

# THE MEDITERRANEAN EXCURSION.

SHIP TIME—FATAL—LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT—CHARACTER OF THE ISLANDS AND THE PEOPLE.

From Our Special Correspondent.

AT SEA, June 23, 1867.

We had a pleasant ten days' run from New-York to the Azores Islands; not a fast run—for the distance is only 2,400 miles straight east—but an exceedingly pleasant one. We had balmy Summer weather, and the nights were even finer than the days. We had the phenomenon of a full moon loated just in the same spot in the heavens at the same hour every night. The reason of this singular phœnomenon on the part of the moon did not occur to me at first, but it did afterward when I reflected that we were gaining about twenty minutes every day because we were going east so fast—we gained just about enough every day to keep along with the moon—it was becoming an old moon to the friends we left behind us, but to us Joshua it stood still in the same place, and remained always the same.

Young Wm. Blucher, who is from the far West, and is on his first voyage, was a good deal bothered by the constantly changing "ship-time." He was out promptly when eight bells struck at noon, but he came to look after a while as if he were losing confidence in it. Seven days out from New-York he came to me, and said with great decision:

"Thish-yer's a swindle!"

"What's a swindle?"

"Why, this watch I bought her out in Illinois—give \$150 for her—and I thought she was good. And, by George, she is good on shore, but somehow she don't keep up her tick here on the water—gets seapack, may be. She skips, she runs along regular enough till half-past eleven, and then, all of a sudden, she lets down. I've set that old regulator up faster and faster, till I've shoved it clear around, but it don't do any good; she just cleans out every watch in the ship, and clatters along in a way that's astonishing till it is noon, but then them eight bells always gets in about ten minutes ahead of her anyway. I don't know what to do with her now. She's doing all she can—she's going her best gait, but it won't save her. I'll bet there ain't a watch in the ship that's making better time than she is, but what does it signify? When you hear them eight bells you'll find her just about ten minutes short of her score, sure." The ship was gaining a full hour every three days, and that fellow was trying to make his watch go fast enough to keep up with her. But as he had said, he had shoved the regulator up as far as it would go, and the watch was on his best gait, and so nothing was left him but to fold his hands and see the ship beat the race. I sent him to the captain, and he explained to him the mystery of "ship-time," and set his troubled mind at rest. This is the young man who asked so many questions about sea-sickness before we left, and wanted to know what its characteristics were, and how he was to tell when he had it. He found out.

We saw the usual sharks, blackfish, porpoises, &c., and large schools of Portuguese men-of-war were added to the regular list of sea-wonders. Some of them were white and some of a brilliant carmine color. The nautilus is nothing but a transparent web of jelly, that spreads itself to catch the wind, and has fleshy-looking strings a foot or two long dangling from it to keep it steady in the water. The nautilus is an accomplished sailor, and has good sailor judgment. It reefs its sail when a storm threatens or the wind blows pretty strong, and furls it entirely and goes down when a gale blows. Ordinarily it keeps its sail wet and in good sailing order by turning over and dipping it in the water for a moment. Scamen say the nautilus is only found in these waters between the 35th and 45th parallels of latitude, and one of them told Blucher that when the rare pink or carmine ones showed themselves to a ship when she was on the 40th parallel that ship was doomed to disaster, and would go down in some far ocean solitude and never be heard of more. The fact that we were just on the 40th parallel gave the story a vital interest for Blucher, and made him unhappy till the new wonder of a flying fish that darted on board and was captured drew his mind from it.

At 3 o'clock on the morning of the 10th of June, we were awakened and notified that the Azores Islands were in sight. I had only been in bed an hour and a half, and did not take any interest in the islands. But another persecutor came, and then another and another, and finally, believing that the general enthusiasm would permit no one to slumber in peace, I got up and went sleepily on deck. It was 4 o'clock, and a raw, blustering morning. The passengers were huddled about the smoke-stacks and fortified behind ventilators, and all were wrapped in wintry costumes, and looking sleepy and unhappy in the pitiless gale and the drenching spray. The island in sight was Flores. It seemed only a mountain of mud standing up out of the dull mists of the sea. But as we bore down upon it, the sun came out and made it a beautiful picture. It was a mass of green farms and meadows that swelled up to a height of 1,500 feet, and mingled its upper outlines with the clouds. It was ribbed with sharp, steep ridges, and cleft with narrow canyons, and here and there on the high, rocky uplands stepped themselves into mimic battlements and castles, and out of ridged domes came broad shafts of sunlight, that painted summit, and slope, and glen with bands of fire, and left belts of somber shade between. The aurora borealis of the frozen hale exiled to a Summer land. We skirted around two-thirds of the island, four miles from shore, and all the opera-glasses in the ship were called into requisition to settle disputes as to whether mossy spots on the uplands were groves of trees or groves of weeds, or whether the white villages down by the sea were really villages, or only the clustering tombstones of cemeteries. Finally, we stood to sea and bore away for San Miguel, and Flores shortly became a dome of mud again, and sank down among the bushes and disappeared. But to many a sea-sick passenger it was appreciated. See the green hills, and all were more cheerful after this episode than anybody could have expected them to be, considering how awfully early they had gotten up.

But we had to change our notions about San Miguel, for a storm came up, toward noon, that so pitched and tossed the vessel that common sense dictated a run for shelter. Therefore we steered for the nearest island of the group—Fayal (the people there pronounce it Fy-all, and put the accent on the first syllable). We anchored in the open roadstead of Horta, half a mile from the shore. The town has 8,000 to 10,000 inhabitants. Its snow-white houses nestle cozily in a sea of fresh green vegetation, and no village could look prettier or more attractive. It sits in the lap of an amphitheater of hills which are from 200 to 700 feet high, and carefully cultivated clear to their summits are a cut of soil left idle. Every farm and every acre is cut up into little square inclosures by stone walls, whose duty it is to protect the growing products from the destructive gales that blow there. These hundreds of green squares, marked by their black lava walls, make the hills look like vast checker-boards.

The islands belong to Portugal, and everything in Fayal has Portuguese characteristics about it. But more of that anon. A swarm of swarthy, noisy, fying, shoukier-shrugging, gesticulating Portuguese boatmen, with brass rings in their ears, and fraud in their hearts, climbed the ship's sides, and various parties of us contracted with them to take us ashore at 25 cents a head—silver coin of any country. We landed under the walls of a little fort, armed with batteries of 12 and 32 pounders, which Horta considers a most formidable institution; but if we were ever to get after it with one of our torreted monitors they would have to move it out in the country if they wanted it where they could go and find it again when they needed it. The group on the pier was a rusty bunch—men and women, and boys and girls, all ragged, and bare-footed, and uncombed, and dirty, and by instinct, education, and profession, beggars. They trooped after us, and never more, while we tarried in Fayal, did we get rid of them. We walked up the middle of the principal street, and these vermin surrounded us on all sides, and glared upon us; and every moment excited couples shot ahead of the gang to get a good look back, just as village boys do when they accompany the elephant on his advertising trip from street to street. It was very flattering for me to be part of the material for such a sensation. Presently an old woman, with a fashionable Portuguese hood on, approached me. This hood is of thick blue cloth, stretched to a cloak of the same stuff, and is a marvel of ugliness. It stands up high, and spreads far abroad, and is unfathomably deep. It fits like a greus tent, and a woman's head is hidden away in it like the man's who prompts the singers from his tin-bled in the stage of an opera. There is no particle of trimming about this monstrous capote, as they call it—it is just a plain, ugly, dead-blue mass of sail, and a woman can't go within eight paces of the wind with one of them on; she has got to go before the wind or not at all. The general style of the capote is the same in all the islands, and will remain so for the next 10,000 years, but each island shapes its capotes just enough differently from the others to enable an observer to tell at a glance what particular island a lady hails from. Well, as we came along we overhauled a bent, wrinkled, and suspiciously homely old hag, with her capote standing high aloft. She was becalmed. Or rather, she was lying-to, around a corner, waiting for the wind to change. When she saw me she drifted out and held out her hand. Such friendliness in a strange land touched me, and I seized it. I shook it cordially, and said:

"Madame, I do not know your name, but this act has graven your—your—peculiar features upon my heart, and there they shall remain while that heart continues to throb."

She drew her hand away and said something which I could not understand, and then kissed her palm to me and curtsied. I blushed and said:

"Madame, these attentions cannot but be flattering to me, but it must not be—ah, it cannot be—I am another's?" (I had to lie a little, because I was getting into a close place.)

She kissed her hand again and murmured sweet words of affection, but I was firm. I said:

"Away, woman—tempt me not! Your seductive blandishments are wasted upon one whose heart is far hence in the bright land of America. The jewel is gone—you behold here naught save the empty casket and empty if shall remain till grim

necessity drives me to fill the aching void with vile flesh, and drink, and cabbage. Avaunt, temptress!"

But she would not abate. She kissed her hand repeatedly and curtsied over and over again. I reasoned within myself, This unhappy woman loves me: I cannot reciprocate; I cannot love a foreigner; I cannot love a foreigner as homely as she is—if I could, I would dig her out of that capote and take her to my sheltering arms. I cannot love her, but this wildly beautiful affection she has conceived for me must not go unrewarded—it shall not go unrewarded. And so I said, "I will tend to her my poetical paraphrase of the Declaration of Independence."

But all the crowd said, "No—shame, shame, shame!—the poor old woman hasn't done anything!"

And they gave the old hag some Portuguese pennies like shuffle-board blocks, and hustled her away, averting that she was begging, and not making love, and thus, by the well-meaning stupidity of my comrades I was prevented from implanting a sweet memory in the soul of one who may now go down to the grave with no sacred thing upon the altar of her heart but the ashes of a hopeless passion—and yet a stanza or two would have made her so happy!

Speaking of those prodigious Portuguese pennies reminds me that it takes 1,000 reis (pronounced rays), to make a dollar, and that all financial estimates are made out in reis. We did not know this until after we had found it out, and we found it out through Blucher. Blucher said he was so happy and so grateful to be on solid land once more, that he wanted to give a feast—said he had heard it was a cheap land, and he was bound to have a grand banquet. He invited nine of us, and we ate an excellent dinner at the principal hotel. In the midst of the jollity produced by good cigars, good wine, and passable anecdotes, the landlord presented his bill. Blucher glanced at it and his countenance fell. He took another look to assure himself that his senses had not deceived him, and then read the items aloud, in a faltering voice, while the roses in his cheek turned to ashes:

"Ten dinners, at 600 reis, 6,000 reis!" Ruin and desolation!"

"Twenty-five cigars at 100 reis, 2,500 reis!" Oh, my sainted mother!

"Eleven bottles of wine at 1,200 reis, 13,200 reis." He with us all! "Total, 21,700 reis!" Great Caesar's ghost, there ain't money enough in the ship to pay that bill! Go—leave me to my misery, boys, I'm a ruined community." I think it was the blamkest looking party I ever saw. Nobody could say a word. It was as if every soul had suddenly been stricken dumb. Wine-glasses descended slowly to the table, their contents unfasted. Cigars dropped unnoted from nerveless fingers. Each man sought his neighbor's eye, but found in it no ray of hope, no encouragement. At last the fearful silence was broken. The shadow of a desperate resolve settled down upon Blucher's countenance like a cloud, and he rose up and said: "Landlord, this is a wretched, mean swindle, and I'll never, never stand it. Here's \$100, Sir, and it's all you'll get—I'll swim in blood, Sir, before I'll pay a cent more!"

Our spirits rose and the landlord's fell—at least we thought so: he was confused at any rate, notwithstanding he had not understood a word that had been said. He glanced from the little pile of gold pieces to Blucher several times, and then went out. He must have visited an American, for when he returned, he brought back his bill translated into a language that a Christian could understand—thus:

10 dinners, 6,000 reis, or.....	\$6 00
25 cigars, 2,500 reis, or.....	2 30
11 bottles wine, 13,200 reis, or.....	13 20
Total, 21,700 reis, or.....	\$21 70

Happiness reigned once more in Blucher's dinner party. More refreshments were ordered.

I think the Azores must be very little known in America. Out of our whole ship's company there was not a solitary individual who knew anything whatever about them. Some of the party, well read concerning most other lands, had no other information about the Azores than that they were a group of nine or ten small islands far out in the Atlantic, something more than half-way between New-York and Gibraltar. That was all. These considerations move me to put in a paragraph of dry facts, just here, which I might not venture to if I were writing about worn-out and written-out Europe.

The community is eminently Portuguese—that is to say, it is slow, poor, shiftless, sleepy and lazy. There is a civil government appointed by the King of Portugal, and a military governor, who can assume supreme control and suspend the civil government at his pleasure. The islands contain a population of about 300,000, almost entirely Portuguese. Everything is staid and settled, for the country was 100 years old when Columbus discovered America. The principal crop is corn, and they raise it and grind it just as their great-great-grandfathers did. They plow with a board slightly shod with iron; their friding little harrows are drawn by men and women; small wind-mills grind the corn, ten bushels a day, and there is one assistant superintendent to stand by the mill and a general superintendent to stand by and keep him from going to sleep. When the wind changes they hitch on some donkeys, and actually turn around the whole upper half of the mill till the sails are in proper position, instead of fixing the concern so that the sails could be moved instead of the mill. Oxen tread the wheat from the ear, after the fashion prevalent in the time of Methuselah. There is not a wheelbarrow in the land—they carry everything on their heads, or on donkeys, or in wicker-bodied carts, whose wheels are solid blocks of wood and whose axles turn with the wheel. There is not a modern plow in the islands, or a threshing machine. All attempts to introduce them have failed. The good Catholic Portuguese crossed himself and prayed God to shield him from all blasphemous desire to know more than his father did before him. The climate is mild; they never have snow or ice, and I saw no chimneys in the town. The donkeys and the men, women and children of a family, all eat and sleep in the same room, and are unclean, are ravaged by vermin, and are truly happy. The people lie, and cheat the stranger, and are desperately ignorant, and have hardly any reverence for their dead. That latter trait shows how little better they are than the donkeys they eat and sleep. The only well-dressed Portuguese in the camp are the three or four well-to-do families, the Jesuit priests and the soldiers of the little garrison. The wages of a laborer are 20 to 24 cents a day, and those of a good mechanic about twice as much. They count it in reis at a thousand to the dollar, and thus makes them rich and contented. Fine grapes used to grow in the islands, and an excellent wine was made and exported. But a disease killed all the vines 15 years ago, and since that time no wine has been made. The islands being wholly of volcanic origin, the soil is necessarily very rich. Nearly every foot of ground is under cultivation, and two or three crops a year of each article are produced, but nothing is exported save a few oranges—chiefly to England.

The mountains on some of the islands are very high. We sailed along the shore of the island of Pico, under a stately green pyramid that rose up with one unbroken sweep from our very feet to an altitude of 7,632 feet, and thrust its summit above the white clouds like an island adrift in a fog!

We got plenty of fresh oranges, lemons, figs, apricots, &c., in these Azores, of course. But I will desist. I am not here to write Patent-Office reports.

We are on our way to Gibraltar, and will reach there five or six days out from the Azores.

MARK TWAIN.