

from the tracks of Mr. Cook and his tourists, with their green ticket-books and coupons, if I started for the Dolomites at once.

We were a party of three—the best of numbers, to my thinking, where men travel together. If you are two, your tastes must be ideally twin, or you will assuredly before long fall different ways. If you are four, you are sure to break up into pairs. But three are just enough to fill a carriage, to finish a couple of bottles of wine, to divide the linguistic difficulties of the Continent; and whenever, as will happen in the best-regulated parties, two differ, the third man is always available to give a casting vote, or at least to serve the useful office of a medium through which the opposing spirits may communicate and be reconciled.

I have heard it set down among the brag-worthy advantages of London that one may start from it for anywhere. It is equally true that one may start from anywhere for the Dolomites; but they lie at a goodish distance, as Old-World distances go, from the nearest English-speaking country, which is England. To localize the district roughly, draw an imaginary line south from Salzburg on the Tyrol to Venice, and halfway down the line you strike the Dolomites. And here, before going farther, it may be as well to mention, and have done with it (strictly for the benefit of my spinster aunt and my Cambridge brother, and any stray individual whose education or atlas may chance to be defective on the subject), that the Dolomites are a quite unique bunch of mountains, covering a square of fifty miles or thereabouts, incredibly gaunt and weird in shape, extraordinary in their colouring, interestingly dubious and contestable as to their geological formation, and named after a certain scientific Frenchman, M. Dolomieu, who, some seventy years ago, when the globe contained more unvisited nooks and corners than it does now-

a-days, visited the district and first called attention to its geological peculiarities.

At Cortina d'Ampezzo you are still in Austria—the Italian frontier crosses the road half a dozen miles farther down—but the prevailing *patois* is already more flavoured with Italian than German elements, though certainly some of the natives do contrive to mix the two languages in their talk most impartially. At that dear, pleasant little hostelry, the Stella d'Oro, everything is sheer Italian, from the hostesses, the sisters Barbaria, to the little chamber-help; so we must throw off one language and put on another as best we may. No use at all being shy about it where you want beds and food and drink from people who simply don't know any lingo but their own; and indeed, given a very morsel of antecedent grammar knowledge and a pocket dictionary, the tongue soon runs along glibly enough in the strictly necessary and useful ruts of conversation.

While the cloth is being laid for dinner on the second-floor landing, the place of honour in many a Dolomite hamlet, there is time enough for a stroll up the village street, lazily wondering where the money came from to build this massive new *campanile* (a younger brother of the famous one in St. Mark's Piazza) that towers high above the church, and stopping to admire the spirited wall-paintings with which Ghedina, the Venetian painter, has frescoed the outside of his landlord-father's Aquila Vera. '*Il pranzo, signori—é pronto.*' Our Signora Barbaria (each sister takes one entire floor of the house under her exclusive charge) is on the lookout for us, anxious and bustling, at the door; and in two minutes, on that second-floor landing just outside our bedrooms, we are attacking a plentiful tureen of *minestrata* (a watery gray soup containing an ample deposit of rice, which C— irreverently christens 'pudding'), to which succeed in due course a pile of