

THE SICILIAN HIGHLANDS.

WITH the exception of the hinterland of Calabria, there is probably no part of Europe so unknown to the ordinary traveler as the interior of Sicily. These inland lands practically begin at the coastline all along the circumference of over six hundred miles; it is only on the southern and southwestern coasts, or the desolate promontory behind which lie the ruins of Selinunte, and then again at Terranova, the ancient Gela, and thence along the sea-loop to Syracuse and Augusta, to Lentini and Catania, that a mountain-wall does not at once exclude the inlands from the shore lands as a country apart. Of the seven or eight railway lines or short branches which traverse this Sicilian hinterland at remote distances, only three are commonly traveled by the tourist in Sicily: the north-coast line from Messina to Palermo, the east-coast line from Messina to Syracuse, and the central line from Palermo and Termini via Castrogiovanni to Catania (with its due south bifurcation from Roccapalumba to Girgenti). Very few tourists avail themselves of the Palermo-Occidental railway, except those interested in the wine and other export trade of Marsala and Trapani — or a few of the more erudite travelers, anxious to break at Calatafimi for the solitary magnificence of the ruins of Segesta; or at Castelvetro for the fallen temples of Selinunte (Selinus); or at Marsala to view that promontory of Lilybaion, the “most splendid city,” the scene of one of the greatest of Roman sieges, where thirty years earlier the great Pyrrhus failed disastrously, and where for generations Melkarth and the gods of Carthage reigned supreme. Every year, too, a few classical enthusiasts journey to Trapani, to see and climb the Monte San Giuliano of to-day, the Eryx of the an-

cient world, at whose summit (2500 feet) stood one of the most famous of all the shrines of antiquity, that of Venus Erycina, — as, before her, of the Erycinian Aphrodite of the Hellenes, as, before her, of the Phœnician Astarte; and, once more, as, before her, of the unknown Goddess of the Sea and of Love, worshipped by the primitive Sikelians, — perhaps in turn the successor of the Woman before whom bowed down the semi-legendary Elymians and Sicanians.

The southwest railway between Siracusa and Licata may be said to be wholly unused either by the “classically minded” traveler or the ordinary tourist. The country is desolate and unbeautiful: traveling is never comfortable, and in outlying regions is sometimes unsafe; and the towns of Modica, Ragusa, and Licata (the Hellenic *Phintias*) have little to attract the general traveler, though they have much to interest the folk-lorist. Even less traversed, save by the few Sicilians concerned, is the short bifurcation inland, from Lentini to Caltagirone.

There remains only the short line south from Palermo up into the mountain lands of Corleone, — concerning which the Palermitans have a jibe, — that only one *forestiero* (foreigner) in a year attempts the journey, and *he* never returns!

To these official railway lines must be added the short Circum-Ætna loop line, — a narrow mountain-climbing railway starting westward from Catania or northward from Giarre, and making the circuit of the vast lava lands of Etna by Linguaglossa and Terremorte to Randazzo and Bronte (west, north, and east of which lies the duchy of Bronte, — the Sicilian estate of our great Nelson, Duke of Bronte), — where the line ascends sometimes to close on 4000 feet,¹ to cantara and the Simeto, a few miles from Randazzo, the elevation of the line is over 3800

¹ The highest reach is between Randazzo and Bronte. Between the watersheds of the Al-

Adernò (the ancient *Hadranum*), Paternò (*Hybla Minor*), and southwestward down the lava-ravaged, earthquake-shaken, southern flanks of Etna, through a paradise of orange and lemon and almond, of prickly pear and medlar and fig, to where the black flood of the volcano stops like an arrested wave outside the Borgo of Catania.

But if one look at an enlarged map of Sicily, it will be seen at a glance that by far the greater part of the island, practically the whole hinterland from the coasts, remains uninvaded by the *dragone a vapore*, — the iron horse, as we have it. And, in truth, as with so much of the Basilicata and Calabria, this vast isolated country is little invaded even by roads, — roads, that is, as distinct from stony mule-paths or craggy hillways. From centres such as Petralia, under Monte Salvatore of the Madonian mountain range; or Gangi in its hill-wilderness between Monte Zimmara and Monte Zambughetti; or those regional mountain capitals Nicosia or Troina, one may look out upon a vast mountainous wilderness little changed if at all for a thousand years. Or, again, as wild and lonely a region may be seen from Mistretta, isolated between the highlands of Tusa and the great Bosco or forest region of Karonia to the north of the Nebrodian Range, or from Novara, swept by the Tyrrhene winds beating upon the arid crests of the Peloritanean (or Peloric) Mountains, whence one may look far southward past Roccaflorida or Francavilla to where Mount Tauros overhangs beautiful Taormina on the Ionian Sea, or far northward to the pearl-white gulf where of old (with Vulcano and Stromboli and the other Lipari Islands beyond) sat the towns of Mylæ and Tyndaris and perhaps Longanum (to-day, respectively, Milazzo, and La Scala di Capo Tindaro,

and Barcellona¹), and even westward to the long shore where are the Sweet Waters of Saint Agatha, and that lovely promontory of Karonia, the *Kalaktê*, or “beautiful shore,” founded by Ducetius in the fifth century.

To-day, as in the days of the Hellenes of Sicily, the true centre of the land is Enna (Castrogiovanni). But the famous home of Persephone is not a suitable “centre” for the pilgrim to old sites or the seeker of interesting or picturesque survivals. Indeed, except the excursion to the opposite crag-citadeled town of Calascibetta, on the north, or, on the south, to the Lake of Pergusa, “that beautiful water where Persephone sank,” a desolate swamp (without charm save in early spring) reached by an undrivable circuitous path, or, on the east, to Assoro, the site of the ancient Sikelian town of Assorus, there is none that cannot better be made from a more accessible point of departure, — for though Agira (*Agyrium*) and Centorbi (*Kenturipa*) seem near, these can be reached more conveniently from Adernò, on the Circum-Ætnea railway; whence also, or from Bronte, it is easier to reach the mountain towns of Troina and Nicosia. Moreover, at Castrogiovanni, everything of to-day is as it was three hundred years ago, as Sicilians themselves complain. If, however, the traveler, or travelers (for it is not agreeable, nor even advisable, for strangers to travel alone in this region) are hardy, and content to fare roughly in the Holy City of Demeter and Persephone, and can discard the service of a carriage for that of mules, or, at need, can go far afoot, then, certainly, rooms may be taken for a day or two at the locanda in the Via Roma.

An undulating line drawn through the inlands of Sicily will loop at these six mountain towns: Corleone, in the

feet; at Maletto, the station for the Castle of Maniace (the Duke of Bronte) stands at 3700.

¹ Not only is the site of the short-lived if not legendary Longanum uncertain, but it is dis-

puted that the stream by Barcellona is the Longanus where Hiero, Tyrant of Syracuse, defeated the Mamertines in B. C. 269.

heart of the western province, some forty miles due south from Palermo (for Salemi, the ancient *Halicyæ*, some fifty miles westward toward Marsala, though it has a population of about 15,000, is only a rude hill village without an inn); Castrogiovanni, in the heart of the central province; Troina, the "capital" of the northeast; Centuripe, high-set among its craggy ways above the valley of the Symaithos (Simeto); Randazzo, formerly *Ætnea*, between which and Troina lie the lofty forest lands and lower vine-lands and orange woods of the beautiful duchy of Bronte; and Novara, the centre of the province of Messina.

Corleone is the mountain terminus of the little line which crawls up from Palermo, by way of Misilmeri, the Moorish *Menzil-al-Ensir*. Both at the last-named and at Corleone, whose name has changed little from *Korliân*, the Saracenic type has survived more strongly than perhaps anywhere else in Sicily. There is little of interest to see here: the population is of the worst Sicilian type, and the beggars have all the swarming instinct of those at Cefalù, the gnat-like insistency of those at Monreale, and the insolence of those at Girgenti, with a clamant perseverance and terrible furnished appeal all their own. Still, if one would traverse the wild and desolate crossways between Corleone and Castrogiovanni, one must either begin here or leave the region unexplored. The best road is that southeast along the rocky slopes of Monte Cardellia, and thence to Castionoro, where fresh mules and a hill guide must be hired for the mountain paths of the Cammarata. But for the less hazardous traveler I should recommend that the Corleone-Prizzi hill road be left about halfway, at the Ford of the Amendola, and that then the course of the Amendola be followed for some twelve miles by rude goat-ways, till a road is reached beneath the hill village of Vicari, which will lead south and then northeastward to Roccapalumba. There

is neither good accommodation nor tolerable fare to be had in the village, but at the station of the same name (the junction on the Palermo-Catania Central Line for Girgenti) one can be fairly sure of a meal and even of the purchase of provisions. Here as elsewhere, however, one should remember the cardinal rule for travel in the interior of Sicily, — namely, to travel with waterproof tent if possible, but in any case always to carry ample provender, solid and liquid. Milk (goat's milk, of course) can sometimes be procured by the way, but rarely anything else, even bread. In many regions, too, one must be on guard against drinking the water unboiled.

It is extremely doubtful, however, if this part of the Sicilian hinterland be worth the trouble, expense, and fatigue of a systematic tour. It would be better for the traveler to start by rail from Girgenti in the south, or from Termini-Imerese (or, better, of course, as so near, from Palermo itself) on the north, and, by either route, reach Roccapalumba, having previously arranged with the Capo di Stazione there to procure mules and a guide. Hence one may pass under the old half-savage hill town of Alia, — where it is said certain ancient Moorish or Saracenic rites as well as types survive, — across the picturesque and beautiful region of the southern Madonian spurs to the two Petralias, — Petralia Soprana, and Petralia Sottana, — and thence to the remote and almost from year's end to year's end unvisited mountain town of Gangi, and so to Nicosia, of which the citizens claim that it is the heart of Sicily.

Although in the Nebrobian and Peloritanean highlands of the north and northeast the mountain scenery is, as a rule, wilder and grander, no trip in central Sicily could be more impressive in its way, or could better afford an idea of the Sicily of the Middle Ages and of the Norman and Saracenic days, than that from Corleone or Termini to Nicosia.

If one has time to spare, money to spend, patience to accept the divers tribulations of travel in a country less civilized than England or France many centuries ago, and a serviceable knowledge of Italian (with at least a smattering of Sicilian colloquial terms), the best way to make this trip would be to start from Termini-Imerese, with mules hired, not at the Grande Albergo della Terme, where the few foreigners invariably put up, but at the neighboring and less pretentious Locanda della Fenice. There is also a very fine forest route, somewhat shorter, starting inland a few miles eastward of Cefalù, via Castelbuono and Gerace (called Gerace Siculo to distinguish it from the Gerace of Calabria) to Gangi. But from first to last the inconveniences of this route are very great. As to making Gangi a point at which to rest, or upon which to depend for any manner of accommodation or service in that wild and desolate if picturesque hill capital of one of the most wild and desolate regions of Sicily, blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall not be disappointed.

Having left Termini-Imerese, then, we travel eastward two or three miles till we reach the gray-green waters of the Fiume Torte, and then diverge due south by the road to Cerda. In this wild region, between the Fiume Torte on the west and the Fiume Grande (or Imera Settentrionale) on the east, we are upon the famous Saracen Road; for this was the favorite route of the Carthaginians of the city which the later Hellenes called Panormus, and of the Saracens (and Normans) of Palermo, on their martial or predatory raids into the interior. On this steep winding road southward from Cerda to Selafani (a desolate township in a relatively fertile region, where one must not look to obtain even a cup of coffee) many a splendid procession of turbaned and vividly arrayed Orientals must have ridden proudly through what they considered subject lands, or re-

turned more proudly still, with spoil and captives from the Hellenic settlements or Sikelian towns of the interior.

The abrupt racial contrasts so often to be noted in Sicily are exceptionally evident here. At Termini-Imerese, for instance, Norman and Roman, or the later "Sicilian blend," are prevalent; at Cefalù, a few miles away, the Greek type is to be seen oftener than perhaps anywhere along the north coast, where it is less frequent than on the southern shores, and notably at Syracuse, Girgenti, and Taormina, or rather the vicinage of Taormina (Letojanni, Gallodoro, Mola, Graniti, Roccafronza, Castiglione, and Linguaglossa); and here at Selafani the debased Italic type is common, while at the high hill town opposite, Caltavuturo, one might almost fancy one's self in El Keb or other of the mountain towns of Western Tunisia, or in the beyarchy of Constantine. It is worth the ascent, to walk or ride on muleback up the steep winding road to Caltavuturo, that ancient Saracenic eyrie perched at a height of 3000 feet. The population (of whom, at certain seasons, few will be seen, except women, children, and old men) will not beg insistently, as in most places of the kind, but will stare at one with a fixed, passive curiosity as concentrated as that which meets the European in one of the oasis towns of the Sahara. The name, too, is Saracenic, and is taken from the ruined fortress which crowns the arid rock rising beyond it, much as Mola rises beyond the Monte di Castello at Taormina, or, rather, as the Monte di Castello rises out of and over Taormina. Till the Arabic tongue faded out of Sicily the hill fortress of Caltavuturo was Kala't-Abi-Tooro (*Thûr*), — the fortress town of the lord Abi-Thûr.

In the now extraordinary and fantastic savagery of this region a rough triangle might be drawn, with Caltavuturo as its left base, the two Petralias as its right, and Polizzi with the towering height of Monte Salvatore and of the

Peaks of the Antenna — two of the highest summits of the Madonian Range — as its apex.

There is, except from Mount Etna or from the Comb of the Cammarata, from the great rock above Castrogiovanni, or from the walls of Centuripe or Troina, or from the beech woods of Maniace at the summit of the Serra del Rè, no view in Sicily comparable in magnificent range with that from *La Generosa*, as Polizzi is surnamed. This small town, once a Norman eyrie of Count Roger, — his mountain whip for the Saracens, — stands on an extraordinary rock or precipice at an elevation of over 3000 feet sheer from the surrounding mountain region. In the Middle Ages Polizzi was one of the most prosperous inland towns of the Sicilian Highlands, though how it could ever have been so may well puzzle the traveler of to-day, who looks up to its crag-set height either in the blaze of the merciless heat beating with a furnace-wing against the arid rock, or with the sleety rain and tempestuous cloud of the *tramontana* or *gregâle* in the dreaded *stagione di Temporale* — the Season of Tempest.

But none will grudge the ascent. There is, too, a tolerable locanda, not to put up at, but at which to rest awhile and enjoy, perhaps, a garlicky omelet or still more highly savored *frittura*, and some strong and crude, but otherwise creditable, red wine. The immense panorama of the view extends over much of central Sicily, — from the last spurs of the Madonian Range on the north, above Cefalù and the Tyrrhene Sea, to the height of Enna in the south; from the Montemaggiore and Cammarata mountain ranges of the west to the steep slopes of Nicosia and Troina and to the snows of sky-reaching Etna on the east. Far below, in the rocky valley, foam the torrents which become the Fiume Salso (the *Himera Meridionalis*) and the Fiume Grande (the *Himera Septentrionalis*). Near by are the precipitous neighboring mountain towns of Castellana and Pe-

tralia, and, due south, Alimena, on the flanks of Monte Balza, — the site, it is believed, of the ancient Imachæ. And even in the little town itself there are things of interest to be seen, — in particular some fine carving and other sculptural adornment in the Duomo, or *Chiesa Matrice*, as the cathedral church is always called in Sicily, and in the church of Sta. Maria degli Angeli a really fine archaic triptych, brought here no one seems to know when or by whom, but obviously painted by a disciple of Memline, if not by the great Fleming himself.

As for the Petralias, I wonder if any tourist has ever wandered thither by some strange freak of curiosity or accident? Coins and other remains have been found here in considerable number, but nothing, I believe, of special interest, or even absolutely to confirm the fact that here of old stood *Petræa*. Gangi, on the other hand, that grimly sordid centre of a region in part luxuriantly fertile, and for the rest desolately wild, may well draw the archæologist who remembers how Verres (who despoiled so many Sicilian fanes and so many civic treasures, and yet whom we in a sense gratefully remember as the cause of some of Cicero's most vivid and splendid eloquence) swept this Siculo-Cretan township of all it held most sacred, and how the great Roman orator spoke bitterly of the "august and sacred fane" that, till the robber-prætor came, still stood here undefiled in honor of the Cretan Mothers (the "Magna Mater," rather, of Cicero's oration). The amateur archæologist must be on guard, however; for the Gangi of to-day is not the same as that which as *Engyum* stood some two miles southward, on the bridge path leading to Buonpietro. All that remained of Engyum to the Middle Ages was destroyed in the last year of the thirteenth century by the then ruler of Sicily because of the revolt of its overlord, one of the powerful family of Ventimiglia.

From Gangi to Nicosia is from ten to twelve miles, though a pedestrian in late spring or early autumn might think it twenty.

Nicosia is perhaps the one remote town of the interior to which a few travelers do annually find their way. These, however, do not approach from the north-east or north or west, rarely even from Castrogiovanni in the south; but from Troina in the east, or directly from more distant Adernd, — which, by comparison with the rail-unserved towns of the interior, appears to the inland traveler as a modern civilized town of excellent parts. Nicosia is certainly well worth a visit for its picturesque aspect, standing as it does on a precipitous steep with two ragged peaks, on the higher of which are the ruins of one of Roger the Norman's many castles or fortresses. Below are the two torrents of the Fiume Salso, and all around is a region of sometimes beautiful and always savage and fantastic mountain scenery. But the interest of the town and its citizens has been exaggerated. The one is said to be the most mediæval-looking town in Sicily, or even in Italy, and the other are reputed to be both in dialect and appearance a people more Lombard than Sicilian. Nicosia is certainly "mediæval" enough, both in dirt and discomfort, and in general backwardness, but is less noteworthy in this respect than, say, Corleone, or even than Bronte, for all that the latter is on the populous Ætnean slope. The "Lombard," too, has long since disappeared. As to the dialect, it seems to be neither better nor worse than the Sicilian of the coast lands, though colloquially it no doubt retains many archaic or debased Lombard words, survivals of the Norman and Lombard colonists who settled, or were "planted" here seven or eight centuries ago. For the benefit, however, of those who think their Italian will carry them far with Sicilian, let me give a few lines in the vernacular. A popular sonnet begins, —

A Ddi e a Mmaria. . . . Acussi passà 'n' atr' annu. . . .

Another, —

Liva u mmiaggiu agghiiri a Bbillafranca. . . .

Another, —

A nnàtru lu 'ngiuriani Sam Pasquali.

But as the most popular *sonetti* are those in dialogue, here is a typical example, — mercifully given only in part: —

Chi ffa la chiina?! . . .

— A ddocu! . . . taliati! . . .

Ari 'na facci di malaconunnatta

Cô 'm pari veru! . . .

— Bbab! . . . si vi fidati

D' idda pi ceamadora, vi cci ammutta

Certa ddagghiusu a mmari: 'un ci pinzati! . . .

Pi ceonu la canusciu ji! . . .

— Cchiù ssutta

L'acqui fannu trimari! 'Ntrubulati

Tunnu p' unu' en' e gghiè! . . . (etc.)

A friend in Taormina, to whom I showed this, remarked that it took away from him all desire to visit the interior, as he could not sleep a night in a place where he heard any one — "murderer or murdered" — "sputtering" words like, —
Certu ddagghiusu a mmari . . . 'Ntrubulati
Tunnu p' unu' en' e gghiè!

The hill town of Troina, some twelve miles eastward, is better worth a visit. From both, it should be added, are to be had the noblest views of Etna in its full gigantic magnificence. Troina is called the highest town in Sicily, but there are several at a greater elevation, though, certainly, it *looks* a more inaccessible eyrie than any other mountain citadel. The neighboring Ætnean township of Maletto, for example, is higher in actual elevation above the sea by about a hundred feet (3730). Here, at Troina, the people are indeed primitive. I write this article at Taormina, and only a few days ago a good lady came to this "dazzling" place in the great outer world on her first visit away from her mountain town, though she is nearer seventy than sixty; and it was strange to note her anxiety to behold at first hand three things she had never seen, — a steamer, a train, and a piano. The steamer was

too far away to impress her much ; the train, even viewed from the safe distance of the station wall at Giardini, had more of terror than of delight ; but before the marvel of the piano her whole soul all but worshiped and adored.

No one who visits Troina is likely to omit a visit to its rival, Centuripe or Centorbi, where to this day more coins, terra-cottas, and other Græco-Roman fragments are found than almost anywhere else in Sicily. The people here are markedly of the Hellenic type or types, though the Roman or Neronian face is often to be seen among the lithe stalwart youth. Probably the real Sicilian of the earlier Middle Ages survives more in Troina and Centorbi than in any other Trinacrian town.

Novara, far away in the northeast, the hill capital of the Messenian Highlands, or the "Neptunian mountains," or "Peloric range," as the geographers and historians have it, is practically never visited. From the north, it can be best reached by the village of Falcone in the Gulf of Milazzo, about half-way between Barcellona and Patti, — a long and arduous but superbly beautiful ascent. But few will ever attempt that route. From the south, by mule, I should recommend either the northeast route from Randazzo (a guide, and perhaps a single *carabiniere* escort, and certainly ample store of provender, should be taken), or, if the traveler be a good climber and willing to "rough it," and able also to risk rapidly varying climatic changes, to go from Taormina — the Eden of Sicily, where it rests in inexhaustible beauty and charm on its chasm-riven crags above the Ionian Sea — either up behind Mola and Monte Venere, and then by way of Graniti and Francavilla, or first to Letojanni on the eastern Corniche, and then northward and upward by Gallodoro, Mongiuffi, and Roccafiorita. At these last-named villages, however, the people are often unfriendly, and at best are apt

to be sullen. It will be well, therefore, not to accede to any prior requests for a halt for food or rest there, unless for change of mules. But except for the splendid views, — hardly, however, so exceptional as to be worth the fatigue and trouble of the excursion, — there is nothing to see in Novara itself, and even the archæologist is hardly likely to be impelled by any passionate desire to view the site of ancient Abacænum. At Roccafiorita, I may add, one day last spring, I came upon a brotherhood of three rejoicing in the baptismal names Orestes, Æschylus (*Æschilò*), . . . and Galahad (*Galahotto*) ! and heard of a girl of the place called Saffa (*Sappho*, *Psapppha*). At Taormina and Syracuse, indeed, there are many Greek names in common use among the people. I have been shaved by an Orestes in the one, and by a Diodoro in the other, and, in the same street as the latter, saw Olisso (Ulysses) and Ullissu (Sicilian) twice, and Dionisio (Dionysius) and Empedocle, above shops or handicraft quarters. Medea and Aretusa, and other Greek women-names survive ; and among the two or three hundred vine laborers on the lands of Maniace, in the duchy of Bronte, are such unexpected baptismal names as the ancient Zeffonia and Sephone, both (like the Sicilian *Ssuffinnù*) a corruption of Persephone — and as the more modern surname Kyrie-eleison ! Indeed, there are at least a score of vintagers — possibly a score of families — on the Maniace estate, whose name of Kyrie-eleison (Pietro Kyrie-eleison, Maria Kyrie-eleison, Giorgio Kyrie-eleison, and so forth — modern Græco-Sicilian colonists, no doubt) I have seen entered on the Duke of Bronte's labor list, kindly brought to me for my interested investigation by Mr. Charles Beek, Lord Bridport's (the Duke of Bronte's) agent at Castello di Maniace, the ducal residence.

From Castello di Maniace date some of my most memorable and delightful

experiences of inland Sicily. In the company of the Duca Alessandro ¹—or the *Ducchino*, the Young Duke, as he is commonly called—I have seen more of the wild and beautiful country behind Etna than would be practicable otherwise. The duchy of Bronte is, in itself, one of the most remarkable tracts in Sicily, stretching as it does from the high plateau of lava-covered lands near the Lake of Gurrida (between Randazzo and Maletto),—the *Balze*, as it is called, and not only the legendary scene of the wanderings of Demeter, but the historical background of a great battle wherein the Saracen host was routed by the Greek general Maniaces and his ally—of all unexpected persons, Harald Hardrada, future King of Norway, with his fierce Northmen!—to the superb orange forest of the ravines of the Simeto (Symaitos), miles away beyond Maniace Castle and its vinelands, and distant, half-savage, hill-set Bronte itself, and more than a thousand feet lower. At Maletto one looks over a great region that is all the duchy; and at Bronte, ten or twelve miles away, at another part of it; and from the hills above the Simeto at another part, hidden below the gorges of that classic and beautiful stream; and from the far-stretching vinelands of Maniace, below the fantastic hill of Rapiti, as from the beautiful gardens and north end of the castle itself, up at hill rising from hill, and mountain ridge cresting upon mountain ridge, first to the oak woods of the Serraspina, and then to the famous ducal beech forests of the Serra del Rè.

I have lived amid and traversed this wonderful region—which one regrets that the first Duke of Bronte, our great Nelson, never saw—in spring and au-

tumn and winter, and hardly know when it is loveliest. Doubtless it has a supreme loveliness in March and April, when the lava-wilderness blossoms with the yellow flowers of the spurge,—that characteristic Sicilian plant, the euphorbia, more characteristic even than the cactus or prickly pear (“Indian fig”), so omnipresent throughout Sicily and southern Italy, and yet so strangely ignored by both painter and poet that I can remember no painting wherein it takes its dominant place, and only a single poem in which it is even mentioned,—one of the lovely “sonetti di natura selvaggia” in the *Flora* of Alinda Brunamonti; and there, as *Veleni* (used equivalently to *fleurs-du-mal*), the poet sees only the evil side of this beautiful if poisonous plant:—

Euforbie gonfie di maligno latte,
Neri solani e di cicuta ombrelle
Consacrate alla morte atre sorelle,
Crescon tra sassi dove il Sol non batte. . . .

At this season, too, every variety of crocus and lily and violet, of jonquil and narcissus and iris, almost every wild bloom of north and south, from the wild rose to the asphodel, appears in incredible luxuriance. This is the season of Persephone, and of the youth of the world. But inland Sicily is not a joyous land, and I think its beauty is less poignant and more exquisite in late October or early November. Is there anything in Europe finer than the beech forests of the Serra del Rè when the wind from Etna, blowing at a height of six to eight thousand feet, moves across this gold and amber mountain raiment, immense, primeval, solitary, on the neck of the vast Sicilian watershed; or, anywhere, is there another Enchanted Garden like that *giardino selvaggio* of the Castle of Maniace, surrounded by giant poplars, vast tremulous columns of shaken but unfalling gold?

William Sharp.

¹ Lord Bridport's son, the Hon. Alex. Nelson Hood, Administrator-General of the duchy of Bronte.

THE COMMON LOT.¹

XII.

THE Phillippses had spent the winter in Europe. Mrs. Phillips was still adding to her collection for the new house, — Forest Manor as she had dubbed it. Leaving Venetia in Paris with some friends, she descended upon Italy, the rage for buying in her soul. There she gathered up the flotsam of the dealers, — marbles, furniture, stuffs, — a gold service in Naples, a vast bed in Milan, battered pictures in Florence. Mrs. Phillips was not a discriminating amateur; she troubled her soul little over the authenticity of her spoil. To San Giorgio, Simonetti, Richetti, and their brethren in the craft, she was a rich harvest, and they put up many a prayer for her return another season.

In March of that year, Jackson Hart, struggling with building strikes in Chicago, had a cablegram from the widow. "Am buying wonderful marbles in Florence. Can you come over?" The architect laughed as he handed the message to his wife. "Some one ought to head her off! She'll send over a shipload of fakes." Helen, thinking that he needed the vacation, urged him generously to accept the invitation and get a few weeks in Italy. But it was no time just then for vacation: he was in the grip of business, and another child was coming to them.

From time to time Mrs. Phillips's treasures arrived at Forest Park, and were stored in the great hall of her house. Then late in the spring the widow telephoned the architect.

"Yes! I am back," came her brisk, metallic tones from the receiver. "Glad to be home, of course, with all the dirt and the rest of it. How are you getting on? I hear you are doing lots of things.

Maida Rainbow told me over there in Paris that you were building the Bushfields an immense house. I am so glad for you, — I hope you are coining money!"

"Not quite that," he laughed back.

"I want you to see all the treasures I have bought. I've ruined myself and the children. However, you'll think it's worth it, I'm sure. You must tell me what to do with them. Come over Sunday, can't you? How is Mrs. Hart? Bring her over, too, of course."

Thus she gathered him up on her return, with that dexterous turn of the wrist which exasperated her righteous brother-in-law. On the Sunday, Jackson went to see the "treasures," but without Helen, who made an excuse of her mother's weekly visit. He found the widow in the stable, directing the efforts of two men servants in unpacking some cases.

"How are you?"

She extended a strong, flexible hand to Hart, and with the other motioned toward a marble that was slowly emerging from the packing straw.

"Old copy of a Venus, the Syracuse one. It will be great in the hall, won't it?"

"It's ripping!" he exclaimed warmly. "Where did you get that bench?"

"You don't like it?"

"Looks to be pure fake."

"Simonetti swore he knew the very room where it's been for over a hundred years."

"Oh! He probably slept on it!"

"Come into the house and see the other things. I have some splendid pictures."

For an hour they examined the articles she had bought, and the architect was sufficiently approving to delight the

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