



YOKE FELLOWS AT THE PLOUGH.

A BICYCLE TOUR IN THE LAND OF ENCHANTMENT—MADEIRA.

BY WILLIAM JAMESON REID.

(Concluded from December.)

FROM the vale of Eceari we ascended into the mountains of Quira, one of the least frequented and not often visited parts of the island. Of roads there were none, and progress awheel became a delight not unalloyed with pain, in being obliged to pick a tortuous passage through a narrow mule-path littered with countless obstructions rolled down from the mountain-sides. But the toils of the road were fully requited by the majestic panorama constantly unfolding to view. Here the rocks are still shaggy with oaks and cork-trees, interlaced with wild vines. They are broken eccentrically into white and ruddy pinnacles and scars of granite, clothed with brushwood, and so precipitous that they are forsaken even by the agile mountain goats. Myriads of birds in dazzling plumage make these fastnesses their home and beguile the lazy dawdle with unceasing melody.

The hills fell around us in startling cliffs, or in long slopes studded with great trees upon the greensward. We could count trout by hundreds in the river by our side. Hawks were in the air above our heads, and eagles above the brows of the boldest of the mountains. We lunched under the shade of a spreading fig-tree growing wild by the water-side; and oleanders in full flower grew ten and twelve feet high along the banks.

While we dozed and smoked thus during the noontide heat, a pair of ancients joined us by the cool brook. They wore sheepskins, and their greasy black hair fell low on their backs. Their faces were corrugated with wrinkles, and in their eyes was an expression of plaintive hardness, the outcome of their gentle pastoral life. This honest couple of Madeiran Strephons laid down their guns and lay along the grass with us for an hour or two, and drawing forth a

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wine-skin, shining like burnished rose-wood with the precious liquid which it contained, made us regret that moment when the promptings of necessity urged us forward.

As we were on the point of leaving, one of them remounted his mule, and acquainting us with the fact that he would lead us by the easiest route to Icarra climbed the side of the mountain by a prodigiously steep trail. Our guide was a tough old septuagenarian and a retired brigand to boot, and although he held his head high as he spoke, as if brigandage was the most distinguished of professions, the effect of this blunt statement on our nerves was somewhat trying. When he discovered that I had a taste for out-of-the-way places and unhackneyed things, he said that he would take me to a friend in the village of Icarra, and this was our easiest way thither. Although by action he gave us no reason to doubt the reformation in his character or to distrust the peaceableness of his intentions, we were right glad when the last summit had been left behind, and for miles we coasted down the gentle descent into the quaint valley below.

We found Icarra to be a miserable little village lost in a deep grove, which obscured it from view until one had been brought to everyday consciousness by stumbling into the moat lying before its walls of sun-dried brick. The native houses are dull hovels enough—all of one story, offering their backs to the public thoroughfare, the front entrance being through a stoutly walled courtyard, where the pigs, poultry and children innumerable mingle on terms of the most even-handed democracy of spirit. Among these poor huts rose other more elaborate structures painted pink and blue, erecting themselves proudly like cavaliers in a group of tattered beggars. These were the dwellings of the great men, among whom was the friend of our guide, a low-browed, sinister-looking rascal, who eyed us with evident mistrust and gazed enviously at our belongings, doubtless wishing that he was back in his brigandish days once more.

Although we had come to secure much-needed rest, the population of the village imagined that our arrival was prompted by the idea to exhibit ourselves as a traveling circus. It has been

said that the average Madeiran native is the most inquisitive person in the world; whether this be right or not, in our own case there was certainly little rest for the weary. Notwithstanding the pressing invitation of our brigand host we preferred to pass the night in the ramshackle inn, filled with yawning cracks, through which the wind played with undesirable force, to be superseded by a violent rainstorm, which exposed us to the indignity of being immersed in a domestic bog.

As this domicile was a type of those to be found in all parts of Madeira a description of it may not be amiss. The wall of the long reception room was snowy white, it being an article of domestic faith to keep it so by lavish use of whitewash, which serves the utilitarian purpose of hiding many a shortcoming. A number of spits for the roasting of lambs, larks or wild boar hung against the wall, while on a ledge running around the entire length of the abode was a row of water-jars in every gradation of size. Some cheeses lay on a wooden shelf cannily slung over the hearthstone. Five or six circular straw sieves, tufted with bits of red and yellow cloth, dangled from the rafters in imposing array. These sieves were utilized to sift the flour ground by the donkey in the corner, and as we subsequently learned such are a popular and useful wedding present in Madeira.

Save the above articles, the room was empty of movables—always, however, excepting the donkey and his machine. Nothing takes the fancy more in Madeira than the omnipresent pot-bellied little ass which, with a hood over its eyes' to protect it from giddiness, goes round and round, crushing the grain between two millstones, to which it is attached by a rotating beam of wood. The patience and diminutiveness of the creature are alike remarkable. As there is an' ass to every house it is the custom to appoint a man to look after all the "millers" of the community during their hours of relaxation. At a certain time in the day, therefore, one may see the little donkeys capering out of the houses, with many a bray of satisfaction and greeting to each other, all frolicking in a troop toward the pasture ground of the community. During playtime they are as full of spirit and antics as they are methodically in-

dustrious when harnessed to the mill. In the morning, however, the ass-herd reappears among them to recall them to their toil. Sometimes he pipes them homeward, and they trot along, kicking playfully at each other as if they liked the music. But when the village is reached, each little ass in a sobered manner steps over the threshold of its master's house, and, with tail between its legs and drooping ears, listlessly submits to its fate, like a schoolboy about to be catechized by a dame.

But to recur to our entertainer in Icarra. He was a tall, sinewy gentleman of the pastoral order, wearing, among other interesting garments, a donkey-skin vest embroidered with variegated silk. A demijohn of wine, crushed from his own grapes, was in a twinkling brought in and set on the ground between our legs, while several of the *élite* of the neighborhood gathered around, like Sioux braves at a council fire, to help us drink it, and make philosophical and erudite remarks on the potent qualities of our "witch steeds."

None of these illustrious wights could understand why a stranger, of his own free will, should come among them. "You have the whole world to choose from; and you come to Madeira!" However, they could not but take it as a compliment, and so we became very friendly over the wine; and when we parted, the ex-brigand, with the mirth of fifty clowns in his large, down-trending nose and his expansive mouth, said to me, as he held my hand between his two brown palms, "On your return, my friend, to Madeira and Icarra, I beg you to seek me in the churchyard, and there scatter a few flowers on my grave."

From Icarra our wayfaring took the form of a triumphal procession, and as we scrambled along during the day it was needful to enter sundry other houses and drink, wine. Our brigand friend, who had volunteered to see us through the journey, had a wide circle of friends, some of them queer fishes; and so there was much hob-nobbing round the fires of olive-twigs heaped in the middle of the rooms, and during the day we carried on a bureau of general occult information that would have ensured the fortune of a rising seer. The Madeirans are, indeed, unconscionable tipplers. They go nowhere without a gourd of

wine braced to their shoulders. Strangers who meet in the byways stop and drink to each other, and even the young girls who gave us "good-day" in the course of our saunterings were eager to stand a while, take a pull or two at our flasks, and discuss the quality of the vintage. The quantity of wine, our guide could consume in a day was astounding; and he never impugned the cellar of our host in the evening by retiring sober to bed.

The twilight was beginning to prevail when we coasted down a long descent of two miles into Camacha, at the imminent peril of breaking our necks and likewise those of any unfortunate persons who might be in the road. As it was, at one moment we seemed on the point of ending our terrestrial careers, when, rounding a sharp bend, we descried a donkey trotting peacefully along ahead and occupying the entire road, excepting a narrow foot-path on the right. Juan, with visions of sudden launching into eternity, hallooed with all the strenuousness of a lost spirit, but his muleship was not to be so easily discommoded. He trotted amiably along, looking neither to the right nor left, and satisfied with himself and the world in general. I was just able in the daze, caused by sundry attempts to catch breath, to see Juan shoot through the narrow path at the right; and, closing my eyes, and expecting that the next moment would find me in another sphere, I followed blindly. If ever there was a scared donkey it was that one. As we brushed by his drooping head he performed the most remarkable acrobatic feat of turning over on his back in mingled fright and astonishment, and, doubtless thinking that he had seen the skeletons of two of his departed compatriots, bolted through the woods with a celerity remarkable for one of his years and sobriety. His frightened braying echoed in our ears during the entire descent, and from the speed at which he started on his wild career he is doubtless running yet.

Our accommodation for the night in Camacha was so typical of what we met with in other places that a few words about it may be welcome. We arrived at dusk, and stumbled up the uneven streets of the village, attended by a motley following that increased at every moment. "Oh, you must not mind,"

observed our guide, when I demurred at this conspicuousness. "It is a mark of respect for us," and he held his grizzled old head high as he spoke, I do not think that the mistress of the establishment whom we requisitioned for a lodging was very happy to see us. Like our guide, her husband was a brigand, but

neglected the wildest flights of hyperbole) the light of suspicion in her eye although not quenched was visibly lowered.

One mortally annoying peculiarity of Madeira is the heartless way in which you are left to hunger until the fashionable feasting hour arrives. Though you



"WE COASTED DOWN INTO CAMACHA." (p. 377.)

unfortunately for her peace of mind he was not as yet entitled to the honor of subscribing an "ex" before his name; and although she had nothing to fear from the villagers, she was undecided as to whether in some way we were not bent on his capture. Juan, however, with the self-possession of a man of the world, took matters into his own hands; bade the lady get together what edible luxuries she could for the evening repast, and give us a good bed, and quenched her alarms by the information that her husband's roadside courtesies were nothing to us so long as they did not interfere with our own progress. The ex brigand completed the effect by deftly making her to understand that she ought to be proud to receive a distinguished traveler; for, according to his logical reasoning, how could a man who underwent fatigues for no definite object be other than *distinguished*. With this little dose of flattery (he had not

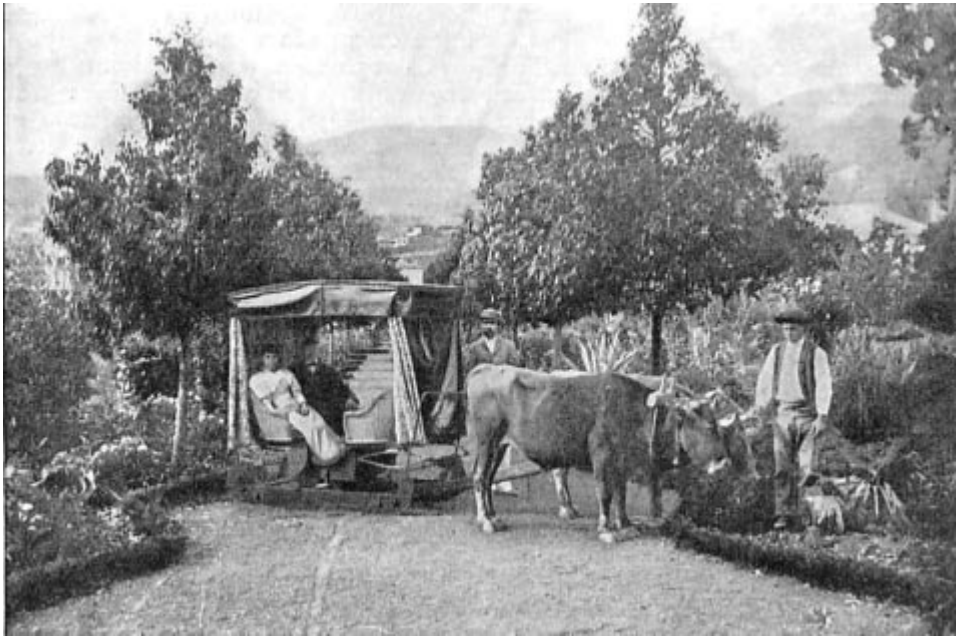
reach your host's house at two o'clock in the afternoon, there will be nothing for you to eat until nine or ten. Certainly, the wine will flow, but not every one can find comfort in wine. Here at Balao, for instance, we spent several famishing hours amidst our hostess's various babies. They, the cats, the pigs, and poultry all found amusement about the floor of the room; and the mule in the corner contributed the music of his welcome to the other hubbub. Now and then a villager would look in, mumble forth a scarcely audible "How do you do? There's nothing much the matter with me," and speed away as if fearful that further prolongation of his presence would cause him to be consumed.

But although supper was tardy in its appearance, it was a solace to famished vagabond wayfarers. We had soup of sour milk, macaroni, lamb-chops moistened with lemon juice, cold trout and

cheese; but hardly had we time to revel in these delights when the lady rose with a how, offered me the rush light that illuminated the feast, and wished us good repose. But good repose was out of the question, chiefly from the sudden home-coming of the brigand, who stepped between the sheets unwashed and tainted with an odor in which garlic predominated to an unusual degree. He was a large-limbed, dusky ogre, with only one eye and several scars across his face, and doubtless was not overjoyed at our presence. Evidently we had misjudged the friendliness of his intention; at least we were led to believe so by the affectionate disposition which he showed to cling closer than the fondest brother during the night, interspersing slumber with sundry gurglings, gruntings and snortings which would warrant the assertion that he snored abominably. Likewise he seemed the general stamping-ground for all the

Early in the morning we were up and awheel again, our route for nearly all the day wandering in and out through a narrow valley, beneath a natural arbor formed by interlacing branches of trees and clambering vines overspreading the road in an emerald dome. At every step the scene became more solemn and impressive; all was still around us, and not a sound broke the universal silence, except the soft scrudge of our wheels over the yielding moss, and now and then the voice of one of us; but the entrancement of languidly dozing along and sleeping the sleep of fantastic day-dreaming gave little encouragement to garrulity.

Rounding a sharp bend in the road during the morning, we came upon a party of shepherds gathered about a fire, and not totally ignoring the good things of life, as a fowl in process of broiling gave ample testimony. A strapping youth, of nineteen or twenty,



A SUMMER SLEIGH.

fleas in Madeira, judging by the persistency with which he maintained an involuntary scratching. Would to heaven that they had been common settled fleas and not nomads, for, scenting new pastures on our elysian persons, they entered upon a journey of exploration that was not altogether pleasant to us.

and who evidently thought himself no small personage, invited Juan to engage in a bout of wrestling. At this suggestion there was a general clapping of hands and grunts of approval, and Juan, being nothing remiss, winked confidently at me, as if to say, that he would teach these barbarians a thing or two.

The contest was of short duration, for Juan, although slighter in build, was more than a match for his adversary in skill and agility, and the whilom champion was obliged to suffer the indignity of being felled three times before the eyes of his companions. During the trying operation he received some pretty severe handling, but what was more remarkable, he never lost his temper, and, in proof that there was no hard feeling, seized the choicest morsels and temptingly offered them to us in his grimy hands.

Our experience on this night at the village of Raste was a curious contrast to that of the night before. Here our society was mostly masculine. The good man of the house was glad to the core to have us under his roof, and invited his neighbors to come and envy him his good fortune. That we should not be delinquent in courtesy, we contributed to the enjoyment of the occasion by riding round in a monotonous circle for several hours to the general mystification and edification.

The evening's celebration was rather protracted. I cannot tell how much wine we drank, but I recall the passive reproach in the faces of the women during our bacchanalian indulgence, the heavy way in which at length they rose, gave their arms to their hilarious better halves, or rather lesser halves,

and closed the revel by loudly intimated good-nights. The only drawback to the occasion was the unusual conviviality of our host, who at frequent intervals, carried away by maudlin emotion, would seize me, kiss me on both cheeks, our beards rubbing together in friendly unison, as if I had been his clearest friend just escaped from the jaws of death. While I was glad to find his friendship was so thorough I gladly, could have spared the kissing operation. It would not have been so bad had these welcomes been from rosy lips of the weaker sex, but his beard was the growth of years.

Leaving Raste we descended abruptly from the mountains again to the seashore and for hours wheeled along the soft sand, pondering unspeakable things, listening to the crooning plaint of the dancing blue waves, and showered by the fine spray tossed from the madly rushing breakers as they crashed on the beach. During the afternoon heavy banks of lowering clouds, presaging a storm of unusual violence, quickened our pace. For several hours longer we rose and fell over undulating sand-dunes, and, just as day faded into the arms of night and the first spiteful drop of rain struck on our cheeks, we toiled into Funchal, and our wayfaring through the paradise of Madeira was ended to our infinite regret.

