

**AN EASTER HOLIDAY IN LIGURIA:
WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE
GARDEN OF THE PALAZZO
ORENGO AT MORTOLA**

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An Easter holiday in Liguria: with an account of the garden of the Palazzo Orengo at Mortola by Flückiger

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FLÜCKIGER

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AN

EASTER HOLIDAY IN LIGURIA.*

BY PROFESSOR FLÜCKIGER, UNIVERSITY OF STRASSBURG.

THE strip of land that extends round the Gulf of Genoa from Spezzia to Nice, is rightly called simply "The Shore" (*Riviera*). Where else is there such a diversified abundance of landscape beauty poured out? Perhaps the double gulf of Naples and Salerno outvies the Riviera in grandeur, but not in loveliness of form of mountain and coast, or in the variety and fulness of its flora. Not till four degrees further south does the plant-world again find itself under equally favourable conditions for the unfolding of the southern character that so much attracts the Northerner, and doubly charms him if privileged to shelter himself upon that sunny coast from the wild storms of winter.

By the end of March, or beginning of April, the umbrageous westerly and south-westerly portions of the Lombardy plains are already rejoicing in a fresh if not a varied green, whence in a very short time the sea may be reached by the Turin and Savona road. The Ligurian Alps are still covered with snow, and from ravines and valleys turbid streams rush southward, and, conducted through widely ramified artificial channels, "Béai" or "canali," fill numberless reservoirs, "peschiere" or "pille," from which in summer time the olive and lemon gardens are refreshed. The snow covering becomes thinner and thinner; the bare chestnuts and miserable pines are replaced by olive thickets and the glossy

* Translated from *Buchner's Repertorium für Pharmacie*, vol. xxv. (München, 1876), pp. 449-505, with additional notes of the author. I have to thank Messrs. Winter and Rüttschi, the owners of a well-known flourishing Stabilimento d'orticoltura at Bordighera, for many competent contributions to this paper.

foliage of the *agrumi*, where fragrant lemons, mandarins, and oranges make their appearance in thousands. Savona is more than superficially connected with these, for a burgher of that pleasant city, Giorgio Gallesio, cannot remain unmentioned when speaking of our botanical knowledge of those noble economic plants, since he contributed to it a still valuable book, "Traité du Citrus" (Paris, 1811); besides his splendid "Pomona Italiana" (Pisa, 1817-1834). Gallesio rightly traced back their numerous cultured varieties to the few principal species of *Citrus*; for instance, in his opinion the bergamot is a hybrid between the orange and the lemon. According to him, also, lemons and citrons were cultivated in Savona in the middle of the fifteenth century. Belgrano ("Vita privata dei Genovesi, Genova" 1875, p. 158) however alludes to the planting of twelve "citroniorum," A.D. 1369, in the garden of a palace at Genoa. And as to Sicily, *agrumi* were no doubt introduced there at a much earlier period by the Arabs. Aranci and cedri are mentioned as growing in the tenth century near Palermo ("Amari, Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia" ii., 1858, p. 445; iii. 787). And Vincentius Bellovacensis, a Dominican monk of Beauvais in the French Département de l'Oise, in the middle of the thirteenth century, points out, in his "Speculum naturæ," that the juice of "limonum vel pomorum citrinorum," termed "melangoli vel arangii," is a good solvent for many substances; no doubt in allusion to the citric acid it contains.

Charming as is the country of Savona, the beauty of the coastline and the mountains westward increases considerably. The stages between San Remo and Bordighera to Nice may be described as the most magnificent portion of the whole Riviera; and if one single point is to be preferred, it is the district of Monaco. But it would be a fastidious undertaking to attempt to separate the most beautiful from the perfectly lovely. In respect to climate, however, a sharp boundary can be drawn. The mildest portion is the strip between Ventimiglia and Beaulieu, or Villafranca, in which, near Monaco and Mentone, landscape beauty and softness attain their most complete expression. Only rarely are a few snow-flakes seen at Mentone, and the number of days on

which rain falls (not rainy days) is about sixty; but at Nice it is at least eighty. These figures illustrate clearly the considerable difference between Mentone and Nice. At Nice the sheltering mountains recede, the background is more open, and the outlook extends to the lofty summits of the Maritime Alps; the district is therefore more accessible to wind and weather.

Between Ventimiglia and Villafranca the country is level only where the rivers have broken their banks and left deposits of detritus. The mountains consist of hard Jurassic limestone, soft marly deposits, and much distorted strata of crumbling nummulitic limestone, presenting a sufficiently large surface to the action of water to form excavations, which sometimes recall—as in the Val di Latta—the famous “Karrenfelder” of the Alps, and impart to the coast a wild craggy formation. The principal action of the water probably occurred far back in pre-historic times, and it stands out in striking contrast to the present poverty of water in the district.

As in many southern lands, so also in the Riviera, the heights put off their forest adornments for the longest time; only isolated patches of pine, consisting mostly of weakly trees, are to be seen on the upper mountain slopes. Somewhat denser and more stately clumps here and there adorn the shady sides of the more craggy valleys, which are not suited to cultivation. The magnificent *Pinus Pinea*, L., is absent from the western half of the coast, the Riviera di Ponente; on the eastern half, the Riviera di Levante, as at Sestri, beautiful groups of this species occur; but not until considerably farther south, as at Viareggio, near Pisa, is there an opportunity of admiring its full effect as a forest tree. By far the most prevailing conifer in the Riviera is the *Pinus halepensis*, Mill., much less picturesque than the mighty *Pinus Pinea*, though always affording a beautiful prospect, from the light green of its soft, thin, outspreading tufts of leaves. *Pinus halepensis* is greatly injured by the people of this country, inasmuch as they frequently deprive it of its leaves in order to use them instead of straw in their stables. Even the smallest trees bear comparatively numerous cones, which are at first very slender and acutely conical, but after the falling out of the seed,

through shrinking, come to look shortened and rounded, and remain on the weather-beaten trees. They are always sharply recurved, the scales broad and not pointed. This maritime pine is distinguished from other species by its less rigid growth; the stems and branches often assume the most fantastic contortions from the direction given to the south-west wind by rocky angles exposed to it. *Pinus Pinaster*, Solander, generally known under the name of *Pinus maritima*, Poiret, occurring more isolated in the Riviera di Ponente, is of more regular growth and rigid appearance, to which the stiff divergent leaves, three millimetres thick and twenty-five centimetres long, especially contribute. In no part of the country do these conifera occur in such number or of such size as to favour their use in the production of resin or turpentine.

The northern juniper is in these sunny climes replaced by the far more handsome *Juniperus Oxycedrus*, L. Its somewhat broader and shorter leaves do not differ very much from those of the *Juniperus communis*, but from the greater prominence of the white bands on the under side they produce a different impression. Moreover, the much more plentifully developed ramifications of this tree do not tend upwards, but form dense rounded tops of vigorous appearance; consequently it differs essentially from the compact pyramidal growth of the *Juniperus communis*, as shown most exquisitely by this tree in Norway (see Schübeler, *Pflanzenwelt Norwegens*, Christiania, 1875, pp. 143, 145). The berries of *J. Oxycedrus* attain a size of seventeen millimetres by fifteen millimetres, but are sometimes much smaller; they are red-brown when ripe, and usually proceed from three carpels, like those of *J. communis*. Göppert, in 1871, has described a variety of the latter as *J. duplicata*, in which two whorls of three leaves grow adherent to the fruit. This condition occurs frequently in the cones of *J. Oxycedrus*, and the grey-blue hoary sutures of the carpels contrast strongly with the brown epidermis. The fruit encloses only three seeds, which, as in *J. communis*, are provided on the sides and back with hollow resin vessels. Opinions may differ as to the delicacy of the smell, but it is undeniable that this southern conifer is much

less aromatic than its northern relative. The epicarp is also tougher, and the light yellow fleshy portion of the fruit is drier and coarsely fibrous. The undoubtedly smaller proportion of essential oil present in the berries of *J. Oxycedrus* allows their sweetness to become more manifest, although they may contain less sugar. The contents of the resin ducts are nearly solid and tasteless, and consist just as little as in *J. communis* of volatile oil. The reply to an oft-repeated inquiry whether the juniper or its berries were in any way used in this district, was always positively negative. Although the Pharmacopœa Germanica derives its oleum juniperi empyreumaticum (oil of cade) from the wood of *Juniperus Oxycedrus*, it cannot, at any rate, be drawn from the Riviera, and it is probable that it is not prepared commonly anywhere else.

The mastic tree (*Pistacia Lentiscus*, L.) in this district no longer merits the name of tree, since it forms as a mere bush the chief constituent of the underwood, and its glossy evergreen leaves cling to the dryest rocks. One exception is the magnificent mastic tree of the Villa Giribaldi, in Bordighera, probably one of the largest specimens at present in existence; for throughout the Mediterranean region the scarcity of fuel has pressed hardly upon this tree. The mastic tree in the above garden stands upon a rather elevated spot; the ground is heaped up round about the stem, so that only the strong boughs, bare underneath, are visible; these are much branched, and form a beautiful leafy shade, about ten metres in diameter. The smooth branches are prettily bent, and form an elegant tuft, adorned, even on the 8th of April, with racemes of male flowers. From the slow growth of this species an age of many decades (or, as thought by competent men, even several centuries), may be ascribed to the Bordighera tree. Even the owner was not exactly informed upon the subject, but is well aware of the interest attached to his remarkable tree. In Chios, which island is famed for mastic resin, many of these trees were killed in 1850 by frost; the tree at Bordighera, although standing in a position by no means particularly sheltered, remained uninjured, which is a striking illustration of the mildness of this strip of coast.

A very usual companion of the mastic bush is the myrtle (*Myrtus communis*, L.), the ornamental flowers of which do not appear until late in summer. At present the plant has not a specially cheerful look, as it only bears a few shrivelled berries, and the evergreen leaves present no fresh colour at the commencement of April. A somewhat less massive but not quite dissimilar form of bush appears in the slender *Daphne Gnidium*, L., the flowering time of which is already past. Its bark is used in Italy and France, like that of *Daphne Mezereum* in the North. Both plants are distinguished, amongst other characteristics, by a very remarkable growth. *D. Gnidium* occurs frequently with a stem more than a metre long; at the end only of which are a number of nearly whorled compressed branchlets; the leathery leaves are arranged at wide intervals nearly all over the stem. *Gnidium* bark is therefore easily recognized by the arrangement of its leaf scars, and moreover it is never so broad as *Mezereum* bark, since the stems seldom exceed a centimetre in diameter, which in the knotty *Daphne Mezereum* is frequently the case.

Bucus sempervirens, L., is entirely absent from the coast, but grows beautifully in the cool well-watered valleys. Thorns and prickles prosper in this country better than in the north. In this respect the *Smilax aspera*, L., is guarded in a prominent manner, and is of unparalleled importunity, being a disagreeable weed throughout all the Mediterranean. On the rocks it forms, in conjunction with the procumbent *Asparagus acutifolius*, with its prickly leaves and stems, a dangerous thicket, but an *Oxycedrus juniper* ensnared and overgrown by *Smilax* is unapproachable. It costs considerable trouble to obtain for the herbarium good specimens in which the tough tendrils, the elegant drooping bunches of red-black insipid berries, and the many-shaped leaves can be shown uninjured. More difficult still is it to obtain the root-stock, which does not resemble sarsaparilla. The part above ground, however, does so very much, recalling the *Smilax officinalis*, as it may be seen at Kew, and giving a very good idea of the appearance of the sarsaparilla plants. Of course the leaves of *S. aspera* are much smaller; but in good soil and rather moist

spots they attain a diameter of ten centimetres, and a length of twelve centimetres, and might very well then be compared with the leaves of the said South American species, the obtusely cordate outline of which they completely share. *Smilax aspera* possesses a tolerably elongated woody root-stock, devoid of roots corresponding with the officinal *Radix Sarsaparillæ*. It has not been demonstrated whether these root-stocks contain the same frothing substance (parillin, smilacin) as is present in sarsaparilla. A decoction of them is used in skin diseases by the people of Malta. "*Radix Sarsaparillæ, Smilacis asperæ Peruvianæ,*" which occurs in the German medicine tariffs of the seventeenth century, as, for instance, in that of Nordhausen (1657), shows that already this similarity had been noticed. It is more remarkable perhaps to find in a Nuremberg tariff of 1652, "*Baccæ Smilacis asperæ.*" This plant, in respect to the number and form of its leaves, stalks and runners, shows as many variations as our blackberry, and would be favourable to the setting-up of a good number of species or varieties. The variety *mauritanica* has been distinguished as being devoid of prickles.

Smilax forms the most formidable bulwark of thornbush when it is combined with *Calycotome spinosa*, Link (or *Cytisus spinosus*, Lamk., *Spartium spinosum*, L.), and *Sp. junceum*. The golden blossoms of these two even now adorn the uncultivated slopes and crags, just as in England and South Germany they are covered at Easter by the nearly allied Broom, *Sarothamnus scoparius*, Koch. (*S. vulgaris*, Wimmer). The representative of the elastic pliable stems of the latter are in the *Spartium spinosum* shorter and more woody, and hence more offensively rigid.

Beautiful as are the above-mentioned Papilionaceæ, and some other bushes of the same family that also make their appearance at this time, they are far excelled by the perhaps less plentiful *Euphorbia dendroides*, L., an indescribably elegant bush when in full bloom. All the northern euphorbias, even the *Euphorbia palustris*, have only a simple herbaceous stalk; but the stem of this species, which at the base is some centimetres thick, is quite woody, and rises in most elegant three-forked branches to a most