

Rossini, played on a bugle; the performer—one of their number—having first thrown himself flat on the deck, in the attitude of a Turk about to receive the bastinado, and then raising his chest, by the aid of his two elbows, to the height required for the inflation of the instrument.

Nor is this leap from north to south so purely imaginary, since the boat *Sirius*, aided by the furious current, actually paddled at the rate of from seventeen to eighteen miles an hour; and we reached Avignon at sunset, about five o'clock. The distance being calculated, allowing for the windings of the river, will verify the rate maintained during the day. Notwithstanding the odious nature of comparisons, I could not help forming that between this river and the Rhine, and giving the preference to the first. The bold though gloomy precipices of the Rhine yield, in point of charm, to the more open expanse of the Rhone valley, and the larger scale of the scenery, especially when the far more brilliant lighting-up is considered. Nor does the Rhone yield to its rival, in regard to the picturesque form and position of its castles and other buildings; while its greater width, and handsome bridges, add an additional feature.

The best scene of the day, and a fit climax for its termination, was the approach to Avignon at

sunset,—a superb Claude. A turn of the river placed the castle—an immense mass crowning the city, and presenting an irregular outline—directly between us and the sun, the sky doing away, by its brightness, with all the details of the landscape. The principal objects were, the broad expanse of water, and the mass of deep purple, tracing its dark but soft outline on the blaze of gold at its back. On turning to look in the opposite direction, a scene equally striking presented itself. The mountains between which we had been winding during the last half of the day, are, from this point of view, ranged in an immense semicircle, extending round half the horizon, and at that moment were tinged by the sun with a bright rose colour, while they scarcely appeared at half their actual distance. It looked like the final scene of an aërial ballet, when a semicircle is formed by the rosy sylphs who have figured during the representation.

After the hurly burly of debarkation at Avignon, and forcing our way through the army of luggage porters—a ferocious race, notorious, at this place, for the energy, amounting often to violence, with which they urge the acceptance of their kind offices—the picturesque look of the place, and the necessary hour of waiting for dinner, led me to a scene, which I accepted as a satisfactory greeting

on my arrival in the land of the troubadours. A group of half a dozen labourers, returned from their day's work, were lolling in every variety of attitude, on some large stones placed in front of the *château*. They were singing—and with perfect precision of *ensemble*—each his part of the chorus. At the conclusion of every *morceau*, the whole party made the façade of the ancient palace echo with peals of laughter; after which they all talked at once, until they had agreed on the choice of the succeeding air.

The castle of Avignon—ancient residence of the Popes, shelters now a different sort of inmates. It serves for barracks for a regiment of infantry. At this moment the lamplighter had completed his rounds in the interior, and given to each of the innumerable windows an undue importance in the architectural effect of the mass. Such is the irregularity of their distribution over this vast façade—or such it appeared to be then, for I have not seen it by daylight—as to give them the appearance of having been thrown at it by handfuls, and fixed themselves each at its first point of contact with the wall.

Or by way of compensation for the extravagant supposition of so large a hand, we can suppose the edifice diminished, and resembling with its jagged

outline, a ragged black cloak, which, having been stretched out, to serve as a mark for rifle-shooters, would admit the light through openings not less symmetrically distributed than these windows.

Between Avignon and Marseille, by the land route, the only spot of interest is Aix. It is a well placed little town; although, in the summer, its position must procure for it rather too much warmth. There are no remains of king René's palace; nor could I learn that any souvenir of him was extant, with the exception of a statue, which represents the jovial old king of the *trouvères* in the character of Bacchus. This figure ornaments a hot fountain, situated at the head of the wide street, planted with trees, by which the town is entered.

LETTER XVI.

VOYAGE TO GIBRALTAR.

Cadiz.

I HAVE just returned from a visit to the signal-tower—the highest look-out in Cadiz; from which is seen a panorama equalled by few in Europe. The Atlantic, and its coast down to Trafalgar Cape—the mountain distances of the Ronda—and Medina Sidonia on its sugar-loaf rock, like an advanced sentinel—all Cadiz, with its hundreds of white Belvideres—and the bright blue bay, decked with glittering white towns, and looking (but with more sparkling glow) like an enormous turquoise set round with pearls. But let not, I entreat you, these magic words—Cadiz—Andalucia—raise your expectations unduly; lest they be disappointed, on finding that I fail in doing justice to this charming country. With regard to this town, not only would it be a task beyond my powers to paint its bright aspect and to give you a sufficiently glowing descrip-

tion of its pleasures. It is not even my intention to partake of these—being bent on accomplishing my principal object—the exploration of the monuments of Seville. However let us not anticipate. You ought to have had news of me from Gibraltar, where I made a much longer stay than I had intended, owing to an unexpected meeting with an old friend.

The fact is, I put off writing until I should again be in movement, hoping that my letters might thus acquire greater interest. I will resume my journey from France, in which country we parted.

The steam-packets leave Marseille for the south of Spain every tenth day; and I happened to arrive a day or two after one of the departures. Rather than wait eight days, therefore, I agreed for my passage on board a trader bound for Gibraltar; by which arrangement, as the captain assured me that the voyage would only occupy five days, I was to be at my journey's end before the departure of the *Phénicien*, as the steam-packet was called. The latter, moreover, made no progress excepting during the night, in order to afford the passengers an opportunity of passing each day in some town; and being anxious to arrive at Seville, I should not have liked the delays thus occasioned. I do not, however, recommend the adoption of my plan; for the

five days, as it turned out, became twenty-four, and the Phénicien arrived at Cadiz long before I reached Gibraltar.

The captain's prognostic of course supposed a favourable voyage; and I was wrong in reckoning on this, particularly at the time of year, and in the Mediterranean. I was wrong, also, in confiding in my Provençal captain, who, in addition to various other bad qualities, turned out to be the most inept blockhead to whom ever were entrusted lives and cargoes.

My fellow-passengers consisted of a Marseille merchant, who possessed a trading establishment at Gibraltar; a young French officer, on leave of absence to visit his mother, who was Spanish; and a Moorish traveller, proceeding homeward to Tetuan. From certain hints dropped by the merchant, who was well acquainted with the passage, we soon learned the probable character of our captain, as he belonged to a race not very favourably spoken of by those whose goods and persons they were in the habit of conveying; and these predictions being soon partially confirmed by the man's incivility, we began to look upon him as our common enemy. One of the accusations brought against his class was, a disposition to reduce the supply of provisions within undue limits. This, however,

we could not lay to his charge, as the adverse winds rendered necessary an extreme prudence in our daily consumption. My principal anxiety arose from want of confidence in the capacity of the man for the performance of his duties as a seaman. This anxiety was grounded on various symptoms sufficiently striking to attract the notice even of a landsman; and more particularly on a scene, during which his presence of mind, if mind he possessed, totally deserted him.

We had passed several days off the Balearic Islands—or rather on and off—for each morning we issued from behind Ivica, and returned at night to take shelter under its cliffs; ours being the only vessel of several performing the same passage restrained by fear from attempting any progress during these nights. The reason of this we learned subsequently. At length, when we did risk an advance, we chose the worst moment of all: the breeze becoming a gale, and almost a head-wind, from having been less unfavourable. Whatever may now have been our anxiety, we could easily discover that the author of our misfortune was a prey to more terror than ourselves.

Against this wind we proceeded, gaining about a hundred yards an hour, during five days; at the end of which it changed slightly, and allowed us to

reach the entrance of the channel ; that is, we had doubled the Cape de Gata, and were off the south coast of the peninsula, nearly opposite Almeria, and in the direct line of all the vessels entering the Mediterranean ; which, as they are sometimes delayed in expectation of a favourable wind for passing the Straits of Gibraltar, were now bearing down in great numbers. At this crisis the gale, which had all along continued to be violent, became once more almost directly adverse, and increased in fury.

Our gallant captain's features always assumed towards evening a more serious expression. A faint tinge of green was observed to replace the yellow of his usual complexion, and he passed the nights on deck, as unapproachable as a hyena—by the way, also a most cowardly animal. At length one day as evening approached, the wind was almost doing its worst, and we went to bed tossed about as if in a walnut-shell—lulled by an incessant roaring, as it were, of parks of Perkin's artillery.

It being essential to keep a good look-out, and to show a light occasionally, in order to avoid being run down—the lantern—unable to live on deck, from the water as well as the wind, which passed through the rigging—was confided to the passengers, with a recommendation, by no means

likely to be neglected, to keep it in good trim, and to hand it up with promptitude when called for.

At about twelve o'clock, sure enough, the call was heard, in the somewhat agitated tones of the captain. The passenger, whose business it was, for we took the watch each in his turn—immediately jumped up and handed up the lantern. Thinking this sufficient, we remained as we were; but in less than a minute, it was brought back extinguished, and thrown down into the cabin. Immediately after a general view holloa was audible above the roar of the storm, and the mate's voice was heard at the top of our staircase, begging us to get up as we were going to be run down.

We now lost no time in making our way to the deck; no one speaking a word, but each waiting for his turn to mount. Being furthest from the staircase, or rather ladder, I arrived the last. On reaching the deck, I was met by about a ton of salt water, which appeared to have mistaken me for a wicket, as it came in as solid a mass, and with about the same impulse as a cricket ball. Finding I was not to be dashed back again down stairs, it took the opportunity of half filling the cabin, the door of which I had not thought of shutting. On recovering my breath and reopening my eyes, I discerned, by aid of the white bed-apparel of my

fellow passengers, a dim crowd, pressed together at the bow of the vessel, consisting of all the inhabitants of the frail tenement, excepting the steersman and myself. I rushed forward; but finding my voice insufficient to add any effect to the cry which had been set up, to give notice to the crew of the approaching vessel, I made for the side, which I saw, by the position of the group, was threatened with the expected contact; and catching at a rope ladder, placed myself on the top of the bulwarks, resolved on trying a jump as the only chance of escape in case of meeting.

There was now time to examine our situation perfectly well. I looked towards the stern, and could see that the helm was not deserted: but it was of no avail to save us from the danger; since, sailing as near the wind as we could, as far as I understood the subsequent explanation of the sailors, we could not change our direction on a sudden, otherwise than by turning a sort of right-about-face. We went on, therefore, trusting that the other crew would hear the cry, and discover our position in time. The night being extremely dark, and the sea running high, the approaching vessel was scarcely visible to us when first pointed out by the sailors; still less should I have looked forward to its threatening us with any danger: but the eye of experience

had not been deceived, and from my perch I was soon able to discover, as each passage over the summit of a wave brought the dark mass against the sky, that its approach was rapid, and directed with unerring precision, so as to cross our course at the fatal moment. She was scudding before the gale, with almost all her sails set, and consequently, on striking our ship, nothing could save us from an instantaneous foundering.

At each successive appearance the mass became larger and blacker; but the cry of our crew, in which I now joined, never ceased. At length we were only separated by the ascent of one wave, at the summit of which was balanced the huge bulk of our antagonist, while we were far below the level of her keel—but her steersman had heard the cry; for at the moment when certainly no hope of saving—at least our ship, remained to any of us, we saw the other swerve as she descended—and after approaching to within half her length of our starboard bow, she glided by at the distance of a yard from where I was standing.

I now drew a deep breath before I jumped down on to the deck; after which, beginning to perceive that I was as wet as if we had been run down, I was hastening to the cabin, when my progress was stopped by the captain, who, without perceiving

any one, was stamping up and down the centre of the vessel, and actually tearing his hair with both his hands. I paused to observe this tragic performance, which shortly gave place to an indistinct and much interrupted speech, in which, in the intervals left by all the oaths as yet invented in the French and Languedoc tongues, there could be distinguished dark threats of vengeance, addressed to the captain of the large brig, whom he was to discover without fail on his return to Marseille.

All the passengers now descended to the cabin, and having stripped and rolled myself in my cloak turned inside out, I threw myself on my couch. We were now, in spite of recent experience, provided with a fresh lighted lantern, to be produced on the next call. This we took care still to look to, although we hardly expected more than one such chance in one night.

It was past two, and we had scarcely left off discussing our narrow escape, when another rapid and significant demand for the lantern announced a second peril. On this occasion I took my time, for I had reflected on the odds, which were immense, against our being a second time so exactly in any one's way, where there was room for the whole navigation of the world to pass abreast. Nor could I suspect any of my fellow-passengers of being the

unlucky Jonas of our misfortunes; although the Moor was looked upon by some of the sailors with a suspicious eye, for not consenting to partake of a leg of chicken, if the animal had been killed and cooked by any other hand than his own, and for the mysterious formalities they accused him of observing in killing his poultry; such as turning his face in a particular direction, and requiring the blood to flow in a particular manner—on failure of which last requisite, he threw the fowl overboard. These things alarmed the sailors, but helped, on the contrary, to encourage me; as I thought the man's being possessed of a conscience and religious scruples, rather, if any thing, an additional safeguard for us.

This time, therefore, I drew on my boots and trowsers; and, wrapped in my cloak, proceeded in company with the Moor, who had taken it as leisurely as myself, to join the party on deck. They had kept the lantern in a safe position until the moment it would have the best chance of taking effect, a proper precaution, as it was likely to be so shortlived. And at the moment I arrived the order was being given to shew it ahead. A sailor took it, and before he could reach the bow of the vessel, a wave broke over him and washed his lantern fairly into the sea. Upon this the captain said not