



CHAPTER XIV

THE CASTLE IN THE AIR

OUR expedition was soon arranged. Mrs. St. John and her eldest boy would ride. I was offered a mule, but I greatly preferred to walk. In a quarter of an hour we were all of us setting out, the boy on a white donkey, his mother on a white horse. We scrambled through a breach in a wall from the yard behind the house, up a shoulder of hill, which at first was rough with brushwood, but which higher up was under some rude cultivation. Beyond this was a table-land, also cultivated; then a thicket of gorse; then a dip in the ground, ribbed with curving furrows and crowned with a further thicket. The same alternation went on repeating itself of rocky, bush-grown ridges and rudely-cultivated hollows; but all the while we were, on the whole, ascending. At last there opened before us a great gash in the mountains, which showed us the sea and the coast-line far below, and made us feel that already we had climbed high into cloud-land. Our real climbing,