness of to-day. The harbour, whence one used to start for Capri, is filled up; the sea has been driven to a hopeless distance beyond a wilderness of dust-heaps. They are going to make a long, straight embankment from the Castel dell'Ovo to the Great Port, and before long the Santa Lucia will be an ordinary street, shut in among huge houses, with no view at all. Ah, the nights that one lingered here, watching the crimson glow upon Vesuvius, tracing the dark line of

the Sorrento promontory, or waiting for moonlight to cast its magic upon floating Capri! The odours remain; the stalls of sea-fruit are as yet undisturbed, and the jars of the water-sellers; women still comb and bind each other's hair by the wayside, and meals are cooked and eaten *al fresco* as of old. But one can see these things elsewhere, and Santa Lucia was unique. It has become squalid. In the grey light of this sad billowy sky, only its ancient foulness is manifest; there needs the golden sunlight to bring out a suggestion of its ancient charm.

Has Naples grown less noisy, or does it only seem so to me? The men with bullock carts are strangely quiet; their shouts have nothing like the frequency and spirit of former days. In the narrow and thronged Strada di Chiaia I find little tumult; it used to be deafening. Ten years ago a foreigner could not walk here without being assailed by the clamour of *cocchieri*; nay, he was pursued from street to street, until the driver had spent every phrase of importunate invitation; now, one may saunter as one will, with little disturbance. Down on the Piliero, whither I have been to take my passage for Paola, I catch but an echo of the jubilant uproar which used to amaze me. Is Naples really so much quieter? If I had time I would go out to Fuorigrotta, once, it seemed to me, the noisiest village on earth, and see if there also I observed a change. It would not be surprising if the modernization of the city, together with the state of things throughout Italy, had a subduing effect upon Neapolitan manners. In one respect the streets are assuredly less gay. When I first knew Naples one was never, literally never, out of hearing of a hand-organ; and these organs, which in general had a peculiarly dulcet note, played the brightest of melodies; trivial, vulgar if you will, but none the less melodious, and dear to Naples. Now the sound of street music is rare, and I understand that some police provision long since interfered with the soft-tongued instruments. I miss them; for, in the matter of music, it is with me as with Sir Thomas Browne. For Italy the change is significant enough; in a few more years spontaneous melody will be as rare at Naples or Venice as on the banks of the Thames.

Happily, the musicians errant still strum their mandoline as you dine. The old trattoria in the Toledo is as good as ever, as bright, as comfortable. I have found my old corner in one of the little rooms, and something of the old gusto for *zuppa di vongole*. The homely wine of Posillipo smacks as in days gone by, and is commended to one's lips by a song of the South. . . .

Last night the wind changed and the sky began to clear; this morning I awoke in sunshine, and with a feeling of eagerness for my journey. I shall look upon the Ionian Sea, not merely from a train or a steamboat as before, but at long leisure: I shall see the shores where once were Tarentum and Sybaris, Croton and Locri. Every man has his intellectual desire; mine is to escape life as I know it and dream myself into that old world which was the imaginative delight of my boyhood. The names of Greece and Italy draw me as no others; they make me young again, and restore the keen impressions of that time when every new page of Greek or Latin was a new perception of things beautiful. The world of the Greeks and Romans is my land of romance; a quotation in either language thrills me strangely, and there are passages of Greek and Latin verse which I cannot read without a dimming of the eyes, which I cannot repeat aloud because my voice fails me. In Magna Graecia the waters of two fountains mingle and flow together; how exquisite will be the draught!

I drove with my luggage to the Immacolatella, and a boatman put me aboard the steamer. Luggage, I say advisedly; it is a rather heavy portmanteau, and I know it will be a nuisance. But the length of my wanderings is so uncertain, its conditions are so vaguely anticipated. I must have books if only for rainy days; I must have clothing against a change of season. At one time I thought of taking a mere wallet, and now I am half sorry that I altered my mind. But—

We were not more than an hour after time in starting. Perfect weather. I sang to myself with joy upon the sunny deck as we steamed along the Bay, past Portici, and Torre del Greco, and into the harbour of Torre Annunziata, where we had to take on cargo. I was the only cabin passenger, and solitude suits me. All through the warm and cloudless afternoon I sat looking at the mountains, trying not to see that cluster of factory chimneys which rolled black fumes above the many-coloured houses. They reminded me of the same abomination on a shore more sacred; from the harbour of

Piraeus one looks to Athens through trails of coal-smoke. By a contrast pleasant enough, Vesuvius to-day sent forth vapours of a delicate rose-tint, floating far and breaking seaward into soft little fleeces of cirrus. The cone, covered with sulphur, gleamed bright yellow against cloudless blue.

The voyage was resumed at dinner-time; when I came upon deck again, night had fallen. We were somewhere near Sorrento; behind us lay the long curve of faint-glimmering lights on the Naples shore; ahead was Capri. In profound gloom, though under a sky all set with stars, we passed between the island and Cape Minerva; the haven of Capri showed but a faint glimmer; over it towered mighty crags, an awful blackness, a void amid constellations. From my seat near the stern of the vessel I could discern no human form; it was as though I voyaged quite alone in the silence of this magic sea. Silence so all-possessing that the sound of the ship's engine could not reach my ear, but was blended with the water-splash into a lulling murmur. The stillness of a dead world laid its spell on all that lived. To-day seemed an unreality, an idle impertinence; the real was that long-buried past which gave its meaning to all around me, touching the night with infinite pathos. Best of all, one's own being became lost to consciousness; the mind knew only the phantasmal forms it shaped, and was at peace in vision.

CHAPTER II

PAOLA

I slept little, and was very early on deck, scanning by the light of dawn a mountainous coast. At sunrise I learnt that we were in sight of Paola; as day spread gloriously over earth and sky, the vessel hove to and prepared to land cargo. There, indeed, was the yellowish little town which I had so long pictured; it stood at a considerable height above the shore; harbour there was none at all, only a broad beach of shingle on which waves were breaking, and where a cluster of men, women and children stood gazing at the steamer. It gave me pleasure to find the place so small and primitive. In no hurry to land, I watched the unloading of merchandise (with a great deal of shouting and gesticulation) into boats which had rowed out for the purpose; speculated on the resources of Paola in the matter of food (for I was hungry); and at moments cast an eye towards the mountain barrier which it was probable I should cross to-day.

At last my portmanteau was dropped down on to the laden boat; I, as best I could, managed to follow it; and on the top of a pile of rope and empty flour-sacks we rolled landward. The surf was high; it cost much yelling, leaping, and splashing to gain the dry beach. Meanwhile, not without apprehension, I had eyed the group awaiting our arrival; that they had their eyes on me was obvious, and I knew enough of southern Italians to foresee my reception. I sprang into the midst of a clamorous conflict; half a dozen men were quarreling for possession of me. No sooner was my luggage on shore than they flung themselves upon it. By what force of authority I know not, one of the fellows triumphed; he turned to me with a satisfied smile, and—presented his wife.

"*Mia sposa, signore!*"

Wondering, and trying to look pleased, I saw the woman seize the portmanteau (a frightful weight), fling it on to her head, and march away at a good speed. The crowd and I followed to the *dogana*, close by, where as vigorous a search was made as I have ever had to undergo. I puzzled the people; my arrival was an unwonted thing, and they felt sure I was a trader of some sort. Dismissed under suspicion, I allowed the lady to whom I had been introduced to guide me townwards. Again she bore the portmanteau on her head, and evidently thought it a trifle, but as the climbing road lengthened, and as I myself began to perspire in the warm sunshine, I looked at my attendant with uncomfortable feelings. It was a long and winding way, but the woman continued to talk and laugh so cheerfully that I tried to forget her toil. At length we reached a cabin where the *dazio* (town dues) officer presented himself, and this conscientious person insisted on making a fresh examination of my baggage; again I explained myself, again I was eyed suspiciously; but he released me, and on we went. I had bidden my guide take me to the best inn; it was the *Leone*, a little place which looked from the outside like an ill-kept stable, but was decent enough within. The room into which they showed me had a delightful prospect. Deep beneath the window lay a wild, leafy garden, and lower on the hillside a lemon orchard shining with yellow fruit; beyond, the broad pebbly beach, far seen to north and south, with its white foam edging the blue expanse of sea. There I descried the steamer from which I had landed, just under way for Sicily. The beauty of this view, and the calm splendour of the early morning, put me into happiest mood. After little delay a tolerable breakfast was set before me, with a good rough wine; I ate and drank by the window, exulting in what I saw and all I hoped to see.

Guide-books had informed me that the *corriere* (mail-diligence) from Paola to Cosenza corresponded with the arrival of the Naples steamer, and, after the combat on the beach, my first care was to inquire about this. All and sundry made eager reply that the *corriere* had long since gone; that it started, in fact, at 5 A.M., and that the only possible mode of reaching Cosenza that day was to hire a vehicle. Experience of Italian travel made me suspicious, but it afterwards appeared that I had been told the truth. Clearly, if I wished to proceed at once, I must open negotiations at my inn,

and, after a leisurely meal, I did so. Very soon a man presented himself who was willing to drive me over the mountains—at a charge which I saw to be absurd; the twinkle in his eye as he named the sum sufficiently enlightened me. By the book it was no more than a journey of four hours; my driver declared that it would take from seven to eight. After a little discussion he accepted half the original demand, and went off very cheerfully to put in his horses.

For an hour I rambled about the town's one street, very picturesque and rich in colour, with rushing fountains where women drew fair water in jugs and jars of antique beauty. Whilst I was thus loitering in the sunshine, two well-dressed men approached me, and with somewhat excessive courtesy began conversation. They understood that I was about to drive to Cosenza. A delightful day, and a magnificent country! They too thought of journeying to Cosenza, and, in short, would I allow them to share my carriage? Now this was annoying; I much preferred to be alone with my thoughts; but it seemed ungracious to refuse. After a glance at their smiling faces, I answered that whatever room remained in the vehicle was at their service—on the natural understanding that they shared the expense; and to this, with the best grace in the world, they at once agreed. We took momentary leave of each other, with much bowing and flourishing of hats, and the amusing thing was that I never beheld those gentlemen again.

Fortunately—as the carriage proved to be a very small one, and the sun was getting very hot; with two companions I should have had an uncomfortable day. In front of the *Leone* a considerable number of loafers had assembled to see me off, and of these some half-dozen were persevering mendicants. It disappointed me that I saw no interesting costume; all wore the common, colourless garb of our destroying age. The only vivid memory of these people which remains with me is the cadence of their speech. Whilst I was breakfasting, two women stood at gossip on a near balcony, and their utterance was a curious exaggeration of the Neapolitan accent; every sentence rose to a high note, and fell away in a long curve of sound, sometimes a musical wail, more often a mere whining. The protraction of the last word or two was really astonishing; again and again I fancied that the speaker had broken into song. I cannot say that the effect was altogether pleasant; in the end such talk would tell severely on civilized nerves, but it harmonized with the coloured houses, the luxuriant vegetation, the strange odours, the romantic landscape.

In front of the vehicle were three little horses; behind it was hitched an old shabby two-wheeled thing, which we were to leave somewhere for repairs. With whip-cracking and vociferation, amid good-natured farewells from the crowd, we started away. It was just ten o'clock.

At once the road began to climb, and nearly three hours were spent in reaching the highest point of the mountain barrier. Incessantly winding, often doubling upon itself, the road crept up the sides of profound gorges, and skirted many a precipice; bridges innumerable spanned the dry ravines which at another season are filled with furious torrents. From the zone of orange and olive and cactus we passed that of beech and oak, noble trees now shedding their rich-hued foliage on bracken crisped and brown; here I noticed the feathery bowers of wild clematis ("old man's beard"), and many a spike of the great mullein, strange to me because so familiar in English lanes. Through mists that floated far below I looked over miles of shore, and outward to the ever-rising limit of sea and sky. Very lovely were the effects of light, the gradations of colour; from the blue-black abysses, where no shape could be distinguished, to those violet hues upon the furrowed heights which had a transparency, a softness, an indefiniteness, unlike anything to be seen in northern landscape.

The driver was accompanied by a half-naked lad, who, at certain points, suddenly disappeared, and came into view again after a few minutes, having made a short cut up some rugged footway between the loops of the road. Perspiring, even as I sat, in the blaze of the sun, I envied the boy his breath and muscle. Now and then he slaked his thirst at a stone fountain by the wayside, not without reverencing the blue-hooded Madonna painted over it. A few lean, brown peasants, bending under faggots, and one or two carts, passed us before we gained the top, and half-way up there was a hovel where drink could be bought; but with these exceptions nothing broke the loneliness of the

long, wild ascent. My man was not talkative, but answered inquiries civilly; only on one subject was he very curt—that of the two wooden crosses which we passed just before arriving at the summit; they meant murders. At the moment when I spoke of them I was stretching my legs in a walk beside the carriage, the driver walking just in front of me; and something then happened which is still a puzzle when I recall it. Whether the thought of crimes had made the man nervous, or whether just then I wore a peculiarly truculent face, or had made some alarming gesture, all of a sudden he turned upon me, grasped my arm and asked sharply: "What have you got in your hand?" I had a bit of fern, plucked a few minutes before, and with surprise I showed it; whereupon he murmured an apology, said something about making haste, and jumped to his seat. An odd little incident.

At an unexpected turn of the road there spread before me a vast prospect; I looked down upon inland Calabria. It was a valley broad enough to be called a plain, dotted with white villages, and backed by the mass of mountains which now, as in old time, bear the name of Great Sila. Through this landscape flowed the river Crati—the ancient Crathis; northward it curved, and eastward, to fall at length into the Ionian Sea, far beyond my vision. The river Crathis, which flowed by the walls of Sybaris. I stopped the horses to gaze and wonder; gladly I would have stood there for hours. Less interested, and impatient to get on, the driver pointed out to me the direction of Cosenza, still at a great distance. He added the information that, in summer, the well-to-do folk of Cosenza go to Paola for sea-bathing, and that they always perform the journey by night. I, listening carelessly amid my dream, tried to imagine the crossing of those Calabrian hills under a summer sun! By summer moonlight it must be wonderful.

We descended at a sharp pace, all the way through a forest of chestnuts, the fruit already gathered, the golden leaves rustling in their fall. At the foot lies the village of San Fili, and here we left the crazy old cart which we had dragged so far. A little further, and before us lay a long, level road, a true Roman highway, straight for mile after mile. By this road the Visigoths must have marched after the sack of Rome. In approaching Cosenza I was drawing near to the grave of Alaric. Along this road the barbarian bore in triumph those spoils of the Eternal City which were to enrich his tomb.

By this road, six hundred years before the Goth, marched Hannibal on his sullen retreat from Italy, passing through Cosentia to embark at Croton.

CHAPTER III

THE GRAVE OF ALARIC

It would have been prudent to consult with my driver as to the inns of Cosenza. But, with a pardonable desire not to seem helpless in his hands, I had from the first directed him to the *Due Lionetti*, relying upon my guide-book. Even at Cosenza there is progress, and guide-books to little-known parts of Europe are easily allowed to fall out of date. On my arrival—

But, first of all, the *dazio*. This time it was a serious business; impossible to convince the rather surly officer that certain of the contents of my portmanteau were not for sale. What in the world was I doing with *tanti libri*? Of course I was a commercial traveller; ridiculous to pretend anything else. After much strain of courtesy, I clapped to my luggage, locked it up, and with a resolute face cried "Avanti!" And there was an end of it. In this case, as so often, I have no doubt that simple curiosity went for much in the man's pertinacious questioning. Of course the whole *dazio* business is ludicrous and contemptible; I scarce know a baser spectacle than that of uniformed officials groping in the poor little bundles of starved peasant women, mauling a handful of onions, or prodding with long irons a cartload of straw. Did any one ever compare the expenses with the results?

A glance shows the situation of Cosenza. The town is built on a steep hillside, above the point where two rivers, flowing from the valleys on either side, mingle their waters under one name, that of the Crati. We drove over a bridge which spans the united current, and entered a narrow street, climbing abruptly between houses so high and so close together as to make a gloom amid sunshine. It was four o'clock; I felt tired and half choked with dust; the thought of rest and a meal was very pleasant. As I searched for the sign of my inn, we suddenly drew up, midway in the dark street, before a darker portal, which seemed the entrance to some dirty warehouse. The driver jumped down—"Ecco l'albergo!"

I had seen a good many Italian hostelries, and nourished no unreasonable expectations. The Lion at Paola would have seemed to any untravelled Englishman a squalid and comfortless hole, incredible as a place of public entertainment; the *Two Little Lions* of Cosenza made a decidedly worse impression. Over sloppy stones, in an atmosphere heavy with indescribable stench, I felt rather than saw my way to the foot of a stone staircase; this I ascended, and on the floor above found a dusky room, where tablecloths and an odour of frying oil afforded some suggestion of refreshment. My arrival interested nobody; with a good deal of trouble I persuaded an untidy fellow, who seemed to be a waiter, to come down with me and secure my luggage. More trouble before I could find a bedroom; hunting for keys, wandering up and down stone stairs and along pitch-black corridors, sounds of voices in quarrel. The room itself was utterly depressing—so bare, so grimy, so dark. Quickly I examined the bed, and was rewarded. It is the good point of Italian inns; be the house and the room howsoever sordid, the bed is almost invariably clean and dry and comfortable.

I ate, not amiss; I drank copiously to the memory of Alaric, and felt equal to any fortune. When night had fallen I walked a little about the scarce-lighted streets and came to an open place, dark and solitary and silent, where I could hear the voices of the two streams as they mingled below the hill. Presently I passed an open office of some kind, where a pleasant-looking man sat at a table writing; on an impulse I entered, and made bold to ask whether Cosenza had no better inn than the *Due Lionetti*. Great was this gentleman's courtesy; he laid down his pen, as if for ever, and gave himself wholly to my concerns. His discourse delighted me, so flowing were the phrases, so rounded the periods. Yes, there were other inns; one at the top of the town—the *Vetere*—in a very good position; and they doubtless excelled my own in modern comfort. As a matter of fact, it might be avowed that the *Lionetti*, from the point of view of the great centres of civilization, left something to be desired

—something to be desired; but it was a good old inn, a reputable old inn, and probably on further acquaintance—

Further acquaintance did not increase my respect for the *Lionetti*; it would not be easy to describe those features in which, most notably, it fell short of all that might be desired. But I proposed no long stay at Cosenza, where malarial fever is endemic, and it did not seem worth while to change my quarters. I slept very well.

I had come here to think about Alaric, and with my own eyes to behold the place of his burial. Ever since the first boyish reading of Gibbon, my imagination has loved to play upon that scene of Alaric's death. Thinking to conquer Sicily, the Visigoth marched as far as to the capital of the Bruttii, those mountain tribes which Rome herself never really subdued; at Consentia he fell sick and died. How often had I longed to see this river Busento, which the "labour of a captive multitude" turned aside, that its flood might cover and conceal for all time the tomb of the Conqueror! I saw it in the light of sunrise, flowing amid low, brown, olive-planted hills; at this time of the year it is a narrow, but rapid stream, running through a wide, waste bed of yellow sand and stones. The Crati, which here has only just started upon its long seaward way from some glen of Sila, presents much the same appearance, the track which it has worn in flood being many times as broad as the actual current. They flow, these historic waters, with a pleasant sound, overborne at moments by the clapping noise of Cosenza's washerwomen, who cleanse their linen by beating it, then leave it to dry on the river-bed. Along the banks stood tall poplars, each a spire of burnished gold, blazing against the dark olive foliage on the slopes behind them; plane trees, also, very rich of colour, and fig trees shedding their latest leaves. Now, tradition has it that Alaric was buried close to the confluence of the Busento and the Crati. If so, he lay in full view of the town. But the Goths are said to have slain all their prisoners who took part in the work, to ensure secrecy. Are we to suppose that Consentia was depopulated? On any other supposition the story must be incorrect, and Alaric's tomb would have to be sought at least half a mile away, where the Busento is hidden in its deep valley.

Gibbon, by the way, calls it Busentinus; the true Latin was Buxentius. To make sure of the present name, I questioned some half a dozen peasants, who all named the river Basenzio or Basenz'; a countryman of more intelligent appearance assured me that this was only a dialectical form, the true one being Busento. At a bookseller's shop (Cosenza had one, a very little one) I found the same opinion to prevail.

It is difficult to walk much in this climate; lassitude and feverish symptoms follow on the slightest exertion; but—if one can disregard the evil smells which everywhere catch one's breath—Cosenza has wonders and delights which tempt to day-long rambling. To call the town picturesque is to use an inadequate word; at every step, from the opening of the main street at the hill-foot up to the stern mediaeval castle crowning its height, one marvels and admires. So narrow are the ways that a cart drives the pedestrian into shop or alley; two vehicles (but perhaps the thing never happened) would with difficulty pass each other. As in all towns of Southern Italy, the number of hair-dressers is astonishing, and they hang out the barber's basin—the very basin (of shining brass and with a semicircle cut out of the rim) which the Knight of La Mancha took as substitute for his damaged helmet. Through the gloom of high balconied houses, one climbs to a sunny piazza, where there are several fine buildings; beyond it lies the public garden, a lovely spot, set with alleys of acacia and groups of palm and flower-beds and fountains; marble busts of Garibaldi, Mazzini, and Cavour gleam among the trees. Here one looks down upon the yellow gorge of the Crati, and sees it widen northward into a vast green plain, in which the track of the river is soon lost. On the other side of the Crati valley, in full view of this garden, begins the mountain region of many-folded Sila—a noble sight at any time of the day, but most of all when the mists of morning cling about its summits, or when the sunset clothes its broad flanks with purple. Turn westward, and you behold the long range which hides the Mediterranean so high and wild from this distance, that I could scarce believe I had driven over it.

Sila—locally the Black Mountain, because dark with climbing forests—held my gaze through a long afternoon. From the grassy table-land of its heights, pasturage for numberless flocks and herds when the long snows have melted, one might look over the shore of the Ionian Sea where Greek craftsmen built ships of timber cut upon the mountain's side. Not so long ago it was a haunt of brigands; now there is no risk for the rare traveller who penetrates that wilderness; but he must needs depend upon the hospitality of labourers and shepherds. I dream of sunny glades, never touched, perhaps, by the foot of man since the Greek herdsman wandered there with his sheep or goats. Somewhere on Sila rises the Neaithos (now Neto) mentioned by Theocritus; one would like to sit by its source in the woodland solitude, and let fancy have her way.

In these garden walks I met a group of peasants, evidently strange to Cosenza, and wondering at all they saw. The women wore a very striking costume: a short petticoat of scarlet, much embroidered, and over it a blue skirt, rolled up in front and gathered in a sort of knot behind the waist; a bodice adorned with needlework and metal; elaborate glistening head-gear, and bare feet. The town-folk have no peculiarity of dress. I observed among them a grave, intelligent type of countenance, handsome and full of character, which may be that of their brave ancestors the Bruttii. With pleasure I saw that they behaved gently to their beasts, the mules being very sleek and contented-looking. There is much difference between these people and the Neapolitans; they seem to have no liking for noise, talk with a certain repose, and allow the stranger to go about among them unmolested, unimportuned. Women above the poorest class are not seen in the streets; there prevails an Oriental system of seclusion.

I was glad to come upon the pot market; in the south of Italy it is always a beautiful and interesting sight. Pottery for commonest use among Calabrian peasants has a grace of line, a charm of colour, far beyond anything native to our most pretentious china-shops. Here still lingers a trace of the old civilization. There must be a great good in a people which has preserved this need of beauty through ages of servitude and suffering. Compare such domestic utensils—these oil-jugs and water-jars—with those in the house of an English labourer. Is it really so certain that all virtues of race dwell with those who can rest amid the ugly and know it not for ugliness?

The new age declares itself here and there at Cosenza. A squalid railway station, a hideous railway bridge, have brought the town into the European network; and the craze for building, which has disfigured and half ruined Italy, shows itself in an immense new theatre—Teatro Garibaldi—just being finished. The old one, which stands ruinous close by, struck me as, if anything, too large for the town; possibly it had been damaged by an earthquake, the commonest sort of disaster at Cosenza. On the front of the new edifice I found two inscriptions, both exulting over the fall of the papal power; one was interesting enough to copy:—

"20 SEPT., 1870.
QUESTA DATA POLITICA
DICE FINITA LA TEOCRAZIA
NEGLI ORDINAMENTI CIVILI.
IL DI CHE LA DIRA FINITA
MORALMENTE
SARA LA DATA UMANA."

which signifies: "This political date marks the end of theocracy in civil life. The day which ends its moral rule will begin the epoch of humanity." A remarkable utterance anywhere; not least so within the hearing of the stream which flows over the grave of Alaric.

One goes to bed early at Cosenza; the night air is dangerous, and—Teatro Garibaldi still incomplete—darkness brings with it no sort of pastime. I did manage to read a little in my miserable room by an antique lamp, but the effort was dispiriting; better to lie in the dark and think of Goth and Roman.

Do the rivers Busento and Crati still keep the secret of that "royal sepulchre, adorned with the splendid spoils and trophies of Rome"? It seems improbable that the grave was ever disturbed; to this day there exists somewhere near Cosenza a treasure-house more alluring than any pictured in Arabian tale. It is not easy to conjecture what "spoils and trophies" the Goths buried with their king; if they sacrificed masses of precious metal, then perchance there still lies in the river-bed some portion of that golden statue of *Virtus*, which the Romans melted down to eke out the ransom claimed by Alaric. The year 410 A.D. was no unfitting moment to break into bullion the figure personifying Manly Worth. "After that," says an old historian, "all bravery and honour perished out of Rome."

CHAPTER IV

TARANTO

Cosenza is on a line of railway which runs northward up the Crati valley, and joins the long seashore line from Taranto to Reggio. As it was my wish to see the whole of that coast, I had the choice of beginning my expedition either at the northern or the southern end; for several reasons I decided to make straight for Taranto.

The train started about seven o'clock in the morning. I rose at six in chill darkness, the discomfort of my room seeming worse than ever at this featureless hour. The waiter—perhaps he was the landlord, I left this doubt unsolved—brought me a cup of coffee; dirtier and more shabbily apparelled man I have never looked upon; viler coffee I never drank. Then I descended into the gloom of the street. The familiar odours breathed upon me with pungent freshness, wafted hither and thither on a mountain breeze. A glance upwards at the narrow strip of sky showed a grey-coloured dawn, prelude, I feared, of a dull day.

Evidently I was not the only traveller departing; on the truck just laden I saw somebody else's luggage, and at the same moment there came forth a man heavily muffled against the air, who, like myself, began to look about for the porter. We exchanged greetings, and on our walk to the station I learned that my companion, also bound for Taranto, had been detained by illness for several days at the *Lionetti*, where, he bitterly complained, the people showed him no sort of attention. He was a commercial traveller, representing a firm of drug merchants in North Italy, and for his sins (as he put it) had to make the southern journey every year; he invariably suffered from fever, and at certain places—of course, the least civilized—had attacks which delayed him from three days to a week. He loathed the South, finding no compensation whatever for the miseries of travel below Naples; the inhabitants he reviled with exceeding animosity. Interested by the doleful predicament of this vendor of drugs (who dosed himself very vigorously), I found him a pleasant companion during the day; after our lunch he seemed to shake off the last shivers of his malady, and was as sprightly an Italian as one could wish to meet—young, sharp-witted, well-mannered, and with a pleasing softness of character.

We lunched at Sybaris; that is to say, at the railway station now so called, though till recently it bore the humbler name of Buffaloria. The Italians are doing their best to revive the classical place-names, where they have been lost, and occasionally the incautious traveller is much misled. Of Sybaris no stone remains above ground; five hundred years before Christ it was destroyed by the people of Croton, who turned the course of the river Crathis so as to overwhelm the city's ruins. Francois Lenormant, whose delightful book, *La Grande Grece*, was my companion on this journey, believed that a discovery far more wonderful and important than that of Pompeii awaits the excavator on this site; he held it certain that here, beneath some fifteen feet of alluvial mud, lay the temples and the streets of Sybaris, as on the day when Crathis first flowed over them. A little digging has recently been done, and things of interest have been found; but discovery on a wide scale is still to be attempted.

Lenormant praises the landscape hereabouts as of "incomparable beauty"; unfortunately I saw it in a sunless day, and at unfavourable moments I was strongly reminded of the Essex coast—grey, scrubby fiats, crossed by small streams, spreading wearily seaward. One had only to turn inland to correct this mood; the Calabrian mountains, even without sunshine, had their wonted grace. Moreover, cactus and agave, frequent in the foreground, preserved the southern character of the scene. The great plain between the hills and the sea grows very impressive; so silent it is, so mournfully desolate, so haunted with memories of vanished glory. I looked at the Crathis—the Crati of Cosenza—here beginning to spread into a sea-marsh; the waters which used to flow over golden sands, which made white the oxen, and sunny-haired the children, that bathed in them, are now lost amid a wilderness poisoned by their own vapours.

The railway station, like all in this region, was set about with eucalyptus. Great bushes of flowering rosemary scented the air, and a fine cassia tree, from which I plucked blossoms, yielded a subtler perfume. Our lunch was not luxurious; I remember only, as at all worthy of Sybaris, a palatable white wine called Muscato dei Saraceni. Appropriate enough amid this vast silence to turn one's thoughts to the Saracens, who are so largely answerable for the ages of desolation that have passed by the Ionian Sea.

Then on for Taranto, where we arrived in the afternoon. Meaning to stay for a week or two I sought a pleasant room in a well-situated hotel, and I found one with a good view of town and harbour. The Taranto of old days, when it was called Taras, or later Tarentum, stood on a long peninsula, which divides a little inland sea from the great sea without. In the Middle Ages the town occupied only the point of this neck of land, which, by the cutting of an artificial channel, had been made into an island: now again it is spreading over the whole of the ancient site; great buildings of yellowish-white stone, as ugly as modern architect can make them, and plainly far in excess of the actual demand for habitations, rise where Phoenicians and Greeks and Romans built after the nobler fashion of their times. One of my windows looked towards the old town, with its long sea-wall where fishermen's nets hung drying, the dome of its Cathedral, the high, squeezed houses, often with gardens on the roofs, and the swing-bridge which links it to the mainland; the other gave me a view across the Mare Piccolo, the Little Sea (it is some twelve miles round about), dotted in many parts with crossed stakes which mark the oyster-beds, and lined on this side with a variety of shipping moored at quays. From some of these vessels, early next morning, sounded suddenly a furious cannonade, which threatened to shatter the windows of the hotel; I found it was in honour of the Queen of Italy, whose *festa* fell on that day. This barbarous uproar must have sounded even to the Calabrian heights; it struck me as more meaningless in its deafening volley of noise than any note of joy or triumph that could ever have been heard in old Tarentum.

I walked all round the island part of the town; lost myself amid its maze of streets, or alleys rather, for in many places one could touch both sides with outstretched arms, and rested in the Cathedral of S. Cataldo, who, by the bye, was an Irishman. All is strange, but too close-packed to be very striking or beautiful; I found it best to linger on the sea-wall, looking at the two islands in the offing, and over the great gulf with its mountain shore stretching beyond sight. On the rocks below stood fishermen hauling in a great net, whilst a boy splashed the water to drive the fish back until they were safely enveloped in the last meshes; admirable figures, consummate in graceful strength, their bare legs and arms the tone of terra cotta. What slight clothing they wore became them perfectly, as is always the case with a costume well adapted to the natural life of its wearers. Their slow, patient effort speaks of immemorial usage, and it is in harmony with time itself. These fishermen are the primitives of Taranto; who shall say for how many centuries they have hauled their nets upon the rock? When Plato visited the Schools of Taras, he saw the same brown-legged figures, in much the same garb, gathering their sea-harvest. When Hannibal, beset by the Romans, drew his ships across the peninsula and so escaped from the inner sea, fishermen of Tarentum went forth as ever, seeking their daily food. A thousand years passed, and the fury of the Saracens, when it had laid the city low, spared some humble Tarentine and the net by which he lived. To-day the fisher-folk form a colony apart; they speak a dialect which retains many Greek words unknown to the rest of the population. I could not gaze at them long enough; their lithe limbs, their attitudes at work or in repose, their wild, black hair, perpetually reminded me of shapes pictured on a classic vase.

Later in the day I came upon a figure scarcely less impressive. Beyond the new quarter of the town, on the ragged edge of its wide, half-peopled streets, lies a tract of olive orchards and of seed-land; there, alone amid great bare fields, a countryman was ploughing. The wooden plough, as regards its form, might have been thousands of years old; it was drawn by a little donkey, and traced in the soil—the generous southern soil—the merest scratch of a furrow. I could not but approach the man and exchange words with him; his rude but gentle face, his gnarled hands, his rough and scanty vesture,

moved me to a deep respect, and when his speech fell upon my ear, it was as though I listened to one of the ancestors of our kind. Stopping in his work, he answered my inquiries with careful civility; certain phrases escaped me, but on the whole he made himself quite intelligible, and was glad, I could see, when my words proved that I understood him. I drew apart, and watched him again. Never have I seen man so utterly patient, so primaevally deliberate. The donkey's method of ploughing was to pull for one minute, and then rest for two; it excited in the ploughman not the least surprise or resentment. Though he held a long stick in his hand, he never made use of it; at each stoppage he contemplated the ass, and then gave utterance to a long "Ah-h-h!" in a note of the most affectionate remonstrance. They were not driver and beast, but comrades in labour. It reposed the mind to look upon them.

Walking onward in the same direction, one approaches a great wall, with gateway sentry-guarded; it is the new Arsenal, the pride of Taranto, and the source of its prosperity. On special as well as on general grounds, I have a grudge against this mass of ugly masonry. I had learnt from Lenormant that at a certain spot, Fontanella, by the shore of the Little Sea, were observable great ancient heaps of murex shells—the murex precious for its purple, that of Tarentum yielding in glory only to the purple of Tyre. I hoped to see these shells, perhaps to carry one away. But Fontanella had vanished, swallowed up, with all remnants of antiquity, by the graceless Arsenal. It matters to no one save the few fantastics who hold a memory of the ancient world dearer than any mechanic triumph of to-day. If only one could believe that the Arsenal signified substantial good to Italy! Too plainly it means nothing but the exhaustion of her people in the service of a base ideal.

The confines of this new town being so vague, much trouble is given to that noble institution, the *dazio*. Scattered far and wide in a dusty wilderness, stand the little huts of the officers, vigilant on every road or by-way to wring the wretched soldi from toilsome hands. As became their service, I found these gentry anything but amiable; they had commonly an air of *ennui*, and regarded a stranger with surly suspicion.

When I was back again among the high new houses, my eye, wandering in search of any smallest point of interest, fell on a fresh-painted inscription:—

"ALLA MAGNA GRAECIA. STABILIMENTO
IDROELETTROPATICO."

was well meant. At the sign of "Magna Graecia" one is willing to accept "hydroelectropathic" as a late echo of Hellenic speech.

CHAPTER V

DULCE GALAESI FLUMEN

Taranto has a very interesting Museum. I went there with an introduction to the curator, who spared no trouble in pointing out to me all that was best worth seeing. He and I were alone in the little galleries; at a second or third visit I had the Museum to myself, save for an attendant who seemed to regard a visitor as a pleasant novelty, and bestirred himself for my comfort when I wanted to make sketches. Nothing is charged for admission, yet no one enters. Presumably, all the Tarentines who care for archaeology have already been here, and strangers are few.

Upon the shelves are seen innumerable miniature busts, carved in some kind of stone; thought to be simply portraits of private persons. One peers into the faces of men, women, and children, vaguely conjecturing their date, their circumstances; some of them may have dwelt in the old time on this very spot of ground now covered by the Museum. Like other people who grow too rich and comfortable, the citizens of Tarentum loved mirth and mockery; their Greek theatre was remarkable for irreverent farce, for parodies of the great drama of Athens. And here is testimony to the fact: all manner of comic masks, of grotesque visages; mouths distorted into impossible grins, eyes leering and goggling, noses extravagant. I sketched a caricature of Medusa, the anguished features and snaky locks travestied with satiric grimness. You remember a story which illustrates this scoffing habit: how the Roman Ambassador, whose Greek left something to be desired, excited the uproarious derision of the assembled Tarentines—with results that were no laughing matter.

I used the opportunity of my conversation with the Director of the Museum to ask his aid in discovering the river Galaesus. Who could find himself at Taranto without turning in thought to the Galaesus, and wishing to walk along its banks? Unhappily, one cannot be quite sure of its position. A stream there is, flowing into the Little Sea, which by some is called Galeso; but the country-folk commonly give it the name of Gialtrezze. Of course I turned my steps in that direction, to see and judge for myself.

To skirt the western shore of the Mare Piccolo I had to pass the railway station, and there I made a few inquiries; the official with whom I spoke knew not the name Galeso, but informed me that the Gialtrezze entered the sea at a distance of some three kilometres. That I purposed walking such a distance to see an insignificant stream excited the surprise, even the friendly concern, of my interlocutor; again and again he assured me it was not worth while, repeating emphatically, "*Non c'è novità.*" But I went my foolish way. Of two or three peasants or fishermen on the road I asked the name of the little river I was approaching; they answered, "Gialtrezze." Then came a man carrying a gun, whose smile and greeting invited question. "Can you tell me the name of the stream which flows into the sea just beyond here?" "Signore, it is the Galeso."

My pulse quickened with delight; all the more when I found that my informant had no tincture of the classics, and that he supported Galeso against Gialtrezze simply as a question of local interest. Joyously I took leave of him, and very soon I was in sight of the river itself. The river? It is barely half a mile long; it rises amid a bed of great reeds, which quite conceal the water, and flows with an average breadth of some ten feet down to the seashore, on either side of it bare, dusty fields, and a few hoary olives.

The Galaesus?—the river beloved by Horace; its banks pasturing a famous breed of sheep, with fleece so precious that it was protected by a garment of skins? Certain it is that all the waters of Magna Graecia have much diminished since classic times, but (unless there have been great local changes, due, for example, to an earthquake) this brook had always the same length, and it is hard to think of the Galaesus as so insignificant. Disappointed, brooding, I followed the current seaward, and upon the shore, amid scents of mint and rosemary, sat down to rest.

There was a good view of Taranto across the water; the old town on its little island, compact of white houses, contrasting with the yellowish tints of the great new buildings which spread over the peninsula. With half-closed eyes, one could imagine the true Tarentum. Wavelets lapped upon the sand before me, their music the same as two thousand years ago. A goatherd came along, his flock straggling behind him; man and goats were as much of the old world as of the new. Far away, the boats of fishermen floated silently. I heard a rustle as an old fig tree hard by dropped its latest leaves. On the sea-bank of yellow crumbling earth lizards flashed about me in the sunshine. After a dull morning, the day had passed into golden serenity; a stillness as of eternal peace held earth and sky.

"Dearest of all to me is that nook of earth which yields not to Hymettus for its honey, nor for its olive to green Venafrum; where heaven grants a long springtime and warmth in winter, and in the sunny hollows Bacchus fosters a vintage noble as the Falernian—" The lines of Horace sang in my head; I thought, too, of the praise of Virgil, who, tradition has it, wrote his *Eclogues* hereabouts. Of course, the country has another aspect, in spring and early summer; I saw it at a sad moment; but, all allowance made for seasons, it is still with wonder that one recalls the rapture of the poets. A change beyond conception must have come upon these shores of the Ionian Sea. The scent of rosemary seemed to be wafted across the ages from a vanished world.

After all, who knows whether I have seen the Galaesus? Perhaps, as some hold, it is quite another river, flowing far to the west of Taranto into the open gulf. Gialtrezze may have become Galeso merely because of the desire in scholars to believe that it was the classic stream; in other parts of Italy names have been so imposed. But I shall not give ear to such discouraging argument. It is little likely that my search will ever be renewed, and for me the Galaesus—"dulce Galaesi flumen"—is the stream I found and tracked, whose waters I heard mingle with the Little Sea. The memory has no sense of disappointment. Those reeds which rustle about the hidden source seem to me fit shelter of a Naiad; I am glad I could not see the water bubbling in its spring, for there remains a mystery. Whilst I live, the Galaesus purls and glistens in the light of that golden afternoon, and there beyond, across the blue still depths, glimmers a vision of Tarentum.

Let Taranto try as it will to be modern and progressive, there is a retarding force which shows little sign of being overcome—the profound superstition of the people. A striking episode of street life reminded me how near akin were the southern Italians of to-day to their predecessors in what are called the dark ages; nay, to those more illustrious ancestors who were so ready to believe that an ox had uttered an oracle, or that a stone had shed blood. Somewhere near the swing-bridge, where undeniable steamships go and come between the inner and the outer sea, I saw a crowd gathered about a man who was exhibiting a picture and expounding its purport; every other minute the male listeners doffed their hats, and the females bowed and crossed themselves. When I had pressed near enough to hear the speaker, I found he was just finishing a wonderful story, in which he himself might or might not have faith, but which plainly commanded the credit of his auditors. Having closed his narrative, the fellow began to sell it in printed form—little pamphlets with a rude illustration on the cover. I bought the thing for a soldo, and read it as I walked away.

A few days ago—thus, after a pious exordium, the relation began—in that part of Italy called Marca, there came into a railway station a Capuchin friar of grave, thoughtful, melancholy aspect, who besought the station-master to allow him to go without ticket by the train just starting, as he greatly desired to reach the Sanctuary of Loreto that day, and had no money to pay his fare. The official gave a contemptuous refusal, and paid no heed to the entreaties of the friar, who urged all manner of religious motives for the granting of his request. The two engines on the train (which was a very long one) seemed about to steam away—but, behold, *con grande stupore di tutti*

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