ITALY REVISITED

CHARLES GRAVES

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Siena: Waiting for the "Off" of the Palio
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by

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CHAPTER I

PRELUDE TO ITALY

THERE are, of course, several ways of going to Italy from Great Britain —by train, boat and train; by motor car, ferry and motor car; by aeroplane; by sea all the way to Genoa or Naples; or as we did by Golden Arrow and motor car.

The journey to Paris from London was as gay as ever, with that anticipatory relish over taking eight hours to do what the aeroplane can achieve in less than two. The Channel crossing was flat and blue. The French porters invaded the *Invicta* almost before she had docked at Calais. The lunch on the train, with the waiters scrawling pencil marks on the table-cloths, was better than ever.

At the Ritz we stayed in suite L, up the stairs on the right-hand side from the Place Vendome entrance. In all my visits to Paris (and to the Ritz) I had never walked up that particular flight of stairs before. That night we dined as usual at the Belle Aurore to remind ourselves of how hors-d'œuvres can really be presented. In fact, we were disappointed.

Next day we lunched admirably at a private house in the Rue des Douaniers, a street so little known that even our sixty-year-old taxi-cab driver had never been there before. In the afternoon I played golf at St. Cloud. At night we attended a gala at Maxim's where our party could scarcely have been more exotic. It included a Hollywood film star, the wife of an ambassador, a General in the Foreign Legion, his aide-de-camp and a beautiful Resistance girl. The men were given false moustaches, tall hats and souvenir bottles of real cognac. The women were presented with large-sized bottles of perfume and delightful nineteenth-century bonnets. We were all handed paper pellets to throw at one another—if we had the energy to do so after a nine-course dinner. The cabaret consisted of lovely ladies of today dressed up as the lovely ladies of fifty years ago—Louise Balthy, Liane de Lancy, Eve Lavalliere, Cleo de Merode, La Belle Otero, and Liane de Pougy. The party continued until all hours of the morning, the best gala I have ever attended and a fitting introduction to the continuous gaiety and good food which we were to experience for the next few weeks.

True, there was a drizzle of rain as we drove off at eleven o'clock next morning in our brand new Citroen and in the Rue de Rivoli we nearly collided with a flashy American motor car which bore on its bonnet the astonishing slogan 'To Harold's Camp or Bust.'

But we soon found ourselves on the leafy Seine Embankment with the bookstalls covered because of the rain and drove past Pont Marie and out through the Porte Charenton. A fine straight road lay ahead,

but at Boissy St. Leger we stopped for a visit to the Chateau de Gros Bois given by Napoleon to Marshal Berthier afterwards created Prince de Wagram. The Chateau is only open to the public on Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays between two and six p.m., but as Baedeker would say, it is well worth a visit, particularly if the visitor is shown round by the owner or his wife. Though originally built in the sixteenth century, the Chateau has twenty bathrooms and used to have one hundred gardeners. The reason for the superfluity of employees on the estate was due to the late chatelaine's phobia for seeing leaves on the ground. Every leaf, even in autumn, had to be picked up, one at a time. The Chateau has many fine Napoleonic relics, including one of the last portraits of Napoleon painted during the Hundred Days in which he looks very pale and strained. The castle is full of ancient swords, dirks, arrows, sabres and muzzle-loaders, as well as pictures of famous battles such as Fontenoy, Lodi, d'Eylau, the Pyramids, Marengo, Wagram and Austerlitz—which is said to have been Napoleon's favourite battle.

After a stirrup-cup of champagne we drove off to Provins, still thinking about the dramatic moment in 1944 when the princely owner of the Chateau was informed by a heel-clinking German officer that the Germans were leaving that night and that His Highness could return to his own property from the dingy little auberge where he was living with his wife.

We were following Route 19, instead of the more usual Route 6 or 7, by way of Guignes and its goats, Mormant and its big farms and Maison Rouge, which is a most proper small town in spite of its name. At Provins, where our chauffeur only just succeeded in avoiding a little girl who ran right across the road in pursuit of an india-rubber ball, we stopped for lunch at the Croix d'Or with its oak-beamed ceilings and fleur-de-lys wallpaper. The steak was so tender that it could literally be cut with a fork. Preceded by an omelette with mushroom and washed down by a vin rosé, it provided a very adequate meal.

Afterwards in quick succession came Sourdun, Le Meriot and Nugent-sur-Seine, where we saw a couple of farm tractors—a far too uncommon sight in an agricultural country like France. At Romilly the hangars of the local aerodrome were still blitzed. All round were fields of yellow mustard. And so we passed through Troyes, St. Julien, La Vacherie, Fougeres and Bar-sur-Seine with pretty hills in all directions. We had intended to take a look at the Hotel de la Seine in Polisot where the rich people of Burgundy go for their week-ends. Instead we found ourselves at Neuville-sur-Seine, though the Seine itself is by now only the width of a trout stream. A series of villages all hyphenated with the phrase 'sur-Seine' were duly passed with gypsy caravans and an occasional crucifix, followed by a notice informing passers-by that the actual source of the river was only two kilometres away. . . .

Not long afterwards we found ourselves in the shady city of Dijon where we went to the Hotel Cloche and made the first contact with that modern phenomenon, the cult of the motor coach. Before the war the Hotel Cloche was a dignified old inn which specialized in the personal comforts of travellers. Today the restaurant is full of concealed neon lighting and the bedrooms full of motor-coach parties. Times have changed and many a fine old hostelry in France (and as we learned later, in Italy) has been compelled to make a vital choice. Will it throw its hospitable doors open to the cut-rate travellers in large numbers or will it remain individual? The management of the Cloche (and one cannot blame it) has decided on quantity rather than quality in its clientele.

Dijon remains a splendid old county town, indeed the capital of Burgundy. The Hotel de Ville is most impressive. Here we watched eight young French couples being married by a bearded official. It was quite a touching scene particularly when one white-faced bride readjusted her husband's wedding-ring on the staircase just outside. In the courtyard any amount of martial music was proceeding from the band of the Paris Meat Market porters who were touring France.

Dijon has a series of museums—one of them known as the Museum Rude. Its name is taken, however, from its founder and has nothing to do with its character. In the course of a tour of the city and its monuments, we inspected the tomb of John the Fearless and Margaret of Bavaria, adorned by angels with golden wings; the tomb of the hook-nosed Philip the Rash and paintings by a number of the Primitives—Italian, Flemish, Spanish, German, Swiss and French.

Most English people who find themselves in Dijon are on their way to somewhere else. We were no exception. At the same time we stayed long enough to walk through the delightful Street of the Forges—the really old part of Dijon—took photographs of the House with the Three Faces, sampled the local mustard and gingerbread and bought a couple of the local briar pipes.

But, after all, it was Italy at which we were aiming and next day we drove off along N.5 past Neuilly and Genlis into Auxonne over the river Saone. Logs were seasoning by the roadside and we caught our first glimpse since Paris of a patch of blue sky. Our next stop was Dôle where the canal links the Rhine with the Rhone. By now the weather had become Irish in its contrariness. One minute the sun was shining, the next there was a storm. But the peasants seemed to have no protection against the showers—neither umbrellas, mackintoshes nor coats.

At Poligny we lunched at the Restaurant Geneva. It had no specialities, nó Livre d'Or, but the food was first-class. The meal included a genuine poulet de Bresse and a particularly good cheese called Pavé d'Or. As for the strawberries, they were smothered in thick, clotted cream. The wine we chose was, literally translated, 'Old Onion

Skin' and very good it was, although it only cost the equivalent of 4*s.* 4*d.* The whole bill for the four of us, including the chauffeur, was well under £3 in spite of two bottles of wine, some brandy and several cups of coffee.

From Poligny the road climbs upwards before straightening out through woodland scenery. We were now in the foothills of the Jura mountains and frequently passed oxen towing carts loaded with logs at least ten yards long. Spanish chestnut trees contrasted with the firs in a lovely pass surrounded with apparently insurmountable mountains.

Alongside the road flowed a small stream, the start of the Ain. Yes, we were in the Val de Mièges. Having climbed the crest of the hill, the road passed St. Laurent with its silver statue, and curved downhill to Morber. Beeches and maples dotted the countryside all the way to Morez which must be very hot and humid in high summer. Here a fair was in full swing. Morez is a great place for gruyère cheese and leather goods, and its inhabitants are very prosperous-looking. On the far side of the town one gets a fine view of the Juras, black and green in the sunshine. Next comes Les Rousses, a whitewashed little town with various roadside notices about ski lifts.

Here, owing to the fact that the fourth member of our party carried a diplomatic passport we had no trouble with the French Customs—or with the Swiss at La Cure three hundred yards farther—and were soon bowling downhill to the Lake of Geneva, misty-blue in the sunshine. Tirelex was the first little Swiss town we passed, followed by Nyon. There was no doubt that we were in Switzerland—the geranium window-boxes, the cherry trees, the vineyards and the Alps in the background made it perfectly evident. The road was like silk and the fields were full of tractors. Very soon we found ourselves in Lausanne where we stopped for a moment at the Palace Hotel before continuing to Montreux, skirting Vevey. Here we booked rooms at the Hotel Monney, and dined at the Auberge Chateau de Chillon.

On my last visit the restaurant was merely a bistro. Nowadays it is a charming restaurant and adopts the American system of allowing two guests to share the same portion. We sat on wooden banquettes and watched our neighbours having chicken *à la broche.* Instead of being cooked on a spit on the open fire, however, it was done in a transparent glass box attached by a cable to the electric light. The chicken looked horribly naked and indecent as it turned slowly and reluctantly around getting hotter and redder before it turned brown. There was no electric fire, and the whole thing looked rather Wellsian.

Back at the Hotel Monney the bearded proprietor told us that only a trickle of English visitors had so far reached Montreux that season. He thought it was due to the maximum of £35 that English visitors could spend in Switzerland. Too many of them had found in previous years that it was not enough and did not want again to experience the nightmare of being short of cash.

Next day we stopped at the Castle of Chillon and refreshed our memories of Lord Byron and Bonivard, the man whose hair went white in a single night. After two hours in the Castle we drove on again along the valley. There was snow still on the Alps although it was the month of June. But the pretty flowers and pollarded trees at Aigle, the cherry trees and vineyards at Bex, the lovely waterfall at Mieville, the avenue of poplars at Martigny, the mountainside scarred by avalanches at Riddes, the two chateaux of Sion, a herd of black sheep at Susten, two tramps and two pedestrians with rifles hung over their shoulders at Visp, and the church-goers in black dresses and white silk shawls over their heads at Gliss attracted less attention than they should have done, because we found ourselves overtaking a long-distance professional cyclists' race. Time and time again we thought that we had come to the leaders, but found that there were still others going flat-out two or three miles ahead. At each village there were crowds of people waiting to see them pass. This craze for marathon cycle races along the roads has not yet spread to England; but the Tour de France, the Autogyro d'Italia and the various road races in Switzerland have superseded boxing and all other forms of athletics, even football, on the Continent. Time and time again we were to find the headlines of the local newspapers devoted solely to the various cycling champions rather than to international politics or communism.

Brigue, where the Grimsel Pass, the Furka Pass and the approach to the Simplon Pass all meet, remains the pretty little town with geraniums and green window-frames which I have known for thirty years; and the Hotel des Couronnes et des Postes is as friendly and picturesque as ever. From here the road to the Simplon climbs steeply and narrowly through the town, after which come the chalets and the clouds, the fir trees, the wonderful gorges and the huge abysses—with no real wall to protect vehicles from slithering to destruction if caught in a collision. Of villages there are only Berisal, with the two houses on either side of the road linked overhead with a bridge-like corridor, and Rothwald with its handful of shacks, before one comes to the isolated pinky-cream, green-shuttered Hotel Bellevue at the very top.

According to a roadside notice this is where the Simplon Pass really begins downhill. Here and there are Swiss barracks, green fields contrasting with the snow-clad Alps, huge boulders, green firs and the little logging village of Simplon Dorf, followed by Gestein or Gabi, (the alternative name showing that one is now approaching Italy itself). Fortunately we passed only two vehicles on the whole Pass. On our right flowed the jade green and white stream which later becomes the Doce. Memories of the Second World War were everywhere evident in the form of dragon's teeth and barbed wire.

* * * * *

And so at last we came to the Italian Customs at Gondo, outside which was displayed a large notice in English:—

'Attention to porters of particular military vetos.'

Formalities completed, we continued down the picturesque gorge and a few moments later encountered our first Italian roadsign—Galleria curva, meaning a rocky tunnel. At Vazo, the first Italian hamlet, the peasants walked in carefree fashion down the middle of the road, but drew swiftly to one side at our warning toot. A small Italian dog barked at us but the scenery was still entirely Swiss, with the same huge viaducts and jade-green streams. Then, around the corner, we caught our first glimpse of a real Italian valley. Typically enough, a factory chimney was on fire, and belching blue smoke in all directions. That was the first of many occasions, such as on the outskirts of Venice, Rome, Naples and Tivoli, where the legendary beauty of the Italian landscape was largely obscured by billowing clouds of smoke.

Suddenly the weather became warmer, positively balmy. The chalets grew more dilapidated, women sat on the doorsteps, flocks of bicyclists appeared from nowhere. We had arrived at Domodossola. At the Albergo Milano where we lunched under the chocolate and white striped awnings on the edge of the street, the sun was now genuinely hot and for the first time since leaving England it was desirable to remove one's jacket.

This first Italian meal of ours consisted of pimentos, anchovies and all kinds of charcuterie, tagliatelli with grated cheese, grilled veal chops, strawberries and cream and cost about eight shillings a head, including the wine. There seems much to be said for being an ex-enemy country, when it comes to food.

During the next month we were to taste at least half a dozen different kinds of pasta, to use the generic word for all types of farinaceous foods of Italy. The home of tagliatelli is Bologna and it looks like white ribbon. Everyone knows the shape of macaroni and spaghetti but, besides these, there are canalloni, vermicelli, gnocchi, ravioli and fettucini as well as a whole series of fancy assortments. Suffice it to say, that there are as many types of pasta in Italy as there are shapes to women's hats, the difference in flavour being largely due to the sauces put on them—with the exception of ravioli which contains a meat or spinach paste.

For English people accustomed to an undue amount of starch in their diet these pasta are not really to be recommended. On the other hand one can usually secure olives, eggs, sliced tomatoes, anchovies, sardines and above all, smoked ham—to act as hors-d'œuvres for the main dish. Hitherto Italy has not enjoyed a good reputation for its steaks and chops, but that is a thing of the past. Italian beef and mutton is nowadays quite excellent and there is no need to confine one's choice of meat to veal, as is the case in Switzerland. Indeed the Italian pork chops grilled on charcoal are really first-class. Times have certainly changed since I had last been in Italy. Of wines I will speak later, except

to say that I never really liked Orvieto which we sampled on this occasion.

Domodossola must be a hot little town in August, in spite of its beautiful situation. The market place is picturesque enough and the Palazzo Silva is said to contain a few antiquities; but it did not delay us long, except for threading our way through the swarm of cyclists. On both sides of the road the peasants were bringing in the hay, although it was Sunday. Chimneys smoked in all directions, crickets chirped and we saw our first horse wearing a straw hat as a protection against the strong sun. Here, too, we saw the first of the hundreds of slogans scrawled on walls and houses all over Italy. This one consisted of a single word 'Vincere.' Was it a hangover from Mussolini? Who was supposed to conquer whom? It was the first and last time that we saw this particular phrase.

It was along here that we took a wrong turning and, finding ourselves, after a delightful rustic drive along a secondary road, at Pallanza, had to return on our tracks round the other side of the beautiful blue Lake Maggiore to Baveno, which was to be our headquarters for the next few days.

Our hotel, the Bellevue, was on the very edge of the water and set in its own grounds. Palms, cork trees, lemon trees and orange trees provided exactly the sub-tropical background which one expects of Italy. Here again we encountered motor-coach parties. Two of them were Swiss and the local populace were regaled by the spectacle of a complete Swiss military band debouching from a motor coach, forming up and then marching by a circuitous route through the town, making as much noise as possible and followed by a smaller number of their compatriots carrying their suitcases and attempting to march in step behind them, before finally making their official entry into their hotel. One's first impression was that the band was a local Italian one greeting the arrival of so many hard Swiss francs, but not a bit of it. That evening we saw them swaggering round Baveno, still in uniform, as if they had liberated England as well as Italy. Next morning we were all awakened by a fanfare of trumpets from the same Swiss band—at six-thirty a.m. if you please—preparatory to its departure once again by motor coach.

Baveno itself is not much more than a village, with three or four hotels and a similar number of unpretentious restaurants. Like all lakeside Italian hamlets, it has an arcade of trees along the edge of the water, underneath which one can sit carefree at alfresco tables and order drinks. But the waitresses risk their necks each time they dash across the main road from the restaurants to the outdoor cafés; for this is a main road and is always very lively with traffic. Here we saw the first of thousands of huge four-wheeler and six-wheeler diesel-engined lorries towing trucks behind them. Many of them are German and are driven at well over forty miles an hour. Here, too, we met for the first time the

modern Italian plague of supercharged motor scooters which roar up and down in a most exhibitionistic manner. Among Mussolini's laws, one ordained silence at night and the abolition of superchargers, another forbade begging and the third forbade kissing in public. Only the latter law is still respected, more's the pity.

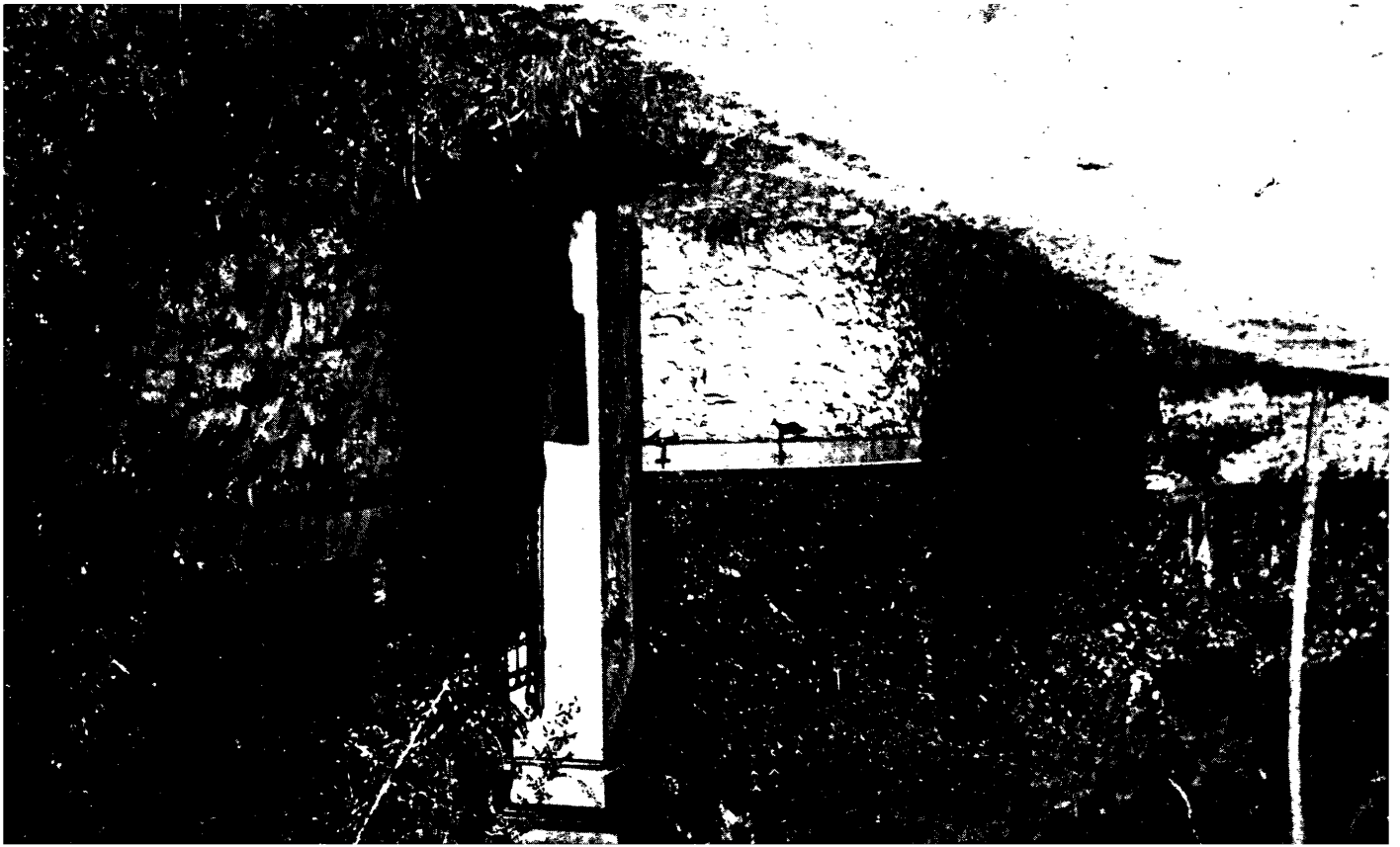
Starting from Domodossola and continuing for 5,000 kilometres of Italy we met beggar after beggar, old and young, and in every kind of walk of life. Not only do real down-at-heel tramps stick out their hands at all visitors, but quite respectably dressed men, women and children walk up and shamelessly ask for money; and the chances are that they will get it. Until the introduction of the one, five and ten-lire coins, all the money in Italy was, and still is, paper—much of it in a most dilapidated condition. What is more, there is literally nothing to buy with a single lira and practically nothing to buy with a five-lire note. It is said that the only reason for the existence of these tiny denominations is that in certain cheap Italian coffee houses the price of a cup varies from twenty-two to twenty-three lire. There is, therefore, some inclination to give away these semi-useless notes whenever possible, even to beggars.

Another thing we learned in Baveno, from our hotel bill, was that there is not only an official 15 per cent service surcharge; there is also a 3 per cent City/Town Tax in addition to a State Tax of forty or fifty lire. In this way a bill of 3,000 lire leaps to well over 4,000 and visitors are well advised to watch their bills very carefully. Time and time again they will find that the surcharges have been added to the concierge's bill—which, of course, is most improper. It may even be added to the laundry. Not once in our tour of Italy did we ever find that the errors, which were continuous, were in our favour—as opposed to that of the hotel.

Another early discovery here at Baveno was that mineral water frequently cost more than wine. Thus a bottle of San Pellegrino cost 300 lire whereas a nice little bottle of wine was only 200, and it is the local wines which are almost invariably the best. The internationally known Italian wines are Chianti, Orvieto and the Piedmont wines—of which Barolo and Barbera are the best known. There are also Soave, which you get round Verona, Lacrima Christi and the Capri wines which are obtainable round Naples. Incidentally, the amount of wine which is given the name of Capri is out of all proportion to the number of vineyards on that remarkable island. Around Rome one can buy Frascati and Grotta Ferrata. Memories of previous visits to Italy, however, prompted me wherever possible to order the white *vins du pays*. Several of them, particularly round Porto Fino and Perugia, taste very much like *champagne nature*, whereas the big-name wines like Chianti are rather a lottery. It seems that the Italian wine-growers are more interested in the alcoholic content of their wines than in bouquet or delicacy. They therefore blend the coarse, fiery wines of the south with

Isola Bella from Upper Terrace, lookin shorewards

Photo: ENI



the smoother wines of the north. Chianti, being as common as beer in England, has at least as many varieties.

As for post-war Italian spirits, they show a surprising advance on the 1939 quality. Not that I recommend all the products of the Stock distillery which produces imitations of practically every French liqueur. There is, of course, Strega—a genuine Italian product which tastes something like a thin yellow Chartreuse—while the best Italian brandy is sold in a bottle resembling a dimpled Haig. Another brandy, fabricated in Genoa, not only describes itself as Cognac—which is impossible—but gives itself the sub-title of Fine Champagne. It is surprising that the French authorities do not make a protest about this; but perhaps they have.

In hot weather the most sensible drink is Citron pressé; in other words fresh lemon juice with soda water, sugar and a lump of ice. (Spremuta di limone in Italian.) Even better perhaps is the same mixture with the addition of fresh orange juice. It is a real thirst quencher. Coca-Cola is already rife in Italy if you prefer a made-up drink. But Italian lager has, like Italian spirits, improved very considerably since the war. German, Dutch, Belgian, Czechoslovak and American lagers are also available in considerable quantities.

It was while sitting under a baby palm tree at Baveno, with the blue waters of Lake Maggiore beside me, that I decided to brush up my Italian with the aid of a phrase book. The most useful word is *dov'é* (phonetically dovay) meaning where is? *Come faccio per andare a . . .* (how am I to get to . . .). Other phrases are: *quanto* (how much?), *cambio* (rate of exchange), *conto* (the bill), *prego* (please), and *cameriere* (waiter), although it is more polite to call the waiter's attention by saying *senta* (meaning listen). Many English words survive in their entirety, like sandwich and tearoom, but it is easy to forget that the word for oranges is *aranci* and that strawberries are *fragole.* It is also useful to know that *casalinga* means home-made, and that 'have you any?' is *avete del?* and 'give me some' is *Date mi del.* In fact you scarcely need any more phrases than the above, particularly if you can talk a certain amount of French. As a relative of mine once said: "English spoken slowly and correctly articulated is good enough for anybody." There is perhaps one word which is helpful—*basta* (pronounced busta) meaning 'that is enough'. It is also desirable to know the Italian word for octopus. The word itself (*calamari*) looks so pretty on the menu but the dish itself is definitely an acquired taste. . . .

One of your first discoveries in post-war Italy is that the Italians are very grudging with their coffee and seldom provide more than a half-cup. But this is not surprising. Good coffee costs 8*s.* 0*d.* a pound in the shops. (As in France, there is the national acorn variety which naturally one refuses, if offered.) English, Egyptian and Turkish cigarettes are contraband. American cigarettes of the Lucky Strike type, Chesterfields, and so on, cost 3*s.* 6*d.* a packet and can be sold

Two X's mark the spot where Mussolini and his mistress were executed

openly. It is inadvisable to buy them from men at street corners even at a cut rate, because they are usually faked. Our chauffeur was badly caught in this way. Of the Italian cigarettes the Giubek is an American-type 'toasted' cigarette and costs barely half the imported variety. I can recommend it. There are also one or two Macedonian-type Italian cigarettes which are perfectly good, though without much flavour.

Italy is so different from England that it takes several days for the most observant visitor to appreciate the many contrasts. One of the first discoveries is that £1 notes are worth only two-thirds of their face value in Italy though traveller's cheques if presented at a bank are, of course, honoured to the full. There is even a disparity between the green and blue £1 notes, the blue pound note being worth fifty lire more than the green pound note. The reason for the difference is that the Germans were supposed to have forged large numbers of green £1 notes and there is a faint possibility that some of them are still in circulation; or so the Italians say.

Speaking generally, a 100 lire note in Italy buys the same amount as 100 francs in France. In view of the disparity in the two exchanges vis-à-vis pounds or dollars this means that Italy is at least one-third cheaper than France. Thus it costs 1,600 lire to go in a boat rowed by two men to Isolabella or 800 lire in a boat rowed by one man, whereas in France one can safely assume that it would be respectively 1,600 francs or 800 francs.

Isolabella (beautiful island) is visited by a hundred thousand people a year. It is one of four islands which takes its name from the ancient Borromeo family, the others being Isola Madre, Isola dei Pescatorei and Isola di Giovanni. There is also the Island of the Lovers which in fact is only a few feet across. From Baveno it takes nearly half an hour to reach Isolabella in a rowing boat; that is, if the older of the two oarsmen happens to be Angelo. Angelo is a great character who talks all the time and, leaning on his oars for most of the journey, leaves all the work to his younger colleague Guilio. Middle-aged, merry and mahogany-coloured, Angelo provides an excellent example of the Italian peasants' reaction to the Second World War. Explaining that he had been so thoroughly frightened in the First World War that he decided to keep well out of the way in the Second World War and therefore arranged to be stationed on the Swiss frontier well away from the British and Americans, Angelo told us that he had nothing to do with the Resistance Movement, forty-three of whom were put in front of a firing squad by the Germans in 1944. There is a marble memorial to them on the Baveno waterside. In fact, one of them was not killed and was removed still alive by his friends and relatives that night. He is once again hale and hearty and is always known as '43', not by his surname any longer.

The nearest that Angelo got to danger was when American aircraft sank a small lakeside steamer full of civilians about a mile from

the shore. There is still a buoy marking the spot. As we moved slowly along, wafted by Angelo's conversation and Guilio's oars, we had a splendid view of Monte Leone with its peak covered in snow, although it was June. We also saw that remarkable edifice Villa Branca, where Queen Victoria stayed in 1879. Its fake gothic façade, rises absurdly from a very beautiful garden and was dutifully visited by Princess Margaret in 1949.

Isolabella itself takes its present form from the prodigality of Prince Borromeo who built a fantastic palace filled with astonishing art 'treasures' and surrounded by a highly remarkable garden, in 1632. One wing was never completed and, being roofless, gives the impression that it was bombed during the war. Among its many visitors was Napoleon who stayed there for three days before the Battle of Marengo and composed the prophetic slogan 'Victory, not battle'. In 1868 the surface of the lake rose 50 feet and there are still flood marks visible two yards up the walls of this astonishing white marble edifice.

Having decanted us at the steps nearest to Baveno, Angelo and Guilio sat in the sun and played cards while we joined a large party of trippers awaiting the official guide.

A visit is certainly worth while. The salons are horribly ornate and Queen Caroline of Brunswick, wife of George IV, slept in a particularly hideous room, though in the ante-chamber there is a fine satinwood table. The ballroom is edged with scarlet divans, but a table with an iridescent mosaic top, looking like a still life by William Nicholson, is unquestionably a collector's item. It took four years to make this jig-saw puzzle de luxe for Prince Borromeo, then Ambassador to the Vatican. Elsewhere there are fifteenth-century Flemish tapestries, a Venetian saddle, mosaic chests of onyx, Napoleon's bed in which he slept after crossing the Simplon with General Berthier, and the table used at the futile Stresa Conference in 1935 attended by Mussolini, Flandin, Sir John Simon, Laval and Ramsay MacDonald.

Next, a roomful of rural scenes by Zuccarelli and a trio of pictures by Luca Giordano—the 'Judgment of Paris', Galatea's 'Triumph' and the 'Rape of Europa'—have to be negotiated before a visit to the six grottoes used by the Borromeo family during the hot weather. Their walls, floors and ceilings, covered with a mosaic paste of iron scum, lake pebbles, lava from Vesuvius and marble, could scarcely be more unlovely quite apart from various effigies made out of volcanic rock, Chinese statues, a sleeping Venus in marble, a prehistoric canoe and a miniature gondola.

But it is not the interior of Isolabella so much as the gardens which have made it one of the world's minor wonders. These contain ten terraces which might well be described as a miniature version of what the Hanging Gardens of Babylon probably looked like. Every kind of oriental tree and plant—bamboos, cactuses, eucalyptuses, banana trees, palm trees, lemon and orange trees, mimosas, camphor trees, camelias,

acacias, agaves, pomegranate trees, as well as orchids and lotus blossoms, provide a delicious background to some of the most unbelievable statuary in the world. Monstrous Cupids made of volcanic rock vie with other statues of soldiers on horseback and various gods and goddesses all made of similar material, for the title of the World's Ugliest Effigy. The ultimate in absurdity are huge vases with artificial tin flowers and an obelisk with tin feathers on top.

In this paradise of flowers the hot-houses are strangely neglected. But perhaps they are unnecessary in a climate where the orchid roots sprout like mushrooms out of hollow tree trunks suspended in the air by rows. Finally the visitor climbs to the flat roof of the highest terrace and notices at close range that one of the monstrous equestrian statues has a kind of colonic irrigation caused by the iron pipe, which acts as a support for the horse in a peculiarly intimate manner.

The exit from the gardens is carefully designed so that all visitors are subjected to a short-range barrage of salesmanship from the owners of various stalls selling straw hats, coloured picture postcards, plates and saucers, straw baskets, local silk handkerchiefs, artificial pearl necklaces and other junk. Having survived this alleyway, visitors next find themselves in a kind of street full of similar junk stalls and three or four restaurants and cafés, the best of which is the Ristorante Delfino. In spite of its tawdriness, however, it is a gay scene in real Technicolor with the Italian stallkeepers chattering like monkeys.

It took some time to find Angelo and Guilio, who were drinking the results of their card game. As we rowed back, Angelo told us that he had no desire to go to heaven. He explained this by saying that, if he did, he would find himself among all the black marketeers who collaborated with the Germans during the war and had now gone respectable and become pious church-goers. He repeated his dislike for the First World War in view of it having been so very dangerous.

Meantime, the green-clad hills, the pink and orange villas, the dark green of the larches and cypresses undoubtedly provided a wonderful backcloth to the sparkling blue waters of Lake Maggiore and acted as a reminder of the murals in so many Italian restaurants in Soho.

Isolabella in retrospect could not be more artificial, nor a greater mixum-gatherum of appalling taste and beautiful flowers—something to see once, but never again. It cannot hold a candle to Isola Madre, which also belongs to the Borromeo family but the tropical vegetation of which has not been ruined by the juxtaposition of man-made monstrosities. True, the Palace is built like the home of a Lebanese sheik and we decided not to inspect its interior. But there is a lovely scent of cedars and pines, an aviary full of blue parakeets, huge camphor trees, gigantic magnolias over fifty feet high, enormous azaleas in full flower and giant balsam trees, with a full choir of birds as good measure. It would be a wonderful place for sufferers from tuberculosis. One squeeze of a camphor bud and one almost sneezes.

The real charm of Isola Madre is that it is an arboreal League of Nations. The owners for over a century have imported every type of tree from all over the world—Canadian gum trees, Tasmanian eucalyptuses, Californian pines, yucca trees from Mexico, Royal palms from Brazil, Chilean palm trees, agawas from Morocco, droopy Chinese elms and all kinds of oriental shrubs. One can walk around the shady grounds for hours without being surfeited by the scenery.

Third largest of the Borromeo islands, the Isola dei Pescatorei, is again quite different. It has practically no trees and certainly no palace. As its name suggests, it is a fishing village, very ancient and with a narrow main street which looks more like a Moorish alleyway. The eaves nearly meet overhead, the nets drip down and the rickety balconies look as though they will collapse at any moment. White-haired old women squat on doorsteps knitting fishing nets, children play hide-and-seek with kittens and puppies, and the small, dark, cool bistros invite you to escape the midday sun.

Best of the handful of hotels which cater for the visitor (there are only 300 inhabitants—much intermarried) is the Verbano, owned by the Ruffoni family which has lived on the island since the fifteenth century. Bernard Shaw, Prince Chichibu and Ernest Hemingway are among the unlikely patrons of this small hotel which charges only £1 a day all-in and once again makes sponge cake for English visitors—whom the inhabitants particularly welcome, because the Germans bombed the lake water for fish and reduced the numbers of lake trout and therefore the value of the local industry very considerably.

Isola de Giovanni has been leased indefinitely by Toscanini, but he was not in residence when we were there and so we did not visit it. Swathed in flowers and coppices, it looks quite delightful, only a few yards from the mainland at Pallanza.

This charming little town with its orange roofs, cream and pink-fronted villas, larches and fir trees has a would-be Riviera frontage on the lake with every facility for swimming and diving. The magnolia trees, in full bloom almost all the year round, are as common as apple trees; rambler roses climb up palms and a rustic atmosphere is provided by peasant women washing their clothes in the lake water.

By far the most remarkable feature of Pallanza is, however, the huge marble mausoleum dedicated to Marshal Cadorna, the Italian Commander-in-Chief at Caporetto, Italy's greatest individual military defeat since Rome was last captured and looted. Inscribed on the marble is the legend: 'Fate could contest his triumph, but not his glory'. For sheer double-talk it would be difficult to match this. Italians, indeed, have a remarkable mentality. If you ask, as we did, why Pallanza should thus perpetuate the memory of its ill-starred son you are told that Caporetto was not really a defeat at all. It was a very great moral victory because it made the Italians realize that they would really have to put their backs into winning the war thereafter. The truth is that the

Italians are a noisy race and only enjoy the prelude to battle, as opposed to the battle itself. Which, of course, is very reasonable, but they should not shout so much in advance.

Stresa, on the other side of the lake near Baveno, is a pint-sized Italian Cannes with half a dozen delightful hotels, any number of villas and a convent. Gayest spot is the Café Haiti, the chairs and tables of which extend right out into the Piazza. Not far away is the Castello Borromeo which has a local reputation for its collection of paintings and furniture. Behind it, up a steep, winding road is a sporting nine-hole golf course, laid out in 1924, with spectacular views over Lake Maggiore in one direction and towards the Alps in the other. It is at least twice as good as Mont Agel, above Monte Carlo. The greens are well kept and the fairways are covered with good, firm springy turf. The dark red stucco club-house has a delightful balcony and a very mixed membership. Here we met Swedish, Danish and French golfers as well as some English.

Close at hand is the Panorama and Golf Hotel, which provides an even better view of almost the whole length of Lake Maggiore for thirty-five kilometres and has a well-deserved reputation for food. The smoked ham, the salty butter, the pineapple and strawberries, the roast chicken and the local Varese wine is worthy of the Villa d'Este. And no wonder. The proprietor is Carletti who used to be at this most famous of all Italian restaurant-hotels for a number of years. And yet one can stay there *en pension* for the equivalent of £1 a day.

It is one of the many pleasant trips within easy reach of Baveno. Others are Campione (see *Switzerland Revisited*), Laveno, Lake d'Orte with the picturesque island of San Guilio, and the local granite quarries where the boatmen, like Angelo, work during the winter. The stone is red and black and said to be the best in the world. It was used for the basilica of Saint Peter's at Rome, the Opera House at Paris, the Cathedral at Milan, the monuments of Christopher Columbus in New York, and for that of Emperor Wilhelm at Bremen. Orders still pour in from all parts of the world for Baveno granite.

CHAPTER II

IT is no real distance from Lake Maggiore to Lake Como. The road passes through the pretty little palm-dotted village of Belgirate, the shady arcades of Lesa and the orchards of Merna before taking a look at Castello Angera, another property of the princely Borromeos. Now comes Arona, dull except for the presence of Italy's most famous racing stud where winners of many leading British horse-races have been bred. The Germans, according to their wont, took the pick of the mares and stallions with the exception of Bellini, the sire of Tenerani, among other successful race-horses. Tenerani has the reputation of being one of the most ill-tempered horses in history. In September 1948, however, Signor Tesio, his owner, tried the experiment of putting a sheep in his stable. This worked like a charm. Tenerani and the sheep became inseparable, though it was still necessary to have heavy rope netting stretched from wall to wall a yard below the ceiling to prevent the stallion from hurting himself when he reared up.

This stable once belonged to that other famous race-horse, Dante, but the same head lad lives in the flat attached to it. Incidentally, Tenerani immediately tried to savage him when he tried to get him into the right position for a photograph. The reason for the success of the stud is presumably due to its proximity to the Lake of Maggiore which keeps the temperature level, and to the long lines of chestnut trees and cedars which act as wind-breakers. There are also thick hedges of honeysuckle which take the place of the boards used at studs in Great Britain to protect the mares and foals from any unkind wind.

In the course of three hours we were introduced to many thousands of pounds' worth of bloodstock including a number of English mares recently bought by Signor Tesio to improve his stock. The house is ivy-clad and has a fresco of Christ on the front with the Latin quotation *Nomini meo adscribetur victoria.* Inside there are pink-chintzed divans and chairs and walls covered with racing pictures. The owner, alas, was in Milan and so we did not meet him.

A few miles on the far side of Arona the road crosses the river Ticino by way of a military bridge where a policeman halted a number of vehicles, the owners of which he asked for their identity papers. Presumably because we had a foreign number plate, we were not asked to stop. It is in this undulating country that the Milan foxhounds are hunted. As many as two hundred and fifty riders start out, though only a handful remain at the kill, if any.

We now came to our first autostrada. There are pretty woods and coppices on either side, but in the immediate foreground whole rows of hideous, gaudy hoardings advertise anything from motor-car tyres

to baby clothes, and completely deface the landscape. Here and there they thin out and the scenery becomes attractive again. The furrows in the cornfields are deliberately interspersed with small pollarded elms which give shade to the growing corn in the hot summer weather. At Gallarate the slight undulations in the countryside disappear, and the plain is lovely with fields of blue forget-me-nots. Then come orange-tiled villas, a number of small textile factories, fields of golden barley and once again the ugly hoardings, almost as interminable as those on the outskirts of New York. But at least the autostradas have no side roads to make the motorist check speed—a very clever pre-war bid on the part of Mussolini to attract the European tourist traffic. There is a minimum speed limit of fifty miles per hour, so everybody with a motor car and a sense of duty to it feels that he must go flat out to see what he can do. Although our Citroen had only done 2,000 kilometres our chauffeur was no exception to the rule.

The last time I had driven along this route was in 1935. Our car, although a taxi, had been capable of sixty-five miles per hour. She was a squat Fiat and the driver drove her full tilt. Hardly had we gone a mile, however, when a Rolls-Royce slid swiftly past us, doing eighty miles per hour. Then a Bentley snarled by at ninety. And, then, straddling the road like a spider overtaking a couple of trapped flies, a supercharged Mercedes gurgled into the night. There was a glimpse of a couple of laughing German boys in crash helmets, then the red tail light dwindled into a pin-prick. She was moving a couple of tons at something more than a hundred miles per hour. Nothing else passed us. But that trio was dramatic enough, particularly as a first-class thunderstorm had just begun. It started with summer flashes right across the sky, like a series of eruptions from a volcano. This gave place to corkscrew lightning which split the firmament. On we drove into the rumbling thunder, hoping to make it before the inevitable torrent of rain. Reluctantly the speedometer crawled up to 110 kilometres. The driver could push her no faster. Every moment the white marking stones were illuminated by flashes. They slid past like a cemetery, and the telegraph poles like a hedge. How I craved a ride in that Mercedes. . . .

On this occasion we were travelling in broad daylight and continued to be appalled by the hoardings which were in strong contrast to the Italian peasants hoeing potato plants and, in the background, a mountain range very much like Snowdonia.

Como itself is not a very interesting town although it has a world-wide reputation for lace-making and was the birthplace of both Pliny the Elder and Pliny the Younger. In ancient days it was regarded as the key to Lombardy and consequently was always being fought over by the supporters of the Ghibellines and the Guelphs, before it was finally captured by an army from Milan. For the inveterate sightseer there is a cathedral built entirely of marble, the old town walls and a

couple of churches. Most visitors to Como, however, are primarily interested in the lakeside scenery with the attendant swimming, diving and motor-boating, walks, golf and the superlative cuisine of the Villa d'Este which I was now visiting for the second time. Deliberately disregarding the posters advertising the local zoo, the aquarium, a forthcoming horseshow, a cycle race and, unintentionally, a traffic light—we were promptly stopped by a policeman who was, however, very amiable. Most of the traffic lights in Italy are suspended high above the road and it is quite easy in a low-slung car to fail to see them.

At the far end, the Como road narrows as it approaches Cernobbio and Villa d'Este itself. This huge cream-coloured hotel, set in its own superb park overlooking the lake, has had a remarkable history. Originally it was a convent; then in the sixteenth century Cardinal Tolomeo Gallio ordered the crumbling edifice to be demolished. In those days it was known as the Villa del Garrova. Later, it was enlarged by Duke Tolomeo. During its chequered history it passed into the hands of the Jesuits and was then leased to various illustrious owners until finally in 1815 it was bought by Queen Caroline during her separation from George IV. Stories are still told of her scandalous behaviour with her lover, an ex-cavalry sergeant called Pergami. It was Queen Caroline who changed the name of the Villa to its present one, because a local antiquary was able to prove that her husband's family was descended from Guelfo of Este, who left Italy for Germany in the year 1054. This Villa d'Este has, in fact, nothing to do with the historical Villa d'Este near Rome which we were to visit later.

Queen Caroline was allowed £35,000 sterling a year from the English Treasury—a very considerable sum in those days. Even this, however, was not enough for her orgies and finally Prince Torlonia bought the property from her, though he allowed her to remain in it until her death. Another occupant later on was the Dowager Empress of Russia. However, in 1873 it became a hotel and is therefore one of the oldest luxury establishments of this type in the world—far older than the Ritz or Claridges for example.

It remains an Italianate palace with long corridors and empire furniture and has become the ultimate *reductio ad absurdum* of Americans going abroad to meet each other again three thousand miles away. Sitting out under the chestnut trees, one hears Charleston, South Carolina surrendering to Boston, Massachusetts in the moonlight. The black, rippled waters of Como look for all the world like ancient Spanish leather bindings. Across the lake are the lights of the villas on the hills, just like the fairy lanterns in the gardens of an Oxford College during Commemoration Week. With the moon throwing a silver bar across the molten black surface of the lake, with a gondola gliding past full of people singing softly in the breathless hush of the night, and with the tall pagan cypresses rising darkly and phallically into the night sky, it is, as the Americans say, out of this world.

In daylight, white-jacketed waiters bring cool drinks from the alfresco cocktail bar. In the immediate foreground are diving boards, gondolas and launches. With a delicious breeze ruffling the blue waters of the lake as they lap against the edge of the lawns, with camellia trees in full bloom, the rustle of green leaves, the deck chairs and the rambling roses, one acquires a wonderful feeling of luxurious ease and a delightful appetite for luncheon under the dove-grey sunblinds.

The Villa d'Este specializes in superb hors-d'œuvres which include lobster and *langouste* and *œufs froids* trimmed with cucumber and tomato. The cold table with its beef, ham, veal and tongue is most impressive, and so are the fresh raspberries, wild strawberries, ice cream and gâteaux of every description. There are only two regrets—firstly that Sem the cartoonist of the Casinos in the '20s is dead. It would have gladdened his heart to see the same pale gawky men, plump brunettes, curvacious blondes in smoked spectacles, squat industrialists in shirt sleeves, and aged beldames resembling as ever, mutton dressed up as lamb. Secondly and inevitably is the size of the bill—even apart from the overcharge which was duly pointed out in our case. It seems strange but fortunate, in retrospect, that the Allies did not bomb Villa d'Este during the war when it was the obvious hide out for Italian generals and other military specialists in Milan every week-end.

Until Queen Caroline's arrival there was no proper road from Como to Cernobbio, much less one from Cernobbio onwards along the lake. Even today the road to the Italian frontier is exceedingly narrow and dangerous with no 'give'. It is therefore impossible for the driver of a motor car to enjoy the superb scenery of terraced villages, climbing roses and the green hills sweeping precipitously down to the very edge of the lake. Time and again there is no room for two lorries to pass and long delays occur before one loquacious driver can persuade the other to back sufficiently for him to pass. Yes, it is a real nightmare road, though the only serious accidents which have occurred along it took place during the American and then the South African occupation in 1944/5.

It was along this road past Brienno, a tumbledown little village which seems to have stepped straight out of Algiers, past Argenio where a road block was put down to stop him (but too late) that Mussolini fled from Milan with his mistress. One can easily visualize the plump, frightened little man urging his chauffeur to drive faster and faster as he approached the Swiss frontier and safety. One can see him hurrying past the 400-year-old church tower near Campo, the pergolas of Lenno, until finally he decided to stay the night at Menaggio.

Next day he started out early for the Swiss frontier, a few kilometres away, only to find to his horror that the Swiss would not let him through. He doubled back to Dongo, next to the village of Musso. It was there that the partisans caught him in bed. The rest of his suite

were shot out of hand, but Mussolini and his mistress were such prizes that the leaders could not immediately make up their minds what to do with him. Some suggested that they should hand him over to the advancing Americans; others said that if this happened he would never get his deserts. They were still undecided when news reached them that an armed force was coming out from Milan in their direction. They consequently took their prisoners back along the lake to Azzano where further news reached them that a road block had been put up to intercept them.

Conveniently enough there was a gravelled side road leading into the hills on the right. They hurried up it with their prisoners and held another council of war outside the Villa Bellini, a tall cream building with green shutters, a box hedge, a row of pink rambler roses and a massive copper beech. The hotheads won the day. Mussolini and his mistress were lined up against the low stone wall and shot.

There is no memorial except for two very small dingy black crosses about three inches long and three inches wide, four feet apart.

Crickets were chirping, and bees were humming as I studied the spot intently. As I did so, two people approached. One was the gardener of the villa who sold me two postcards with two X's marking the spot; the other was an aged beggar with a sack on his back and a shapeless hat on his head asking for alms with outstretched hand. It was a hot sunny afternoon, which made it all the more difficult to visualize the drama which had been enacted there on 28th April, 1945. On 29th April, by the way, German aeroplanes came over and bombed Tremezzo in reprisal.

Tremezzo is the nearest point across Lake Como to Bellagio which is at the very tip of the peninsula dividing the two legs of the lake. It is regarded by many people as the prettiest spot in all the Italian lake-lands. It has a number of attractive hotels, some particularly lovely gardens and especially sumptuous villas, two of the best known in the neighbourhood being the Villa Carlotta and the Villa Pliniana. Between the two legs of the lake south of Bellagio lies the district of Brianza which looks surprisingly English in spite of the architecture of the local farmhouses.

The southern end of Brianza finishes at Lecco towards which we ultimately drove out of Como, climbing swiftly past the golf course before reaching a fruitful valley with vineyards, straggling villages and an occasional small blue lake. Motoring was not made more simple by the presence of numbers of haycarts with the hay packed so loosely that it spread right across the road and made it impossible for anyone behind to see what traffic was coming in the opposite direction. But when we had passed them, the serrated, saw-toothed hills and the rugged mass of Monte Martino formed a splendid background to the Lago di Alone which might have been transported straight from Killarney. Lecco itself nestles among the tall hills and in spite of the

local iron, silk and cotton industries is a typical Italian town. Here, too, trees are used to shade the corn. Supercharged Italian motor bicycles go roaring about, long-distance motor coaches exude peculiar foul fumes, small boys wobble around on grown-ups' bicycles, bulky carts hold up traffic, small children going home from school break formation and run across the road. Yes, a typical Italian town.

More vineyards interspersed with fields of corn, low foothills, occasional streams and still more occasional trains lead the way to the little old town of Ponte and thence to Bergamo which is built in two tiers—the lower modern town and the old city on the top. It is the latter which is primarily worth a visit and in the Piazza Vecchia, which can only be reached after some hard, steep driving through narrow alleyways, one finds the local branch of the local Communists using the Café Italia as their headquarters, exactly opposite the Torquato Tasso, the café headquarters of the Christian Democrats.

Torquato Tasso from whose statue the café takes its name was the author of *Jerusalem Freed.* He was the court poet of the Dukes of Ferrara but went mad in his later years. Behind the statue is the Piazza del Duomo which is flanked by the Cathedral, a church and a chapel. Of these, Santa Maria Maggiore is the most interesting. It was begun in the twelfth century and not completed until the end of the sixteenth. What fascinated me particularly was an effigy of Christ on the cross with a skull and cross-bones attached. I had never seen one on consecrated ground before. In the adjoining Capella Colleoni there is a statue of a huge golden horse, dating back to 1501. There is also a monument by Amadeo of his daughter Medea (imagine anybody calling his daughter Medea!). An electric light switch gives a wonderful view of the frescoed dome and vaulting. The Cathedral was begun in the fifteenth century although the present dome only dates back to the nineteenth century. As with the church and the chapel, the interior was beautifully cool, thanks to the curtains across the main entrance.

The massive clock tower and campanile is only a few yards away. So, too, is the Broletto, the local name for the gothic Palazzo della Ragione. In which connection, the Italians call almost everything a palazzo if it is not a villa. Venice, in particular, is full of mansions which would never be called palaces anywhere else. But this one is a real palazzo.

It is fortunate for the sightseer that all the historical monuments worth seeing in the Upper City are within a few yards of each other. As for the Lower Town, the Carrara Academy contains a number of pictures by Botticelli, Raphael and Mantegna. There are also the church of Santo Spirito which has no aisle, and San Bartolomeo.

The local industries, such as wool weaving, date back to the twelfth century. But Bergamo is also a garrison town and there are always large numbers of Air Force trainees and other troops. The general effect is of colonnades of shops, boulevards of leafy chestnut trees and in-

numerable bicyclists. The outskirts of the town, near the aerodrome, still show the effects of the Allied bombings in the Second World War. Bergamo lies at the edge of the Alps and the great plain of Lombardy which extends between it and Brescia, swiftly reached by autostrada with the usual road signs mitigated by occasional fields of scarlet poppies.

Brescia, which stands nearly 500 feet above sea level, is a very attractive city with boulevards of leafy chestnut trees just like Bergamo, cream-coloured buildings and huge modern blocks of flats built to the orders of Mussolini in the centre of the city—a good example of Fascist town planning. Architecturally, it is a combination of the Venetian and Lombard schools and today looks calm enough and with nothing to show for the ancient wars between the Guelphs and Ghibellines. Time and time again it was fought over, but its fine renaissance buildings still stand. Later, the nineteenth-century theatre, two cathedrals, the medieval tower of the Broletto and the loggia all survived the fortnight of street fighting when General Haynau put down the insurrection of 1849. It is said that he was roughly handled when he came to London in the following year and given the nickname of Hyena. Against this it must be remembered that the inhabitants of Brescia murdered a number of wounded Austrian soldiers in the City hospital.

From here the road, no longer an autostrada, narrows as it passes through the picturesque valley of Chiese, descending to Salo and giving a splendid view of the blue waters of Lake Garda. Salo is an attractive little town with a reputation for making a good local liqueur. It lies on the west shore of the bay which opens at Gardone. The Lido Restaurant offers bathing and dancing on the edge of the lake. Olives, cypresses, vineyards and coffee-coloured villas provide a picture postcard setting. At night, under a full moon, with the utter silence of the silvery lake and the fireflies flashing among the cypresses, it is sheer Walt Disney. Most visitors prefer, however, to stay at Gardone or Fasano on the north side of the lake.

All three of the major Italian lakes, Maggiore, Como and Garda have their champions and while it depends on individual taste whether one prefers the more varied beauties of Maggiore to the more cloistered charms of Como, there is no doubt that Lake Garda combines the beauties of both and is far larger than either. At Gardone and Fasano there is all the comfort of Villa d'Este or Stresa, but without the extra expensive luxury. Better still, the British and the Americans know it less. We ourselves, on expert advice, chose the Grand Hotel Bellevue, at Fasano, on the very edge of the lake, with terraces shaded by magnolia trees, palms, orange trees, tangerine trees, cypresses, laurels and lemon trees. In the morning it is possible to walk straight across from a ground

floor bedroom and take a swim in the lake. The food is first-class, the chef specializing in *suprême de volaille* done with cheese sauce. Another dish not to miss is *costolette di pobbo alla Bolognese.*

The view across the lake to Sirmione, a narrow little peninsula flanked by irises, in one direction, and to San Vigilio in another is quite breath-taking in its static beauty, even if an occasional speedboat goes rocketing across the surface of the lake at over sixty miles an hour.

A few hundred yards up the hill behind Fasano is the world's most remarkable building, Il Vittoriale, the fantastic daydream-come-true of Gabriel d'Annunzio. It is hard to know where to begin to describe it, but the pace is set by the inscription over the door *Ioho quelqueho donato* (if you know what that means). By good fortune we had an introduction to Signor Maroni, the architect, who showed us, vulgarly speaking, the works.

The average visitor only sees the outskirts of this so-called Villa which extends in all directions with huge patios, colonnades, shrines, alcoves, a vast mausoleum and outbuildings.

Most fantastic of all is an Italian gunboat jutting out of the mountainside several hundred feet above the level of the lake. The gunboat, half of which is real and was hauled up from below, was the *Puglia* which served all over the world in the First World War. The other half is sheer granite built into the mountainside. It is supposed to represent Italy's aspiration for Dalmatia and is in perfect keeping with the ludicrous legends which have been fostered around the name of Italy's last real patriot since Garibaldi. D'Annunzio said, reasonably enough, that a ship should be on the sea and not on the hillside, but he was overruled and there it projects, like a fish out of water. On reflection, it is perhaps no more ludicrous than present Italian theories about regaining Jugoslav territory.

According to Signor Maroni, who was his right-hand man during the latter years of his life, and who wore a beard and an orange-coloured suit, d'Annunzio hated the idea of Italy's tie-up with Germany so much that he refused to receive the German Ambassador, withdrew into a hermit-like existence and died of a broken heart. To the British, d'Annunzio was a sporting poet-airman who achieved a temporary *coup d'état* by persuading an Italian destroyer to sail into Fiume, occupying the town with a small army of volunteers, providing it with a constitution and ruling it for some years as an independent State before being relegated to Gardone.

To the Italians, d'Annunzio is a cross between a god and a saint in spite of the fact that he was probably the most pagan character who has lived in the past century. Of his courage there is no doubt. In one of the outhouses is the elderly pusher-biplane from which he dropped leaflets over Vienna in the First World War. You can also see the aged Fiat in which he drove to Fiume. That he was a good poet there is also no doubt and it was from the sale of his literary works (translated into

every language) that he was able to start building his sensational villa and alter quite a section of the countryside.

There is, for example, a delightful little valley with a stream which flows down to the lake, but it is all artificial—stream, valley, and of course the goldfish pool where he planned to have classical dancing by moonlight. This shrine is not accessible to the general public and the trees all round the pool are surrounded by marble to 'improve the symmetry'. There are also a dogs' cemetery, an outdoor assembly room with stone divans under magnolia trees where he used to give audiences, a shrine which looks like a rock garden but is dotted with bits of barbed wire, an ancient bayonet and a 420 centimetre shell. (Each rock has a name like Monte Rossa or Monte Grappa with a cross on top to represent the places in the First World War where the Italians suffered casualties.) There is also a statue of St. Francis of Assisi with arms outstretched and miniature wolves representing the men of the Tuscany regiment which d'Annunzio commanded, together with a small stone bridge surmounted by the horns of an antelope which one is invited to touch for luck.

Up the hill is a huge white mausoleum, not yet fully completed, which is supposed to be a symbolic tribute to the 'humble artists and heroes of modern times'. Needless to say, d'Annunzio's body (at present lying in a coffin in a small red and white alcove at the entrance to the villa) is ultmately to be transported to the top of the mausoleum with fitting ritual. According to Signor Maroni, d'Annunzio was 'full of exuberant appreciation of war, poetry and women, and yet he was a most unhappy man. He always wanted to do better'. Though actually he died of a stroke, d'Annunzio was killed, according to his friend, by a presentiment that Armageddon would follow the meeting of Mussolini and Hitler. Inside the villa which we were specially privileged to visit is the study in which he breathed his last. It seems that he had been studying an Italian version of *Old Moore's Almanac*, *The Barbenera*, and observed, on 1st March, 1938, a prophecy that a great man would die that day. He thereupon marked the reference with a blue pencil and promptly expired. His spectacles still lie on the desk where he had placed them.

As the visitor is escorted round the villa he becomes more and more aware of the feverish efforts to create a Leadership Cult with d'Annunzio as the spiritual Duce in the centre of a modern Valhalla—which is really what the mausoleum, the gunboat, the aeroplane and the motor car represent.

Unfortunately, d'Annunzio's adherents have gone too far and the whole effect is partly ridiculous and partly indecent in its embarrassing exhibition of d'Annunzio's inner feelings—some phoney and some fine. Tiger skins, grand pianos, mandarin's chairs, carpets from Bokhara, Baluchistan and Persia, a bust of Napoleon, an organ, a divan with twenty cushions on it, a double bed with a silk counterpane and a nude statue of a girl (with a blue necklace round her neck, a bunch of real

barley stooks in her hand and a purple pad fixed to a delicate portion of her anatomy) prepare you for 'The Room of Pure Thought'. The chief contents of this are a painted statue of a naked youth, stained glass windows, a child's bed, a coffin, a hard narrow wooden bench-like bed and a good deal of lacquer work. This is supposed to be the ultimate manifestation of d'Annunzio's soul.

A few minutes later, you are shown the New Apartments which he never used because he died a week before he could move into them. Huge marble nudes—copies of classics by Michelangelo—adorn the bedroom and, because he had lost one of his eyes in the First World War, there is at the back of the vast bed a golden tableau of one huge, horrible unwinking eyeball with a golden wing attached to either side. As for his new study, with the naked female statue at one end, the writing table has six swivel chairs and would dwarf most board rooms. The idea was that if he did not feel inspiration at one swivel chair d'Annunzio would move over to the next. This contrasts with his previous so-called workroom which has a very low door in order to make everyone bow at the thought of his hard work. (I nearly knocked my head against it.)

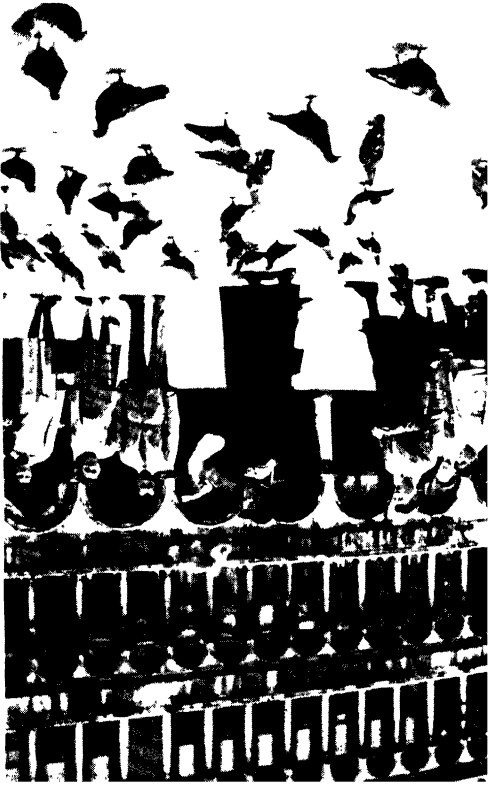
The room contains a leather chair without a back, and a side table adorned with his sugar basin, medicine, a bottle of mineral water, a liqueur glass and an opener, just as if he were still alive—or to show to the faithful that he still is. On this writing table there is a dedication to Eleanor Duse of his unfinished manuscript *The Virgin and the City*. On various shelves are piles of untyped manuscripts, which would make fifteen new volumes if any rash publisher undertook to print them. The rest of the room is cluttered up with statuary, friezes and books. Books are endless, something like sixty thousand. One room is full of best sellers translated into foreign languages. Elsewhere you are shown the music room with two grand pianos, dark blue and gold curtains, four fluted oak pillars and a huge divan on which he used to recline in order to listen to the pianists.

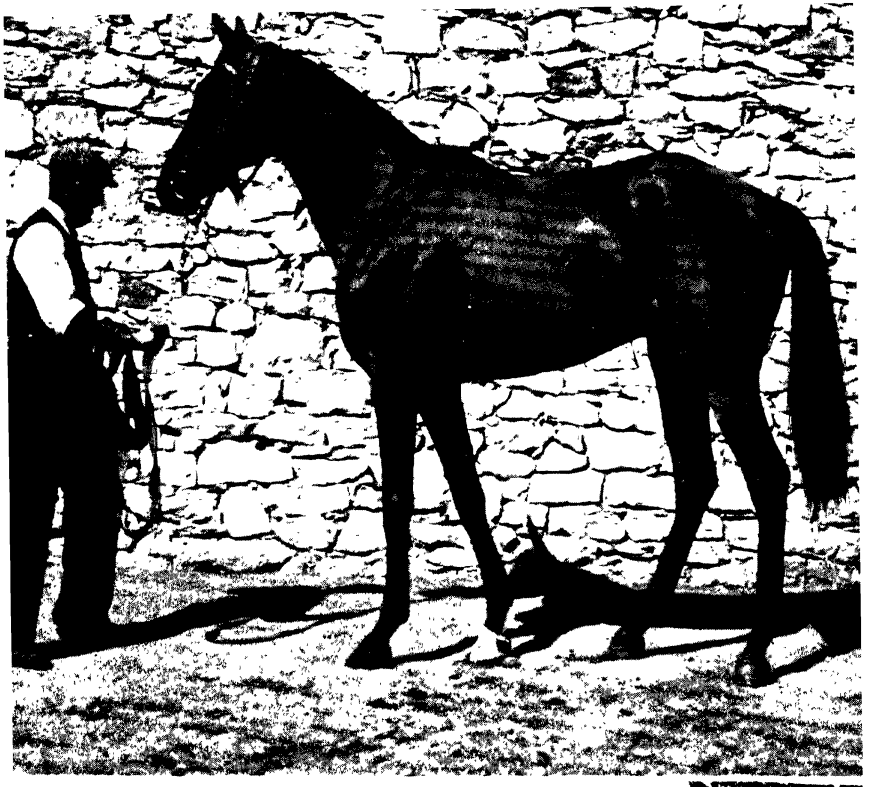
The dining-room is decorated in scarlet and black lacquer. At one end of the table (which seats twelve people) is a statue of a rude, nude faun chasing a rude, nude girl. At the other end is a very large defunct tortoise which the visitor is told 'died a perfumed death'. On a side table are a dozen Buddhas.

The finishing touch occurs when the guide excuses himself for a moment and goes off to the organ room where he plays a brief excerpt from the 'Prayer of the Seamen'. He returns shortly afterwards to explain that d'Annunzio always did this before going out for a walk.

Of all the attractive resorts on the Lake, Gardone is probably the best to make one's headquarters, as Messrs. Winston Churchill and Aneurin Bevan decided to do in 1949. The olives, magnolias, aloes, lemon and orange groves provide a picturesque setting worthy of the former's brush.

(*Upper left*) The pigeons of St. Marks. (*Upper right*) Carabinieri, also Venice. (*Lower*) Scenes from the market place. Trieste.





If you are in a hurry (we were not) the easiest way to visit the various fishing villages round the lake is to go by steamer. Otherwise you can take the picturesque road going north to Campione (alas, not equipped with a casino like its namesake on Lake Maggiore), Tremesino perched high above the lake, and Limone in a bay round the corner with delightful white houses, and with still more delightful olive groves and lemon groves. In the old days when Austria owned the upper part of the lake, armed cutters were stationed here to prevent smuggling. Still farther on comes Riva which used to be a garrison town. This is at the head of the lake and surrounded by mountains quite Norwegian in appearance, just as the inlet looks something like a fjord. The Ponale waterfall is a favourite excursion. So, too, is Arco, four miles away up the beautiful valley of the Sarca.

Driving south from Gardone, the road passes once again through Salo, on its way to Desenzano. Lumps of broken pink granite lie along the front, while orange and blue parasols invite the passer-by to luncheon or a drink on the edge of the tiny harbour. A few hundred yards from the shore lies Isola di Garda with a modern gothic castle surrounded by cypresses. After narrowing slightly for a mile or two the road improves again, though the lake is frequently screened from view by leafy trees planted to protect the vines.

Now comes the sandy spit of Sirmione with a narrow road shaded by chestnut trees.

Sirmione has a squat, moated castle which belonged to the Viscontis and a reputation of having no mosquitoes. To anybody who ever had to learn Latin at school, however, it is best known as the alleged home of Catullus. The ruins of a fourth-century Roman villa extending along the lakeside is said to have been the poet's country house and the place where he wrote so many of his love poems. In the old days Sirmione was a favourite holiday resort for German visitors.

At the end of the promontory is the Hotel Eden where lunch may be taken under the chestnut trees and palm trees. One of the specialities is a local dry wine, to enjoy which one needs an acquired taste. Here a splendid view of the lake is available with Gardone immediately opposite, and as one sits lazily in the sunshine, the sense of relaxation is increased by the sight of fishermen rowing in pairs, each man standing up and working the oar as if he were steering a gondola.

The next little village—of Peschiere—has a moated bridge. Along here the vines act as hedges between the small fields of corn, and the sedge grows fifty yards into the water. Continuing the lakeside drive you now come to Bardolino which is celebrated for its local wine, and to the old city of Garda which is followed by San Vigilio. This is one of the prettiest places on the lake, with the sheer bulk of Monte Baldo towering above and the small promontory covered with olive groves below. From here it is some distance along the lakeside to Malcesine and its romantic old castle where Goethe was nearly arrested by the

Tenerani and friend.

Venetians. The final stretch of the lake contains Torbole and a series of wonderful views, leaving only a kilometre or two to reach Riva.

It takes only an hour or two to reach Verona from Gardone. Instead of turning north for Bardolino at Peschiere, one drives due east to this most beautiful city in the province of Venice. Until 1866 it was the pivot of the Austrian defences in Italy. To enter it one crosses the swift-flowing Adige before driving under an ancient Roman arch into the Piazza d'Erbe. Once the ancient forum, it is now the general market where one can buy anything from pots of geraniums to braces and pyjamas. Primarily, however, it is a fruit, flower and vegetable market with oranges, melons, cherries and lemons predominating on the stalls. Altogether, it is one of the most picturesque squares in Italy, with a marble column, an ancient fountain, a tribunal, and a fine tower. Napoleon stayed in one of the ancient houses over looking the Piazza.

Having halted the car before making a prolonged tour of the city, we were at once accosted by a young Italian who had jumped off his bicycle to talk to us. In broken English he informed us that the best time of his life had been spent as a prisoner of war at Banbury, Oxford and Tewkesbury among other places. Out of gratitude for his treatment in England he volunteered to take us by short cuts to all historic buildings, as well as advising us on the best hotel in the city. He was the first of a series of ex-prisoners of war who offered their services to us almost before the car had stopped in various Italian towns. Once or twice these offers of service were preceded by a cautious question as to whether we were Inglesi or Americano. Usually, however, these volunteer guides spotted our nationality at once and without any suggestion of wanting money for their time and trouble acted as our honorary guides.

There is no doubt that to have been captured by the British is still regarded as a great feather in the cap of any Italian who had this singular good fortune. This one's name was Luigi Dextare and as soon as we had expressed our willingness to accept his services he leapt on his bicycle and rode off ahead to the cathedral, which was delightfully cool inside. The roof is decorated with blue and gold stars and over the first altar on the left is Titian's 'Assumption'.

The cloisters are of red and white brick and stone in alternate layers and have original mosaics and pillars dating back to the Romans. According to Luigi the courtyard is modelled on the one at Monte Cassino devastated by the Second World War.

First Mussolini and then Rommel made Verona their headquarters, with the result that the outskirts were bombed by the Allies and the bridges ultimately blown by the retreating Germans. Most of the houses in the old part of the city are of Venetian architecture and many

of the streets are exceedingly narrow, particularly near the tombs of the Scaligers. These consist of statues of knights on horseback in tiers, to immortalize their ancient dynasty. Close at hand is the Palazzo del Consiglio—usually called La Loggia. Here Dante lived for some time after he was banished from Florence in 1303.

Preceded by Luigi we now made our way to Juliet's tomb outside the city. There was only a matter of inches between its survival and destruction by Allied bombing. All the buildings immediately around it were flattened, but the huge weeping willow tree, the shady courtyard, the empty well, the white pigeons, the badly kept privet hedge and the so-called marriage chapel remain unchanged—like the large open tomb, except that the pre-war habit of dropping a visiting card into it seems to have died out. The vaults remain nice and cool, and were no doubt used as air-raid shelters during the bombing. It is all part of an old Franciscan monastery but smacks strongly of tourism rather than of authenticity.

Shakespeare's play of *Romeo and Juliet*, like his other play *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, is based on events which actually occurred locally, "Escalus, Prince of Verona" having been Bartolomeo della Scala (one of the Scaligers) while the house of Capulets, Juliet's parents, is in the Via Capello. It is a thirteenth-century edifice and bears a marble tablet to this effect.

Of the other historic buildings in Verona there are a number of Romanesque churches dating back to the thirteenth century and even earlier. Most of them, like the cathedral, are built in this harlequinade style of red and white—which personally I found unattractive. San Zeno with its massive tower and slender campanile also has cloisters in red and white. The columns of the main portal rest on lions of red marble, an architectural device which we had seen before and which we were to see again. It is covered with reliefs of scriptural subjects, one of which shows a huntsman speeding headlong to the devil. Inside there is a Holy Water basin, an ancient porphyry bowl nearly ten yards in circumference and a marble figure of St. Zeno himself, who began life as a fisherman and ended up as Bishop of Verona.

Frankly we did not visit the churches of San Bernardino, of San Paolo, Santo Stephano, nor of San Giorgio. But the Roman theatre which was only fully revealed fifty years ago by the pulling down of a number of houses is well worth a visit, while the picture gallery in the Palazzo Pompeii contains a number of paintings by Veronese artists and works by Bellini. The city is delightfully situated, with sycamore trees along the river bank which provide a charming setting.

Between Verona and Vicenza the Lombardy plain is extremely fertile. Mulberries, fields of maize and vineyards extend in all directions; the first village, Soave, giving its name to the famous local wine. The road is straight and fast with a border of trees. In the middle distance is the small range of the Euganean Hills. Vicenza is primarily interesting

to the English as the home of Andrea Palladio, the sixteenth-century architect, whose impressively simple style was imported by the Lord Burlington of the day and given the adjective Palladian. This proved so popular that no rich English landowner worth the name in the eighteenth century failed either to add a Palladian wing to his existing country house or to build an entirely fresh one in the new style. Incidentally, the Horse Guards are pure Palladian.

Palladio is represented in Vicenza by the Basilica, the Olympic Theatre, his own house and the Porto Barbaran Palace with the Villa Capra (known as the Rotonda) a few kilometres away. The Basilica has splendid colonnades in two storeys, one Doric and the other Ionic.

Modern Vicenza is typified by a football stadium, trolley buses, Italian ice-cream men with the shiniest possible machines, a number of beggars and several smart restaurants, where fresh lemon juice and sherbert will cool the thirst on the hottest of days.

Unusually tall plane trees shade the road on the exit to Padua as it climbs over railway bridges like an autostrada. There is no question that the Italians are the finest road builders in the world, nor that there is any limit to the number of vehicles which a single lorry can pull. Here at Vicenza we passed one towing three six-wheelers.

The next town of any importance is Padua which betrays its presence some miles away by a whole series of belching chimney stacks. But once you have entered it you find that nearly all its winding streets are flanked with arcades—the ones which inspired Napoleon to imitate them in the Rue de Rivoli in Paris. Padua dates back to the Romans and was the home of St. Anthony to whom all Roman Catholics and many other people pray when they lose anything. The Basilica named after him in Padua took nearly two hundred years to build between 1232 and 1424 and then was restored in 1749 after a fire. It contains scenes from the life of St. Anthony which include his resuscitation of four corpses and the interesting discovery of a stone instead of a heart in the body of a dead miser, the marble screen of the choir designed by Donatello, and a number of bronzes. Another relic of medieval times is the Salone, a great hall which is 91 yards long and 31 yards wide, but entirely unsupported by pillars. Its most intriguing exhibit is a stone pillory on which defaulting debtors had to face the insults of the public when it used to stand in the market square.

Padua's chief reputation is for its ancient medical school, said to be the oldest in Europe, although the same claim is made for Bologna in central Italy and Upsala in Sweden.

A short, quick autostrada striding over rivers, railways and other roads connects Padua with the outskirts of Venice. It is made more horrid than usual by the roadside posters, but at least the Fiat advertisements are useful in giving the mileage, or rather the kilometerage. Halfway to Venice we glimpsed the odd spectacle of an old man on a pedal bicycle in the middle of the road, although the minimum speed

limit is 50 m.p.h. The fact that he carried a red flag made his presence all the more entertaining.

On the outskirts of Venice we saw our first gondola but by-passed the city as we were making for Trieste. Troops wearing scarlet ties with their olive green uniform, whole families hoeing or haymaking, teams of oxen, the flat Venetian plain, sedge and cyclists, barracks with barbed wire and an occasional sentry, red-headed Italian girls, a canal, then another and another, thousands of young poplars with foliage looking like olives on a cocktail stick, more vineyards, a trio of soldiers bicycling with carbines on their backs, another canal and yet another, fields of artichokes and then the Piave at San Dona. These were our most vivid impressions as we drove on again over more canals, past more yoked oxen pulling cartloads of wine vats, over more canals all with names such as Melonetto, past tile factories and cattle pulling ploughs although it was June, until we came to Porto Gruaro. On the far side of it we were held up at a level crossing by the Orient Express, and a column of huge Italian lorries from the local refinery at Fossalta. By this time we had stopped counting canals, and, instead, counted the different things that Italians carry on their bicycles or on themselves when bicycling—a crate of live hens, a barrel of wine, half a load of hay, children, logs of wood, and baskets of oranges and lemons.

The next town, San Giorgio al Tagli, was evidently the scene of an air raid in the Second World War. The bridges had been blown, the town had been bombed and the outskirts had been flattened. It was here in the open fruit market that we saw our first British Army lorry and jeep—evidence that we were approaching the troubled city of Trieste. At Muzzano the haycarts drawn by oxen stretched right across the road. Then came another oil refinery, a huge red-brick modern affair, and another level crossing where, after we had waited for twenty minutes, the barrier was raised, although no train had passed.

In the course of a 5,000 kilometre tour of three countries it is inevitable that incidents occur. On this occasion we were travelling at speed, overtaking a lorry when a bottle of wine shot off it and nearly broke our windscreen. A road sign indicating Gorizia to our left and a couple of U.S. soldiers in the middle of the road was a further indication that we were approaching Trieste. We had just passed three army jeeps when the Isonzo, very much silted up, came into view and we drove into Monfalcone.

CHAPTER III

MONFALCONE is a busy little town full of shipbuilding and oil refineries with a huge cemetery recalling one of the battles of the First World War. It is today the northern end of the Free Territory of Trieste and it was here that at the frontier post we saw our first Venezia Giulia police in their pale blue shirts and black trousers. But, before one goes any further, it is essential to explain the para-military situation in the Free Territory.

The Free Territory covers 285 square miles of which eighty-six are controlled by British and American troops and the remainder by the Jugoslavs. The Allied Military Government which now administers the British-U.S. Zone known as Zone A was originally formed to govern that part of Venezia Giulia which came under the control of the Allied Command when the Jugoslav Army withdrew to the east of the so-called Morgan Line in accordance with the Duino Agreement of 20th June, 1945. As such, it was a Caretaker Government bound by international conventions to administer the territory according to the Italian law and procedure as far as possible. Unfortunately Trieste and its neighbourhood was the focus of bitter racial jealousies, both Italian and Jugoslav. Moreover, the normal civil administration had ceased to exist. The higher officials had disappeared or were tainted with Fascism. There was no police force and security depended entirely on the presence of allied troops.

From 1945 onwards the political keynote was violent hostility between pro-Italian and pro-Jugoslav Communists who later made it quite clear that they would do everything to frustrate, insult and embarrass the new administration. This was made easy for them by the fact that the Morgan Line (called after General 'Monkey' Morgan of the British Army) was so hastily defined that the dividing line sometimes went right through cottages, or over hillsides so full of rocks and trees, that the original markers were almost impossible to identify. The physical appearance of the Line was a series of piles of white stones which could easily be (and were) moved forward a few feet every now and then by the Jugoslav partisans. Even when this trick became quite apparent it was not easy to combat it. Finally to prevent this seeping forward from affecting one of our vital communications, a number of photographers with telescopic lenses were sent from British G.H.Q. to take photographs as ostentatiously as possible. The result was immediately successful. For some reason best known to himself, everybody behind the Iron Curtain has a phobia for being photographed which is only equalled by those primitive races who regard the camera as the 'Evil Eye.

According to the Duino Agreement, the British, Americans and Jugoslavs had to limit their armed forces in the Free Territory to 5,000 officers and men apiece. American troops consisted of a complete infantry regiment, a company of reconnaissance regiment and various oddments adding up to the prescribed 5,000. They wore a most peculiar black shining casque in place of a beret or steel helmet which looked most unserviceable but must have some very good *objet d'être.* The British troops consisted of three first-line battalions of different infantry regiments of whom more than a third were regulars. The Jugoslav troops remained very much in the background.

The most important unit of all in the Free Territory was the Venezia Giulia Police, 6,000 strong, who manned all the frontier points and handled all the questions of passports, smuggling and the like. Specially selected by the Allied Military Government, they were trained by senior officers of Scotland Yard, and though there may have been an occasional black sheep, they were doing their difficult job very well indeed. It was largely thanks to them—though backed by the 10,000 Anglo-American troops and the continuous presence of at least one major Allied warship in the harbour of Trieste—that the rehabilitation of the two major local industries (shipbuilding and oil refining) achieved such extraordinary progress in so short a space of time. For, though Trieste started to benefit from the European Recovery Programme very late in the day, it had almost entirely recovered from its war wounds and consequent depression by January, 1950.

Commander-in-Chief of the British-U.S. forces was ex-officio the Military Governor with headquarters at Duino Castle. It was two of his aides-de-camp who met us in a staff car at the frontier post and led the way to Castle Duino a few kilometres away.

The remains of the original castle built by the Romans in 384 A.D. stands about 200 yards to the north and was intended as a link in a chain of forts to protect the Romans from coastal pirates. It was destroyed by the Turks in 1467. The present castle was started in the tenth century and was shelled by Italian artillery in the First World War. Reconstruction was started in 1926 and today it is a perfect combination of ancient fortress and modern comfort.

We were given a huge double bedroom covered with yellow Chinese wallpaper. From the balcony above we could see the Dolomites, Trieste and the Julian Alps. Two hundred feet below was the blue Adriatic and a rocky swimming-pool, which could only be reached by a steep path shaded with fig trees, firs and oleanders. The walk back was very good for the figure, being just about as long and precipitous as the walk from the private beach at Cap d'Ail to the hotel. To enter the castle from the road it is necessary to pass through two medieval arches and a fine old courtyard dotted with smart Redcaps. There is also an ancient drawbridge. At night there are superb sunsets and the molten silver of the Adriatic by the light of the moon is something one can never forget.

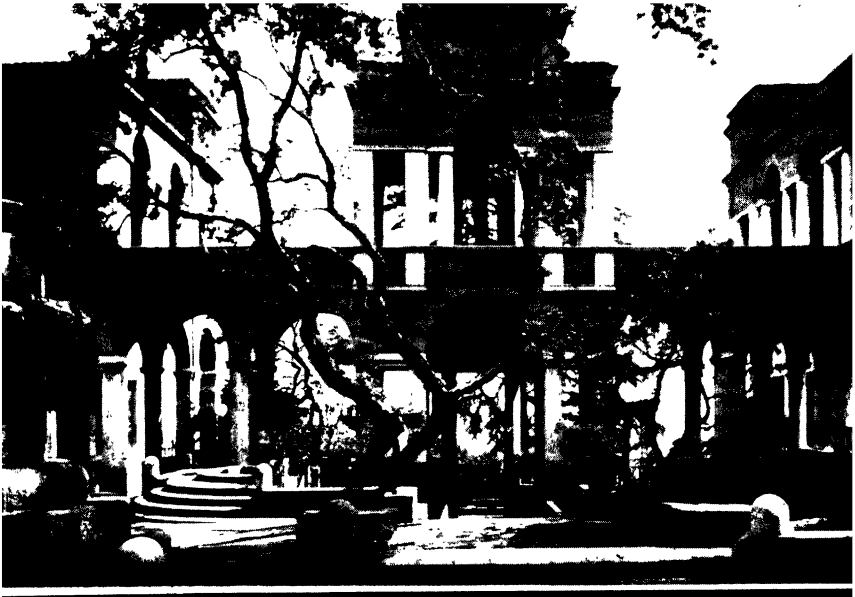
Next day we went by launch to Trieste, thirteen miles away, after a swim before our eggs and bacon breakfast. To our left lay the green hillside pouring straight into the sea with the gold of the gorse and broom, the dark green of the cypresses, and the pale green of the terraced vineyards. The aide-de-camp attached to us pointed out the remains of Roman baths on the hillside and then told our coxswain to steer towards the shore, thus giving us a close-up view of the hoodoo castle of Miramare.

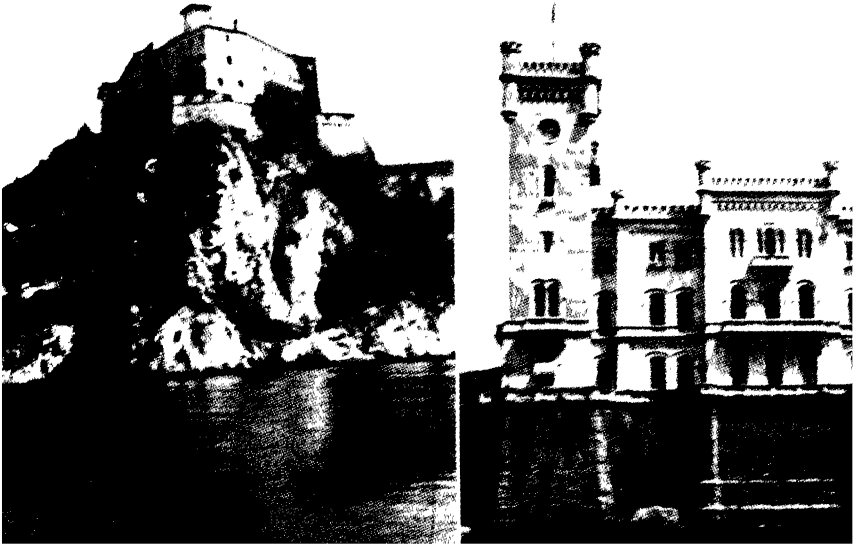
This large white villa—it is not a real castle at all—looks like something which a retired Surrey stockbroker might have built between the two world wars near Cannes. In fact, it dates back to 1867, its first owner being the Emperor Maximilian who was assassinated in Mexico. The next tenant, the Empress Elizabeth, was stabbed to death at Geneva. The Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, whose murder at Sarajevo started the First World War, followed her. Next came the Duke d'Aosta who died unhappily as a prisoner of war in South Africa. No wonder that even General Freyburg, V.C. (whose New Zealand Division chased the last remaining Germans out of Trieste) refused to live in it, preferring to camp in his caravan in the grounds. It is said that Brigadier de Winton, murdered by a fanatic at Pola in 1947, also stayed there. In spite of all this Major-General Hoge, commanding the American forces in the Free Territory, made it his headquarters. He came from Missouri, like his wife, and did not believe in hoodoos or superstitions; so the Stars and Stripes flaunted themselves lazily from the flag pole at the top of this large white Victorian edifice with its square tower and sinister history.

A mile or two farther along the coast we passed a hillside church, a road at sea level, a number of red masts and then a lighthouse. To our right were dozens of fishing-smacks and a couple of three-masted schooners. Ahead, as we approached the harbour, was a British frigate, H.M.S. *Magpie*, 'dressed' for the King's birthday, an American destroyer, also 'dressed' for the occasion and an enormous U.S. army transport disgorging shining limousines for sale to the American troops both in Trieste and Austria at the nominal price of £100 apiece. A few moments later we drew alongside the landing stage and walked into the Piazza Unita.

Our arrival had fortunately coincided with the Municipal Elections—the first for twenty-seven years. The whole city was plastered with advertisements, posters and slogans down-crying each other and upholding their own interest. Green, white and red flags pasted on to every possible pillar, tree trunk, blank wall and even nude statue gave a general effect of Christmas crackers. The square was marked out into white lines. It could hold 100,000 people and had been frequently 'honoured' in the past by the presence of Mussolini. During the elections it was the scene of a number of typical Italian incidents. When the Communists, for example, addressed the crowds, one of the other parties marched up,

(*Upper*) d'Annunzio's fabulous villa above Lake Garda.
(*Lower*) San Fruttuoso. *Photo: ENIT*





1,500 strong, blowing tin whistles. What is more, they disconnected the Communists' loud speaker and connected it to one of their own agitators, so that the more purple in the face the Communists became the louder came the words from the amplifier used by his rival.

On this occasion we only spent a few minutes in the Piazza before continuing by launch to Lazaretto, the farthest point of the Allied Zone. Up above the harbour is the hill of San Giusto with the castle on top which was shelled by the British Navy in the time of Napoleon. In previous centuries it, like the other castles along the coast, had served its purpose by beating back the waves of Turks, Visigoths and other marauders from Eastern Europe. In 1926 it was turned into a museum and recreation centre. Near it is the Cathedral, built on the ruins of a Roman temple and well known for its Byzantine and medieval mosaics. Close at hand too, are memorials to the men of Trieste who fought not only in the two world wars but also in Abyssinia and the Spanish Civil War.

Although the total population of the Free Territory of Trieste is only 360,000, there are no fewer than twelve different parties. They are headed by the Christian Democrats (approved by the Pope), whose platform is to revindicate Italy's right to Trieste and Istria. The Christian Democrats also oppose the sickly anti-Italian front of Danubian nostalgia and believe in the disinterested love of their own fatherland and service to their own country as being the only sure resurrection of Italy. The Communist Party, which has the usual hammer and sickle imposed on a halberd as its symbol, asks for the nomination of a Government for the Free Territories, a unification of the two zones and the removal of both the Anglo-American and the Jugoslav occupation troops. The party pretends to consider that it is struggling for peace and is therefore against the Atlantic Pact.

The Italian Republican Party considers itself to be waging war against national Communism and believes that Trieste's prosperity lies in increasing its commerce (like everyone else). The Venezia Giulia Socialist Party believes in struggling against Fascism and stands for scrupulous honesty in public life. The Italian Liberal Party considers Trieste's detachment from the political entity of Italy as unjust (like the others) and believes in private enterprise. The Italian-Slav Popular Front believes in struggling against reaction. The Italian Bloc believes in "A jealous and rigorous defence without any compromise of Trieste's Italianity until Venezia Giulia and Istria return to national unity". It further calls for supreme defence of Italian civilization on the frontiers and strengthening ties of the motherland. The Independent Front believes simply in Trieste for the people of Trieste—in fact, a Trieste Free State. The Slovene Democratic League desires a peaceful cohabitation of the Italian and Slovene population based on completely equal rights, refuting any Totalitarian régime and demanding a full application of the Four Freedoms—in other words, an idealistic party.

(*Upper*) Peggy and General Pechkoff at Isola Madre
(*Lower*) Castello Duino contrasts with the villa-like
:llo Miramare.

The Republican Independence Movement also wants to assure peace between the Italian and Jugoslav peoples in the Free Territory of Trieste and like the Slovene Democratic League wants Trieste to be independent. The Trieste Democratic Party has the same kind of theories, recommending "All cultural and political rights whether Slav or Italian within precise terms of numerical proportion".

The twelfth party, the Italian Socialist Movement, stands apart from the other political parties because it believes primarily in "Reconstructing the Fatherland in all its values." Unlike the other parties it has no local theories about improving the local administration. This is strange because it was undoubtedly the resurgence of Trieste as a port which has made it the target for so many different countries' aims—Jugoslavia, Russia, Italy and the United States. America had sent all the latest equipment for shipbuilding, loading and unloading. The biggest floating crane in the Mediterranean is one of the prize possessions of Trieste and every type of salvaging equipment is in active use. It was in 1943 that the Germans bombed the harbour, sinking literally dozens of ships which were still being brought to the surface in 1950. Rusting Liberty ships, a 28,000 ton Transatlantic liner, a light cruiser and a large cruiser were all lying on the surface either upside down or on one side, ready to be dismantled and turned into scrap while we were there.

A tour of the harbour by launch is certainly of acute interest. The dozens of wrecks, the hundreds of cranes, the keels of new ships being laid, the steel works, the vast store houses, the huge piles of timber bought from Austria and awaiting shipment, the three moles and the breakwaters built by the Italians, the great oil refinery works which have already been shipping 20,000 tons of oil to Czechoslovakia every month, form a very interesting contrast to the bare green mountainside of the Jugoslav territory less than five miles away.

Altogether the splendid harbour has half a dozen inlets. On one of them is the little town of Muggia, a hotbed of Communists although entirely rebuilt by the Allied Military Government. Round the corner is Lazaretto occupied by a battalion of British troops who were sunbathing when we arrived. They were billeted partly in an old monastery and partly in Nissen huts. Lazaretto forms the southernmost tip of the British-U.S. Zone and it is noticeable that the fine road suddenly becomes a goat track where it crosses the frontier into the Jugoslav Zone.

The local peasants seem to be quite unconcerned by events. There they sit, laughing, eating and drinking outside their inns and taverns and wine shops, while in the castle on the hill behind them a Jugoslav agent armed with a telescope counts every ship which enters or leaves the harbour. At San Dorligo della Valle there is a real gulch, with limestone caves and a number of foibe. There are natural oubliettes down which many a victim has been thrown and will doubtless be thrown in the future.

On some of the walls of the chalets was the single word 'Tito'. Others had 'Viva Stalin, Tito'. Yet others had, crossed out, either Stalin or Tito according to taste.

This rugged countryside contrasts with the green hill and the afforestation scheme of Montebello, the scene of one of Napoleon's battles. Near at hand on a fir-clad hill, the top of which is in Jugoslav territory though the rifle range (originally made by the Germans) remains in our hands, is an encampment of another of our infantry battalions.

At Basovizza there are stone walls like those in North Wales and the frontier is very close. We ourselves approached it in a staff car. At one end of a lane was a guard hut with three Venezia Giulia police armed with carbines. At the other end—a hundred yards away—was a Jugoslav soldier who promptly disappeared into his sentry box when Peggy produced her camera. Loopholes had been made in the stone walls. It was from here, incidentally, that one of the Venezia Giulia policemen had been kidnapped a week or two previously. On the day we paid our call it was nice and hot with a bright blue sky, and all this business of frontiers and rifles and carbines seemed both unnecessary and out of date.

Not far away were the very luxurious American barracks, set however in rocky country. The next village we visited was Aidussina—another hotbed of Communists. The ground continued to be exceedingly rocky and covered with scrub. Next came Sistiana, a small town much used by the American troops when off duty. It was a slatternly place full of undesirable women from Trieste.

Meanwhile our visit to Castello Duino continued to be most pleasant, punctuated with dinner parties attended by the leading lights of the Allied Military Government, generals, colonels, aides-de-camp and those fascinating people—political officers. Early morning bathing was followed by further visits by launch to Trieste.

On one occasion we were proceeding at a fair rate of knots when an American vedette appeared from nowhere and warned us off our course. At first we thought that some wartime mine had broken loose and lay in our track. Actually it appeared that the American troops were carrying out an anti-tank practice with their new recoil-less 88 millimetre gun. No warning had been given to our host, the Military Governor. Fishing boats were also being ordered out of the area. Two of them with parti-coloured amber and maroon sails came so close to each other that they looked like a giant butterfly settled on the water. After making a wide detour and watching with interest the extremely accurate fire of the American gunners we finally reached Trieste once more.

Again we disembarked opposite the Piazza Unita before paying a call on the marble palace of the Allied Military Government, formerly the Prefecture. It was interesting to see British and American officers all working together amicably. Not far away is the American club

known as The Sugar Bowl, opposite The Hole in the Wall, Trieste's best-known night club.

The Piazza della Borso is, to use an Irishism, a triangular square dominated by the Stock Exchange, which looks like an opera house. The two chief shopping streets are the Corso, which is full of tramlines; and the Via Carducci. Both are continuously full of jeeps, Italian motor scooters, bren gun carriers, large new American cars and small dilapidated Italian ones. The most popular bar for British officers is the Carnaro. It has a code name 'X19' which is used when anybody having his elevenses is required by his superior officer. The smartest restaurant is Pépé Grandi in the Via Rossetti. It has panelled walls, a white ceiling, alcoves, fairy lights and a reputation for scampi and red mullet. Unfortunately one can seldom get luncheon there before 2 p.m. The leading hotel is the Excelsior—a fine grey stone building on the harbour with a big airy lounge and a comfortable bar. It was lucky to have escaped the general destruction of the port installations. While we were there its façade was covered with Communist posters showing Resistance men being hanged by the Germans.

The most colourful and charming part of Trieste is the market place in the Piazza del Ponte Rosso. At one end is the flower market where sweet peas, carnations, gladioli, arum lilies and other flowers are exhibited for sale. Visitors, however, should bear in mind that if they are sending flowers to anybody in Italy—and particularly in Trieste—there is a language of flowers which has the deepest significance. When I ordered some the picturesque old flower woman questioned me strictly: (*a*) were they for a woman and (*b*) was she married? If not, were they for a man? At least she did not ask whether the man was married. Elsewhere under red, white and dove-coloured awnings were trestles covered with combs, buttons, panties, cooking utensils, silk stockings, needles and cotton, gaudy india-rubber balls, sandals, shoes, handbags, silk handkerchiefs and ties. I bought three of the last named for the equivalent of 5*s*. the lot. In England they would have cost at least half a guinea apiece. That is always a good plan—to buy your presents and souvenirs in the market and not in the shops. It saves a great deal of money and is very good fun into the bargain. In another section of the market place were cocks and hens, pigeons, goslings, chickens, live rabbits—none of them behind bars or in cages.

Architecturally, Trieste is rather a muddle. It has been conquered by so many races and so many different buildings have been erected, knocked down and reconstructed that there is no outstanding style, except for the vast new blocks of white flats built by the Allied Military Government. So, whatever may happen in future years to the destinies of Trieste, there will be many thousands of people who will remember with gratitude the solid contributions of the United States and Great Britain to the unhappy city. Huge stretches of marshland have been reclaimed and turned into market gardens. (Needless to say, the Com-

munists claim that the real, sinister reason for the reclamation of the land is to build an atom bomb aerodrome site.) The port installations have been entirely renovated and when finally Trieste is handed back to its inhabitants it will be enjoying a greater prosperity than ever before.

At last our stay at Castle Duino had to come to an end and it was with real regret that we drove off to Venice. En route we were stopped for over half an hour by an infuriating Italian police officer at the control point. A mile or two farther we only just avoided a bare-footed boy who rushed across the road immediately in front of us from behind a bridge. The rest of the journey to Venice was by the same road as the one along which we had come a few days previously. As before, the sequence of canals was the chief feature of the landscape—canals which were more like wide irrigation ditches than the sort with which one associates Venice and the Venetian Plain.

As for the approaches to Venice, they were most unglamorous. Huge factories belching smoke, pylons and chimney stacks and refineries, derricks, cranes and motor-car works cover the landscape. Then comes the causeway with the sea on either side ending in the Piazzale Roma.

My last visit to Venice had been in 1936 and I had no idea that it was still impossible for a motor car to enter the city. All we could do was to park our Citroen in the local garage and then set off on foot with the baggage following later. On this occasion we chose the Germania because it was the nearest hotel, instead of making our way to the Danielli in the heart of Venice, unlike the task force of shock troops sent ahead under the command of a colonel to take and hold this luxury hotel until their general arrived and made it his headquarters. The mission was accomplished, and jeeps entered the town for the first time in history.

CHAPTER IV

VENICE is quite the most remarkable city in the world, built on piles and surrounded by water. It is actually founded on an archipelago of 118 islands divided by a network of 160 canals crossed by 400 bridges. The heavy traffic passes along the major canals so that the roads are reserved exclusively for pedestrians.

The reason for its unique situation is simple. When the sixth-century barbarians arrived from the East the people on the mainland took refuge in the islands of the lagoons already inhabited by a poor handful of fishermen and salt-mine workers. Following further attacks, notably by the son of Charlemagne, the current Doge decided to move still farther inland—from Malamocca to the Rialto group of islands. This coincided with the arrival from Alexandria of the body of St. Mark, the patron saint of the Venetians.

It was from here that the inhabitants began their commercial conquest of the Orient, subjugating Dalmatia, freeing the Adriatic of pirates and then, taking advantage of the Crusaders who required large fleets for their idealistic objectives, turned them from the Holy Land to the conquest of Constantinople, and the foundation of a Latin Empire in the East, where the Venetians acquired all possible commercial advantages at no cost to themselves. All went well until the Turks appeared on the scene, captured Constantinople in 1453 and deprived Venice of almost all her naval outposts.

The next phase was when the Doges decided to turn their attention to the mainland and proceeded to capture most of the big cities in the Lombardy plain. In the meantime,the discovery of America deprived Venice of much of her importance as the main stepping-off point between Europe and Asia. In spite of this, her enormous riches enabled her to survive another two centuries with every appearance of pomp and splendour, carnivals and masquerades, until Napoleon finally captured the city in 1797 and gave it to Austria. It was not until 1866, less than ninety years ago, that Venice finally became part of the Kingdom of Italy. It is still a very odd shape, being two and a half miles long and a mile and three quarters wide with the Grand Canal and the Piazza San Marco as the two main features. On our first evening we took a steamboat from the end of the Grand Canal. These steamboats are a fairly modern innovation and being the water-omnibuses of Venice, stop every four or five hundred yards at one side or the other of the Canal. But their upper decks are only partially covered, so if it rains only a small number of seats are dry.

On either side of the Grand Canal, are palaces coloured maroon, cream and ochre, most with green shutters and all with balconies. Some

are of marble, some of ordinary stone. Many of them have posts coloured white, blue and white, or blue and gold, like barbers' poles, to which are tethered the gondolas or speedboats of the occupants. Some palaces have geranium window-boxes. One has green trees on its roof. The surface of the water, which is surprisingly clean, is dotted with every kind of gondola. These like motor vehicles are of every type—the equivalent of taxis, private cars, lorries, vans and pony traps—but all water-borne, of course.

As the gondoliers work their craft along or across the canal like water beetles, they make an interesting study. The technique seems to be a half-moon curve of the long blade of the oar in and out of the water, with a golfing pivot of the hips to ensure a good follow-through as they lean from the stern of their oddly shaped craft.

It has taken centuries for the gondola to assume its present form; the reason why it is used almost exclusively in Venice being its helplessness in rough weather. In the placid canals, however, gondolas are sensitive to the slightest movement of the oar and in spite of their length—about twelve yards—have a lock like a taxicab. Slender, elegant, perfectly balanced, usually painted in black and with a shining iron prow shaped like a halberd, they can carry a remarkably large load. The iron prow, by the by, is intended to counterbalance the weight of the gondolier at the other end. In a delightful paragraph on the subject of these craft the pre-war *Baedeker* refers to the weird and melancholy shouts of the gondoliers on turning a corner and to the desirability of applying to a policeman if any difficulty arises about the fare charged. In 1949 the gondoliers struck for higher wages. Nor was this surprising. Their earnings must have been badly hit by the growing use of the steamboats, speedboats and water taxis which have had the further effect of causing many of the owners of the palazzos to give up their residence owing to the hoots, toots and roars of the engines. As it is, their numbers have dwindled from 5,000 to 450.

Here and there one sees a really smart motor boat outside one of the few remaining palazzos still privately occupied, but it is as rare as a Rolls-Royce in Pimlico. The chief sights at the lower end of the Grand Canal where it broadens out to half a mile or more are undoubtedly the Palace of the Doges and the campanile. The palace looks as if it were made of pink and white fretwork. The Piazza San Marco is nearly two hundred yards long and fifty or sixty yards wide. At one end is the Cathedral. On the other two sides and at the bottom end, is a series of splendid palaces, three storeys high, occupied in ancient times by the Procurators, the highest officers of the Venetian Republic after the Doge. But to the average visitor these buildings are a mere backcloth to the cafés like Quadri, Laveno and Florian, the chairs and tables of which extend right across the Piazza until they practically meet.

There is no place quite like this in the world. Other meeting places like the Café de la Paix in Paris and the Café de Paris at Monte Carlo,

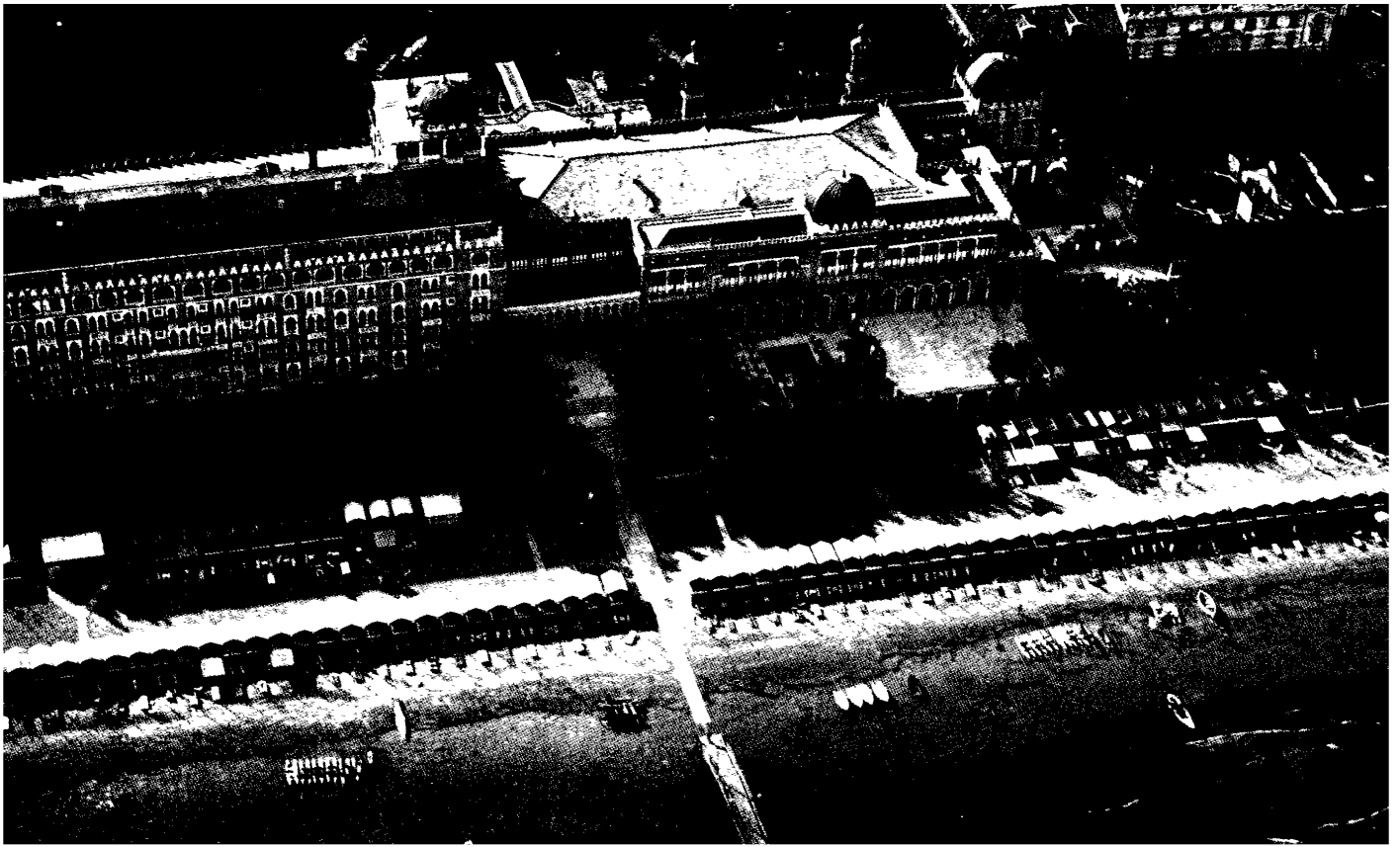
for example, are at the mercy of passing vehicles. The Piazza San Marco suffers no interruptions from passing traffic, because motor cars have no way of entering into the city. As a result you see people walking and talking, girls in couples, Italian sailors as gay as if they had won the war, young men in quartettes, children chasing pigeons, old and young sitting at the various café tables listening to sentimental music and eating pink, green and mauve Neapolitan ices, white-jacketed waiters, little girls trying to do ballet dancing to the nearest orchestra, carabinieri in their ancient red, white and black uniforms, lovers and lawyers, shopkeepers and their wives, none of them interested in Libya or Cyrenaica or Trieste or any other former territory of Italy, about which the Italian newspapers are always printing heavy headlines. Venetians, like all other Italians, are today only interested in having enough Chianti to drink, enough pasta to eat and enough good news about some local cyclist who has won a long-distance race.

The ordinary member of the public whether he is Italian, English or French, is today surfeited with high-powered editorials in the national newspapers about their position in the world. It is even more true of the formerly occupied countries like Italy and France that the general tendency of the public is towards sport and to local success in boxing, bicycling, lawn tennis and the like. The Italians in particular have begun to learn that Mussolini's dreams of empire show a serious financial deficit. If the truth be known, Italians are delighted that their sons do not have to go and sweat unprofitably in Italian Somaliland and other countries beyond the seas. Italy is the perfect example of a country which has benefited by losing a war (as usual); whereas Great Britain has to support an army of a million or more, a costly navy, an exceedingly expensive air force and various colonies which are not self-supporting. Italy is in the happy position of avoiding the overheads of both an unprofitable empire and the three fighting services, with the exception of a skeleton army, navy and air force. Not a penny which reaches the Italian Treasury has to be spent in jet aircraft, advanced tanks, new type submarines and other expensive luxuries. It is for this reason that the Italian Prime Minister was able to say four years after VE Day that the Italian paper money was backed by as much gold and hard currency as it was in 1939.

The crowds every evening in the Piazza San Marco afford excellent testimony of all Italians under the surface. They are the first to admit that they have long ago ceased to be a belligerent race. All they want is to be left alone and enjoy the sweet fruits of defeat. The balance of the conversation in the Piazza—in fact the whole atmosphere of the Piazza—is rather like that of an interval between two acts of a play. Everybody is having a good time, criticizing or applauding, at the same time wondering what is going to happen next, without any intention of taking part in events themselves. So much for the social side of the Piazza.

Over the principal portal of the Cathedral are the four horses in

Limone on Lake Garda
Photo: ENIT



gilded bronze, the only existing specimens of an ancient quadriga. They were brought to Venice from Constantinople centuries ago and it is quite probable that they originally adorned the triumphal arch of Nero in Rome. Napoleon took them to Paris in 1797, but after the battle of Waterloo they were returned to Venice. Hitler also stole them, but back they came again.

The Cathedral from outside looks very much like St. Sophia in Constantinople, definitely Byzantine and somewhat bulbous. The interior with its uneven floor is dimly impressive and full of mosaics. Under the high altar repose the relics of St. Mark. Elsewhere there are fourteen marble statues, a gilded Byzantine relief of the Madonna (tenth century) and three red slabs in the marble floor in memory of the reconciliation between Barbarossa and Pope Alexander III. Next to the Cathedral is the Campanile, over 100 yards high. Unfortunately it is not the original. This collapsed in 1902, but the Clock Tower, erected in the fifteenth century, has two ancient bronze giants on the platform to strike the hours on a bell.

At the bottom end of the Piazza one can walk through a portico down an alleyway which might be described as the Bond Street of Venice to a series of excellent restaurants such as Taverna, La Fenice and the Colomba where scampi, wood strawberries flavoured with lemon juice and other delicacies, like Parma ham, are served. Venetian cooking is of quite a high standard but as elsewhere in Italy, hot food is invariably sent in on cold plates. Another disadvantage is that it is seldom possible to eat out of doors without being interrupted by beggars, itinerant accordion players and children at play. At the same time there is a great deal of pleasure in searching out the narrower alleyways of the city, crossing little bridges, poking one's nose through the open windows of wine shops with the local peasants playing cards, losing one's way and buying presents in gay little shops which seem to be open until midnight.

Venice is a city of ancient, narrow streets, strips of water, cocktail bars like Harry's or the Monaco, notable hotels, picture galleries and churches; but one certainly needs a guide to get the full flavour of this ancient city. Only a guide can identify for you the small red house in which d'Annunzio lived, the palazzo where Robert Browning died, the palazzo where Lord Byron lived, the Court of Appeal with its blue and gold barbers' poles, the Town Hall with even bigger blue and gold barbers' poles, the palazzo which Richard Wagner occupied, the warehouse of the Turkish merchants, the Ghetto down a small side canal near Jeremiah's Church, the palace near the Rialto which is today the G.P.O. of Venice, the Prefecture and the Palazzo Grimani now the Court of Appeal. The Rialto bridge, however, is unmistakable, like the wooden bridge of the Academia and The Bridge of Sighs which owes its name to the fact that it crosses the canal between the Palace of the Doges and the notorious dungeons, where political

Bird's-eye view of the Lido
Photo: ENIT

criminals were first tortured and then executed. Today it is merely a means of communication between the Criminal Courts and the criminal prison and it is highly improbable whether anybody who has crossed it deserves any sympathy, the original dungeons having been destroyed over 150 years ago. The best view of The Bridge of Sighs, which is much smaller than picture postcards suggest, is obtained from the Riva degli Schiavoni which I always thought was the Quay of the Slaves until I was informed that it means the Quay of the Dalmatians. It is on the Riva degli Schiavoni that the Hotel Danielli stands. This is as expensive as ever, with its huge maroon pillars and a general effect of white and scarlet, but the Grand and the Gritti Palace are even more fashionable.

One way to spend a day in Venice is to take a motor boat leaving the Grand Canal just outside the hotel. Visitors who are short of lire can reserve seats through their hotel concierge in one of the sight-seeing launches which carry about thirty people. The route is usually up the Grand Canal which is linked by 200 palaces, one of which was started in the eighteenth century and was never completed. Near the Rialto Bridge are the Venetian Fruit and Meat Markets, lined by dozens of lorry-type gondolas. At the top of the Grand Canal the boat turns left along the Canal Della Giudicca. This is more a harbour than a canal. Giudicca Island is full of docks and flour mills; anchored off shore are American, Swedish and even Swiss merchantmen. (The Swiss use Genoa as a harbour.) Ocean-going barges and big white post-war Italian liners show the depth of the water.

The first stop is the Island of San Giorgio Maggiore named after the splendid church begun by Palladio and completed from his design by Scamozzi in the year that Titian died of the plague. The magnificent interior is a kind of reversed Latin cross with three naves, a wonderful wooden crucifix and 'The Last Supper' by Tintoretto. In the nearby monastery (now a barracks) Pope Pius VII was elected in 1799, because Rome was occupied by the French. Tourists who have the energy. can climb the 180 feet tall Campanile and secure a fine view of Venice, which, by the by, has no fewer than eighty churches. It was on this island that the Mint, where the gold ducats were coined, used to stand.

In the surrounding island are hospitals for dangerous diseases, tuberculosis and mental cases. All the islands are piped, some have artesian wells. One of the handsomest is the rose red brick-walled lunatic asylum near the Island of Lazzaro which gave its name in Italian to Lazzaretto as a term for all hospitals for contagious diseases. Its history dates back to the eighteenth century when it was handed over by Venice to Armenian monks of the order of St. Lazarus who had been expelled by the Turks from Greece, and its geraniums, wistaria, magnolia and cedars of Lebanon provide an excellent example of what can be done over the course of two centuries by godly men. Byron spent three

months on the island in order to learn Armenian, though originally the settlement was intended solely for the treatment of lepers.

Today it is inhabited by forty priests (not monks) who live tolerably well. They have their own vineyard at Azzolo and drink their own wines. They own a good deal of landed property on the mainland and teach oriental languages. The panelled refectory contains a rather crude 'Last Supper' by Novelli and has an orange and white marble floor. The monastery—if that is the word—contains an unexpected Egyptian mummy in its unimportant little museum, a celebrated printing works with publications in most languages and a fairly valuable library. All the available ground of the island is cultivated as a garden, but it is continually being enlarged by the importation of rubble and earth.

From here to the Lido is only a few hundred yards and one can go straight to the Excelsior Hotel which is just as *soigné* with its marble pillars, yellow cushions and divans as it was before the war. On the last occasion I had visited it, absurd little waves licked feebly at the aching silver beach. A German baron in a soft grey hat and purple pyjamas lay draped on the divan of the cabin on my left. A very attractive American girl in nile-green pyjama legs and a white singlet fondled a small sleepy dachshund puppy on my right.

If she had looked at the triplicate notice boards a few yards away she would have read: (1) 'The dog will be seized'; (2) '*Le chien sera saisi*'; and (3)—I forget the Italian and German for it. But then all the rules at the Lido are intended to be broken One day I followed a queue of people through a door, although on it was written '*Chiuso, fermé*, closed, *cerrado, geschlossen*'.

What is the Lido anyway? In fact, it is an island eight miles long and one mile wide, with two huge hotels, two medium-sized hotels, an immature golf course, eight tennis courts, a small pier, dozens of water bicycles, a gondola or two, a mile of beach dotted with gaudy bathing cabinets, each containing three compartments, a floating population of Italian princesses, Italian counts, Spanish dukes, American millionaires, Old Etonians and cocktail shakers.

Everyone wears pyjamas all day. It is an orgy of slumber-suits. All day you bask. At night reputed Batavian princesses dance before you in the cabaret. Foreign royalties aqua-plane by searchlight. American kings of industry give £1,000 dinner parties.

The week I was there last they were having an international speed-boat tournament, and an international tennis tournament for prizes given by the Crown Prince of Italy and the King of Sweden. Nine months in the year the Lido is an unruffled expanse of yellow sand and blue sea, without a sound or sight of man. For three months it is the most gorgeous wash-pot in Europe, where dawdle, doze, and even bathe the prettiest women and the plumpest men you can possibly imagine.

On this occasion the season had not yet begun and there were less than twenty people staying in the 550 bedrooms of the Excelsior.

Miles of bathing huts, many of them with private apartments at the back, were untenanted. At least, however, there have been various improvements since before the war. There are piers every hundred yards which enable one to dive into the sea without having to walk all that distance until the water reaches one's neck. But I have never yet fathomed the reason why the Lido should have become a generic term for bathing places all over the world—unless it is because of its brevity, just as the need for short words in newspaper headlines is responsible for 'Tory' instead of 'Conservative'. There are hundreds of bathing resorts much more attractive than the Lido, where the water is more limpid, where there is rock bathing as well as sand beach bathing, where the background is far more picturesque. It must be admitted, however, that the Casino which was built after my last visit is a casino to end all casinos, quite the most spectacular of the dozens I have visited all over the world. The one at Monte Carlo is really dwarfed by it. Inside there are huge marble pillars, gigantic roulette rooms, positively ducal *salles privées*, vast bars, huge chandeliers. Everything is on an epic-colossal scale and the acres of purple carpets, the vast pink curtains, the gold and white décor in the huge corridors positively dwarf the gamblers. As for the exterior, which is built in the modern German style, it contrasts strongly with the baroque and Byzantine Hotel Excelsior across the road. The great dove-coloured cinema, a few yards away, was also new to me.

Yet another day in Venice can be spent simply in shopping if one has the lire. The Merceria is the Regent Street or Fifth Avenue of Venice. There are also shops on the bridge of the Rialto itself. When tired of walking one can have drinks at the Al Tadora, or lunch at the Noemi or the Tre Rose in the Calle dei Fabbri on scampi, steaks, peaches and cherries. Wherever you go there are musical cries of "Gondola, gondola, signor?" but as the steamboats continue until midnight there is no need to put oneself to this expense except for romance under the full moon. Yes, Venice is quite a place.

Another way to spend a day in sightseeing is to start with the Chiesa dei Frari (the Frari Church) begun in 1250 by the Franciscans and only completed in 1417. The interior is 270 feet long in the form of a Latin cross and there is a most beautiful monument to Titian. Tradition says that he is buried there. After this one should go to the adjoining school of San Rocco which houses an enormous collection mostly by Tintoretto—vast pictures on vast walls—so many that it seems incredible that any one man had the time to paint them all. Thence to the Ca' Rezzonico, which is really three exhibitions in one building. On the ground floor there is a series of enormous rooms, one leading out of the other, with most beautiful frescoes by Giandomenico Tiepolo.

Each ceiling seems more beautiful than the last and the delicate colourings are really exquisite, especially the blues and greys. On the second floor there is an exhibition of eighteenth-century painting. The pictures are quite small, which seems a relief after the enormous compositions by Tintoretto and the subjects are very gay with masquerades and every aspect of Venetian life in those days. There are also some beautifully carved examples of Malacca furniture and tapestry.

On the third floor the curators have reconstructed rooms from patrician houses. Everything is perfect. There is a bedroom of the mistress of the house complete with her bed, her fitted dressing-case and all her personal belongings. Opening out of this is her dressing-room with built-in cupboards which would be the envy of any woman, even today. There are alcoves completely furnished, boudoirs and a library. In the drawing-room there are two models of Chinese figures with heads that nod when you touch them. In fact, if the lady of the day came home she could move directly into this suite and find it completely furnished. This museum has all the charm of the Carnavallet in Paris.

The Academy of Fine Arts is also delightful but needs two or three hours to digest, beginning with the Primitives. Here are the portrait of St. Mark by Tintoretto, Titian's 'Presentation of Mary in the Temple', the famous 'St. George' by Mantegna, Bellini's 'Madonna of the Trees' and several other examples of this artist's work.

By contrast, the pink and white fretwork Palace of the Doges is strangely disappointing inside. The vast rooms with their heavy ceilings and pictures of overwhelming dimensions are oppressive in their grandeur. It is impossible to imagine women living or breathing or moving around in these rooms, though one gets the impression that men of tremendous importance made history here. The largest hall of all gives no indication of any kind of artificial light; no chandeliers, no brackets. Presumably it must have been illuminated by some kind of flood-lighting. This hall is called the Sala del Maggior Consiglio, on the east wall of which is 'Paradise' by Tintoretto—the largest oil painting in the world.

CHAPTER V

THE only motoring route to the south or north from Venice begins along the autostrada to Padua. The entrance fee is seventy-five lire, but by this time we had learnt the trick of collecting the filthy little five lire notes given to us in exchange and keeping them specially for autostrade. Vineyards and cornfields alternate on either side of the road for several miles until, once again, the small volcanic Euganean foothills beloved by Shelley and Petrarch come into view, followed by Abano.

Abano is an unimpressive-looking little resort which, however, should be well known to schoolboys as the birthplace of Livy, and should be even better known to people who suffer from arthritis, rheumatism and gout as having quite miraculous mud baths. I know of people who have been flown on stretchers from England to Abano and within three weeks have been completely mobile again. Hot springs and mud baths are also to be found a few kilometres away at Battaglia, near which the Castello Gattaio looks like a pinhead on the top of a tall green hill. As we drove along we narrowly avoided a number of children playing a kind of Italian hopscotch. As we learnt afterwards the game is called gyro d'Italia and is based on the Round-Italy marathon bicycle races. A crude series of parallel lines, bending this way and that, are drawn on the surface of the road. The game is to snick the cap of a beer bottle round the course without going over the parallel lines. It causes intense excitement among the children, who are entirely oblivious of the passing traffic.

The scenery in the Lombardy Plains continues flat but attractive—mostly cornfields dotted with mulberry trees to give shade, and occasional olive trees. The fertility of the soil is guaranteed by the river Adige which comes into view once again near Rovigo. This is not a particularly interesting little town and one has no regrets in more or less by-passing it.

At the far side, the road approaches the green and sullen Po, and the cornfields give place to rice and sugar beet. The Po is exceedingly wide at this point and must have formed an excellent natural boundary in medieval times when the various Italian cities were fighting each other so bitterly. Having run alongside the river for some distance, the road now crosses it by means of an Italian Bailey bridge into Ferrara.

This famous city has most unattractive outskirts, with belching chimney stacks, sugar refineries and large factories. It was raining as we entered and the cyclists carrying umbrellas over their heads reminded us, somehow, of a series of trapeze acts. But there is this to be said for them—they actually kept to their special lane under an arch of plane

trees; which is quite unusual in Italy. Ferrara was the headquarters of the celebrated house of Este and is of particular interest to the British because Welf of Este was the founder of the family of Guelph whilst his brother, Henry the Proud, became the founder of the families of Brunswick and Hanover.

The impressive moated castle of the Estes still divides the Old and New Quarters of Ferrara. Nearby, in the old quarter, is the Cathedral, the lower part of which dates back to the twelfth century. One should also visit the Palazzo Schifanoia, a kind of Italian Sans Souci. It was here that Lucrezia Borgia spent part of her twenty-second year after she had already been married three times. The Palazzo dei Diamante is in the New Quarter, an excellent example of early Renaissance. It takes its name from the way the stones are carved with diamond-like facets. Ariosto built a house for himself in Ferrara and it still exists.

On the southern side of Ferrara are vast orchards of fruit trees and the hamlet of Malalbergo where some sharp skirmishes must have been fought in the Second World War. But why Malalbergo? Presumably the local inn must have been notorious for its bad food. Along here an afforestation scheme is in progress all the way to Bologna.

Never having visited Bologna before, I was quite unprepared for the charm and dignity of this splendid city. It has always had for me a certain curiosity value as being the home of boloney, in other words, of the famous Bologna sausages. In addition it has a world-wide reputation for its salami and macaroons. But its inhabitants do not seem to welcome visitors nor desire to emphasize their touristic attractions. And yet it has two leaning towers at least as impressive as the Leaning Tower of Pisa. It has the oldest university in Europe unless Upsala in Sweden is still older. It has a series of wonderful fountains and the most splendid colonnades of any city in Italy. The leading hotel—the Majestic-Baglioni—is on the main street but so badly signposted that it is easy to drive past it a couple of times. For many years it was under German management, which accounts for its continued efficiency. Incidentally, visitors are urged by notices in their bedrooms to eat at least one meal in the hotel. And quite right too. We ourselves did the obvious thing of going to eat at Pa Pagallo.

This restaurant is built rather like a cellar, with its walls covered by photographs of stage celebrities. During dinner the clients are pestered by itinerant pedlars of lottery tickets, postcards, newspapers, toys and even by a negro selling silk handkerchiefs. Any minute we expected a Moor to come in with carpets over his shoulder. The finishing touch was when one of the waiters, late on parade, walked into the main entrance with a bicycle which he steered through the

tables to the far end. Other waiters banged the knives and forks about. At least, the cherries were first-class. But the waiter asked how many we had eaten before giving us the bill.

One needs at least three days to visit Bologna properly. One of the most interesting buildings is the church of San Petronio which the local inhabitants intended to be the biggest church in the world. It was begun in 1390 but, like Westminster Abbey, was never finished. The original plan was to make it 700 feet long with a dome 500 feet high. However, only the nave and the aisles as far as the transept were completed. It is, nevertheless, 128 yards long and 52 yards wide and is said to have the most highly developed Gothic interior in Italy.

Outside is a grocery store in which I counted no fewer than nine different kinds of pasta in addition to the usual spaghetti, gnocchi and macaroni. Some looked like spillikins, some like cockle shells, others like bow ties—all sorts of fancy shapes. Not far away is the Via Zamboni which in spite of the trams has a series of very attractive backwaters. Here is situated the university and, as the visitor can read on the notice board, the rector is still called 'Il Magnifico' according to ancient usage.

No fewer than 1,800 graduates from all parts of the world study here. There are ten professorial chairs, the most important of which are medicine and mathematics. In the new building there is a huge secretariat as up to date as the B.B.C. and yet Dante was a student. Another of the students—Giuseppe Mezzofanti—who died at Naples a hundred years ago spoke eighteen languages fluently by the time he was thirty-six and no fewer than forty-two at the time of his death. Another romantic figure was a girl professor of anatomy who was said to be so beautiful that she always had to lecture to the students from behind a curtain, so as not to take their minds off their studies. Actually, the site of the present university is comparatively new, having been moved from the ancient Palace of Poggi in 1905.

Bologna like other Italian cities is full of pacifists and many blank walls are covered with slogans advocating peace. The only occasions, indeed, where there are any public references to Mussolini in Italy, are posters showing his photograph and underneath the inscription, "Mussolini advocated armed peace," followed by a photograph of the current Italian Premier, with the inscription, "Gasperi advocates armed defence," with a final sentence "Both mean war." Occasionally one sees a street notice pointing out the nearest air-raid shelter, but with the exception of a large gap in the Via della Independenza there are few signs of bombing.

What are most impressive are the two leaning towers—the Torre Asinelli and the Torre Garisenda. The first-named was erected 850 years ago and is 320 feet high but four feet out of the perpendicular as compared with the Leaning Tower of Pisa which is only 179 feet high though fourteen feet out of the perpendicular. The Torre

Garisenda is 156 feet high but eight feet out of alignment. They are only a few yards apart and remain a remarkable testimony to the unsettled conditions of Bologna in ancient days when the Guelphs and the Ghibellines fought against each other for over a hundred years. The two towers are very nearly in the centre of the city, with five streets radiating from them to the five main gates to the ancient city. Anyone who has the energy can climb the Asinelli tower but there are no fewer than 447 steps to negotiate. Incidentally, as in the Cathedral at Milan, visitors are not allowed to go singly for fear of their committing suicide.

Altogether, Bologna has fourteen fine churches, in addition to the Cathedral and also a number of museums and palaces. Of the palaces the Palazzo del Re Enzio is the most romantic. It was here that young King Enzio, the son of the Emperor Frederick II, was kept prisoner all his life by the Bolognese. Of the churches, that of St. Francis was considerably damaged by bombing. Oddly enough, it was formerly used as a military arsenal and was not restored to its sacred use until fifty years ago. The Academy of Fine Arts has a valuable picture gallery although the seventeenth-century artists are somewhat trite. The gem of the collection is Raphael's 'St. Cecilia'. There are also several works by Guido Reni.

The Museo Civico contains a number of Roman remains found in the neighbourhood, relics of the primitive dwellers in the lake villages of Bologna, Etruscan weapons and thousands of Umbrian bronze articles, together with Greek vases imported in the fifth century. To the casual sightseer, however, the most attractive monument in Bologna is the Nettuno fountain. This is in the form of a bronze statue of Neptune eight feet high surrounded by sirens sitting on dolphins. It is from the breasts of the sirens that the water of the fountain flows out—highly unbiological when compared with the Mannekin Pis in Brussels. Here the neighbouring walls are usually covered with posters shouting, "Women, you give life. Fight for peace and not death".

The Palazzo Bevilacqua, not far away, is an early Renaissance edifice occupied by the Council of Trent in 1547. By a coincidence, the newspapers of Bologna had their front page devoted to Bevilacqua whilst we were there, but it had nothing to do with the Council of Trent. Bevilacqua was the name of a local racing cyclist who at that moment was leading the field in the round Italy bicycle race. Once again we were reminded, as in Venice, of the modern Italian's passion for sport, particularly long-distance cycle races. That and keeping out of war (at all costs) are their main preoccupations.

Among the more picturesque corners of Bologna are the Via delle Arte and the Via delle Moline, both streets flanked by really old buildings with grilled windows. There are no pavements: the road is rough. Then suddenly one enters modern streets with up-to-date shops and cafés.

Bologna is undoubtedly a place not only of colonnades and courtyards but of good food and I can confidently recommend the Sampiere off the Via Castiglione. There are numbers of other excellent restaurants as well and to eat Bologna sausage in Bologna is a real experience. It was fortunate indeed that this ancient city suffered so little from the ravages of the Second World War.

The exit towards Florence is by way of the Strada Maggiore. In a few minutes, after passing a few fine villas, the road crosses a bridge over the little Savana torrent and approaches the Tuscan foothills. It all looks most peaceful with fields of golden barley alternating with green coppices, though strangely enough, one sees no pigs at all in spite of the reputation of the local salami and sausages.

Then suddenly one comes across a series of battle scenes. The first is the village of Pianora which has been entirely wiped out, though numbers of children still play among the ruins. This is the start of the Futa Pass and very beautiful it is, a lovely hill drive with fields of poppies, steep little climbs followed by another blitzed hamlet and then a U.S. battle monument on the hillside. It is to the memory of the 361st Infantry Regiment of the 91st American Division. The statue is of a G.I. with his head bent, but although it was erected in 1945, it is already impossible to decipher the gilded lettering around the base. The grass border, however, is kept neatly trimmed by an old peasant named Bruno who announces to all and sundry that he is officially entitled to sell picture postcards of the monument. There was only one withered wreath at the base of the statue, so we placed a few fresh red poppies there.

The scenery now becomes semi-Alpine. The village of Saddioni follows; then Loiano, which must have been the scene of a sharp skirmish to judge by the piles of rubble on the outskirts. It is a narrow little town and on the day we visited it was crowded with peasants who had come in from the countryside for the Fair. From here there is an all-round panorama of tree-clad mountains, yellow broom and pink wash farmhouses. Every few hundred yards a twist in the road brings another superb view either to the left or to the right.

The air is delicious with a lovely smell of hay to give it further fragrance; but it would be no route to traverse at night or in bad weather. Villages are few and far between and a breakdown could involve considerable hardship. Among the hamlets along the route are Ca' del Costa, Filigare and Monte Albano. The Pass now rises to four or five thousand feet above sea level before it begins to descend towards Pietra Mala where we saw quite a number of red-headed peasant girls in green corduroy jackets.

Flocks of sheep now appeared in the fields on either side of the road.

At Mazzetta we passed a German war cemetery, but we were still a long way from Florence. The Pass never seems to end. At Covigliaio we overtook a lone cyclist carrying a red rose in one hand, no doubt to propose marriage to his girl friend. It was raining in torrents but it clearly did not damp his ardour. The road ascended again through forests of young pines. We were now in the middle of a cloud and had to put on our headlights. More mountain sheep, a number of blue irises, a herd of cows and then a highly intelligent flock of black sheep who leapt smartly out of our way when we hooted, showed the way to San Lucia where we slowly emerged from the cloud and into sunshine.

Considering how religious the Italians are, it was surprising how few wayside crucifixes we had passed, particularly as it is the mountain people who usually show most devotion in this way. The descent from San Lucia was shortlived. The road started to climb fast once more amid masses of yellow broom; but it was the last effort. Once again we found ourselves going downhill (being passed by two youngsters on a single bicycle, neither with his feet on the pedals and travelling at nearly thirty miles an hour down the middle of the corkscrew road). At last we saw olives and cypresses again, sure evidence that we were approaching the plain. They were followed by vineyards and corn protected at Lemaschere by a sheer wall of cypresses grown closely together as a wind-breaker for the whole village's vineyards.

Then after a short corkscrew among oaks and firs we found ourselves at the bottom of a valley, but once again had to climb several hundred feet before entering yet another and another valley on the way to two or three down-at-heel Tuscan villages like Campo Migliano and Carlone. Then, by Apollo, we found ourselves in still another valley and encountered our first motor car in three hours. Its occupants were all carrying fishing rods, including the driver.

At long last we reached Vaglia and by great good luck caught sight of an arrow directing wayfarers to the Ristorante Padellino. This proved to be a delightful rustic tavern and must have many happy memories for the American troops who were billeted in the neighbourhood during the Second World War. There are still signs of their occupation—"This way to the Orderly Room", for example. Here we were introduced to that splendid dish, Bifstek Florentine. It is a cut of beef far too extravagant for any English butcher to encourage, the nearest approach to it being an outsize American T bone steak. It is grilled on charcoal and seems to be the complete sirloin of a prime ox. With it we drank a fiasco of Rufino Chianti, and very good, too. (I have often wondered how the meaning of the English word 'fiasco' was derived from the Italian for 'flask' and I still do not know the answer.)

We started lunch on a terrace surrounded by fir trees, camellias and magnolias and a variety of children and puppies, all of them very well behaved, with a circular stone dance floor just in front. Then came

a flash of lightning and an imperial clap of thunder. A second later huge drops of rain splashed down. We fled into the cream-coloured restaurant with its check table cloths and green, red and white tiled floor. The Rains Came.

People talk about sunny Italy. I swear that the rain drops bounced two feet into the air off the stone dance floor. Fortunately we had finished our steak (with the aid of the puppies I am afraid) and called for a superb local cheese which was followed by enormous black cherries. Coffee was served in glass cups and then I made a fatal error. I selected from the wine list a dark brown liqueur called 'Elixir Chinois'. No doubt Baedeker would have called it 'a curiosity'. It was entirely my fault. I was advised against it by the proprietor and by my fellow guests.

Tuscans are charming people with a tradition for hospitality. As for the bill, the waitress actually looked inside the fiasco to see whether there was any left, in case there was anything to deduct. Everybody saw us off with waves and handshakes, including the aged chef in a black and white apron. By this time the storm had disappeared as though by magic and the sun shone brightly on the pale green of the pastures, the dark green of the cypresses, and the yellow cornfields dotted with red poppies.

The road now descends past forests of pine and larches before giving a sudden vista of foothills first to the right and then to the left. Ahead of us roared two of those big, pale blue, cross-country Italian motor coaches which provide such excellent communications throughout Italy. Tall walls on each side of the road made it difficult for us to pass and for some distance we had to follow them, therefore closing the windows of the car against the foul black fumes emanating from their exhausts. Then once again we could see clear ahead and noticed the widespread use of battalions of cypresses to protect the olive groves and vineyards from the wind.

Now came our first glimpse of Florence from above—pink roofs and cream walls nestling in low green foothills. Florence is a very gracious city but it can be more excessively hot than anywhere else in Italy owing to its shut-in position. Horse cabs and plane trees, broad streets, chestnut arcades, lovely villas which would be called palazzos in Venice, escorted us to the Ponte Vecchio, the little old bridge with houses and shops on it just like London Bridge in ancient times, though on a miniature scale. The bridge itself fortunately survived the retreating German sappers who blew up some splendid old houses at both ends and incidentally the Hotel Grande Bretagne, to prevent the advance of the Allied troops.

This act of destruction was quite unnecessary because the river Arno was less than two feet deep at the time. All the other bridges, including the Ponte Santa Trinita—one of the most beautiful bridges in the world—were destroyed. Fortunately the original blue-prints of Ponte Santa Trinita are still in existence and in 1950 the Florentines were still hoping to rebuild it exactly as it was; though, of course, it can never be the same.

As for us, we continued along the bank of the Arno until we reached a further bridge rebuilt since the war, and stopped at the Anglo-Americano. The name of this hotel, or rather its series of names, would make a splendid Hollywood film. Built in 1910 as the Anglo-Americano it continued to bear this name until May 1940, when Italy entered the war against France and Great Britain. At which point the 'Anglo' was removed and it became the Americano. In December 1941 when the Japanese fleet surprised the Americans at Pearl Harbour and thus brought the United States into the war against Italy as well, its name was changed to the Regina. In September 1943 when King Victor Emmanuel came over to the Allies it was altered once again to the Mercurio. As the manager will tell you with a grin, this name could not offend anybody. A year later when the Allied troops marched victoriously up the backbone of Italy it again became the Anglo-Americano. It is a charming place, cool, quiet and less expensive than the Excelsior or the Grand.

Here in the lounge we met an Englishman who had lived off and on in Florence ('off' during the two world wars) since he was a boy. From him we learnt more in a week than we could have discovered for ourselves in six months. It seems that two thousand elderly English residents stayed in Florence throughout the Second World War though the British colony has now shrunk to three or four hundred. Italy used to be delightfully cheap. Today, though servants are still first-class, they cost 1,000 lire a day for food alone. Italian cheeses, we were told, taste better in the winter and early spring than they do in the summer—Robiolo being the best of the summer varieties. Italian coffee is roasted more than is the case in England, which is why it has a different flavour. Turkish cigarettes made in Switzerland and English cigarettes have to be smuggled into the country and therefore command black market prices. Florence has always been 'agin the Government' and is now a hotbed of Communism. Owners of houses can be sent to gaol if they tear down posters put on their own residences by the various political parties—unless they previously affix a 'No Posters' sign, for which they have to pay an annual fee.

Other peculiar items of information were that the English visitor unless he is a first-class linguist should never talk about birds or figs, both being dangerous words to use in Italian. We also learnt that people with money can obtain anything in Florence from Black Label Scotch whisky to caviare.

On that first evening we were taken on foot for a dry martini to the bar of the Excelsior Hotel and thence to Buca Lapi in the Via del Trebbio. Buca Lapi is a regional restaurant—once the cellars of a wine merchant patronized by the stewards from the local farms. Today it makes a bid for the tourist trade. Its subterranean walls are covered with gaudy posters in every colour of the rainbow—posters inviting one to 'Come to Britain for Fishing', 'To Drink Cinzano', 'To Visit Sweden' or 'Switzerland' and so on—a clever décor costing the proprietor nothing. In the old days the decorations consisted of the coats of arms of the various Florentine nobles.

The restaurant is reached down a flight of steep steps past the display tables covered by wood-strawberries, peaches, lobsters and scampi, with the open grill and the white-capped chefs on one side. The food is first-class—whether you choose veal chops, lamb chops, chicken livers or, above all, a Florentine steak. Visitors are invited to write their autograph on the yellow lamp shades. At one corner of the room a gay little band plays anything from 'Auld Lang Syne' and 'When Irish Eyes are Smiling' to 'El Relicario' on an accordion, violin and banjo. On this occasion we drank a fiasco of Piandaccoli. It, too, was a Chianti like the one which we had tasted at luncheon but there was no comparison between them—this was young and green.

From Buca Lapi we walked round the corner to the Piazza Vittorio Emmanuele, as it is still called by the inhabitants in spite of its name having been changed to the Piazza della Republica. Here we were taken up to the Florence Club where I was elected a temporary member. It reminds one somewhat of the Travellers' Club in Paris and has much the same *raison d'être*. It also has a number of valuable coloured racing prints of the eighteenth century, many of them like 'The Run In' and 'The False Start' being similar to those in the National Sporting Gallery at Hutchinson House, London. There are two or three card rooms and a dining-room for the members. The secretary is a former Italian cavalry colonel who served on the Allied side in the First World War. He was one of the many Italian aristocrats who suddenly found themselves on the wrong side of the fence when Mussolini entered the war. Many of them had married American wives during the 'long week-end' and had a very awkward time.

From the Florence Club we took a horse cab to have our first look at the Baptistery, Cathedral, Belfry and Signoria Palace by moonlight. I am glad we did. The effect is superb, particularly as excellent use is made of concealed lighting. It was just like fairyland.

After this visual hors d'œuvre we clattered back to the hotel, our driving cracking his whip at every corner because his cab did not have either a hooter or klaxon, the use of which even by motor cars is forbidden throughout Florence. He was a cheerful little chap, uttering ruderies to the various passers-by and playfully flicking his whip at the alley cats.

Next day we returned to, first of all, the Signoria Palace (the Palace of the Nobles). In daylight, too, it is quite spectacular, with a wonderful tower nearly 300 feet high dominating the scene. Once again the modern visitor marvels at the astonishing feat of its construction. For the Palace was completed in sixteen years, though additions were made to it for the next century. The Duke of Athens lived here in 1342, followed two centuries later by the great Duke Cosimo. More recently the various provisional governments and the foreign office occupied it. Today it is the Town Hall and it is rather a shock to find lorries parked inside the courtyard near the fountain.

Outside, the chief decorations of the wide flight of steps facing the piazza are 'Judith and Holofernes' by Donatello, a copy of 'David' by Michelangelo (the original is in the Academy of Fine Art) and a terrific group representing 'Hercules' and 'Cacus'. On the first floor of the Palace is the Hall of the Five Hundred. This is 160 feet long and over sixty feet wide, and yet the golden-painted ceiling, although eighteen yards above, seems somewhat oppressive and heavy. The walls are covered with Homeric frescoes of battle scenes—twice as large as life and nothing like so natural. These include 'The Florentines Defeating the People of Pisa', 'The Emperor Maximilian Attempting to Take Leghorn' and 'The Coronation of Charles V'. The enormous voice of Savonarola was often heard booming through the Hall of the Five Hundred, until finally he was put to the stake near the fountain outside. Luckily, the Palace of the Nobles has a lift which only costs ten lire to use; so it is no effort to visit the second floor with its Hall of the Elements, the Terrace of Saturn, the Terrace of Juno and the Apartments of Eleonora. There are various other rooms—of the Sabines, Esther and Penelope, but one soon gets surfeited.

Down in the piazza is the Lanzi Loggia used as a bandstand by the city orchestra. Under it is the very moving statue of the 'Rape of the Sabines', the statue of 'Perseus' by Benvenuto Cellini and another of Ajax holding up the dead body of Patroclus. From here it is only a matter of yards to the Uffizi Palace with its splendid colonnades and pillars, in the niches of which are a number of statues erected to illustrious Tuscans like Leonardo da Vinci. One needs at least half a day to study the picture gallery alone.

Unfortunately there is no lift and there are two long flights of steps to negotiate before one reaches the paintings. It so happened that during our visit to Florence many of the best pictures had been temporarily moved for an exhibition at the Strozzi Palace in honour of Lorenzo the Magnificent and though we saw them later they were not in their usual places. However, we feasted our eyes on Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus' emerging from the shell, which oddly enough was being banned by the Italian Parliament as a poster, much to the merriment of the Florentines. Peggy, owing to her medical knowledge, was technically interested in 'La Fortizza' which showed a woman suffering

from *Hallux vulgus*—enlarged gouty joints of the big toe. Botticelli's 'Adoration of the Magi' was missing from its rightful place but we found it in another gallery, alongside versions of the same scene by Leonardo da Vinci and Filippo Lippi. And very interesting it was to see how differently the three great artists' imaginations worked. Elsewhere we studied the 'Venus de Medici' and, to show how ignorant I am, I have to confess that until I had seen the statue with my own eyes I had no idea that it is the size of a fourteen-year-old girl rather than a grown woman. Personally I much preferred the statue of the 'Wrestlers'. Their energy, anguish and straining muscles are more lively than any motion picture.

Another picture which fascinated me was Bugiardini's 'Madonna Teaching Christ to Walk'. The miniatures were also delightful, particularly No. 8895 of a gay, plump brunette which looks as though it had been painted yesterday. Cimabue's 'Crucifixion' is far bigger than I thought it was. Incidentally, every room was full of copyists, most of them elderly spinsters. Later in Rome I made inquiries as to their fees. Altogether the Uffizi Gallery has thirty rooms, but only half of them were open while we were there and I spent nearly an hour trying to trace 'The Perfection of the Sensual Body of Venus and Dog, Surrounded by Languid Abandonment' and I could not find Botticelli's 'Spring' at all. Worse still the self-portraits of the great Masters were nearly all absent on leave.

Next day we walked across the Ponte Vecchio with its sun blinds, junk jewellery, silversmiths and leather goods to the Pitti Palace. This looks more like a castle than a museum and picture gallery. Inside there a resplendid golden frescoed ceilings and a smell of sassafrass, and we felt rather like Alice in Wonderland. For our guide book was most inaccurate and nothing is more agitating than trying to identify a Rubens as a Titian. The Palatine Gallery can only be reached by the door of Bacchus, a side entrance on the left. The various galleries are called after the Roman gods—Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Apollo and Venus. In spite of the hideous gold chandeliers, each one more monstrous than the last, we spent hours in the Palace. Tintoretto's 'Leda With a Swan', apparently pecking the lady in the fifth rib, was quite enjoyable but most of the Venuses are very plump by modern standards and look as if the original models were Flemish peasants. Against that we saw the portrait of Andrea del Sarto and his wife painted by himself, Van Dyck's splendid portrait of King Charles and Queen Henrietta and Rubens's 'Consequences of War'—a huge nude being snatched by a bearded soldier. All the ceilings are fabulously frescoed with gold and marble embellishments.

Other pictures which attracted me were Raphael's 'Madonna' which I recognized at once, and a picture of a cross-eyed man in the red robes of a cardinal. Guess who? The Pitti Palace also contains a gallery of modern art which was rather disappointing. Apart from the pictures there are a number of treasures—amethyst vases belonging

——You've guessed right ! ! !

to Lorenzo de Medici, the famous rock crystal box and a wonderful marble inlaid table like the one at Isolabella, but finer. . . .

A good hint for hungry sightseers is to go to a restaurant on the same side of the Arno only half a mile away. Its name is Camillo, the haunt of the colony of would-be authors and artists from England and the United States. Altogether, it has much of the atmosphere of one of the small Paris restaurants on the Rive Gauche. Signora Camillo, the mother of the establishment, is hook-nosed, dark-eyed and looks as if she has come straight off the walls of the Uffizi Gallery. Actually she is a Czech and the staff consists of herself, her husband, cousin, daughter and son-in-law. Bruno, the son-in-law, acts as head waiter. The restaurant has only nineteen tables and consists of one large room leading into a small one. The specialities are milk-fed veal, artichokes in olive oil (the olive oil of Florence is the best in Italy), raspberries and anything else in season. It is close to the San Trinita bridge.

A useful hint for visitors to Italy, wherever they go, is that the trattoria is usually preferable to the ristorante. The trattoria has not yet aspired to the higher grade, though it is senior to an osteria. It therefore spends less money on neon lighting and décor, concentrating primarily on good food and wines. Ristorantes are more spacious, more expensive and, with only a few exceptions, should be avoided if there are any trattorias handy.

Among the other eating places, whilst on this admirable subject, are (1) the Corradi in Via Parione. You enter it through a curtain of orange, yellow and blue beads. There are only seven tables. The specialities are frozen *minestrone* (served like cold *consommé*), the tenderest boiled beef I personally have ever eaten, minute steaks, chicken livers and really enormous Florentine steaks. Another speciality is Baccala. This is dried cod, probably from Iceland, and the last thing in the world that any English visitor would care to eat.

(2) A good little regional restaurant called Al Campidogli opposite the Gambrinus. It has eight tables outside, very pleasant in the summer. No. 3 on the list is the Alfredo in the Viale Don Minzoni. Here, too, one can eat outside—under a trellised roof of American vines. A more expensive restaurant is the Doney, which also has a reputation as a cocktail bar. Most fashionable of all the bars is the Leland, near the Ponte San Trinita. This has a tall vaulted ceiling, which makes it cool even in the hottest weather, and is very much a rendezvous of smart young Florentine society.

Other useful tips for the visitor is that Via Tornabuoni is the best shopping street; Primo is the best beauty parlour, Principe is the best shirt-maker and if you want to buy anything made of plaited straw, go to the Vigna Nuova. Not far away is Italy's best jeweller, whose workshop is in the ancient Presbytery of Or San Michele. Maybe it is the religious atmosphere but Signor Mancini works just as if he were still in the eighteenth century, spending a whole year on a single job of

Siena: The Cathedral and Campanile.

original hand-worked jewellery, and then not wanting to part with it because he likes it so much.

Or San Michele is one of the oldest churches in Florence and is decorated on the outside with statues by the twelve original guilds whose armorial bearings are still visible. They include the Guild of the Merchants, the Guild of the Cloth Dealers, the Silk Weavers, the Apothecaries, the Furriers, the Wool Weavers, the Money Changers, the Armourers, the Shoemakers, the Ferriers and the Joiners. The statue of St. Mark by Donatello representing the Joiners was paid a great tribute by Michelangelo himself. "It would have been impossible," he said, "to have rejected the Gospel of such a straightforward man as this."

By contrast, the statue of Pope John XXIII in the Baptistry recalls the famous remark by Gibbon, the historian, who said of the Pope's trial before the Council of Constance in 1414: "The more scandalous charges were suppressed; the vicar of Christ was only accused of piracy, murder, rape, sodomy and incest." Which brings us to the Baptistry itself—a remarkable octagonal edifice with an octagonal cupola which dates back to the seventh century, though remodelled in 1200, and the three celebrated bronze doors added in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

At first sight it resembles a harlequinade, being built of dark green and white marble, which from a distance gives the effect of half-timbering. But there is very little to be seen inside and even when the sun is blazing it is impossible to decipher the mosaics. The three bronze doors are another matter. The South Door, oldest of the three, shows scenes from the life of John the Baptist, ending up with his beheading. The North Door is the work of Lorenzo Ghiberti. Like the South Door the figures on it are heavily embossed. Lorenzo Ghiberti was also responsible for the third door, which faces the Cathedral and is known as the Gate to Paradise, because Michelangelo said that this door was worthy of forming the entrance to Heaven. On it there are ten different scenes from the Scriptures, including Noah intoxicated, the Walls of Jericho and the Queen of Sheba. If you look carefully you can see Ghiberti's own representation of himself—the man with the bald head fourth from the top in the central band.

The original Cathedral dates back to the thirteenth century, though it was not completed until 1436. The present façade is only seventy years old and looks better by moonlight. The inside is bare and so dark that, as in the Baptistry, it is impossible to appreciate the craftsmanship. There is, however, some wonderful stained glass giving an effect of amethyst and flame.

Various monuments in marble and statues of the saints are also dotted around, but the visitor gets the impression that Italian cathedrals —such as this—are built more as repositories of art than as places of worship. In the main body of the Cathedral there are not enough pews

to take more than 140 people tightly packed. True, there are two side chapels with extra pews which would take another 200. Compared, however, with the cathedrals of Spain, which are full of worshippers even during the week, Italian cathedrals seem to have been built more to encourage local prestige than local worship.

Incidentally the Cathedral has a vast clock inside (which had stopped at five minutes to five o'clock) a very unusual object to see in the interior of a place of worship. A few yards away is the Belfry, built of pink, dark green and white marble by Giotto. A number of bicycles were cluttering up the entrance to it and, as it was a hot day, we decided not to climb to the top by the winding staircase. Its exterior is most impressive, the windows growing larger on each storey, of which there are four. But it would take hours to identify all the various allegorical figures, which include 'Habbakkuk', the 'Seven Cardinal Virtues', the 'Creation of Eve' and—not to confine them to religion—figures of Orpheus, Aristotle and Euclid.

After studying all this the average sightseer is well advised to wend his way to the Piazza della Republica and have a drink. This Square, surrounded by five-storeyed buildings, is a very pleasant place to watch the world go by. Horse cabs with white parasols over the passengers, swarms of cyclists, the countless beggars (including small nuns), the stall holders, the motor coaches and the shoppers provide a bustling, variegated scene.

Sitting here under a blue and orange parasol, drinking a long cool glass of fresh lemon juice and fresh orange juice combined (there is no point in ruining it with gin) one gets the correct feeling that nobody in Florence ever arrives in time for an appointment and that everybody is as casual as the Irish or the Spanish. At night the Piazza is very gay. The Café Paszkowski has chairs and tables right out into the Square. A lively orchestra, aided by concert artists, attracts large crowds, while the white-jacketed waiters serve iced coffee with whipped cream, Neapolitan ices, Italian lager or anything else you may order. Next to it is Gilli's Café. Fortunately the proprietor does not provide an orchestra. Otherwise there would be a slight case of cacophony. Yes, the Piazza della Republica, whether by day or by night is a very pleasant place in which to cool off after sightseeing.

* * * * *

As there are nearly two dozen important churches and chapels in Florence, only the most ardent sightseer is likely to visit them all. Nobody, however, should miss the church of Santa Croce near the church of Santa Trinita. The latter seems to be the one which is most used for actual worship nowadays by the local inhabitants, although it is one of the oldest in the city. Its chief adornments inside are the frescoes from the life of St. Francis by Ghirlandaio.

The church of Santa Croce is known as the Pantheon of Florence

because so many celebrities are buried there—276 tombstones can be counted. In front of it stands Dante's monument unveiled on the 600th anniversary of his birth. The interior is in the form of an Egyptian cross embellished with frescoes by Giotto and Taddeo Gaddi. In the right-hand aisle is the tomb of Michelangelo whose body was brought there from Rome after his death in 1564. In the left-hand aisle is the monument of Galileo Galilei. British visitors may be interested in the marble tomb near the choir, of the Bishop of Exeter, who died in Florence in 1419 when representing Henry V on a mission to Pope Martin V.

Of museums there are eleven, of which the most important is the national museum in the Podesta Palace. It contains some wonderful weapons which used to belong to the Medici. There is also an enormous bronze cannon cast in 1638. The picturesque courtyard has a fine flight of steps leading up to the first floor. In the Hall of the General Council one can see the statue of David in marble by Donatello. Elsewhere there is a portrait of Dante, glazed terra cotta works by the della Robbia and some very valuable old coins.

But Florence must not be treated purely in terms of antiquity. It has always had the reputation of being, after Paris, the city with the most smartly dressed women on the Continent and the Via Tornabuoni is a great deal smarter than Bond Street today. There is also a country club with a first-class golf course and swimming-pool. It is reached by a shocking road, but is well worth the visit. The course is kept in first-class condition, the holes are very sporting, the members of the club are most agreeable, and the caddies as keen as mustard. As for the view, it is superb, being well up in the Tuscan hills. The swimming-pool is deep at both ends and is surrounded by cypresses to keep off the wind.

Florence even boasts a night club, though I do not recommend it. Known as the Pozzo di Beatrice it is two flights below the level of the ground in the building in which local tradition claims that Dante met Beatrice. It is close to the splendid painted statue of Cosimo which, however, needs a telescope to appreciate—being on the top of a pillar about twenty yards tall. Anybody who wants to buy those somewhat rude Italian ash trays can find them in the Lung' Arno. Ugo Reghini who designs them is primarily a newsagent and tobacconist, but does a very good business on the side with these inexpensive square pottery souvenirs.

Yes, Florence is a very pleasant place in which to live. In some ways its outskirts resemble Nice with their long leafy boulevards and modern blocks of flats. I visited one of these in the Viale Mazzini. It seems that the flats have to be bought freehold, unfurnished—£3,000 being necessary for a really nice large apartment. On the other hand there is no ground rent to be paid and the tenants jointly share the communal overheads of electric light, lifts and heating.

Visitors who stay in a hotel like the Anglo-Americano can secure a good deal of quiet amusement merely by staying in the lounge and listening to the conversation. Three elderly American women were gossiping one afternoon when I was there. Said one: "My dear, tell me about Alice. She looks old enough to be his mother." The woman thus addressed leant forward and in ringing tones began: "It all started in October. Now with her high heels she looks terribly commonplace. Yes, she's just ruined herself. . . . We used to be most intimate. . . . I called her a poor, little rich girl. You see, she would not have a baby because she had such an unhappy childhood." The third woman chimed in: "Did you see Alice when she was first married?" she said, "she was so slushy it was quite embarrassing. 'Oh! Herman isn't it beautiful' she would say on every occasion."

At that moment a waiter brought in a tea tray and I missed the next 'sequence'. The second woman was in full spate: "A cousin of his—a divorcee but a perfectly delightful person—she was a stunning woman—fell down and broke her leg. She and Alice had everything in common artistically but now they've gone to Mexico. As I told you, Alice was head over heels in love with Herman but was determined not to have a child. I tell you, it was one of those peculiar things. But Herman had other ideas. It was the financial side which appealed to him. I don't mean that unkindly, so anyway Alice was an heiress and he had an inferiority complex but Corinne was a woman of the world and was determined to get them together. She did it, but it was the way of all flesh. Samuel Butler all over again. 'Herman do this, Herman do that' but he still loves her. But now with Alice's manner and her new hair-do she looks old enough to be his mother and Herman has had trouble with his eyes so he resigned his job. Now, as I told you, they're going to Mexico for six months and when she comes back she's going to have plastic curtains in her house on Long Island. Poor Herman, he is her little pet poodle—possessive isn't the word for it and Alice—she used to be just a casual drinker, now she's a whisky drinker. Alice of all people! They say her face is quite sallow now."

Well, that seemed to have fixed Alice but the tab line was still to come. Said the first woman happily: "Say, the psychiatrists would have a whale of a time with her."

Florence is surrounded by delightful villas, two of them being famous all over Italy. One belongs to Arthur Acton and the other to B. B. Berenson. The Acton villa, which once belonged to the Sassetti family, dates back to the fourteenth century. Arthur Acton, now in his seventies, has a well-deserved reputation as an art dealer and art collector, and every room is furnished in a different period dating back to the earliest primitives, artists who flourished even before Cimabue. The grounds are most beautifully laid out with cypresses, jasmine, lemon groves and garden statuary. One stone figure is of a huntsman with a gun. I do not recollect ever having seen a gun represented in stone before.

It was in the dining-room of the Villa Pietra that representatives of the Italian and German authorities were brought together by a leading official of the International Red Cross in an attempt to save the various bridges over the Arno just before the German retreat. As has been seen, the meeting was only partially successful. But in spite of the German occupation the villa suffered absolutely no loss or damage, except for a picture which received a revolver shot from a German general and even this has been restored.

Another pleasant excursion from Florence is to drive out to the Piazza Michelangelo from which one gets a superb view of the whole of Florence. The Piazza is up on a hill, five minutes away by car and is embellished with a copy of the statue of David in the Podesta Palace. The time to go is in the evening so as to watch the setting sun. A huge telescope mounted near the parapet enables the visitor to have not only a first-class close-up of Fiesole and Monte Cenario but allows him to 'intrude' in a quite remarkable way on other people. Its magnification is such that it is quite possible to see the expressions on the faces of the boatmen fishing in the muddy Arno half a mile away, the pedestrians crossing Ponte Vecchio, and various other local inhabitants having drinks, quarrelling or begging in whatever section or street on which the telescope is trained. For souvenir purposes visitors can have excellent snapshots taken of them by an itinerant photographer who develops the prints in seven minutes and charges less than ten shillings for six prints and the negative as well. From the Piazza, Florence looks surprisingly small considering its reputation and armed might in medieval times. The green dome of the Jewish synagogue is one of the buildings which immediately catch the eye. It is also fun to pick out the Belfry and other leading edifices from above.

The drive back into Florence by Via San Leonardo is also attractive. It is full of private cream-coloured villas as it descends to the Costa San Giorgio, a steep, narrow, cobbled slum full of Communists. During the war, forty partisans were shot here and today the jeeps of the Celere police barracks are always at readiness in case of trouble. The Celere police whom we were to meet again at Perrugia are heavily armed, use tanks, armoured cars and Bren gun carriers and ask no questions. If a visitor ever finds himself in Italy and catches sight of them he is well advised to withdraw rapidly. Their duties are primarily to keep political agitators and strikers under control and they do so with considerable efficiency.

Once again it was time to move on. This we did with the greatest reluctance. A city which on the one hand has the Neptune fountain by Bartollio Ammanati and on the other hand a place like Tennuta di Biccione, where cab drivers and their fares can stand up all night

eating macaroni and drinking a good bottle of wine for less than two shillings, is difficult to desert in spite of its mosquitoes. And even then, of course, one cannot dream of doing such a thing before visiting Fiesole.

It was a delightful sunny afternoon when we drove out of Florence up the steep road to Fiesole about three miles away. There is a large piazza where several cars were already parked near two or three nice little cafés. In front of the cafés were tables shaded by parasols. We left the car and asked the way to the monastery. A girl pointed to the left up a very steep hill and it took us a good ten minutes to walk up the cobbled road. There were houses on the right hand and also a most attractive park with terraces and lovely trees. To the left was a wonderful view of Florence. Eventually we arrived rather breathlessly at the top of the hill where small boys were having a great time kicking a football along a terrace.

On one side of this is the monastery, founded in 1405, where Friar Giovanni Angelico de Fialozzi lived before his removal to San Marco at Florence. At the entrance to the church a little old monk in a brown cassock beckoned us inside the church. The church itself seemed quite small and after we had been there a few moments several small boys appeared and moved benches from one side of the chapel to the other under the direction of the little brown monk. Then they disappeared to the left and we followed them into another chapel. From here we walked out of another door and up a narrow little stairway which led to the monastery cells. There were nine of them, four on one side and five on the other in a very narrow passage. You could see each cell through its little door. The first one that we passed had a table with a large Bible and a skull. Each small cell looked as if it was used purely for studying and contemplation. When we had seen what remained of the monks' quarters we went down the stairs again and found our way past a little courtyard and out to the museum.

This was unusual because the only human remains were those of mummies which had obviously been transported from Egypt. All the contents seemed to be eastern, including many Chinese relics, which must have been collected by missionaries. One tiny section seemed to be the remains of the original monastery. When we left the museum the bells were ringing and we passed the cloisters where the same little boys that we had seen out in the courtyard were busy acting the part of bell-ringers. There were several ropes and each little boy was pulling his rope and ringing his bell with the greatest enthusiasm. Other small boys were putting on their little brown cassocks and getting ready for the service which was obviously about to take place. The smallest boy of all was obviously a newcomer and could scarcely have been more than five years old. His miniature brown cassock was being arranged by the little brown monk who looked exactly like a nanny dressing a child; the small boy standing very earnestly with his arms

outstretched while the monk twitched the cassock into place and arranged the hood at the back. Peggy was very much tempted to try and get a snapshot of this delightful scene but she felt that the monk might not approve and so we just stood and watched. When we emerged into the sunshine and started down the deep descent several housewives from the nearby houses were playing with their children in the streets. Next, as we walked down the cobbled road towards the town of Fiesole we passed a procession of at least fifty school children accompanied by nuns, obviously on their way to a service in the monastery. The children walked two and two. Each one carried a long-stemmed white lily and it really was a very pretty sight. Still further down we went into the small park for a few moments and sat on one of the benches. Directly below us some new wooden buildings were being put up. These looked rather like outhouses. Eventually we returned to the piazza where we sat at one of the tables under a parasol and sipped *citron pressé.*

Assisi from below

CHAPTER VI

FROM Florence the road towards Siena passes through vineyards and groves of olive trees over a blitzed bridge at Ponte Falciani with a convent on the hillside and more of those wind-breaking walls of cypresses. It then ascends through a miniature pass with a muddy stream on the right, and pine trees and broom on either side punctuated by occasional vineyards and cornfields. Now comes another U.S. Military Cemetery, a pleasant resting place for brave men, with crickets chirping, bees murmuring and a bright blue sky overhead. The road continues to climb steadily to San Casciano before descending into a valley with a lovely view of olive groves, cornfields and vineyards.

This is the heart of the Chianti country and we stopped for a moment at the hamlet of Bargino to take in the scenery. Women in black clothes were sewing in the shade of their houses on the main street of each village that we passed. In the nice little town of Tavernelle it was market day. Once again the road climbs and twice in five minutes one gets a panoramic and very colourful view extending thirty miles in all directions —the silver of the olives blending with the dark green of the cypresses, the orange tiles of the cottages and farmhouses, the white oxen, the pale green vineyards (greenish blue where the copper sulphate had been applied), the yellow of the broom, the blue of the sky, the pink of the distant watch towers, the golden corn and the white posts on the corners of the road which was evidently built by the Romans, because it always clung to the top of the hills.

Ignorantly enough, I had hoped to see Acqua Pendente and the restaurant Milano with its *livre d'or* signed by Hitler and Mussolini and a number of Allied army officers whose ruderies are a matter of quaint interest. At least, however, we came to Poggibonsi, famous for its Chianti. The outskirts are still blitzed. But the vineyards stretch for miles in all directions. Here we saw a donkey, which are surprisingly rare in this part of Italy. Once again the road climbs along the rim of the hill and at the next village of Staggia we passed some of the Celere police in a lorry. A strike was taking place among the farm hands who were sitting by the roadside. Next comes a lovely valley with a fine old ruined fort on the left, terraced vines, half a dozen watch towers and another windscreen of cypresses. Round here the soil is orange-coloured as can be seen from the cuttings on the hillside. Away to the right is San Gimignano.

This is one of the most picturesque little hill towns in the world. Thirteen of its medieval towers still survive from the original seventy-two. It is 1,100 feet above sea level and was declared a national monument by Mussolini in 1928. The Museum and Cathedral have a number

Florence: Michelangelo's statue of David

of frescoes and paintings, but San Gimignano is primarily attractive as a place in which to walk around the narrow streets and then, if one has the energy, around the ancient walls. It is only an hour's drive to Siena which one approaches downhill.

Siena, huddled in a valley, can be blazing hot in summer. Approaching it from Florence, the visitor will probably follow our example and spend an hour or so in the huge red brick church of San Dominico. The sacristy is well worth seeing, particularly the fresco of St. Catherine of Siena who is shown praying for a beheaded man who had just been converted. It was St. Catherine of Siena who persuaded the Popes to return from Avignon to Rome, and the dripping head is one of many that one sees in Italy. Decapitation seems to have had an uncanny attraction for medieval painters.

From here it is best to go on foot by the Via della Sapienza and then down the Costa San Antonio, a steep ancient alleyway which finally rises to the Cathedral—an astonishing edifice. On the outside it looks like a wedding cake. Inside it has black and white marble columns which give a weird zebra effect. The marble floor is covered with wooden blocks which the verger prises up for the benefit of visitors. It took, apparently, one and a half centuries to make and is in five different colours, from white to amber. Under the floor boards one sees a series of designs by ancient artists—like the 'Killing of the Innocents'—with soldiers attacking women and children with carving knives. The marble pulpit decorated with most intricate carving, is constructed of the local yellow marble. There were four groups of sightseers in the Cathedral besides ourselves. A service was in progress, but the thirty people taking part paid no attention to the tourists.

A bronze statue of John the Baptist by Donatello and the huge altar in one piece of marble vie with the thirteenth-century pulpit for top honours. Leading out of the left aisle is the library of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini who spent a disreputable youth, but ultimately became Pope after visiting England, Norway and Scotland. (He had been sent to Scotland by the Council of Basle to secure a military alliance between Scotland and France.)

From the Cathedral it is a short walk through another ancient alley—the Via de Citta—to the Piazza del Campo. The Piazza is a lovely, semi-circular arena like a shallow amphitheatre surrounded by tall houses, the campanile and the Palazzo Pubblico. The general effect is distinctly Spanish. On market days the Piazza is full of stores and hucksters selling pots and pans, shoes, sandals, socks, all kinds of fruit and whole lengths of material at remarkably cheap prices. Italian barrow boys are amusing characters and full of whatever is the Italian for blarney.

Twice a year the Piazza is the scene of the famous horse-race—in the beginning of July and in the middle of August. We missed it by a fortnight but my niece, Jenny Nicholson, gave me a splendid account of it.

"The evening before the race," she said, "groups of men and boys stood around talking excitedly. 'Is Goose running?' 'Who knows after today's accident?' 'They are filling her full of injections so that she may run'. 'Tortoise and Snail look to me as if they stand a good chance. What do you think?'

" 'He's from the *contrada* of the Shell. His heart isn't in the race'. '*Poverino* (poor little one)'."

It soon became clear; Siena is divided into seventeen *contrade* (most of them called by names of animals), in other words, *communes*. There are only ten horses running for the *palio* (a religious banner which is the prize) and *communes* draw lots to be one of the ten. These then draw lots for horses and jockeys.

The Palio has been run twice a year since 1656 and has not changed its appearance, nor lost anything of its excitement.

The *commune* of Goose's horse had been hurt in the trial race. The horse of the *commune* of Shell had fallen badly and would not race the following day.

By the time the moon had risen and its light had fallen on the ancient, tiled roofs and filtered into the narrow alleyways, all the participating *communes* except Shell were engaged in noisy revelry. Until far into the night men were arguing the chances of success of their own *communes* and several heads were beaten against the moon-lit cobbles. From a dingy café where the Tortoise followers were holding banquet came chanting of the refrain:

'Tortoise, Tortoise,
Tortoise will win.'

while the people of Shell *contrada* hung around their corners where lamps in wrought-iron wall-brackets threw eerie shadows, and murmured dismally together.

At five o'clock, in the cool hours of the morning, a shot rang out, and the people crossed themselves. Some wept. By the time the sun rose next morning, the golden walls of Siena were plastered with obituary notices of Shell's horse.

But for those with horses still in the race; for those 40,000 who were going to watch it, and for Giovanni, one of the two flag throwers for Tortoise, it was a beautiful day—gay and exciting.

Soon after noon Giovanni ran from his house, dressed in medieval page boy's costume—blue and yellow, the colours of the Tortoise *contrada*—pulling on his fair, curled wig, clutching his flag.

He arrived rather puffed outside the Church of Saint Anthony, the church of the *commune* where the people of the *contrada* and a small clutch of tourists were milling—all those taking part in the procession wearing blue and yellow costumes of velvet and satin.

Giovanni, who was nineteen, had been playing *sbandierata*—the game with banners—since he was eight. It demands great skill to make the passes with the flag which he was showing off to the crowd.

He spun it fluttering round his neck and round his waist and under his knee. Then he threw it forward and jumped over it, catching it under his raised leg. Finally, after more passes, he furled it with one movement and threw it high in the air with another. It flew up level with the windowsills hung with rich tapestries, then fluttered and unfurled as it fell into the expert grip of Giovanni who had barely shifted his balance.

In the chapel beside the church hung the banners Tortoise had won in other Palios. The church was cool and shadowy and tightly squeezed with people. The priest was at the altar, candles flickering behind him.

At a given moment the church doors were thrown open and in poured pages, flag throwers, the 'captain' in armour, the drummer, the jockey (a merry, wicked-looking little man like a monkey) and Piero, the Tortoise race-horse. Piero didn't behave well and at one moment nearly kicked the candles off the altar, but the priest dodged round and appeared nimbly facing him and sprinkling holy water above his wild eyes.

The blessing ceremony over, the priest looked much relieved. Everyone streamed out again into the blindingly sunny streets, formed a procession and began to process to a rolling drum.

Through the streets of the *contrada* moved Tortoise, a heavy parade-horse representing Piero, until it joined the processions from the other *contrade* which were moving down the main streets towards the black and white striped Cathedral. Here the Archbishop in a purple cummerbund leant out of a window and blessed the *contrade* as they went by. Like the others Giovanni threw his flag as high as the window, saluting the Archbishop. The sun beat down. Swallows swept the heads of the crowd with small fleeting shadows.

At last the trumpets and the approaching drums.

A company of mounted police in cocked hats and red and navy-blue uniforms galloped round the course in a cloud of sand and the first *commune* in the procession swept into the *campo*, throwing up their flags.

The applause was tremendous. And it increased with every brilliant pass in the *sbandierata* and the entrance of each *commune*. A sigh went up when Shell appeared, his jockey on foot, his flag throwers with their furled flags hung with black crepe, carrying the hooves of the deceased horse in a silver shell. But soon the sigh died away and the noise was once again so loud that you could hardly hear the great bell in the *campanile* which towered over the *campo*.

The scene was marvellous, with brilliant costumes and tossing flags. The *palio* came by, fluttering on a cart drawn by white oxen.

And finally the horses—nine of them, because Goose was running—came cantering out of the *palazzo pubblico* up to the starting rope. A cannon boomed. The crowd yelled and they were off.

It was as if the Lord Mayor's show and the Derby had been mixed up and was being run round Leicester Square in a heat wave. The jockeys rode without stirrups or saddles. They wore a sort of crash helmet and needed them, for they beat each other over the heads with their riding crops as they raced.

Everyone yelled. Goose's jockey was beaten off as they pounded round the first corner—so fast that it seemed the whole field was leaning at a dangerous angle. The law of gravity claimed Dragon and his jockey who rolled sickeningly aside towards the rails. The high, unbreakable thread of yelling was deafening. Torr's jockey was beaten off his horse round the dangerous Martino corner, and flew like a mad bird into the mattresses. Snail was in the lead but Tortoise was pounding up in a cloud of Siena dust.

Again they were approaching the San Martino corner. There was a sudden vision of Tortoise's jockey being projected from Piero like a clay pigeon and last seen cowering against the mattresses as another jockey hurtled off and rolled to his feet.

The cannon went off. The yelling increased—went up half an octave and became a scream. Snail had won. Only three jockeys were still up. "Snail. Snail."

The ridden and the riderless slowed down at last, the scream descended to a long last yell, dropped again to mere shouting and then to ragged protests and laughter. "Snail, *viva* Snail . . ." and the supporters of Snail bundled into the open and flung up their flags—scarlet and gold—the air was full of them.

A newspaper lay trampled underfoot. The headlines read: 'Bulgarian priests murdered', followed by the word 'Dimitrov' looming black and: 'Soil erosion threatens. . . .'

And then the hot feet shuffled over it again. And that is almost the best thing about the Siena Palio—nothing beyond the great walls of the city matters. Snail had won—that's all that mattered. You can't moralize about it or take it as a text or learn any lesson from it. The Communists can't call it bourgeois. The reactionaries can't call it proletarian propaganda.

It involves no strikes, no class-talk, no income groups, no talk of money or politics. It is just a sparkling, exciting event—gay and traditional which Snail had won.

And even though Tortoise hadn't even got a place, Giovanni chucked his flag as high as he could—for the last time officially before the next Palio.

Inside the Palazzo Pubblico which is faced with pink brick are a number of fine frescoes by Martini and Lorenzetti. From the Piazza radiate the main roads to Florence, Rome and the coast, passing through the city walls by handsome gateways. We ourselves had come through the Porta Camollia, a very narrow portal with the pleasing inscription: "Siena gives you a broader welcome than this."

The Tolomeo Palace is well worth a visit; so, too, is the Saracini Palace. The best restaurant in Siena is Tullio's in the Via de Rossi. It is advisable, however, to leave your motor car on the outskirts of the city; otherwise you have a nightmare drive through the narrow alleyways to reach it. Tullio's is protected from the heat by coloured bead curtains over each of its three arched entrances. The interior, like so many other ancient Italian restaurants, resembles a wine vault. The walls are covered with coats of arms and frescoes, one of which shows a cavalier on a yellow caparisoned charger. His name? Simone Martini, like the vermouth. On another wall is an inscription expressing the pious hope that 'If anyone goes away and says rude things about Siena, let him die like a dog.'

Many of the local inhabitants lunch regularly at Tullio's on *pension* terms and have their own napkins. Another pleasant feature are the bread bins. Specialities are baby lamb, veal grilled on charcoal, panforte (marzipan) which should only be eaten in winter because it melts in the heat, and a local red wine by the name of Castellina Straccali, which I hereby recommend.

Siena is a city of ancient alleyways with no sign of a kerb-stone or pavement, tall lean houses and any number of extraordinarily pretty children. Visitors who plan to stay the night there would do well to choose the Excelsior or the Continental.

For the next few miles the road towards Perugia from Siena leads through pleasant green valleys with vines so promiscuous that they even act as hedges along the roadside. Then suddenly the scenery changes as one approaches the metalliferous mountains. All round there are inland sand-dunes, just like the desert. Some are such a bright yellow colour that they look as if they have been dyed. In spite of the poverty of the ground a certain amount of corn is grown, but there are very few houses to be seen.

Meantime the road becomes more and more Roman, always climbing up the hillsides to the top. Once again appears a series of vineyards set in very sandy soil, which of course, means that the wines which comes from then are particularly good. Young forests of oaks and elms and ash trees escort you as you climb higher and higher beyond the level of olives and vineyards.

At one point there is a really spectacular view. This can be identified by the ancient stone farmhouse on the top of a hill which might have been transported bodily from Merioneth. The view from here is positively immense. A mile or two farther comes the hamlet of Palazzullo

where the scenery changes once again and the traveller feels that he might be in the Black Forest. Again the countryside changes and there is a kind of hedge of cypresses along the road—most impressive.

At Monte Sanno the motorist gets his first view of Arezzo in the middle distance, rimmed by hills with terraced olives and long avenues among the cornfields in the foreground. Monte Sanno is a little walled town with a level crossing. Here we stopped the engine of the car and listened to the sounds of the countryside—dogs barking, cocks crowing, the rustle of the breeze in the vineyards and crickets chirping. An old peasant woman did 'Sister Ann' for us with her red flag—looking for the train to arrive, which ultimately appeared twenty minutes late. A moment afterwards we were passed on a blind corner by a speedy Italian car which very nearly collided with another coming in the opposite direction. (It is always desirable to keep very much to the right hand side of the road in Italy.)

By now we were in Umbria, having crossed the border from Tuscany and turned sharp right near Olmo for Perugia, after passing a real little Mount of Olives. Castiglione lay on our left; ahead of us a charming little hill town sprawled down an Apennine, its two watch towers seeming to say 'Come and get us'. After crossing the river there is a straight stretch of road bordered by the usual vines and cornfields to the battered little village of Riccio. A moment later the lovely blue lake of Trasimene comes into view, the first real lake since Lake Garda.

Trasimene has been the scene of a series of battles from the time of Hannibal's victory in 217 B.C. to 1944 when a particularly sharp engagement took place between the Allies and the Germans for the possession of Arezzo. From above, the view of the lake with its islands, vineyards and foothills is delightful but as the road descends into the plain, the pine trees and oleanders screen it from view. The chief town on the lake is Passignano, almost entirely unknown to British and American visitors but able to provide a delightfully inexpensive holiday. There is a lido bar on the end of an Italian-type pier with a dance floor, gaudy red chairs and futuristic murals. In the gardens are a number of weeping willows. Out in the lake are the three inhabited islands of Maggiore, Minore and Polvese. The road now winds right by the shore of the lake, while on the hill-tops one can see a number of ancient Italian watch towers. Farther along comes the little old town of Magione with its square citadel and relics of medieval walls.

For the next few miles every hill-top seems to have, if not a village, a small castle—sure sign of the old wars when nobody trusted anybody. It is only surprising that the inhabitants or garrisons could find water so high up.

Biggest of all the hill towns is, of course, Perugia now close at hand. To reach it one drives up a leafy arcade flanked by new-looking villas to the very top of a steep hill where the Brufani Palace Hotel greets you. This self-styled 'Queen of the Hill Towns' is well worth a lengthy

visit. Besides its churches and museums, it has a reputation for angora wool, pottery, almond-sugar bonbons, little round cakes with balls of coloured icing, huge almond and raisin cakes and a first-class local wine which tastes very much like Beaujolais and costs only two shillings and ninepence a bottle.

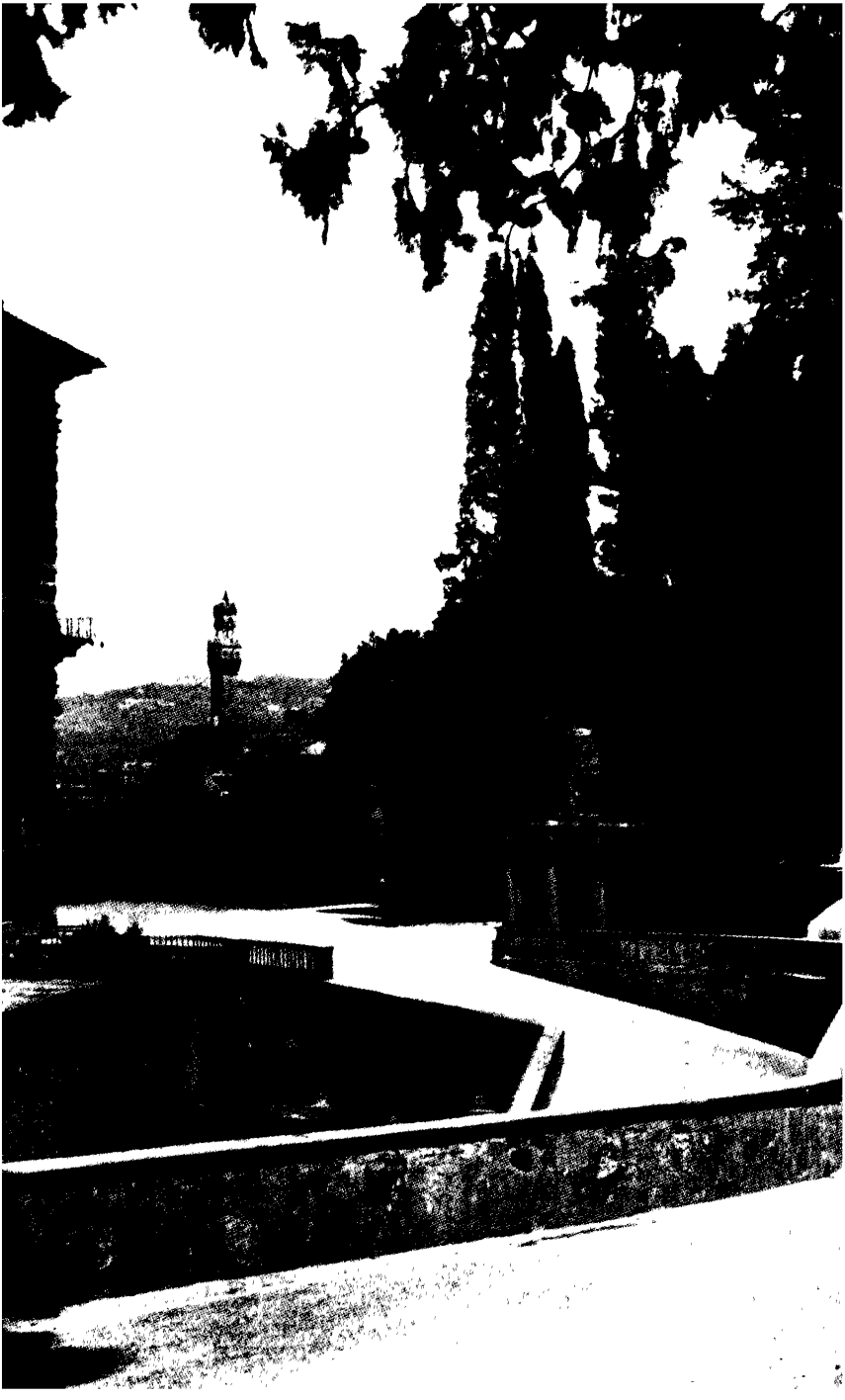
The Gothic cathedral has some very fine choir stalls carved in 1492 the year that Columbus discovered America. What is also interesting, is the fact that the organist sits behind the altar, quite a distance from the organ. At the back there is a courtyard which has to be crossed to reach the cathedral treasury.

On the occasion when we visited it the vergers were preparing the banners for the Corpus Christi procession. Among the treasures is more than one ancient carved wooden statue with clothes superimposed on the wood. You can touch and feel them. There is also a series of crude eighth-century coloured drawings in cream, red and blue. One of them represents St. Luke with what looks like a devil above him. Anyway, the creature has horns. A fifteenth-century representation of the martyrdom of St. Lorenzo being burnt alive is pretty vivid. One man is using his bellows to increase the intensity of the flames; a second is bringing further piles of faggots. A cracked twelfth-century church bell is another exhibit and visitors are told that it is 30 per cent silver. Wonderfully intricate croziers and immensely rich vestments of rose and gold silk contrast with fifth-century manuscripts. One papyrus extends to forty-two pages of the Gospel according to St. Luke, but is completely undecipherable except for an occasional word. In the delightfully old two-storeyed cloisters at the back the washing was hanging out to dry, a pleasant example of the way in which ancient buildings remain habitable.

As we had discovered on previous occasions, the visitor can always rely on an ex-prisoner of war to show him around, particularly if the visitor is English. Perugia was no exception.

As we walked up the main street, the Corso Vanucci, a lean, dark, somewhat spivvish-looking citizen sidled up. I thought that he was going to offer us dirty postcards or an improper address. Not a bit of it. "You Inglese or Americano?" he began. "Inglese", I said, showing off my knowledge of Italian. "Splendido" or words to that effect, was the reply. Our new-found acquaintance thereupon told us with pride that he had been captured as early in the war as Sidi Barani and insisted on acting as our guide. As we walked along, he told us that he was now a driver of an armoured car in the Celere police and pointed out three of them in the forecourt of a neighbouring palace. He went on to say that it was his afternoon off and nothing could give him greater pleasure than to show us around. This he did, taking us to the Taverna della Strega, an unappetizing bistro down a side alley, actually inside the fortress walls. After a reluctant drink of local wine, we made our way back into the Corso Vanucci and thence to the parapeted gardens.

The Ponte Vecchio, Florence



Everybody apparently plays some kind of ball game in Perugia—youths of twenty were playing football with tennis balls, small girls played pat-ball, bigger girls played net-ball without a net, small boys just threw india-rubber balls around. Traversing the Corso Vanucci again we made our way to the Palazzo dei Priori in the main piazza known as the Fourth of November Square, its splendid old building overlooking a great fountain. Unfortunately the latter was surrounded with a white palisade and we had to peer through the cracks in the walls like small boys at a football match.

That evening a coachload of English tourists appeared on the scene and once again I did some professional eavesdropping. The party were all middle-aged, hot, fatigued, and consequently querulous, with one exception: this was a little old woman, who was holding forth on the general subject of motor-coach tours on the Continent and hers in particular. "I thought the change would do me good," she was saying, "it has. Nice company and fresh scenery occupy one's mind. I live by myself in the country, you know. I am all alone. So I am really rationed. There are only two wee shops in the village to serve me so I have to have high tea. Sometimes I go into Newcastle where my daughter and son-in-law live." Her companions listened to her impatiently, then began attacking the unfortunate courier. According to them, he was idle, inefficient, ignorant, rude and unhelpful. "I think he's working to a schedule. He's just doing a job," said the little old woman charitably.

Next day we took a further look at Perugia. There was much to see. The choir stalls of San Pietro and San Agostino are quite remarkable. There is also the queer little church of San Angelo which is said to be 1,400 years old; nor should one miss the Ipogo de Volunni, the subterranean vaults which date back to the Etruscan Age. Once again we visited the church of San Pietro and inspected the eighteen black marble columns, while a church service was in progress. A section of this church is used by the local department of Chemical Agriculture.

Being built on the top of a hill, proud Perugia is not an easy city in which to do a comprehensive sightseeing tour. Ancient medieval streets meander downwards in all directions and the visitor has to retrace his steps before starting all over again. Among the churches which we visited was that of San Ercolano which has positively gigantic arches in the Gothic style. Other places worth visiting are the Gallenga Palace and the Via Baglioni.

Distant view of Palazzi Vecchia

CHAPTER VII

THE road out of Perugia to Assisi passes through orchards of cherry trees and fields of maize, wheat and barley, rimmed by the picturesque hills of Umbria. At Brascia we crossed the Chiascio, still 600 feet above sea level.

It has been said that all roads lead to Rome. At Bastia, the signposts directing one to the Eternal City pointed in all directions, the only difference being that some showed that the mileage was greater than others. Soon we saw across the plain what looked like a big church on a hill with huge, arched pillars resembling a viaduct and houses in tiers.

This is one's first view of Assisi, which takes some time to reach across the plain, before the road ascends in zigzag fashion among the silvery olive groves.

Assisi, to be truthful, enjoyed a very undistinguished history until the rich clothmaker's son, who became known ever afterwards as St. Francis, was born there in the year 1182. As a youth he lived a gay, dissolute life. Thomas of Celano said: "He was always first in all vanities, the first instigator of naughtiness, and thus drew upon himself the attention of the public by his vainglorious extravagance. He was not chary of jokes, ridicule, light sayings, evil speaking, singing and in the wearing of fine clothes. Being very rich he spent freely, being less desirous of accumulating wealth than of dissipating his substance. Thus, surrounded by many worthless companions, he went upon his way triumphantly and scornfully." St. Francis, as he later became, was still under twenty-one when he was captured by the Perugians in one of the intermittent skirmishes between them and the men of Assisi, and nearly died as a result of his imprisonment.

Then suddenly he altered his whole life and, having given all his money to the poor, founded the order of Mendicant Friars known as the Franciscans whose essential characters were poverty and self-abnegation. During his prayers, St. Francis frequently had visions of the Virgin Mary and of the Saviour, the most important being the one in his cell on Mont La Verna in 1224 when Christ impressed upon him the marks of his wounds (Stigmata). He was only forty-two when he died but he left an imperishable memory, not only as a result of his way of life but also as a result of his writings, particularly his *Canticle of the Creatures.*

Scarcely was he dead, when Brother Elias conceived the idea of erecting the great Basilica of Assisi to his memory and persuaded Pope Gregory IX to sponsor his project. Within twenty-two months the lower church was completed and the body of St. Francis was brought from the church of San Giorgio, where it had temporarily

laid, and placed in a tomb prepared so secretly that it was not found and identified until 1818.

Today one cannot see very much in the lower church because it is so dark inside, but there are a number of tombs and chapels and certain frescoes over the high altar which are ascribed by some people to Giotto. In the inner sacristy there is a walnut cabinet which contains the sacred veil with which the Virgin Mary is said to have covered the Infant Jesus on the night of his birth. Other relics are the habit of white wool St. Francis wore during his last illness (still showing the bloodstains from the miraculous wounds at the side of the saint), and a silver reliquary containing two autographs. St Francis's sandals and slippers and the stone he used as a pillow are also exhibited. But the average visitor to Assisi is bound to feel that St. Francis would have disapproved completely of all the ostentation and the vulgar lack of taste with which modern Assisi ruthlessly exploits everybody who makes the pilgrimage.

At least, however, the upper church contains twenty-eight magnificent frescoes of scenes from the life of St. Francis by Giotto. Though they are somewhat faded, the colours are still wonderful. They show the bearded saint offering to the Sultan of Egypt proof of the Christian faith by an ordeal by fire; relieving the thirst of a poor man by a miraculous spring of water; preaching to the pigeons near Bevagna; his canonization and his restoring a woman to life. They are not, in fact, in chronological order.

On the day we arrived a number of monks were laying a long green carpet of fresh laurel branches up to the church from the centre of the town for the Corpus Christi procession.

As with Siena, Assisi is better inspected on foot. The Torre Communale with its bell of praises, the Temple of Minerva with its high fluted columns, the Orangery of St. Francis Cuttio (the stable where St. Francis was born), the cathedral of St. Ruphinus where St. Francis was baptized, the Roman amphitheatre and the church of St. Pietra are all worth a visit. Down below in the valley is the monstrous church of S. Maria degli Angeli with the famous rose garden.

According to legend the plants have remained thornless in honour of the saint. The legend was that when St. Francis was assailed by terrible temptation, he threw himself naked among the brambles and thorns, to punish himself; but these bushes ever afterwards produced leaves with the stains of his blood on them and roses without thorns.

Without being in any way an iconoclast, I have to report that I put my hand through the rails and found gigantic thorns on the rose bush nearest to me. What was really charming, however, was a nest made by a pigeon on the outstretched hands of the saint in which the white hen bird was sitting on her eggs.

Also very charming was the tiny Portiuncula around and above which the hideous baroque church of S. Maria degli Angeli has been

built. In size it reminded one irresistibly of those miniature houses at the *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition in Olympia, dwarfed by the roof and its surroundings. Actually, it is quite exquisite and there were queues of people waiting to enter it by its four different doors. This fine chapel with its rough, primitive walls is so much more moving than any of the grandiose buildings erected to the saint in the neighbourhood. . . .

Not far away is the ancient oratory of St. Dominico where St. Francis received St. Clare and her companions. It still has a gentle, old-world atmosphere without any modern ostentation, like the Hermitage delle Carceri where St. Francis used to retire for contemplation.

The road from Assisi to Rome which we had now identified belatedly as the Flaminian Way is bordered with orchards for the first few kilometres. At the undistinguished village of Spello the vines were grafted on to cherry trees. During the next few kilometres the railway line crosses the Flaminian Way no less than half a dozen times, and cyclists in many cases had passengers, usually girls, sitting on the handlebars facing them—which made it almost impossible for them to see what was ahead. (We had missed the Pinturicchio chapel, alas).

Foligno, where we saw our first aeroplane in three weeks, is a ramparted town with the River Topino acting as a moat on one side. It is a small industrial place with a local chemical industry and was eventually fought over during the Second World War, but the oleanders and several groups of statuary remain picturesque enough. Here for the first time we passed a convoy of Italian troops travelling in Army trucks, while in the fields white oxen were being used to harvest the corn. Incidentally it is only around Perugia that oxen are bred primarily for eating purposes, instead of for work in the fields; which is why the steaks in the neighbourhood are so tender. On the left is a fascinating little hill town precariously perched on a typical young Umbrian mountain surrounded with olive groves. Its watch tower commands the valley which is surrounded by mountains the size of the Scottish Highlands.

The next village on the Flaminian Way is Pissingnano, followed by the Fonte del Clitunno, a Roman temple which was used as a church by the Christians towards the end of the Roman Empire. It looks like a little oasis surrounded by cypress trees. Here we passed a procession of girls, all in white dresses and carrying banners, while maroon and yellow squares of silk hung from every window of the neighbouring villages just as if it were VE Day. The local peasants must be most industrious. We saw corn being reaped the hard way, just as in the Bible, with reaping hooks—not even with scythes.

After a series of picturesque farmhouses comes Spoleto, another

hill town which figured bloodily in the Second World War. Its aqueduct can be seen for miles away. Spoleto, which can only be reached after a stiff climb, is full of pre-Roman remains. In addition there is an amphitheatre and the church of San Salvatore which has Doric columns. But the chief monument is undoubtedly the aqueduct which dates back to the Middle Ages and crosses the valley between the Rocca and Monte Luco.

The Via Flaminia next passes through an arcade of olives with an ancient fortress frowning over the defile. Fir-clad hills now begin to close in and the road joins the dried-up course of the Tessino. Red poppies in the cornfields lend colour to the lovely green valley which seems entirely uninhabited except for one large farmhouse. The hills become really steep and the earth is red where there are cuttings. Climbing over the shoulder of a young mountain, the Via Flaminia now meanders into an even prettier green valley. The whole effect can be described as Spanish. On the left up above, is another fortress. Here we passed a girl with a pitcher of wine on her head. As the valley narrows into a lovely defile, olive groves line the road for the last two or three kilometres into Terni.

This is a surprisingly large city full of new buildings, in fact, new suburbs. The reason for its modernity is that its electrical generating stations supply the whole of Rome and the neighbourhood. The after-effects of a fairly heavy blitz are still visible, though scattered. The public gardens are beautifully shady and contain a number of palm trees, but our chauffeur will particularly remember Terni because of a bicycle which had no fewer than three people on it and which wobbled suddenly across our bows from a side street.

The Flaminian Way continues to descend by the valley of the Nera with its poplars and farmhouses. In the distance Narni becomes visible on the hillside. It is famous for the beauty of its girls. High above it is a ruined but still angry-looking castello.

Bellavista is a name given to many hotels all over the world, but none deserves it more than the one at Narni. Its view over the valley of the Nera, stretching for miles below is quite spectacular—and so is the food. We began with smoked ham, following it with veal steak grilled on charcoal, washed down by the red wine of Spoleto. Next came peaches and first-class coffee over which the proprietor was most forthcoming about his expenses. It appears that Italian hotels have to pay ten different taxes amounting to 25 per cent, on top of the initial cost of the food and drink. It is impossible, apparently, to buy enough milk at the legal price, though the authorities insist on a legal price being charged to the customer. Altogether, he said, the filling of forms and the paying of taxes scarcely made life worth while.

On the way south from Narni, there is a precipitous drop on the right-hand side, while across the valley lies Visciano, embellished with a nice castle. Then for the first time since the Futa Pass the sky clouded

over and we were not sorry. The sunshine had been almost too brilliant. The Flaminian Way now deserts the Nera Valley, crosses a hill and wanders along the uplands before another mild descent. Rome, so the milepost told us, was eighty kilometres away.

To the right lay Gualdo, with the hilly village of Otricoli on the left. The general colour scheme is green and yellow with the fields of barley and the coppices of cypress, laurel and poplar. More girls passed us, walking with pitchers on their heads. These did not even use their hands to steady them.

Now at last the road reached valley level, if not sea level, and more girls and women passed us carrying things on their heads—anything from a tin of biscuits to a hundredweight of potatoes. To the right lay Viterbo with its Papal palace, fountains, medieval walls and towers. But what really impresses the visitor is the huge spread of horns of the local oxen.

Once again the scenery changes and leafy valleys with sharp bends are reminiscent of the Ardennes in Belgium. Having crossed the Treia, the Flaminian Way climbs a hill with what looks like three mountains in the distance. As they are approached, however, they reveal themselves to be the single Mt. Soracte with the remains of trenches dug into the side. Next comes the wooded village of Rignano where, thirty-seven kilometres from Rome, a section of the original Roman road has been excavated for 200 yards showing the slabs of flat rock originally put there under the instructions of Flaminius. Thereafter the countryside becomes barren and featureless, for at last the Campagna has been reached.

Round the village of Gamme and the rebuilt township of Castelnuovo di Monte the soil is poor and the population sparse. No wonder. Until the Trappists grew eucalyptus trees and cinchona trees, from the bark of which they had learned to extract quinine, the Campagna used to be riddled with malaria.

Twelve miles from Rome the countryside begins to look a trifle richer, but the hideous roadside posters begin again. Here, too, the maritime pines show themselves for the first time. Blown bridges and blitzed factories mark Castel Giubulo, after which comes a shady arcade of plane trees with long rows of poplars on the left and huge excavations on the right. A kilometre or two farther along are the official outskirts of Rome marked, sadly enough, by a blown railway viaduct. The houses are very shabby and the tramlines begin. Tram lines all over Italy, and particularly in Florence, seem to be cut much deeper than in England; with the result that they are a menace to the narrow wheels of horse cabs and a nuisance to the new tyres of motor cars. After crossing the Tiber by an old bridge, the Via Flaminia continues to its starting point in the Piazza del Popolo, having in the meantime passed a number of huge blocks of flats and the Piazza della Marina in which the Italian Admiralty is situated.

CHAPTER VIII

THE terraces of the Piazza del Popolo in Rome were designed by Valadier for Pope Pius VII in order to give a first impression of 'beauty and magnificence' to visitors from the north; for, before railways were invented, it was the only way to enter the city from that direction. The Square is decorated with four Egyptian lions spewing water into the basins of their fountains. Above them rises one of the largest obelisks in the world, 118 feet high. Originally erected in 1400 B.C. in front of the Temple of the Sun at Heliopolis in Egypt, it was brought to Rome by Augustus in 23 B.C. to decorate his Circus Maximus, where it was found buried and broken by Pope Sixtus V in the sixteenth century. He had it restored and erected here.

Altogether there are thirteen of these obelisks in Rome and every one of them seems to fit into its Italian surroundings in spite of its alien origin. From the Piazza branch out the three most important streets of Papal Rome, the Corso which ends in the stupendous monument to King Victor Emmanuel II; the Via del Babuino terminating in the Royal Palace and the tunnel under the Quirinal Hill, and the Via della Ripetta.

We ourselves drove up to the Via Sistina to the Trinita di Monte where we had booked our accommodation at the Hotel de la Ville, next door to the Hotel Villa Medici Hassler. This we made our headquarters for the whole of our stay. We had chosen it carefully because it seemed that it must be in the least noisy quarter of Rome. And so it was; but we quickly discovered that wherever you stay, Rome should be described as the City of Eternal Noise. Those appalling Italian motor scooters revving up furiously, the hoots of the motor cars, the grinding wheels of the horse cabs on the *pavé*, the shouts of gesticulating men and women, the miaowing of cats, the barking of dogs and the clanging of trams makes sleep almost impossible, unless you wear ear plugs at night. Even in the days of E. V. Lucas who visited Rome in 1926, Rome was by no means a quiet place.

Today it is the most exhausting city which I have ever visited. Not only is the sound deafening, but the cobbled streets are in many cases very narrow. Few of them have pavements. And if there are any, they are only two or three feet wide and the men of Rome are exceedingly rude in the way in which they jostle people into the road, walking arm-in-arm three abreast and refusing to 'break it up' when a woman is coming in the opposite direction. No doubt they learnt these manners from the Fascists when they first occupied the city. It may be added that walking in a Roman street is highly dangerous. Motor coaches, horse cabs, motor cars, motor scooters, even trams, dash about without

paying any attention to each other or to the pedestrians. At night what pavements there are become crowded with sauntering Romans.

Restaurants are so brightly lit with Neon lights that they are positively dazzling to the eye and the only equivalent of the Via Frattina off the Corso is 42nd Street in New York. There are, of course, exceptions to the rule. The Café el Greco in the Via Condotti is pleasantly shabby and ill-lit. This is the rendezvous for Italian newspapermen, artists, authors, mannequins and artists' models. It consists of a series of alcoves leading out of a long narrow passage, with faded oil paintings, gilt mirrors, marble-topped tables and settees. Youths in blue and white check shirts and dove-grey corduroy trousers, girls in voluminous verdant-green skirts and red woollies, young men in shirt sleeves or wearing open-necked collars in the fashion set by Byron who came here often, dejected-looking writers wearing their hair cut round the top of their head in a fringe like a bull-fighter, slowly sip their single glass of chianti, spinning out the time until they feel that they must order another one. Now and then a girl will come in offering camellias for sale, but only the foreigners buy them. Shelley and Mark Twain both patronized El Greco. But visitors who are given a leaflet printed in Italian, French, German and English find that each section gives a different list of celebrities. Thus the Germans are told that Goethe, Mendelssohn, Wagner, Liszt and the mad King Ludwig of Bavaria used to take coffee there. The Italians are assured that d'Annunzio, Gogol, Gounod, Canova and Carducci were regular customers. The French are reminded that Corot, Berlioz, Gounod, Bizet and Anatole France paid regular visits. The British are given in addition to Byron and Shelley, the names of Thackeray and Keats.

One can be pretty sure that Mussolini in his earlier days used the Café El Greco a great deal when he was a penniless pamphleteer, but here as elsewhere in Italy, Mussolini's name is never mentioned. (Even when the tourist visits the Piazza Venezia and asks his guide to point out the place from which Mussolini used to address the populace the guide will only do so very grudgingly.) Germans, strangely enough, do not seem as unpopular as might be expected. At any rate, German restaurants are quickly patronized wherever they appear. There is little doubt that in Rome the Germans behaved with considerable correctitude. Apart from this, it was Rome which produced Fascism, which in turn was adopted as Nazism by the Germans. In the meantime, the absolute refusal of the local inhabitant to make any reference to Mussolini is quite uncanny.

Few cities have undergone so many quick changes as Rome between 1919 and 1939 and it was always Mussolini who in the matter of town planning had the last word. Thanks to him the Capitol was isolated and the Via dell'Impero was built from the Colosseum to the Piazza Venezia. At the time of its construction this was described by Fascist admirers as the most beautiful thoroughfare in the world. In

some ways it is, for it affords a sumptuous vista of the relics of Imperial Rome. Mussolini's idea was to have a wide avenue flanked by the most famous monuments where he could hold victory processions. In fact, the first and only big parade in the Via dell'Impero took place on the first anniversary of the foundation of the Fascist Empire. The second, which was never held, was to have occurred in 1940 to mark the victory of the Axis over Great Britain.

In the northern suburbs on the west side of the Tiber, Mussolini built a glittering white marble stadium where the Fascist youth did their physical training and where Mussolini had his own luxurious swimming-pool. To make it more accessible he had the Ponte Duce d'Aosta built at vast expense, although the Ponte Milvio was only 100 yards away. On the whole, the Romans thoroughly enjoyed their Roma Mussoliniana with its gradual extension in all directions and the modern buildings rising outside the old boundaries. They were also very proud of the military aerodromes built on the outskirts of the city and the large garrison of troops kept permanently in the heart of Rome. But all of this made Rome a legitimate military target with its military missions, military headquarters and munition factories and it was no fault of Mussolini that it was not heavily bombed in 1943. As it was, only two churches were damaged—those of St. Paul's and St. Laurence; and the latter is already repaired.

Rome is so full of antiquities and monuments that it is difficult to know where to begin. St. Peter's? The Pantheon? The Vatican? The Colosseum? The Forum?

To anybody like myself who has willy-nilly had to learn Latin from the tender age of seven until going into the Army there is only one answer—THE Forum. Not the Forum of Augustus, of Julius Caesar, of Nerva, of Trajan or of Vespasian, interesting though they are, but THE Forum.

Rome was sacked twenty times in a thousand years, the last time by the Constable of Bourbon whose followers pillaged it systematically for nine months. It is surprising, therefore, how much remains after the looters of centuries have done with it. True, poppies and nettles grow where Cicero and Julius Caesar uttered their powerful orations. Daisies, purple weeds, rough grass and occasional dandelions grow unchecked and one might have thought that Mussolini would have made everything very spick and span. Maybe he did—before the war. Today the whole Forum is remarkably unkempt. But there is still a great deal to see.

Accompanied by Rome's leading guide we made our way to a large ruined temple which, we were told, became the Church of St. Laurence. It is on the Via Sacra but weeds grow profusely on the sacrificial altar.

Next we were shown the Temple of Castor and Pollux, built to commemorate the victory in 498 B.C. over Tarquinius. That was the battle in which Horatius kept the bridge—'And e'en the ranks of Tuscany could scarce forbear to cheer.' Nearby is the Temple of Caesar. These ruins in the centre of the Forum are all that are left of the sumptuous temple raised by Augustus in 29 B.C. and dedicated to the Great Dictator on the very spot where Mark Antony delivered his famous oration. If the conspirators had succeeded in their plan, the body of Caesar would have been thrown into the Tiber without the honour of a funeral. But the reaction of the public compelled them to change their scheme and Antony, during his funeral oration read Caesar's will in which he bequeathed considerable legacies to his murderers and the sum of 300 sesterces to every Roman citizen.

Little is left of the Rostra Julii, the front of which was originally decorated with the prows of the warships of Mark Antony's and Cleopatra's fleet after their defeat at Actium by Augustus. Opposite the Temple of Julius Caesar on the corner of the Basilica Aemilia are the remains of the monument of Gaius and Lucius, Augustus's grandchildren. The Basilica Aemilia itself is one of the oldest in Rome and mentioned by Cicero because of the money it cost. Aemilius was largely responsible for the conquest of Macedonia.

At the far end of the Forum is the Senate House, originally built in 670 B.C., enlarged in 80 B.C. and completed by Augustus. Here it was that the Roman Senate assembled for so many centuries and discussed the fate of the whole civilized world as it was then known. And surprisingly enough the building is almost intact. The floor is of red, green and white marble and it is perfectly easy to visualize the scene when the senators sat in tiers and listened to the orations of their leading citizens. The comparatively recent excavations made inside it under the direction of Professor Bartoli enable one to see exactly how it looked, at any rate, in the time of Diocletian. Many of the step-like seats of the senators preserve their original marble decoration. At the end of the hall facing the entrance on a platform stood the thrones of the two Consuls who presided. Nobody seems to know how many senators there were, but there must have been at least 300, to judge by the number of seats.

Close at hand is the tomb of Romulus with a somewhat undignified wooden shed protecting the block of black marble which covers the tomb. Some critics claim that it is the tomb of Faustulus and not Romulus at all; but whomever it commemorates it certainly dates back to primitive times and when it was excavated in 1899, a number of bones were discovered—proof of the animal sacrifices on the spot. To see it properly it is necessary to go almost on one's hands and knees. Only in this awkward position is it possible to study the lump of rock bearing an inscription written in vertical lines and in such archaic language that nobody had ever been able to read it. The only con-

secutive three letters which I personally could decipher looked like DSO.

The tomb is only a few yards from the Arch of Septimius Severus erected in 203 A.D. to commemorate his victories over the Parthians and Arabians. It also celebrated his two sons Geta and Caracalla whose fabulous baths we saw later. When Caracalla had his brother Geta assassinated he also arranged for Geta's name to be erased from all the monuments dedicated to him; as can be observed at the end of the third line and all of the fourth line of the inscriptions on this arch.

So little is left of the Umbilicus, the Tabularium and the Temple of Vespasian that the guide took us direct from the Arch of Septimius Severus to the Rostrum. On this platform the aristocrats engaged in wordy warfare with the democrats and Cicero delivered two of his orations. It was here too, that the heads of Antony, Octavius, Sulla, Clodius and Cicero himself were exposed. You can still see the holes where the plaques of marble facing were fixed. As for the bas reliefs in front, they represent events from the life of Trajan.

The most ancient temple in the Forum is that of Saturn but it was destroyed and rebuilt several times. Eight Doric columns still remain. Incidentally, there seems to have been no excavation beneath it, although the State Treasury was preserved there. The Basilica Julii is easily distinguishable. According to our guide it was the last pagan monument erected in Rome. The pilasters, however, are modern. Close at hand is the most important Christian monument in the Forum—St. Maria Antiqua, the connecting link between paganism and Christianity in Rome. It needs, however, an archaeologist to visualize the original construction of this, the first known church to be dedicated to the Virgin Mary throughout the world.

Little or nothing is left of the Lacus Juturna, where according to legend the twin brothers Castor and Pollux casually watered their horses before announcing their victory at Lake Virgillius. As for the Temple of Vesta, nothing is left of it except the round basin to the right of the Arch of Augustus. It was here that the Sacred Fire was kept burning until 394 A.D. when the Emperor Theodosius suppressed the Order of Virgin Priestesses and extinguished the fire which had been burning without interruption for nearly eleven centuries. To the west of the Temple of Vesta is the House of the Vestals with an inscription:

"*Senatus popolusque romanus pecunia publica faciendum curavit.*" The Atrium originally surrounded by a two-storeyed portico enabled the vestals to walk about without getting wet on rainy days. The remains of the three large basins in the centre are thought to have been used for collecting rain-water because the vestals said they could not use water which had been polluted by passing through pipes before their sacred rites. I repeat, that it needs an archaeologist to be really interested in these terribly mutilated relics of ancient Rome. At least, however,

the Arch of Titus, commemorating the destruction of Jerusalem, is still standing and a careful study of the frieze shows soldiers carrying a reclining figure at the River Jordan; while inside the arch on the left are a seven-branched candlestick, the Table of the Shew Bread, the Silver Trumpets and other spoils of war.

Looking down on it all is the Palatine, the most important of the Seven Hills of Rome. It was here that Romulus founded his primitive city and around which he built his first walls. For many centuries it remained the favourite residence of the patricians. Later it became popular with the Roman lawyers, statesmen and magistrates because of its proximity to the Forum. Still later it became the residence of Augustus and other emperors who followed his example by building a series of palaces on it. Unfortunately, in the Middle Ages, lime-kilns were established and the statues and columns were broken to pieces and used for mortar. The finishing touches to the original Palatine were given by the Farnese Princes who turned it into gardens. These cover nearly all the remains of the Palace of Tiberius (still unexplored), the Palace of Caligula, the Lupercal, (scene of remarkable orgies), the Temple of Cybele whose headless statue can be seen to this day, the House of Livia discovered in 1869 and the House of the Flavians completed by Domitian.

Everybody who has read about the gladiators and Christians thrown to the lions must be fascinated by the vast bulk of the Colosseum, otherwise known as the Flavian Amphitheatre. Its original height of 200 feet is still maintained for about a fifth of its circumference and it actually covers six acres. The building of the Colosseum was begun by Vespasian and completed by Titus. Altogether thirty thousand men were hard at work for eight years before it was finished.

Its ultimate inauguration in 80 A.D. was solemnized with the most extravagant Games which lasted one hundred days. During this period over 5,000 wild animals were killed and goodness knows how many gladiators. Eighty-seven thousand people was 'capacity' and it had eighty entrances, the two most interesting being the Sanavivaria and the Libitinensis. The first-named was the entrance through which the gladiators proceeded before fighting; the second, called after the Goddess of Death, was the one through which the bodies of the gladiators were hooked out into the spoliarum where they were stripped of their garments and breastplate and, if still alive, despatched on the spot.

To me the most interesting part of the Colosseum is what can only be described as the basement of the arena where excavations, several yards deep, show an elaborate series of underground passages and tunnels. In the old days it must have been covered by a wooden floor

and there were lifts and trap doors through which gladiators, wild beasts and their handlers were admitted into the arena.

The first gladiatorial fight in Rome took place in 264 B.C. when three couples of gladiators fought in the Forum Boarium. The next big gladiatorial show took place nearly fifty years later when twenty-two couples of gladiators fought to the death. Thereafter the popularity of the Games became intense. There were gladiatorial schools for the training of slaves, prisoners of war and condemned malefactors. Later on, the social prestige of a gladiator became much the same as that of a modern English prizefighter and the Emperor Commodus would fight in the circus himself as a gladiator; which was uncommonly bad luck for his opponent who knew that if he either killed or wounded him he would be tortured to death in a highly unpleasant manner.

Commodus, in fact, must have been one of the world's greatest sadists.

Normally, the gladiators were matched according to their skill and strength and weapons, much like modern boxers. When, as a schoolboy, I first read about them I used to have a series of nightmares that I was armed with a shield and short sword and used to fight against a *retiarius*, one of those unpleasant characters (often Greeks) who carried a net and a trident as their sole weapons. Nothing could be more unpleasant than to be 'netted' and then prodded to death like a butterfly on a pin.

Though the gladiators had sworn to fight to the death (*Te moriturus saluto*), a popular performer was often saved by the public turning its thumbs up. When a gladiator was badly wounded and fell to the ground, the cry would go up "*Hoc habet*," the ancient origin of the phrase "He's had it." If the general feeling was against him they turned their thumbs down and he was ordered by the Master of Ceremonies to "take steel."

The Emperor Constantine abolished gladiatorial combats in 325 A.D., but they were revived under Constantius. The man who put a final end to them was Telemachus, a Christian priest in A.D. 404. While the gladiators were fighting, this forerunner of the Lord's Day Observance Society threw himself down in the middle of the arena urging the public in the name of Christ to stop these bloody Games. At the same time he tried to seize their weapons from the gladiators. The public, naturally annoyed at this interruption of their favourite sport, stoned him to death. However, the Emperor Honorius was so impressed by this act of self-sacrifice that he put an end to the Games for ever.

The best preserved part of the Colosseum is on the south of the Esquiline Hill. Even here, however, only two pilasters show where the pulvinar, the Imperial box reserved for the Emperor, the court and the vestal virgins used to be. Around it, about twelve feet up, was the podium, a lengthy platform reserved for V.I.P.s. Behind and above it sloped up the ramp of seats where the mass of spectators sat. The

lowest ones nearest to the arena were, of course, the best seats and all the different sections were separated by walls lined with marble, including a special reserve for women, called cathedras. On the top of the colonnade at the back was a terrace where the sailors used in hot weather to spread the canvas awning which covered most of the spectators. Anybody who has ever been to a bullfight in a big city like Toledo or Madrid will appreciate exactly how everything was arranged in ancient times, because the whole routine from the first procession of the matadors to the hooking out of the dead bodies of the bulls and horses is copied exactly from the Romans.

Much of the stone work and brick work of the Colosseum still exists although you cannot see it, for until Pope Pius VII stopped the practice, the inhabitants of Rome used the Colosseum as a quarry to build their houses out of it.

The Pantheon, by contrast, is, astonishingly enough, preserved in its entirety and gives one an even better idea of the awe-inspiring effect that Rome must have had on everybody who visited it for the first time. According to an inscription on the frieze it was built by Agrippa when he was elected Consul for the third time (which would have been 27 B.C.); but later on it was restored by Hadrian, that most interesting of all Emperors—at least to the English, owing to Hadrian's Wall, and to all lovers of antiquity who have visited his Villa outside Rome. Legend says that the original building was struck by lightning. Its present portico is supported by sixteen columns of granite surmounted by splendid Corinthian capitals over forty feet high. Its ceiling used to be covered with bronze decorations, but Pope Urban VIII had them removed and converted partly into cannon balls and partly into supports for the high altar of St. Peter's. But at least he left the ancient bronze doors:- "What the Barbarians left, the Barberini took."

The interior is almost completely bare but wonderfully proportioned; and the purple marble floor is decorated with circles and squares. There are huge pillars all round with a splendid dome above, the height and diameter of which are said to be exactly the same. Round the walls are seven empty niches for the Gods of the seven days of the week. The Pantheon, in fact, is simply a skeleton of what it was originally, although King Umberto I, King Victor Emmanuel II and Raphael were buried here. The caryatides of Diogenes have disappeared and it needs a telescope to see the workmanship in the dome. It was Pope Boniface IV who converted it from a pagan temple into a Christian church in A.D. 608 and so it remained up to 1870 when it was officially made a national monument.

After inspecting the Pantheon it is only natural that one should go off and study that immense modern monument to King Victor Emmanuel II and United Italy, so huge that it is quite out of proportion to its surroundings. Though still uncompleted in 1911, it was solemnly

'unveiled' to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of the Unity of Italy. Today, with its statues and fountains it covers an area nearly 800 feet long and 800 feet wide. At the foot of the monument on each side are fountains surmounted by positively colossal figures representing the Adriatic and the Tyrrhenian Seas, and it is a real long walk to reach the top marble terrace. Each time you think you have reached the summit you find there are still further wide marble staircases to ascend.

On the first terrace is the figure of Italy with the body of the Unknown Warrior beneath it, always guarded by two Italian soldiers wearing steel helmets and carrying fixed bayonets. Above them towers the equestrian statue of King Victor Emmanuel. At the back is the gigantic marble colonnade surmounted by two super-colossal quadrigas. From the top terrace of the monument there is in almost every direction a fine view. On the first of the two occasions when we visited it there was a complete rainbow across the sky with an aeroplane flying through the middle of it.

Below runs the Corso leading out of the Piazza Venezia. The Corso is the main shopping street of Rome and takes its name from the horse-races which used to be held there. It is a not a particularly interesting street except for the goods in the shops, but there are a number of churches in it and, at the far end, the Café Aragno where the waiters still wear tail coats and white ties. The coffee is excellent and the clientele is upper middle class Italian. Very few English visitors seem to find their way there although it is a huge place, as big as a Lyons' Corner House and always full of movement. As we sat in it one evening we saw the State police in their red, white and black uniforms hurrying home to change because of the rain.

Within a few hundred yards are a number of trattorias and ristoranti. One we tried was the Ristorante Pizzeria but it was not a great success, neither the roast chicken nor the *frito misto*. As for the *casciota romana*, this proved to be so hard a cheese that we could not even cut it with a knife while the *mozzarellia* is so soft and white and tasteless that it really needs pepper and salt to give it a flavour. A better place to eat is the Groppello d'Or where we tried a bottle of *Soave*, a slightly sweet white wine, and *langouste*.

Some of the best meals we had in Rome were in the restaurant of the Hôtel de la Ville. There is also George's Bar near the Excelsior where one can lunch out in a nice garden. George has dark satanic eyebrows, plays dice at his own bar and has a pleasant grin. When I ordered two Martinis he shook enough for three cocktails and drank the third one himself, a thing I have never seen done before, but proving that the ingredients were good. Nearby is Mario's with tables outside, but we found it cooler to eat indoors.

As in so many ristoranti and trattorias the music is supplied by a free-lance musician, in this case a single sad-eyed youth in blue trousers,

who played the accordion. Presumably these itinerant performers have their own beat. In some restaurants more than one appears during the evening and takes a kind of offertory plate round. Usually, too, girls come in with a tray of camellias and, to prevent the men from being ungallant, pose the camellias unasked on the shoulder of their companions, thus blackmailing them into buying a flower. Newspaper sellers also walk around even in the best restaurants and unless you remember that Italian evening newspapers have the date line of the following day you may suddenly think that you are twenty-four hours late for all your engagements.

Another meeting place is Doney's Bar near the Excelsior. Here, Roman beauties wearing sun-glasses stop and chat to young men seated at pavement tables who do not bother to stand up when addressed. Doney's Bar is frequented also by English visitors—as is shown by the number of people reading the Continental *Daily Mail*. But girls in riding-breeches and well-dressed Italian men in tropical light-weight suits and silk shirts are much in evidence. One girl we saw wore at midday a kind of evening dress—anyway it was bare to the waist at the back. Drinks are expensive and it is quite a shock to see a beggar finding an empty bottle under a tree and gleefully taking it away. Poverty and wealth rub close shoulders in Rome.

Altogether we must have lunched and dined at over a dozen different eating places and proved once again to ourselves that trattorias are preferable to restaurants.

Rome has surprisingly few theatres and cinemas and even those cinemas which exist still show such ancient motion pictures as *King Kong*. This is surprising in view of the new film studios said to be the best in Europe, in which so many English and American films are being made. There is quite a good golf course on the outskirts and a certain amount of polo-playing; and of course the races. Unfortunately there were no meetings during our stay. Bathing is available at Ostia, about half an hour by train from the centre of Rome, but is only to be recommended to people who enjoy Southend and Margate.

CHAPTER IX

IT has always been my habit when visiting foreign cities to hire an open fiacre from which to do my sight-seeing. In Rome it is no economy because the driver charges at least as much as a taxi. In this way we spent a pleasant day, having walked down the somewhat sombre Via Gregoriana to the Piazza Barberini where we hired a fine old boy with a powerful white Kaiser moustache and a well-kept cob. The Piazza Barberini is a large square in the centre of which is one of the many fountains designed by Bernini, representing a triton on a conch. Off the north side of the square is the church of the Capuchins, the foundation-stone of which was laid by Pope Urban VIII (Bernini's patron) in 1624, where Bernini is buried in a simple tomb with the humble inscription, *Hic jacet pulvis, cinis et nihil.* It is somewhat sinister with subterranean burial chapels, decorated by the skulls and skeletons of the 4,000 monks of this monastery who died between 1700 and 1870. The Barberini Palace close at hand, completed by Bernini, is regarded by the guides as one of the most beautiful in Rome, but we did not enter it.

Up the hill, the Piazza Quirinale provides a good view of the city, with the dome of St. Peter's in the distance. In its centre are two groups of statuary which once decorated the Baths of Constantine and are said to be marble copies from Greek originals. There is also an obelisk. At the north end of the square is the Quirinal Palace. The ubiquitous Bernini is here responsible for the main gate and the balcony, though its contents are of no great interest today, the best of the works of art having been handed over to the Vatican when the palace was declared national property in 1870. The palace used to be used for the papal elections and it was here that Pope Pius VII was arrested by Napoleon's orders.

Down one side of the Piazza Quirinale is a steep street which leads to the Fountain of Trevi, the biggest in Rome and at first sight rather reminiscent of the polar bears' den at the Zoo. It shows a huge statue of Neptune being drawn in a chariot by two sea-horses. From the chariot and elsewhere jets of water spurt out into a large basin where it used to be a habit to drop a coin, if one wanted to return to Rome. A few yards away is the Piazza Colonna, in the centre of which stands the column of Marcus Aurelius, in honour of his victory over the Germans. Marcus Aurelius is represented with a beard and the bas-reliefs are interesting because of the clothes and armour in which the Roman soldiers and German tribesmen are clad. The ruins of the Temple of Neptune nearby is also impressive.

Making our way to the Piazza Barberini we jogged along in the fiacre down the Via del Tritone narrowly missing collision with a series of

Part of Hadrian's Villa
Photo: ENIT

trolley buses, turning right into the Piazza di Spagna. E.V. Lucas used to advise visitors to Rome to make the Piazza di Spagna the starting point for all their sight-seeing in Rome. Not a bad idea. It used to be the centre of the old papal Rome and takes its name from the palace of the Spanish Ambassador. Later it became the Anglo-American quarter, as the offices of the American Express Co. and Elizabeth Arden still testify. In its centre is another fountain of Bernini, representing a large stranded barque and said to be in memory of the great flood of 1598, when a boat was actually left stranded here by the subsiding water.

Leading all the way up to the Piazza della Trinita is a flight of steps built at the private expense of a French Ambassador in the seventeenth century. On the right-hand corner of the staircase is the house where Shelley and Keats used to live. It contains a library and small museum of souvenirs of the two English poets. The steps of the staircase were used in the old days as a kind of mannequin parade of artists' models looking for jobs.

Jogging further along we crossed a bridge over the muddy Tiber and once again saw a number of slogans denouncing the Atlantic Pact on the walls of the Lungo Tevere, which might be described as the Roman Embankment. Our cob was quite unperturbed by the traffic although motor cars and lorries tore past his muzzle. We now turned away from the river into the Piazza Liberta and thence along a boulevard, across the Piazza del Risorgimento, then over the Via Ottaviana into the Via Vespasia until we came, to the Viale Vaticane, where the *pavé* ended and we jogged uphill to the entrance of the Vatican Museum.

Here, abandoning the horse cab temporarily, we paid our entrance fee and ascended by lift to the top floor where we made for the picture gallery. After a somewhat cursory glance at the very early Byzantine primitives we entered the Hall of Giotto, in the centre of which is his famous altar piece. There are six panels, three on each side and Giotto was paid 800 golden florins as a fee by the wealthy Cardinal who commissioned him. Which must have been real money in 1297. One of them shows St. Peter being crucified upside down, while the other shows the beheading of St. Paul with the executioner putting his sword away, St. Paul's head being already on the ground. The other panels are not so interesting.

In the next hall is a Madonna by Fra Angelico followed by pictures by Melozzo da Forli (though our guide called him d'Afforli), tapestry of the Creed woven in Tournai in the fifteenth century and presented by the Queen of Spain to Pope Leo XII in 1889. In the next room our guide 'napped' the 'Pieta' by Bellini, who founded the Venetian School of painting and taught Tintoretto. It was being painted by a professional copyist while we were there and we asked how much he proposed to charge for it. The answer was 50,000 lire (about £25), which seemed very reasonable if the artist was right in saying that it took him five weeks to do.

There was nothing much in the sixth hall, but in the seventh there is the 'Crowning of the Madonna' by Pinturicchio. There was also a version of the 'Adoration of the Magi' by Espania, and that magnificent 'Madonna' by Perugino. Perugino is also represented with his picture, 'The Resurrection of Christ', made particularly interesting by the sleeping soldier for which Raphael is supposed to have acted as the model, at the age of fifteen. He is depicted with a long classical nose, red shoes, red cap, long hair over the back of his neck, and slender hands. Interesting, too, is the legend that the figure of the frightened soldier is supposed to have been Perugino painted by Raphael.

Next comes the big hall devoted to Raphael, beginning with the 'Coronation of the Madonna' painted when he was only nineteen. It is said that the first apostle on the left is a self-portrait of the artist. 'The Transfiguration', his last picture, is too famous for me to make any comments on it. Next to it is the 'Madonna of Foligno' which was also being copied. We asked the copyist how much he charged. His reply was 120,000 lire—a reasonable price if it was really going to take him two months, working every morning.

What I never knew before was that Raphael did tapestries. But here they are, inside the glass cases. Actually he merely designed them and they were carried out by Peter von Aelst in Flanders. They were twice stolen from Rome; the first time when the Constable of Bourbon looted the Eternal City and the second time by Napoleon. The original drawings are to be seen in the South Kensington Museum.

The Hall of Leonardo da Vinci contains a single sketch by the celebrated artist and the picture of 'St. George and the Dragon' by Barocci. Here, too, is a headless man. There is no doubt, as I have said before, that medieval painters were fascinatined by decapitation. After passing through two more halls one comes to the 'Last Communion of St. Jerome' by Domenicino. It shows the saint receiving his last communion from the hands of St. Ephraim, the Syrian dressed like a Greek, while St. Paola is kissing the hands of the dying saint. The emaciation of his face and body shows that the artist knew all about anatomy. Further on we came across a Van Dyck, a Murillo and the perfectly delightful 'Madonna and Bambino' by Rubens.

English visitors will naturally be interested in the unexpected presence of a portrait of George IV by Sir Thomas Lawrence, and a self-portrait by an allegedly English artist of whom I have frankly never heard, Wenceslao Peters.

From here our guide took us into the Vatican Library where the bookcases extend for at least 400 yards on either side. The first papal library was begun nearly 1,500 years ago and in the course of centuries it has been enlarged and enriched by a whole succession of Popes. The present gallery is divided into a number of sections. The frescoes on the ceiling have an overtone of blue, white and gold, and through the windows one can see the copper beeches and cedars of the Vatican

Gardens. The walls, too, are decorated with frescoes and in the foreground are royal presents given by various potentates to the Pope of the day. The Emperor Francis Joseph presented a lovely illuminated Bible; the late King Alphonso XIII's somewhat unusual gift was a vast silver and gold plate showing the Rape of the Sabines in high relief. There are other offerings from almost any monarch one can name, from the King of Saxony to the King of Siam. There are also a facsimile of the Hungarian Crown, a beautiful vase of alabaster presented by Mahomet Ali, another of malachite presented by one of the Russian Czars, all well worth studying. So, too, is the first printing press made in 1506 by Bramante, the architect of St. Peter's. It looks rather like the propeller of an aircraft. Galileo's first microscope, a map of America in 1493, which must have been done by one of Columbus's men immediately on his return, and another map of America dated 1529, which is surprisingly accurate, and the largest and smallest books in the world are other exhibits. The largest is two and a half feet long and stands about one and a half feet high, being the Hebrew Bible in parchment. The smallest is a prayer to the Madonna, written by St. Francis of Assisi, measuring an inch long and half an inch wide.

Terra cotta relics from the catacombs and frescoes from Roman houses in A.D. 200 also attract the eye. One of them shows Aphrodite telling a rather gloomy-looking bride all about married life. Others show people paying tribute to Diana, a chariot race with tigers and gazelles, and the first advertisement—a Latin inscription which, when translated, reads: "In this establishment on the Island of Sertorius we have the best goods at the best price." Elsewhere there are a superb gold and diamond rose plant, (the highest decoration which a Pope can give a woman), the sword of Pope Julius II, the militant Pontiff who shouted "Away with the Barbarians," and a number of ivory carvings.

From here it is only a step to the Sistine Chapel which is always crowded, with tourists and guides talking twenty to the dozen. It takes its name from Pope Sixtus IV and took five years to build from 1482 to 1487. Thereafter Pope Sixtus and his successors commissioned the finest Italian artists of the day to embellish its interior—with the result that Boticelli, Ghirlandeo, Pinturicchio and Perugino, Michelangelo and Raphael are all represented. Among many others, there is the 'Temptation of our Lord' by Boticelli who is also responsible for 'Moses Killing the Egyptian' and the 'Punishment of the Tribe of Levi', while Perugino is the artist responsible for the 'Delivery of the Keys'.

But, of course, it is really the ceiling of Michelangelo which is the most splendid sight of all. The trouble is that one ought to be placed in a travelling cradle and then be slowly moved round the Chapel for a couple of hours to get the full benefit of this stupendous performance. It is said that Michelangelo had to endure a series of appalling headaches while doing it and that his neck was bent down for a whole year

after he had finished. (It took him from 1508 to 1512.) Of the nine sections, experts consider that numbers four and five, 'The Creation of Adam and Eve' are the best. Eve is represented as being taken by God from the side of Adam who is asleep. In the creation of Man, God is shown with outstretched hand giving life to him merely by touching his finger. Personally, I thought that the 'Drunkenness of Noah' was the most entrancing section.

Twenty years elapsed before Michelangelo, then an old man, was commissioned by Pope Paul III to paint 'The Last Judgment'. Christ is not shown as a kindly person here. On the contrary, He is evidently pronouncing eternal damnation to the impenitent sinners. On the right is Hell into which the wicked are falling. Down on the left the tombs are opening and the dead are being resurrected, one of them being a self-portrait of Michelangelo himself groping his way out of the tomb.

On leaving the Sistine Chapel, one usually gets a glimpse of the Swiss Guard sentries in their Michelangelo uniforms. On this occasion we heard an American girl exclaim with delight, "Ain't they just pretty."

One can spend days in the Vatican visiting the Gallery of Candelabras, the Hall of the Immaculate Conception, the Chapel of Fra Angelico and the Borghia Apartment among others, but the average sightseer who is allowing himself only three or four hours will probably pass next to the gallery of statues stolen by Napoleon and replaced after the Battle of Waterloo. They include the statues of Demosthenes, Hadrian, Trajan, Mark Antony and Julius Caesar (depicted with thinning hair), fat Titus who destroyed Jerusalem, Aesculapius with his serpent, Caesar Augustus, Mercury, another of Julius Caesar (looking older), two or three of Tiberius, a couple of Pompey, a fine head of Cicero who has a very modern type of face, and a piece of homeric statuary representing the God of the Nile surrounded by cherubs and alligators, all carved out of one piece of marble. Other famous pieces of statuary are the huge torso of the Apollo Belvedere, a rather smug Perseus, the Boxer and the Wrestler, and the Laocoon itself.

A vast black and grey granite bath made out of one piece for Augustus and a similar red and black granite bath made for Nero are immensely impressive. But neither has a plug, so the slaves must have had to tip the water out with ladles. Both are about ten feet long.

Which reminds me. I never realized before that Nero deliberately fiddled while Rome burned. It seems that it was all part of a long-laid plan on his part. It would appear that, having succeeded the Emperor Claudius, he decided to rebuild not only the imperial residence but the whole city. However, as every corner was crowded with shrines and altars and small temples which the existing owners had no desire to see uprooted, he decided to set fire to the whole area which he wanted to renovate. In the meantime he ordered two architects, Severus and Celerus, to draw up a new plan of the city. Next, he had large numbers

of boats and tents secretly prepared and finally ordered a whole fleet of grain-laden vessels to lie off the coast at a given moment. He then gave instructions to start the fire. Everything was arranged so brilliantly that although three of the fourteen sections of the city were completely destroyed and seven almost entirely burnt out, not a single human being lost his life in the conflagration. The homeless people found immediate protection from the elements under the tents erected in the squares and gardens and the arrival of the grain fleet prevented any question of famine. The ships, as soon as they had unloaded, were filled up again with the debris of the fire which was later thrown overboard into the marshes surrounding the mouth of the river. After which, of course, Nero blamed the Christians and the first great persecution began.

But we are still in the Vatican where I was most interested to see the only known statue of Pericles. The bronze Hercules—the biggest in the world is in the Rotondo, a kind of miniature Pantheon with a magnificent mosaic floor representing the fight between the Centaurs and the Lapiths. In the centre is a basin carved from a single piece of porphyry which was found in the baths of Titus. There are several other galleries and halls and a couple of sphinxes which greatly intrigued me.

From the Vatican Museum to St. Peter's is only five minutes by fiacre, Mussolini being responsible for the broad street opened just before the Second World War which leads to St. Peter's from the Castel Sant'Angelo (of which later). Until then the view was blocked by a number of drab buildings. Today the visitor finds himself in the Piazza of St. Peter (which can scarcely be called a square because it is a circle) designed once again by Bernini, with a full view of St. Peter's and nearly 300 huge columns and eighty-eight pilasters in four rows, forming a kind of colossal vestibule for the Faithful. There are two fountains, but it is the gigantic Egyptian obelisk originally erected at Heliopolis and brought by Caligula which catches the eye. This obelisk is the only one which, as far as is known, remains intact. For fifteen centuries it was the mute spectator of the chariot races of Caligula and Nero and of the martyrdom of the early Christians, of the living torches described by Tacitus and of the crucifixion and burial of St. Peter. It was actually exorcised by Pope Sixtus V as an infernal idol before it was removed to its present site. Scholars may recall the description by Tacitus of the sufferings of the early martyrs:—

Nero punished, with exquisite torture, a race of men detested for their evil practices, by vulgar appellation commonly called Christians. The name was derived from Christ, who, in the reign of Tiberius, suffered under Pontius Pilatus, the procurator of Judea.

By that event the sect, of which he was founder, received a blow which for a time, checked the growth of a dangerous superstition; but it revived soon

after, and spread with recruited vigour, not only in Judea, the soil that gave it birth, but even in the city of Rome, the common sink into which everything infamous and abominable flows like a torrent from all quarters of the world. Nero proceeded with his usual artifice. He found a sect of profligate and abandoned wretches, who were induced to confess themselves guilty and on the evidence of such men, a number of Christians were convicted not, indeed, upon clear evidence of having set the city on fire but rather on account of their sullen hatred of the whole Roman race. They were put to death with exquisite cruelty, and to their sufferings Nero added mockery and derision. Some were covered with the skins of wild beasts, and left to be devoured by dogs; others were nailed to the cross; numbers were burnt alive; and many, covered over with inflammable matter, were lighted up when the day declined, to serve as torches during the night. For the convenience of seeing this tragic spectacle, the Emperor lent his own gardens. He added the sports of the circus, and assisted in person, sometimes driving a curricle, and occasionally mixing with the rabble in his coachman's dress. At length the cruelty of these proceedings filled every breast with compassion. Humanity relented in favour of the Christians. The manners of that people were, no doubt, of a pernicious tendency, and their crimes called for the hand of Justice; but it was evident that they fell a sacrifice, not for the public good, but to glut the rage and cruelty of one man only. . . .

The remains of the early martyrs were given Christian burial in the neighbouring caves and the first building to mark the tomb of St. Peter was a small chapel erected in A.D. 90. Nearly 250 years passed before the Emperor Constantine built a large basilica on the site of the original chapel, but it was not until A.D. 1500 that Pope Julius II decided to erect a really fine church and invited all the leading Italian artists of the day to submit designs. Bramante was the successful architect. Michelangelo was responsible for the monument to the Pope. Bernini (once again) had a great deal to do ultimately with the interior.

The first impression of St. Peter's is frankly disappointing to anybody who has seen St. Paul's in London. One cannot, however, blame Michelangelo, Bernini or Bramante for this. St. Paul's was designed and built by one man—Sir Christopher Wren. St. Peter's took 180 years to complete. This inevitably involved a jumble of ideas. At which point tourists must be reminded that male tourists are not allowed inside St. Peter's unless they are wearing a jacket, however hot the weather may be. Thus I myself had to dispense with my elderly guide at the entrance in order to borrow his somewhat voluminous coat on the first occasion on which I entered St. Peter's. Women must also be decently clad.

Before parting reluctantly with his jacket, our guide pointed out the balustrade ornamented with colossal statues of Christ, St. John the Baptist and Eleven Apostles, where the Popes used to be crowned and from which they give benediction on great occasions. Inside is the vestibule, nearly 500 feet long, over twenty yards high. There are

five entrances to St. Peter's, but the main one is only open on great occasions. Opposite is the Navicella, Giotto's mosaic of Christ walking on the sea to raise St. Peter from the waves after his unsuccessful attempt to imitate Him. As others have pointed out before me, it was human of the authorities to lay such emphasis on St. Peter's humiliation in this respect.

The right-hand door is the Porta Santa, only opened in Holy Year. Pilgrims passing through the Porta Santa are lucky enough to be given full remission of their sins. It is for the current Pope to decide which is to be the next Holy Year, but in view of the fact that 1925 and 1950 were selected as Anno Santo it is probable that unless unforeseen disasters occur, a quarter of a century will elapse between each succeeding one. E. V. Lucas was lucky enough to be present at the ceremony in 1925 and described at the time the vivid pageantry—the Pope's bodyguard, gentlemen in capes and knee breeches; clerics in purple and black, others austerely robed in white; the cardinals in their crimson splendour and then—carried high above all the rest and accompanied by two bearers with lofty feather fans—the Pope himself seated in his chair with the great yellow mitre on his venerable head, softly waving his hand from left to right in blessing.

The interior of St. Peter's, which covers 18,000 square yards, compared with the 9,000 of St. Paul's, is not impressively large until the visitor suddenly compares in his mind's eye the size of the human beings with the vast edifice overhead. It is the exquisite proportions which prevent one from realizing the majestic grandeur of the whole place. Possibly the colossal size of the statues is also responsible for this. Opposite the principal entrance is a large round slab of porphyry which marks the spot where the Emperors of the Holy Roman Empire were crowned by the Pope; the first being Charlemagne and the last Frederick of Styria, crowned by Pope Nicholas V in 1452. The dome is sensational—gold, silver and white—the masterpiece of Michelangelo, to which he devoted the last sixteen years of his life. Nothing in modern times compares with the audacity of this architectural miracle. Michelangelo declared that he would outdo the ancient ancients and suspend in the air what Agrippa had constructed on the earth (the Pantheon). He very nearly succeeded. The diameter of the Pantheon is only two feet larger than the dome of St. Peter's. As for the acoustics, you can hear a man blowing his nose a hundred yards away, and the huge long scarlet hangings in the interior give a splendid touch of colour.

One of the reasons why St. Peter's does not look as huge as it is in reality is that the statues are so enormous. The angels holding the basins for Holy Water look like ordinary children in the distance but when you approach them you find that they are more than life-size. The doves carrying an olive branch are the size of fat geese. Only the figure of St. Peter at the end of the right wall of the Nave is something like

(*Upper*) Regional fashions in the Abruzzi. (*Lower*) Florentine tambourinists in medieval costume. *Photo: ENIT*

human. But what is primarily fascinating about it is that the right foot has been kissed into a deformity, although made of bronze.

To many people, the crypt, the only part of the Basilica of Constantine still in existence, is a trifle ostentatious. If there were less velvet and gold and fewer candles, and the huge bronze canopy covering the tomb of the Apostle were miraculously removed, the effect would be much more impressive, particularly if the illumination provided were a single dim candle amidst absolutely bare surroundings. As it is, everything looks too ornate and designed to impress the visitor, rather like Lourdes or Assisi. The balusters of fine marble around the tomb of Pius VI which show him praying before the tomb of St. Peter are also too much in keeping with the rest of the vast magnificence of St. Peter's to provide a contrast of simplicity between the Apostle and the gigantic edifice built for his last resting-place.

The visitor who decides to study each individual aisle cannot hope to do this properly in a single day. However, the tomb of Clement XIII is by Canova who is also responsible for the monument of 'James III', Prince Charles Edward and 'Henry IX' better known as Cardinal York. 'James III' better known as the Old Pretender died in 1766, Bonnie Prince Charles having been responsible for the abortive uprising of 1745. Of the monuments to other Popes, the outstanding ones are to Urban VIII, Paul III, Alexander VII and Pius VIII. The figure of Justice on the left of the monument to Paul III is said to have been the statue of his sister, once entirely nude. It was sometime ago covered by a white washed bronze drapery.

Before leaving St. Peter's it is essential to study the 'Chapel of the Pieta', one of the earliest works of Michelangelo, done when he was twenty-four years old. If you look carefully at the band crossing the breast of the Madonna you can see the name of the artist—the only statue ever signed by him. It represents Christ on the knees of the Virgin Mary after He had been taken down from the Cross. Even at that time critics claimed that the Madonna looked too young, but Michelangelo replied: "Purity is always young." Gigantic crystal chandeliers and vast bronze candelabra are final memories as one leaves the dim religious light of St. Peter's for the glare, hum and bustle of the outside world.

* * * * *

Having returned his jacket to our guide we were treated to a long description of the Vatican Palace on the left-hand side of St. Peter's as one emerges. We were assured that it contained 11,000 rooms (actually there are 1,400) and covers eighty-five acres. As the guide pointed out, however, the Pope can live in any quarters of the Palace he chooses.

Pope Pius XII was elected on his sixty-third birthday on 2nd March, 1939, his election being unanimous. Within an hour he came to the

The Forum today.

balcony to give his first benediction to the world. The vast doors above the portals of St. Peter's were thrown open and the first splash of colour of the Court of the new Pope could be seen. Behind the great cloth of gold he came with his mantle of scarlet thrown back over vestments of pure white. The Pope's surname is Pacelli and his family arms show—displayed in the heavens above—a rainbow, in the centre, a dove with the olive branch, below, a triple rock on which stands the dove over a stormy sea. The rainbow does not appear in the Papal arms, but as the conclavists drove over the bridge of St. Angelo to be locked up for the duration of the election, the late Cardinal Hinsley drew the attention of his companions to a splendid rainbow on a patch of cloud over the castle. Next day at 4.30 p.m. the time when the third scrutiny of the voting declared Cardinal Pacelli definitely Pope, a rainbow was seen arching over the great square of St. Peter's.

The new Pontiff was born in Pionte, a quarter of Rome near the Tiber. Visitors to the neighbourhood are regularly shown the large reddish-brown four-storeyed house with its courtyard and fountain in the Via degli Orsini. This is the Pedicone Palazzo, where, on the 2nd March, 1876, in an apartment on the third floor, the Pope was born and taken the same day to the local parish church to be baptized by his uncle with the names of Eugenio Maria Giuseppe Giovanni. His father was Dean of the Vatican Bar, having come to Rome from the provinces and married Virginia Graziosi. There were four children of this marriage. The eldest Francesco became a lawyer and had a considerable part in the drafting of the articles of the Lateran Treaty of 1929, which enabled the Papal See and King Victor to agree to be reconciled.

In those days, they say, it was unusual for a Catholic child to go to a State school. However, Eugenio was sent to the Visconti Grammar School, reputed to be the best in Rome. Here he proved himself an excellent linguist (today he can read and speak eight languages) and also won the Gold Medal for history.

No doubt his father thought that his second son would also become a lawyer. But this hope was not fulfilled. The future Pope expressed a wish to become a priest and entered the Capranica Seminary. After a year, however, his health deteriorated owing to the harshness of the community life and it was only his father's influence which enabled him to live at home and continue his studies.

It was in a side chapel in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore that young Pacelli said his first Mass (Easter 1899) after having been ordained priest the previous day by the Patriarch of Antioch. His desire then was to become a curate. But somehow Monsignor Gasparri, then Secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, had already heard about this quiet young man with the legal brain and appointed him a junior clerk and later a principal copyist in his department. Here he lived for some time on the top floor of the Vatican Palace and soon became the Under-Secretary.

To Englishmen it is interesting that the first country he visited outside his native Italy was Great Britain. On this occasion he went to London in 1901, bearing a personal letter of condolence from Pope Leo XIII to Edward VII on the death of Queen Victoria. He made a return visit in 1908 when he stayed with the late Duke of Norfolk at St. James's Square during the London Eucharistic Congress. His third visit to London was in 1911 for the Coronation of King George V. Here he was most impressed by the Naval Review at Spithead and received the Coronation Medal. He is thus the only Pope with a British decoration.

Despite his diplomatic training, however, his wish to be a mere curate remained unabated, and in his spare time he heard confessions in the small church where he had served Mass as a young priest, gave Sunday School lessons and occasionally preached sermons.

On the outbreak of the First World War Pope Pius X died of a broken heart and was succeeded by Benedict XV, who had been the immediate superior of both Gasparri and Pacelli when he was Cardinal. Benedict XV promoted Gasparri to be his Secretary of State, while Pacelli took the latter's place in the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs.

It was in this capacity that the future Pope, now a Monsignor, had his first real contact with war and its consequences. For it was he who was instructed by Pope Benedict to arrange the exchange of prisoners of war unfit for further military service (30,000 were thus cleared through Swiss territory); to return civilians too young or too old for active service (23,000 French and Belgians were released by Germany from the occupied areas); to arrange for the moving of 10,000 wounded soldiers (French, British and German) to Switzerland in December 1915 to recuperate. In addition, prominent prisoners were pardoned and the Roman Catholic bishops were instructed to collect information on missing persons and prisoners of war to save the anxiety of their friends and relatives. To do all this, the future Pope trained a special staff and had special offices where he worked night and day.

Pleased with the success attending his efforts, Pope Benedict decided on a peace movement and in May 1917, sent the still young Pacelli to Munich as his Papal Nuncio. Technically, he was accredited to the Catholic Kingdom of Bavaria, always the most independent State in the German Reich, and to emphasize the extra importance of the post Pacelli was made titular Archbishop of Sardes and consecrated by the Pope in the Sistine Chapel.

Within a week of his arrival in Munich he visited Berlin and was received by the Chancellor, Von Bethmann-Hollweg. Soon afterwards he met the Kaiser near Baden. The Kaiser wore his full dress uniform of a Prussian Field Marshal during the interview and remained standing the whole time, with his helmet under his arm. He then accepted from Pacelli a letter containing peace proposals written by Pope Benedict

XV himself. After perusing them, the Kaiser said that he himself had raised the question of peace the previous December, but unsuccessfully. When Pacelli said that any peace offer needed technical details, the Kaiser made it quite clear that he was expecting to win the war and any suggested peace offer was unwelcome. He also made it apparent that in his opinion the Pope should try to persuade Italy and Austria to get together, being Catholic States.

Pacelli pointed out that this was impossible owing to the strong win-the-war Party in Italy in which the editor of the *Popolo d'Italia*, was taking the lead. This editor was none other than Mussolini; but the Kaiser said that the Pope need not be afraid of the 'scum' and, riding his favourite hobby horse, strategy, outlined how the Pope could defend the Vatican.

Within forty-eight hours of passing on the Pope's suggestions, Pacelli was told that they seemed to form an acceptable basis for discussion and would be put before the Kaiser on his return from Vienna. It really looked as though the war might come to an end, especially as an Inter-Allied Conference was due to meet in London within a few days. Pope Benedict decided to force the situation, and the Papal envoys in all capitals handed His Holiness's peace notes to the monarchs and presidents of the world in a magnificent effort to save Europe from further disasters. But it was to no avail and the war did not come to an end for another fifteen months.

In 1925 Cardinal Pacelli became Nuncio in Berlin and in 1930 Secretary of State to the Vatican. Four years later he went to Buenos Aires for the Eucharistic Congress and then in 1936 left Naples for the United States.

When in Rome, do as the Romans. Pacelli the Roman enjoyed America as an American. He consequently did all the usual things like going up to the top (the 102nd floor) of the Empire State Building. He drove along the Triborough Bridge, which is seventeen miles long. He visited Philadelphia and saw the Liberty Bell, which was rung to celebrate the Independence of the United States on the historic 4th of July. At Washington (where he revealed that he had been invited years before to become the professor of Roman Law at the University, but had been told by the Pope that he was to stay in Rome), he drove along to Mount Vernon with the usual escort of siren-like police cars and motor-cycle escort. At Washington, also, he attended a luncheon given in his honour by 500 newspaper correspondents and told his audience that it was the only press function which he had agreed to attend, as his visit to the United States was purely private in character.

Having laid a wreath on the grave of George Washington, he chartered a passenger plane and flew right across the United States. He visited Cleveland, Notre Dame University, and Chicago (where his aircraft had to circle round for half an hour because of the bad weather. "No apologies," he said to the apologetic aerodrome officials. "On the

contrary, I thank you for giving me a chance to catch up with my reading.").

From Chicago he flew to St. Paul; over the Rockies to San Francisco to Oakland Bridge. He even visited Los Angeles and Hollywood, flying over the Boulder Dam to Kansas, making various stops on the way to Cincinnati and, after a visit to the Niagara Falls, back to New York. The interminable series of speeches, inaugurations, public receptions, banquets, conferences, laying of corner-stones and the receiving of degrees, not to mention conferences with his fellow Roman Catholic Cardinals, failed to wear him out. He had a special table placed in front of his leather armchair in the aeroplane so that he could type his letters and prepare his speeches on his portable typewriter. His ability to disarm the reporters anxious for interviews was proved again when the Press asked him for a comment on his luncheon with President Roosevelt at the latter's home in Hyde Park.

"I enjoyed lunching with a typical American family," he said, and again escaped smilingly.

On his return to Rome a month later Cardinal Pacelli was welcomed back by an imposing array of high Vatican officials, who viewed his presence again in their midst with particular enthusiasm in view of the uncertain condition of Pope Pius's health.

Following his election to the Papacy Pope Pius XII made attempt after attempt to prevent the inevitable war. It was an open secret in Rome that the Vatican was opposed to the suggested alliance between Britain, France and Russia, the Pope fearing that such a pact would open the way for Communist penetration into European affairs. As late as August 1939, he told a number of pilgrims that he had not yet abandoned hope that the Governments would be "sensible to their responsibilities to save the peoples from so grave a disaster," adding, "May God spread over this restless world the rainbow of calm peace and fruitful harmony between the peoples and nations."

Throughout the war the Pope was responsible for a series of encyclical letters and expressed the fervent hope that at least Rome would be declared an open city. Many people complain that he did not take a stronger line to carry out his evident desire for world peace. But these critics do not realize that any efforts he might make would have to be free from all political bias and the Pope, who is known to be much more a man of the world than any of his predecessors, is all the more anxious for that reason to prevent any suspicion being felt that the Church might be dabbling in politics. Today, though in his seventies, he is as serene and clear-thinking as ever. It is difficult to estimate the number of people to whom he gives audiences, both general and special, but they must run into thousands. Sometimes his special audiences will last for two hours or more.

One of his greatest attributes is his modernity. He is a great believer in talking pictures for the furtherance of Christianity in general and Roman Catholicism in particular. The producer of that splendid film

M. Vincent said afterwards that he was quite 'suffocated' by the Pope's first question to him. This was: "Did it make a lot of money?" When informed that it had already made over £200,000 the Pope said that he was delighted, because it was his experience that a good film which made money was infinitely more desirable than a good film which was not a box office draw. He went on to say that he was particularly interested in the plan of the producer, the Vicomte Georges de la Grandière, to make *The Divine Tragedy* and asked that the world *première* should take place in Rome.

There is no doubt that the influence of the Pope on non-Catholics is remarkable. (Actually the Vicomte de la Grandière is a Catholic.) People who have been received in audience by him invariably say that they become aware at once that they are in the presence of a really good man.

Who originally built the Vatican remains a mystery. But it is certain that as long ago as the ninth century the Vatican Palace was so magnificent that Charlemagne stayed there when crowned Emperor by Leo III. The history of the present edifice dates back to Gregory XI. He returned from Avignon and selected it as his residence in preference to the Lateran Palace which had been destroyed by a fire and left in a ruinous condition. The Lateran Palace which gave its name to the Lateran Treaty in 1929 (as a result of which the Pope surrendered his claim to temporal power but received recognition of his independent status as sovereign of the 100 acres of the Vatican) is attached to the Church of St. John in Lateran, in front of which is the biggest obelisk in the world—brought to Rome in A. D. 357 and used for the decoration of the Circus Maximus.

This church is regarded as the mother and senior of all churches of *Urbis et Orbis* and was the first Christian church consecrated to the Saviour when Christianity 'came out triumphantly from the secret darkness of the catacombs'. Inside, the carved gold ceiling and the purple marble floor are truly magnificent with the statue of Henry IV of Navarre on the left. The Papal altar dates back to the Avignon period. In it is preserved part of the table on which St. Peter is said to have celebrated mass.

The Corsini Chapel is immensely rich and must have cost a fortune. In the old days noble families were allowed to build their burial chapels inside the churches of the cities, but this privilege was abolished in 1870. The porphyry sarcophagus comes from the Pantheon. The last of these chapels is the Torlonia with an altar of lapis lazuli and Tenerani's 'Descent from the Cross'.

In the crypt is Montauti's 'Descent from the Cross', which many experts regard as the finest representation in the world of this famous subject.

Opposite the church is the building known as the Scala Santa or Holy Stairs. It takes its name from the twenty-eight marble steps

said to have been brought to Rome by the mother of the Emperor Constantine in A.D. 326 from a house in Jerusalem, supposed to have been Pontius Pilate's headquarters. The steps are covered with wood to prevent them being worn away. The round pieces of glass visible here and there mark the places where the Blood of Christ is said to have fallen.

Another church which is well worth a visit is Santa Maria in Ara Coeli, if only because Gibbon decided to write the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* while meditating here, though it was not until four years later that he began his history. In this church is kept the famous Bambino, the miracle-working effigy of the Infant Christ. It is entirely covered with jewels and placed in a manger at Christmas. Sometimes it is taken to the homes of dangerously ill people, the legend being that if the Bambino changes colour the invalid will recover.

I wonder, by the by, how many people alive today have read the *Lives of the Popes* written by my great grand-uncle Leopold von Ranke? It was Macaulay who, writing an essay on Leopold, said:

> "There is not, and there never was on this earth, a work of human policy so well deserving of examination as the Roman Catholic Church. The history of that Church joins together the two great ages of human civilization. No other institution is left standing which carries the mind back to the times when the smoke of sacrifice rose from the Pantheon, and when camelopards and tigers abounded in the Flavian amphitheatre. The proudest royal houses are but of yesterday when compared with the line of the Supreme Pontiffs. That line we trace back in an unbroken series, from the Pope who crowned Napoleon in the nineteenth century to the Pope who crowned Pepin in the eighth; and far beyond the time of Pepin the august dynasty extends, till it is lost in the twilight of fable. The republic of Venice came next in antiquity. But the republic of Venice was modern when compared with the Papacy; and the republic of Venice is gone, and the Papacy remains. The Papacy remains, not in decay, not a mere antique, but full of life and youthful vigour. The Catholic Church is still sending forth to the farthest ends of the world missionaries as zealous as those who landed in Kent with Augustine, and still confronting hostile kings with the same spirit with which she confronted Attila. The number of her children is greater than in any former age. Her acquisitions in the New World have more than compensated for what she has lost in the Old. Her spiritual ascendancy extends over the vast countries which lie between the plains of the Missouri and Cape Horn, countries which, a century hence, may not improbably contain a population as large as that which now inhabits Europe. The members of her communion are certainly not fewer than 150,000,000; and it will be difficult to show that all other Christian sects united amount to 120,000,000. Nor do we see any sign which indicates that the term of her long dominion is approach-

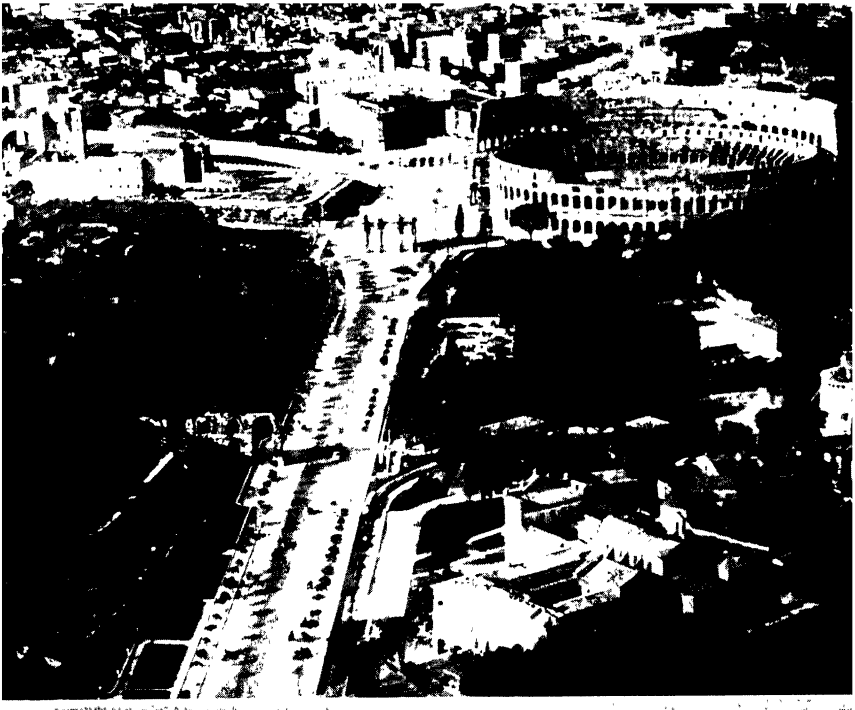
ing. She saw the commencement of all the governments and of all the ecclesiastical establishments that now exist in the world; and we feel no assurance that she is not destined to see the end of them all. She was great and respected before the Saxon had set foot on Britain, but the Frank had passed the Rhine, when Grecian eloquence still flourished in Antioch, when idols were still worshipped in the temple of Mecca. And she may still exist in undiminished vigour when some traveller from New Zealand shall, in the middle of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's."

The Castel Sant'Angelo must certainly be visited. Many people regard it as the most impressive building in Rome. It is a vast circular fortress begun by the Emperor Hadrian and connected with the Vatican by an underground passage which enabled the Popes to use the castle as a bolt-hole in turbulent times. It takes its name from a legend that while Pope Gregory was leading a procession to the Church of St. Peter to pray that the current plague should cease, he had a sudden vision of St. Michael the archangel on the summit of the castle sheathing his sword. The story goes that the plague promptly stopped and the statue of St. Michael was erected on the top of the castle.

On entry you find yourself in a passage excavated in the thirteenth century with a number of cellars used in the Middle Ages for State prisons and store rooms. The castle proper contains a number of oubliettes through which prisoners were lowered and left to die. Elsewhere are the Court of the Balls, so called from the catapult missiles heaped together, the Hall of Justice which is the centre of the massive castle, the Hall of Apollo, Pope Clement VII's bathroom with heating apparatus like the ones at Pompeii, a covered gallery and the Pauline Hall. But it is the prisons which both attract and repel one most. All kinds of celebrities like Benvenuto Cellini and Beatrice Cenci were put in these grisly caverns. Benvenuto Cellini was one of the very few prisoners who escaped, lowering himself down with a rope made with strips of sheet. Earlier he had claimed to have fired the gun which killed the Constable of Bourbon during the siege of Rome.

Another prison, in very great contrast to this, is the Mammertine, the dungeons of which are claimed to be the oldest buildings in Rome. To reach it you have to walk down a fairly steep flight of steps. According to Livy it was built in 640 B.C. and was the original State prison. Later on it was kept for prisoners of great importance. Among the people who died here were the Gracchi, Appius Claudius and the Cataline conspirators who by order of Cicero were strangled; as also was Sejanus. It seems that after the various triumphal processions following some foreign Roman conquest, the captured generals were

(*Upper*) The Colosseum from above
(*Lower*) The baths at Caracalla.
Photo: ENIT



strangled or beheaded here while the conquerors were throwing parties up above.

Legend has it that St. Peter and St. Paul were also confined in the prison. Their cell is only a few feet long and a few feet wide. There are no windows—only a hole in the ceiling barely six feet above the floor, through which food was thrown. And yet as many as forty-nine unfortunates were crammed there together. It is said that the two Apostles converted even the jailers, Processus and Martinianus, who were martyred themselves later on. The hole in the centre of the floor was originally the only means of communication between the upper and lower chambers. The lower one was described as long ago as 67 B.C. by Sallust, who mentioned its fetid air and hideous aspect. Architecturally it is quite primitive. Visitors are shown the well of Holy Water which suddenly emerged from the rock at St. Peter's behest. (This legend is inaccurate because the spring is mentioned by Roman historians in 300 B.C.) Another exhibit is the pillar to which the two apostles were chained round their neck and body. Their busts are shown in a kind of grill, where an altar is dedicated to them.

Not far off is the Arch of Constantine—a splendid relic and the first monument of Imperial Rome in which God is indirectly mentioned. Says the inscription: "The SPQR have dedicated this triumphal arch to Constantine because *instinctu divinitatis* and by his own virtue he has liberated the country from the tyrant Maxentius." The date is A.D. 315, but the huge medallions on either side of the main gate were taken from a previous triumphal arch of the time of Trajan. Another ancient monument which the sightseer cannot afford to miss is the Baths of Caracalla, once able to accommodate 1,600 bathers simultaneously. The walls are still very high in places and form a background for what was really a forerunner of Wembley, with all sorts of facilities for fencing, boxing, jumping and wrestling. As for the baths, ancient Romans had three types available at the same time—cold, tepid, and hot—as well as the changing rooms, also used for the bathers to oil and shampoo themselves after the bath. The *frigidarium* was a huge swimming-pool encrusted with splendid white marble, with the largest flat roof in the world at the time. The *tepidarium* still has remains of the original lead pipes in one of the basins. The *calidarium* was like the modern Turkish bath and visitors can still see the ovens which produced the hot air circulated through the series of terra-cotta pipes all over the building. There are also remains of a complicated system of corridors used by the slaves when they were wanted. Among the ruins were found the Farnese Bull and Praxiteles's Flora.

The Farnese Palace is today the French Embassy but is a real art gallery. It was the first and perhaps the most important of the palaces built in Rome by the Popes as a residence for their family.

(*Upper left*) Strewing the way for a religious procession at Assisi. (*Upper right*) The author and General Pechkoff at Isola Bella. (*Lower left*) Pallanza. (*Lower right*) Angelo

So much or so little for Central Rome.

One fine day we decided to go to the Catacombs on the Appian Way which was constructed in 400 B.C. and connected Brindisi with the capital. It is very narrow and in some places has sunk twenty feet below the level of the surrounding ground. It really starts at the St. Sebastian Gate, one of the apertures in the Aurelian walls. After a short drive our guide pointed out the Quo Vadis Chapel, a terra-cotta square building two storeys high where St. Peter saw the apparition of Christ. The legend says that as he fled from the persecution of Nero he suddenly saw the Saviour. "*Quo vadis, Domine?*" he asked. At which the Saviour said: "I go to Rome to be crucified again" and vanished. St. Peter regarded this as a reproach for his weakness, went back and was beheaded in Nero's circus.

It is only a short distance from here to the Catacombs which are reached by a pleasant, gravelled walk, edged with cypresses. Visitors have to wait for a considerable number of fellow sightseers to assemble before the local guide takes charge. Each is given a taper and then goes in single file down a flight of steep steps. The primary interest of the Catacombs is that they were only properly discovered and excavations begun in 1854, although an occasional opening was discovered in medieval times. Like Pompeii they have come down to us almost intact.

As most people know, the Catacombs were excavated by the Jews before the period of Christianity as burial places. Later, the converts to Christianity took the name and form of funeral societies and thus enjoyed all the privileges granted by law to these associations. In this way they were able to extend the Catacombs into which they escaped and where they carried on their religious ceremonies when the persecutions began. As time went on, these Catacombs spread for miles and today, in order to save people from getting lost, even in parties accompanied by guides, hundreds of them have been railed off. Others have not yet been properly explored. A good tip to any visitor is to go to the head of the party, otherwise the guide's voice can become almost inaudible. Another piece of advice is to bring a torch. True, there are a few dim electric bulbs along some of the passage ways, but they are quite insufficient to illuminate individual cells and the inscriptions which are scrawled on so many of the walls.

The first chapel is known as the Chapel of the Popes. On the stucco of one wall is scratched in Latin: "This is the Jerusalem of the martyrs of the Lord." All the Popes were buried here up to the days of Diocletian with the exception of St. Calixtus, who, though he has given his name to these Catacombs is buried in the cemetery of St. Calipodius. But many of them had a very short reign; one for only forty days and another for nine months.

One of the treasures is a tablet which was found broken into 135 pieces, but put together again. An Italian professor has translated the inscription on it as follows:

"Here lie together in great numbers the holy bodies you are seeking. These tombs contain their remains, but their souls are in Heaven. Here are the companions of Sixtus waving the trophies of victory, there the bishops who shielded the altar of Christ. . . . The noble confessors who came to us from Greece and others. I confess I wished most ardently to find my last resting-place among these saints but I did not dare to disturb their remains."

The author of this was Pope Damasus who rediscovered this chapel and then had it blocked up during the persecutions of Diocletian.

Next we saw the tomb of St. Cecilia, the patroness of music. A replica of her body is shown in a bent position and with the fingers mutilated. Farther along, one sees a kind of primitive Swastika and also the emblem of a fish. The Greek for fish being ichtheus, it was used as a kind of secret code for Jesus Christ the God. Corpses and skeletons covered by plastic glass are other exhibits. It is all somewhat eerie as one trudges down long narrow ill-lit corridors with unopened child's tombs on one side and more skeletons and skulls on the other. All told, visitors are given about three quarters of an hour underground, which is quite enough. There are, in fact, several other Catacombs—those of St. Sebastian and St. Domitilla, for example, but for the average visitor to Rome the Catacombs mean those of St. Calixtus.

Returning to Rome, we made a slight detour and took a look at what in some ways is the most remarkable relic of all—the remains of the gigantic aqueduct which brought water to Rome all the way from the Alban hills, sixty miles off. An even better view of it is obtainable from the windows of the train going to Naples. These huge tall arches, extending for hundreds of yards at a stretch before a break occurs, are an astonishing achievement of engineering skill.

Back in Rome we stopped and looked at Trajan's Column, commemorating his victories over the Bulgarians and Rumanians. It stands in the Forum of Trajan which was not excavated until the French occupation in 1812.

* * * * *

Another day we drove out to Tivoli via the Porta San Lorenzo on the Via Tiburtina, now Route National 5. For the first ten kilometres there are no signposts and twice we had to ask Coco-Cola pedlars if we were on the correct route. Finally a notice announces that Tivoli is twenty-two kilometres away. At first the countryside is flat with the Sabine Hills in the distance. But these are soon reached and the road ascends through groves of very ancient olive trees to the little town which is said to have been founded nearly 500 years before Rome. During the great days of the Roman Empire it became the fashion to build sumptuous villas all round it. Julius Caesar, Maecenas, Cassius,

Catullus, Propertius, all bought estates there and built villas; but the best known of all is the Villa d'Este erected during the sixteenth century by Cardinal Hippolyte d'Este, one of the four sons of Lucrezia Borgia. Local guides describe it ecstatically as the most enchanting Renaissance villa in Europe. They say that neither Schoenbrunn, nor Versailles nor Warwick Castle can bear comparison with it. I choose to disagree.

Its ground floor is covered with very ordinary frescoes; the pictures are of no importance; the rooms are not particularly well proportioned. One of its owners was, however, the Archduke Ferdinand who was assassinated at Sarajevo. The Italian Government then confiscated it and it ultimately became a finishing school for American girls, which it continued to be until the outbreak of the Second World War. In May 1944, Tivoli was savagely bombed and five of the rooms of the Villa d'Este were destroyed. Worse still, its magnificent fountains were all put out of action. Some of them are operating again and according to the local guide, 250 gallons of water pass through them every second; but the scene, as far as we were concerned, was largely vitiated by the filthy black smoke emerging from the chimneys of the local paper mill.

This guide, incidentally, was a cheerful little man. He told us how his house, like hundreds of others, had been bombed flat by the Americans but he had been awarded 80 per cent compensation for his loss, and was most happy about it all.

From the Villa d'Este we walked to the Temple of Vesta and the Temple of the Sirens overlooking a very deep gorge with a tiny stream trickling hundreds of feet below. Ten columns of the temple are still standing. Here, as in other hill towns, the women carry the most astonishing things on their heads—a dozen tins of sardines, a basket of fruit, all the week's groceries. Nor will they or their menfolk move out of the middle of the road until the last minute, after violent hooting. It might almost be China.

From Tivoli to Hadrian's Villa is only a few minutes by car. This, with the exception of the Aqueduct, is quite the most remarkable survival of Rome's greatness. It took ten years to build, but Hadrian, who was a Spaniard adopted by Trajan, only enjoyed it for three years. It was looted and plundered and looted again and then came into the hands of the family of Count Fedi who owned it up to 1870. Today it is a national monument and the official guide produces one of Field Marshal Alexander's Certificates of loyal help to the Allies during the war. His name is Tani, a brisk, silver-haired, bandy-legged little character who fed hundreds of escaped Allied prisoners hiding in the hills as they were working their way back to the advancing Allies. He did it for two years, on alternate days, claiming unexpectedly that his devotion to the British was due to a six months' stay in Newcastle. After we had hired his services, a youth in shorts, carrying a knapsack and a Baedeker, asked if he could join us, explaining that he had won a travelling scholarship from Oxford and would be grateful if he could

accompany us because he was unable to afford a personal guide to himself.

As the visitor soon learns, the charm of Hadrian's Villa which covers an area of over 170 acres, is that it contained realistic reproductions of all the places which had most intrigued its owner during his royal tours of his Empire. If he particularly fancied a theatre in Greece or a temple in Egypt or any other architectural gem, he had it copied exactly.

The first thing shown is an outdoor Greek theatre. Alas, the stage is now covered with poppies, the auditorium is an uneven lawn and the statues of Tragedy and Comedy are now in the Vatican Museum. Led by the guide, we next walked up a pathway with the original Roman well on the left and were then shown a series of underground passages used by the slaves. Tani, with typical guide humour, reminded us that labour was cheap in those days and there was no Trade Union of Slaves, as a result of which they were perfectly content to go everywhere underground, so that their presence should not upset their lords and masters—until the moment when they were carrying out some immediate personal duty.

Next comes an avenue of cypresses and the air is redolent with the perfume of boxwood, olives and pomegranates. The presence of dozens of acanthus plants acted as a reminder that their leaves were the original models for the embellishment of Corinthian columns. Next we came to the Poikile (spelt Peccile in Italian). This is a colonnade with walls reticulated just like a net, surrounding a water basin. According to Tani this was originally a swimming-pool. From here we made our way to the Philosopher's Walk with a huge wall containing a series of holes said to have been used to support wooden beams and an awning when the sun was too hot. Dozens of oleanders in full bloom provided a lovely setting. The Philosopher's Walk leads to the Philosopher's Hall with a number of niches for statues. Its floor was of porphyry. Nearby are some more passages for slaves and Hadrian's own personal studio with Euboean marble columns all round—on which horrid little people have scrawled or carved their names for the past hundred years. This defacing of ancient monuments is a form of exhibitionism which in England is largely confined to public lavatories, the Forth Bridge and the railings of the *Queen Elizabeth* and the *Queen Mary*. Abroad it is a much more common disease.

A series of small rooms and a larger dining-room come next. What fascinated me was a plant which had succeeded in forcing its roots into a column of volcanic rock. The library (for the Emperor's collection of parchments) had a double roof to insulate it against the heat, but the statue of Minerva which once graced it is now in Rome.

The huge garden in which Hadrian spent so much time is now an olive grove. Elsewhere are columns of marble from Italy, Greece, Asia and Egypt, together with remains of a water-closet with a stream underneath. Near this is the guest house which had three beds in each

of its ten rooms and was two storeys high. The Temple of the Household Gods, the remains of the barracks, more underground passages for the slaves, the bath house and the basilica make one feel that this was not so much a villa as a complete town. When one further comes to the Hall of Justice with its Doric columns, the miniature fountains, the Temple of Bacchus facing the Orgies room, the aquarium where live fish used to be kept like the water tank in a modern restaurant, the swimming-pools, the sunbathing terrace, and the furnace for the Turkish baths, one realizes that the old phrase "The more it changes the more it remains the same thing" is painfully true. Lizards, oats, poppies and weeds run wild in the Villa of Hadrian today, but it requires very little imagination to people it with Emperors and lovely ladies, Nubian slaves and clanking centurions taking part in Hadrian's Egyptian revels in the Valley of Canopus.

Nearby a very different festival was taking place as, exhausted by our tour, we sat under a fig tree in the trattoria opposite the entrance to the Villa. A wedding party was having a wonderful time with the village priest, the bride and bridesmaid in white, flasks of chianti flowing in all directions, speeches in the local patois delivered with picturesque fervour, and, I suspect, some rather intimate chaffing, as the guests sat on long wooden benches under a canopy of palm trees and rambling roses.

From here it is no great distance by car on a secondary road to Frascati. Unfortunately it was badly damaged by the Allied Air Forces. Many of the villas on the outskirts have been hit for six. The Cathedral built in the eighteenth century by King Henry 'IX' and containing a memorial to the Young Pretender, was also damaged. The chief charm of Frascati is, however, its vineyards which have a very considerable reputation. Another village in the neighbourhood is Pollombara which has no architectural beauties but is interesting to all schoolboys because it was here that the Sabine women are supposed to have been raped. A strong smell of sulphur from the local mines does not improve the place.

The drive back to Rome discloses more and more political slogans chalked on every available wall. Occasionally you see a double V followed by the words 'Il re' signifying the existence of a monarchist party in Italy. Elsewhere you see the double V inverted showing that there are a number of local Communists. Other political slogans include *Voto blocco del popolo*. We entered the outskirts of Rome by the Via Catania and thus drove through that fine thoroughfare the Viale Regina Margherita. This has large houses on either side and an arcade of pollarded plane trees.

That evening we dined very well at the Hotel de la Ville and drank a bottle of Falernian wine, as recommended by Catullus. His recommendation still holds good. At our next table was a quartet of Americans with a guide. From the conversation, it appeared that they consisted

of two married couples, the husbands being in the artificial-limb business which meant that they had to go to Bologna. When the guide suggested that, while they were about it, they should also visit Florence, one of the Americans snorted: "Florence. There's nothing in Florence; it's just a scenic joint." The guide quivered but said nothing.

On our last day we found that there were two mistakes in the hotel bill which included both a 15 per cent and a 3 per cent tax on our telephone calls. It was also irritating to find that we had to produce our passports in order to get seats reserved on the fast train to Naples. (This continuous demand for passports at the slightest provocation is a distinct feature of Italian travel and should be suppressed at the earliest possible moment.) Our plan was to leave the car and chauffeur in Rome and take advantage of Mussolini's superb railway line between Rome and Naples. Millions of lire were spent in cutting through a sequence of hills and mountains before the war, with a result that Naples can be reached in a trifle over two hours instead of the six and seven hours before the Duce came to power. Our train was the afternoon non-stop express—known as a rapido. Oddly enough, all ordinary trains in Italy are known as expressos, which sheds an interesting light on the Italian temperament.

The Rome railway station is most impressive and quite undamaged during the war, presumably because there would have been grave risk of damaging churches and palaces in its immediate neighbourhood. The rolling stock was first-class, being equivalent in design to the latest Pullmans on the Southern Railway. The track is electrified, but our compartment, being at the back of the train, swayed a great deal and as the express gathered speed the ride became more and more bouncy. Incidentally, dozens of people were standing in the corridor which showed that it was desirable to book seats in advance. Alas, there was no refreshment car on the train.

For nearly seven miles the railway track is accompanied by the Aqueduct which for the first ten kilometres looks as if it could still carry out its original function. Cornfields lay on both sides of the line parallel to which ran a path for cyclists—a somewhat unusual sight, but it did not take long to realize how much of the countryside we were missing by taking the train. (It will be interesting to see whether future Baedekers will be compiled from motor cars instead of from railway trains and trams, as in the past.) Patchy soil, scattered vineyards and a few woods marked Cisterna; then whole fields of lettuces appeared, some of the first that we had seen. After which came a series of long tunnels. Mr. Churchill once talked about the soft underbelly of the Axis. Well, it certainly has very bony ribs and one still wonders why the predominant Allied sea power was not exploited more. It must have been a fearful country to fight through. Indeed, I have always been told that it is the first time in history that Italy was overrun from the South and not from the North.

Formia with its humpbacked promontory and attractive bay looked pretty enough from the windows of the train in spite of two factory stacks, but after the all too brief glimpse of the coast our train turned inland, crossed a large river and drove through yet another range of hills. On the far side lies Villa Literno, a big railway junction picturesquely situated in the centre of a number of orchards. Here fruit trees are planted to give shade even to the cabbages. Much reconstruction must have been done on the railway junction itself because it looked quite undamaged, though most of the isolated buildings near the track were still in ruins.

More tunnels followed until we stopped counting them, like the canals in Venice. After a brief glance at Capua which was badly damaged in 1943, another tunnel followed, and then in the distance we saw Naples with smoke from chimney stacks clouding the whole sky. 'See Naples and suffocate' seemed the right slogan. Yet another tunnel had to be negotiated before the train finally stopped at the Mergellina Station which was still rather blitzed and at which we did not descend. A final tunnel brought us to the main station after we had passed a series of underground platforms which were, no doubt, excellent air-raid shelters during the war.

CHAPTER X

WE were scarcely out of the train before our suitcases had been grabbed and we were being driven by a crazy taxicab driver practically all round Naples, bouncing off a tram, almost charging a horse and escaping a series of manslaughter charges by a whisker, before reaching Parker's Hotel up on the hill; the only hotel which had rooms available. Owing to the seasonal drought there was no light, no water and no power during the night. When we asked for fresh orange juice and *café complet* next morning and it failed to arrive for half an hour, we were told that the reason for the delay was that the staff could not serve two courses promptly. When the coffee finally arrived it was the national variety, quite undrinkable. The bath water was cold and the lift was not working.

Fortunately we had, in any event, intended to stay only one night in the hotel as we were going on to Pompeii, Sorrento, Amalfi and Capri before making a lengthier stay on our return to study Naples at leisure. Fortunately, too, we found an English couple with a large car who were planning to go to Pompeii and asked us to accompany them; this we did. But the last time I had been in Naples was in 1926, and this was their first visit. The result was that we drove through a great deal more of the old town than was necessary before reaching the autostrada to Pompeii. Which, in fact, turned out to be a good thing. No official guide would dream of taking visitors through the appalling slums and desolation along the waterfront which (if it is not too un-Christian to say so) looked satisfactorily like Liverpool or London after the raids in 1941. Naturally, one felt sorry for the urchins playing games among the ruins and pill-boxes. At least, however, the casualties in Naples were remarkably few while the R.A.F. were bombing it.

We were told afterwards by Italians who lived in Naples throughout the war that they went about their business quite unconcerned as long as they knew it was the British who were up above. The bombing was exact and precise—harbour installations and ships in the harbour but nothing else.

Most of the ships, it is true, were scuttled by the Germans whose ruthless demolition before their departure made the devastation of the dock area worse than a battlefield. Every berth was blocked with the wreckage of ships which had been blown up or set on fire; funnels and masts stuck out in a confused tangle of super-structures and trailing wires. Lighters and concrete barges had been sunk at the quays. Among the victims of the battle was the Grand Hotel on the sea front, at which I had stayed on my previous visit. Today everything is being

done to put the port back on its feet again. In the meantime the roads near the harbour are shocking and made still more uncomfortable by the deeply cut tramlines which wander from side to side (as in Florence) and cause the narrow wheels of the donkey carts to twist and skid in a most dangerous fashion. We must have driven nearly five miles through the worst part of Naples before we turned left on to the autostrada with its oleanders and pepper trees, only ten minutes short of Pompeii.

Here we acquired the services of the best guide we met in the whole of Italy. His name was Prosperi, aged thirty-five, with dark curly hair, wearing bright blue trousers and a grey woollie. In his spare time he was a fisherman. His fee was 2,000 lire but it was well worth while. First of all he showed us the villa which was excavated as recently as 1948. He said it was seventy-one yards in circumference and was a favourite rendezvous of ships' captains at the time of the eruption. What I had not fully appreciated before was that Pompeii had suffered from a powerful earthquake in A.D. 63 and that it was still only partly rebuilt sixteen years later when the final calamity overtook the city. For many years to come it will not be possible to be up to date about Pompeii. Every few months more excavations are being made and more treasures found. Modern excavations began in 1812 and by 1860 a quarter of the city had been exposed to view. The next nineteen years did not see much progress, but between 1879 and 1948 over half had been excavated. Probably it will need another quarter of a century before everything is laid bare.

There is no need to go into too much detail about the eruption of Vesuvius. Most people who had to read Latin at school will recall the vivid description written by Pliny in two of his letters to Tacitus. What happened was that an enormous cloud of ashes and pumice stone darkened the sun and poured down the mountainside, engulfing the city. For three days and two nights the cataclysm continued, by which time the city was buried to a depth of twenty feet beneath a layer of boiling lava and ashes. Many of the inhabitants who fled at an early stage were suffocated on the roads. Those who remained behind were either buried alive or killed by the poisonous fumes.

Pompeii in those days was a holiday resort which depended almost entirely for its prosperity on its brothels, taverns, drinking dens and other fun and games. Its immorality was quite astonishing to judge by the 'feelthy' frescoes and other decorations, miniatures of which can still be bought in the form of postcards from a modern restaurant near the entrance—this in spite of their having been made illegal by Mussolini at the request of the Pope.

After a glance at the aforesaid villa we went into the Aquarium, a kind of museum which contains a number of statues, altars and other relics which have not been removed to the museums of Naples and other Italian cities. Here a Greek marble statue of Livia (the wife of Augustus),

a large, square, sacrificial altar excavated in 1947, a bronze statue of a boy with silver eyeballs found in the villa of the Vettii Brothers, gold rings and bracelets, pearl bracelets and a statue of Narcissus looking at himself, all look pallid in comparison with a statue of a naked man having a love affair with a lioness, regarded as a symbol of virility.

Most gruesome are the figures lying on their stomachs or kneeling with their hands up to their faces. These are the first of many corpses which are on show throughout Pompeii. When the excavators, digging into the lava ash, feel that they have come upon a body, they excavate all round it and then pour liquid plaster of Paris over it, thus encasing the complete figure and preventing it from crumbling, when touched.

From the museums we were taken to the olive oil press which would undoubtedly work today. It is on the left of the narrow cobbled Porta Marina near which a bomb was dropped somewhat unnecessarily during the war. From now onwards the tour of Pompeii is quite fascinating.

The narrow streets have stones in the middle of them which were thought, until recently, to have been intended for pedestrians as stepping-stones. They were actually used to define the one-way traffic in each direction. A wine shop with its amphoras, an unfinished temple, the Palace of Justice still covered with volcanic dust stirred up by the bombardment of 1944, follow in swift succession. We asked the guide about the plaster and were told it was a combination of marble dust, lime and cement. Near the large round Temple of Apollo is Apollo's statue—a somewhat girlish one. The Temple has no brick work, which shows that it was originally built by the Greeks before the capture of Pompeii in 80 B.C. There is also a bust of Diana, in the back of which is a small hole to enable the priest to talk from behind, pretending that he was an oracle.

Another interesting relic is a curved stone with a slot on top of it. The idea was that women who wanted to have babies put a coin in and straddled across it.

A few yards away is the Forum, originally surrounded by a portico where free speech was allowed—somewhat like Orator's Corner in Hyde Park. Dozens of pillars a few feet high, which once supported bronze and marble statues, have survived. In fact, it is the most perfect, architecturally, of all the Forums of Italy. The Temple of Jupiter had been seriously damaged by the earthquake of A.D. 63 and was not rebuilt, but a colossal head of Jupiter was found there and transferred to Naples.

Facing the temple at the south end were three large municipal buildings through which lizards slither. Nearby is the remains of the town laundry. At the end of the Forum was the local Wall Street with stockbrokers and money-changers, for Pompeii was a very prosperous town with a population of 30,000 (6,000 bodies have been recovered up to date). In the Via Foro is a gigantic wine vat mended with

British lead after the earthquake, which could contain 250 gallons of wine. The average width of a shop front is about thirteen feet, ornamented with porticos for rainy days.

The public baths are in a wonderful state of preservation. Littered among them on slabs are corpses. The face of one man is distorted with agony from the burning pumice. Another, identifiable as a North African negro by his slave's belt, was equally in pain when he died. In the gymnasium at the back lies a man in a Roman toga with his hands across his chest.

These public baths have separate entrances for men and women, They contain changing-rooms and the same arrangement of cold, tepid and hot water pools as in Caracalla's baths at Rome. The cold water pool is more like a shower bath six feet deep, with niches all round on which people could hang their clothes. Mixed bathing used to take place here. There are lockers for clothes in the room containing the tepid pool. The *sudarium*, the ancient equivalent of the hottest room in a Turkish bath, had insulated walls. The cupboards are adorned with delightful decorations. In the centre is a huge washing basin of Carrara marble which originally cost 6,250 sesterces, considerable money in those days. Opposite these public baths are the relics of a multiple store.

In ancient times Pompeii was used in preference to Naples as a harbour and we all know what sailors are. No wonder that in one of the main streets is a gigantic stone penis carved in the road pointing to number four, the nearest brothel. In contrast is the house of the tragic poet Glaucus. People who have read the *Last Days of Pompeii* by Bulwer Lytton will recall it well. Although small, it is one of the most typical residences of the upper classes of the last years of Pompeii. At the entrance is a mosaic of a fierce dog with the inscription *Cave canem.* This is a phrase known to all youngsters who were compelled to learn Latin. Indeed, the word *cave* is used also by most schoolgirls and many preparatory schoolboys as warning that one of the school mistresses or masters is approaching.

The printed guide of Pompeii goes into great detail about the rustic kitchen and the dining-room with pictures which show Venus contemplating a nest of cupids and Ariadne, abandoned by Theseus. The fact remains that *cave canem* is much the most interesting feature of this house, apart from its association with the late Lord Lytton.

After less than an hour, a tour of Pompeii gives the impression of a doll's-sized town rather like Paris Plage, but full of obscenity. Fresco after fresco represents lewd scenes which are excellent box-office for visitors, provided they are adult, but which could be most embarrassing if they were accompanied by children.

To anybody who has been compelled to learn Latin willy-nilly, the mark of the chariot wheels in the Via Fortuna, the Via Decumano and the Via Cardo are the greatest fun. Goodness knows what my

classical education cost from the age of nine to twenty-one (broken by a period of war service) but it must have amounted to well over four figures in spite of scholarships. It is only on visits to such places as Pompeii that a tangible dividend is paid. True, the protagonists of a classical education claim that it is well worth while merely because of the clear thinking which it unconsciously engenders. Whether this is true or not, it is impossible to deny the pleasure one secures at a place like Pompeii, in being able to nod one's head wisely when the guide comments on *vomitoria*, *amphorae* (or should I say amphoras?) and stumblingly translates simple Latin words. It does not, however, need any knowledge of Latin to appreciate that Pompeii was planned very much on the lines of New York with streets going north to south and east to west. The prototype of Broadway is the Street of the Brothels which wanders casually across, bearing no relation to the points of the compass.

Many of the houses in Pompeii have been given unfortunate names in recent times. There is, for example, the House of the Silver Wedding —so-called because it was excavated in 1893 in honour of the Silver Wedding of the King and Queen of Italy. The House of the Count of Turin, the House of Queen Margherita are similarly ill-chosen. Our guide did not believe in this modern nomenclature. In the Street of the Patricians he showed us the House of Arbacus which has a Dancing Satyr in the patio, dining-rooms, drawing-rooms, a garden to stroll in, another garden for vegetables and a far better pavement than is available in Rome today.

The real show place of Pompeii is the House of the Vettii Brothers which has been reconstructed to give an exact idea of how a family of bankers lived in the old times. The first exhibit is an ancient money chest in iron and wood, evidently necessary to judge by the holes in the walls made by burglars after the eruption; while a reception-room with lead round its edges to keep out the humidity, a funeral room, bird baths and a lovely portico reveal how life was led in those gay days. There are all kinds of flowers in the garden and the representation of a hermaphrodite on one wall. Frescoes in the summer dining-room show chariot races, satyrs, grape festivals and various trades such as goldsmiths, metal workers, glass blowers, dyers and wine merchants. In another room are Daedalus and Pasiphae, represented as a wooden cow, a somewhat tricky problem picture; Dionysus surprising Ariadne whilst asleep, and other fancy subjects; a lovely table with a pedestal representing the claws of lions and a fresco of a woman with a globe of the world. Now, after a visit to the kitchen with its pots and pans, flour bins and charcoal repository, the visitor (on the payment of a small fee) is taken into the spare loving-room.

The walls of this are covered with a series of aphrodisiacal masques showing quite a number of different ways of making love. I never realized before that one comparatively simple form of copulation was

described even in those days as the Spanish fashion. Before entering this love nest the guide very properly inquired if the ladies of our party were married. Of all debased occupations, including that of the pimps in the Bousbir in Casablanca, I find it difficult to conceive of anything more degraded than that of the man whose sole job in life is to open and close doors to rooms or boxes containing 'feelthy' frescoes and Priapic figures. What a life!

There is not even a set fee for their services. They merely depend on the professional curiosity of travel writers like myself and the lascivious interest of the average members of the public. Even on our exit from the House of the Vettii they had not done with us. One of them with an inquiring look in his eye unlocked a cabinet containing a highly heraldic figure of Priapus himself.

As the officially printed guide book to Pompeii says: "The intimate, highly expressive atmosphere of the house is to be felt from the threshold and permits us the sight of a Pompeiian interior with all its sense of intimacy and familiarity."

On an adjoining wall is the ancient Latin phrase of 'Vote for me', close to a bakery with tall, waisted ovens still extant. In the road facing it are the initials of the road contractor 'C.Q.'

Altogether Pompeii covers four square miles and already excavated are seven temples, seven thousand houses and shops, two theatres, three public baths and one amphitheatre. Here and there you can see the small houses of the freed men—slaves who acquired their freedom after twenty-five years of devoted service to their lords and masters. In the Street of the Brothels are a number of tabernas (hence the word taverns) where games of dice flourished. One of them still has the welcome inscription of '*Ave*' and also a symbol of a wounded bear, with the admirable advice to visitors that they should not play above their means. In the brothels themselves are a number of ancient stone beds which were, doubtless, covered by some more accommodating material. Inscriptions show that the ladies of the town altered their fees according to the mode of love prescribed, and at least one client had a Charge Account—as a sign still extant on the wall (perhaps one should say slate) proves conclusively. Altogether there are four major brothels and one drinking-fountain for horses. But the east and south-west quarters of Pompeii have not been excavated and no doubt other fascinating relics will be revealed.

If the visitor solemnly investigated every single house in Pompeii he would spend the better part of a couple of days, and for people with time on their hands I recommend the shop of Popidius Montanus whose election notice was painted on the left of his front door by the so-called Chess Players' Association (*Latruncularii*). Almost next door is one of the earliest shop signs representing the weaving of wool. In the so-called House of Menander was found a great deal of silver—115 coins—during 1930. It takes its name from the poet who is shown seated in

one of the frescoes. It would appear from the guide book that the owner of practically every house had been identified—an archaeological feat which one very much doubts.

Not far from the entrance to Pompeii is a modern hotel restaurant which escaped an Allied bomb by only a few yards in the Second World War. We lunched there. A sad youth in a thick tweed suit—despite the weather—sang at us. He had a good baritone voice and was accompanied by a mandolin and a banjo. The food was poor and so was the wine. As for the bill, it was out of this world. It took five minutes to reconcile it with modern conditions. When I finally paid it, the singer with his two accompanists who had stood anxious and silent during the altercation, let themselves go with joyous shouts of 'Funiculi funicula'. In fact, our meal consisted of some very washy Capri wine, a very stringy steak with a stale egg on top, preceded by a meagre hors-d'œuvre and ending with over-ripe peaches. The only classic ingredient was the mineral water from the spring recommended by Pliny. So much for Pompeii.

Instead of taking the autostrada to Castellamare, we chose the ordinary road (a pity perhaps) and were immediately held up on a level crossing where we were importuned by a small boy. I gave him one of those utterly useless 5 lire notes. He promptly sat down to gamble it away (or to double up) with a number of other urchins involved in a card game on a nearby stone bench. Pretty soon the secondary road improved. The mountains lay ahead with fields of gladioli on either side of the road and a convoy of donkey carts in the middle. We passed a number of down-at-heel villages, the cottages of which were still enlivened with out-of-date tributes to Mussolini. One was Torre del Greco. From here to Castellamare with its tall, narrow cream-coloured houses (somewhat reminiscent of the outskirts of Cannes) was only a matter of minutes. A couple of leafy squares, a palm-studded promenade, a nice little harbour and a huge new yellow multiple store—Magazine Generale—make it quite distinctive; so do alfresco cafés and the remains of a strong point opposite the Hydro, a large quarry and big cement works on the way out.

From Castellamare the road climbs steadily to Vico Equense with its oleanders, fountains, statues, cactus, olive groves, bougainvillaea, priests, novices and pink-washed houses. At Seiano there are particularly tall vines and a derelict tram track which should be scrapped to enable the road to be widened. Next comes Meta, an undistinguished little town except for its cobbles and two small harbours. Why it should have become a favourite Christian name in the United States I cannot think. Orange groves, mulberry trees, pomegranates, figs and sloes show that it was a smart resort in the old days but it is certainly quite unimpressive today.

Now at last Sorrento is reached. Piazza Tasso, the main square, is utterly charming with palm trees and so much bougainvillaea that at least one restaurant has an alfresco roof of it. These huge expanses of purple —in some cases trained on to tall columns—are quite breathtaking. In the centre of the square is a marble statue to our old friend Torquato Tasso. The fiacres are wisely kept in the shade. The horses all wear white plumes on their heads—rather like Easter bonnets. But it is quite a shock to find a lace shop down here in Southern Italy carrying the title 'Useful Things' in English. Anybody with a few lire to spare could do far worse than price the blouses, handkerchiefs, napkins, baby dresses, lace table mats, marquetry, cigarette music-boxes, musical-box cocktail shakers and chess boards. Best of all are the crepe de chine scarves, costing £2 with a monogram and 30*s*. without.

Palm trees and oleanders also provide a pleasant background to this admirable little resort, the best hotel of which, in my opinion, is La Terrazza. This has its own private beach, overlooks a lovely sweep of the coast all the way to Naples and has grounds dotted with palm trees and cactus. Moreover, the proprietor was employed at one of London's leading hotels and has a soft place in his heart for English visitors, in spite of their temporary lack of lire.

Sorrento is surrounded with lemon groves and orange groves, perched 200 feet sheer above the sea. It is therefore quite a walk if one wants to bathe. At least, however, the Ristoranti Leonelli which is built on wooden piers and rocks just above the water-line is delightfully cool and provides an admirable luncheon for bathers who plan to spend most of the day down there before the steep climb back. A few yards away is the tiny harbour from which launches and a twice daily steamer call on the way to Capri. Before, however, visiting this legendary and libidinous island it is practically essential to follow the Amalfi coast road which many people regard as the most attractive in the whole of Italy. After a short, fierce climb it descends on Salerno. None of the officers and men of the Allied forces who landed here at the beach-head in 1943 would believe his eyes if he saw it today. The whole city has been entirely reconstructed. It is gay and fresh; and it is with the utmost difficulty that the visitor (unless he has war-time knowledge) can find an occasional tank or other war relic rusting in some peaceful glade.

From here the lovely coastal road hewn out of cliffs or carried over ravines by viaducts passes a number of fishing villages and watch-towers erected in the sixteenth century as a refuge for the womenfolk from pirates. The first village, Positano, is sure to be exploited in the next few years. In the meantime, it is completely unspoilt and the cost of living is still remarkably low. Before the war it was possible to live in a villa, drink wine every day and eat well on £100 a year. Even now it is possible to do the same thing on £200 a year. One Englishman I know pays ten shillings a month rent for his house.

(*Upper left*) Entering Italy from the Simplon. (*Upper right*) Italian police on the Jugoslav frontier. (*Lower left*) Filling a lighter the hard way. (*Lower right*) The author taking notes in the gardens of Hadrian's Villa.


ITALIA

For visitors, the hotels I select are the Miramare, Savoia and Roma. The bathing is first-class and the colony of French, Swiss, Italian, German and Spanish painters and writers has recently been increased by Picasso. Cyclamen, hyacinth and wild daffodils grow on the hills around. Wistaria drapes the houses which are on such precipitous cliffs that it looks as if they will slide into the sea at any minute. There is a charming little outdoor restaurant called Buco di Bacco. Positano is a real little fishing village and it is a common sight to see the peasants making lobster pots on the stone steps which connect Lower and Upper Positano. By degrees, however, the population is decreasing. No fewer than 4,000 out of the 6,000 living Positanians have emigrated during the past thirty years to New York.

Out at sea are the Li Galli Islands, three little islands which belong to Massine and are a riot of flowers for most of the year. Like a certain baby foreland at Capri, they are said to be the place where the Sirens endeavoured to lure Ulysses and his men ashore.

Amalfi is the official show-place of Southern Italy. Like Sorrento it is swathed in bougainvillaea, wistaria, roses and oleanders. It is, however, too full of tourists today. Incidentally the girls and the men are exceedingly plain. Why this should be the case I do not know. Visitors usually stay at the Capuchin Monastery which was turned into a hotel half a century ago, 193 steps above the town. There are others, however, which are more handy and less expensive. Down below is the pint-sized harbour with a statue commemorating Flavio Gioia who, the local inhabitants claim, was the inventor of the mariner's compass. But not everybody agrees with this. In fact, poor Flavio never existed.

It is difficult to realize that Amalfi used to be a really tough naval republic and that the Amalfi Maritime Code was accepted throughout the Mediterranean for centuries. In those days it was a serious rival to Genoa. Signs of its former greatness are still observable in the Cathedral of St. Andrew built in the eleventh century in Norman style, with bronze doors dating back before the Norman Conquest. The bones of St. Andrew, said to have been brought from Constantinople in the thirteenth century, are highly revered. They lie in the crypt and mysteriously exude a liquid known as the manna of St. Andrew which, so one is told, is soaked in pieces of linen and distributed among the congregation. The cloisters are delightful and on the tiles there are ancient illustrations of Christ as a fisherman, casting nets and being involved in a storm on the Sea of Galilee.

Ravello is still higher than Amalfi, all very picturesque with beautiful gardens and wild flowers, but no place for anybody who wants to bathe. English visitors will be interested in the Palazzo Rufulo once inhabited by Hadrian IV (the English Pope, Nicholas Breakspear) and in Villa Rufulo where Wagner wrote the third act of *Parsifal*.

Milan's La Scala, Italy's most famous theatre, entirely recovered from its war wounds. *Photo: ENT*

CHAPTER XI

Two small steamers a day connect Sorrento with Capri. Motor launches are also available for the comparatively short journey. The vessel we took was crowded with cheerful Italian peasants. In the stern a poulterer had parked four crates of hens, packed unbelievably tightly. Every two minutes he pulled out a couple, wrung their necks and started to pluck them right in front of the other hens, which seemed unnecessarily heartless and ostentatious.

Half a mile out, there is a superb view of Sorrento with the mountains in the background. Fortunately it was a calm day, for our aged craft lurched like a bronco, although there was not a wave in sight. I have seen photographs of this crossing on a mildly rough day and the tiny deck was a shambles of seasick passengers. Looking towards the coast one sees olive trees lining the tops of the tall yellow-white cliffs with an occasional old fort as good measure.

It took us an hour to reach Capri. We were thus able to study at leisure this curious, saddle-back volcanic island which has been the haunt of emperors, lovely ladies, poets, painters and impostors since A.D. 26 when Tiberius ruled the Roman Empire from this Mediterranean rock. Countless songs have been written about it and dozens of novels—Axel Munthe's *The Story of San Michele*, Norman Douglas's *South Wind*, G. B. Stern's *The Dark Invader* and so on. Almost every Hollywood film actor and film actress has paid it a call from Ginger Rogers, Errol Flynn to Myrna Loy upwards and downwards. Gracie Fields bought a villa there before the war and spent thousands of pounds on a restaurant.

True to its tradition of theatrical unconventionality Capri was largely liberated by Douglas Fairbanks (Junior) in 1943. Fairbanks was second-in-command of the first small warship which arrived the day after the Germans had fled. The only prominent non-Fascist on the Island, was instructed to 'meet the Fleet'. He did so and immediately recognized the famous Fairbanks profile.

"I know you," he said.

Fairbanks moved away without a reply.

"Don't be silly," said the Italian. "You slept in Room 204 at the Splendid-Royal, Aix-les-Bains, in 1934. In fact, you are the son of Douglas Fairbanks."

Fairbanks still said nothing. His presence was an official secret and who could tell that Signor Morgano was not an enemy agent? But when finally he was asked a very personal question indeed, Fairbanks admitted his identity, and was promptly given a fine lunch of chicken, peaches and champagne.

That is Capri all over. In 1949 it made the headlines again with the over-publicized visit of Princess Margaret, who, though pestered by photographers, seemed to enjoy herself thoroughly and went everywhere. But there was one resident on the Island whom she was very certainly not allowed to meet—a dumpy woman in a plain print frock with nothing to distinguish her except for the whites of her eyes and her powerful chin. Who was she? Edda Ciano, daughter of Mussolini, the woman said to have been so largely responsible for Italy linking up with Germany.

After Mussolini's death Edda Ciano spent several months in a home in Switzerland, and from the domineering tyrant of 1939-45 she became a rather mousy little woman, deliberately forgotten and unrecognized by the vast bulk of her compatriots in Capri where she now lives.

But why is Capri so famous? After all, it is nothing but a small rocky island three and three-quarter miles long and one and a half miles wide, seventeen miles from Naples and seven from Sorrento. There are many other islands just as pretty off the Italian coast or in the Aegean Sea. True, it is festooned with the purple of bougainvillaea, the green of the vineyards and lemon groves, the yellow of the flowering cactus, the scarlet of the geraniums and the mauvish-blue of the wistaria, the white of jasmine, the pink of the oleander—with the blue sky overhead and the blue sea all round. But in spite of this it is no prettier than Sorrento, and the bathing at Brioni and many of the Greek islands is far better. There is no gambling, as at Monte Carlo. There are only two first-class hotels. The restaurants are nothing special. But I am going ahead too fast.

With shouts and hoots and merry handwavings and gesticulations from its passengers, the little old steamer creaked to a halt in the harbour of Grande Marina. White washed houses, ships' chandlers, fishermen's cottages, osterias, trattorias with gaudy parasols over the tables, lined the quay. Picturesque sailing vessels, dozens of row boats and a handful of neat little yachts lay inshore. A string of opulent taxis awaited the visitors. We could, of course, have taken the comic little funicular up to the main Piazza on the saddle back and then driven by horse cab down the other side to our hotel in Piccolo Marina. However, we had not the slightest idea of local geography and hired the smartest car we could see, drove up the hill and then skirting the Piazza and main town of Capri, descended the other side to the Webber, a charming two-storeyed place built on three levels, overlooking the Rocks of the Sirens. None of the bedrooms had doors. To gain entry one walked through the French windows. The mosquito nets over our beds were the first we had seen during the whole of the previous month. Tables and chairs were laid out for dinner on the terrace outside our windows. To the left lay Gracie Fields's villa smothered in bougainvillaea and beyond it those two remarkable rocks, the Faraglioni. As we looked, there came our last shower of rain for a month. It was followed

by a remarkable sight. Two waterspouts suddenly appeared. They were at least 300 yards high, barely half a mile out and must have sucked everything in near them.

Our arrival also coincided with that perennial miracle, the flowering of the Queen of a Night. Immediately below our bedroom grew a scraggy, thorny, rambling creeper of the type one might expect to see in some pestiferous, rocky hollow infested by scorpions. On six of its tendrils was a still more hideous-looking wart. Said the proprietress of the Webber:

"Look at that now and come back again after dinner."

Dinner consisted of a huge communal bowl of soup (there were only eight or nine other guests), an excellent local fish and lamb chops, all washed down with the local rosé and followed by a bowl of fresh fruit. Without having lingered unduly over the meal, we walked back to the scaly screeper. In an hour a huge white bloom, a kind of cross between a water lily and a magnolia, several inches in diameter, had emerged from one of the warts. By next morning, we were told, it would be as dead as mutton. It was, but looking more like the head of a goose which had had its neck wrung. Even its strange oriental perfume had also died.

In the meantime, we walked up the steep Via de Mulo to the Piazza Umberto for a night-cap. We badly needed a torch, but fortunately we were escorted by two Englishmen from the British Consulate at Naples who were also staying at the Webber. The Via de Mulo is a series of long irregular steps (there must be hundreds of them) which ascend all the way into the town, only crossing the main road at one point. At the top is the uncompleted building originally intended by Mussolini as a country club for high-grade generals. The pillars are about twenty feet high but seem doomed to remain naked.

We were quite out of breath when we finally reached the Piazza still decorated with red, white and green fairy lights from a week-old festival. It is sixty yards long and thirty yards wide, gaudy with bunting and blue and white awnings—the heart of Capri. The tables and chairs of the cafés stretch right across the Piazza on a busy night as this was. Everybody was talking twenty to the dozen and the most extraordinary clothes adorned most of the people at neighbouring tables. For an hour we sat there drinking bottles of local wine and listening to the astonishing conversation all round us and to local hints on how to enjoy Capri from our new-found friends. We were told, for example, that water is so short in Capri that much of it has to be brought by water boats from the mainland and the prices in the hotels are periodically increased owing to this extra overhead. We were told that we would have to go up to Mount Tiberius on Michelangelo, a twenty-eight-year-old donkey, unless we preferred Tiberio, aged twenty-two or Raffaelli, aged three. Mount Tiberius we were told is the place where Tiberius used to have his ex-mistresses and local babies thrown into the sea.

The reason for throwing the babies down was that they were supposed to fatten the fish below.

Another odd item of information was that the people of Capri eat eel pie instead of Christmas pudding on 25th December.

We also learned the sad story of Lucy Flanagan who lived for thirty years in the Hotel Webber and whose pictures still adorn the dining-room. It seems that she won a travelling art scholarship at Boston, U.S.A., but liked Capri so much that she refused to go back. The only time she ever went to the mainland was during her last illness. When news reached Capri that she had died in Rome, the local peasants, knowing that Capri had become her spiritual home, raised a subscription to bring her body back. Unfortunately the cost of transporting the coffin was too great for their slender resources and they had her cremated, the funeral urn being sent by parcel post more cheaply. What everybody had forgotten, however, was that the Roman Catholic Church disapproved of cremation and the local priest therefore refused to bury her. The local representative of the Church of England also refused to perform the last rites because the Roman Catholic priest had been asked first. For months the poor lady's ashes stood on a mantelshelf until the priest relented to the extent of giving her an unconsecrated burial, just as if she had committed suicide.

Suicides in Capri, by the way, are by no means uncommon. And no wonder. The precipitous cliffs yawn right over the sea and people unused to heights can easily yield to the uncanny attraction of an abyss even if they have no desire to end their life. This is particularly true of Mount Tiberius. So, anybody with a weak head for heights is summarily advised not to take the walk or do the donkey ride, in spite of the charms of old Rosina who plays the tambourine and dances the tarantella although she must be all of eighty.

We were also told about Italian gesticulations. It seems that if you extend your middle finger it means money. If you put the knuckle of your forefinger into the side of your cheek it means that things are good. If you put your hand on your Adam's apple it means 'That's enough'; waving the palm of your hand towards your throat means 'nothing doing'; putting your thumb and forefinger together and waving it up and down on a level with your shoulder means 'Why'? We were also told that Quisisana, one of the leading hotels, means 'Here you get well' in Italian; that Sorrento had a casino in 1948, but it was a failure; that up to fifty years ago there was no motor road up to Anacapri and that everybody sings in Capri as if they were permanently in their bath; not always tunefully but with great verve—waiters, cabbies, little boys, shop assistants, and visitors whether on foot or in horse cabs.

Yes, we learned a great deal that first evening in Capri, not only from the Consular officials but also from a party of Americans at the table next to us. It seems that an English honeymoon couple found that nobody would speak to them for five days. At first they were grateful,

but they soon became somewhat concerned at the apathy to which they were subjected. Then suddenly everything changed. They were asked to moonlight bathing, midnight parties in fine villas, to night clubs and to cocktail parties. Over a week elapsed before they discovered the reason for this sudden volte face—the rumour had gone round that they were brother and sister. . . .

If the walk up to the Piazza from Piccolo Marina is steep, the walk back is positively perilous, particularly when the boats are out in the bay with the fishermen dazing the fish with their headlights and then either spearing or netting them. However, we returned safely to the Webber which has on its gate the curious, somewhat meaningless triolet carved on it:

'I am a singer,
And a stinger,
Linger.'

Next morning we looked out on to the enchanted scene. The sea was dazzling blue and breakfast was being prepared on the alfresco terrace. All we had to do was to put on our bathing dresses and dressing-gowns and, after eggs and bacon, coffee and peaches saunter down the four hundred yards which separated us from the bathing-beaches.

The water is superbly clear, wonderfully warm and incredibly buoyant. Here I actually found it possible to float with my arms alongside my body instead of being outstretched. (Later on, at San Fruttuosa, it was so buoyant that I found that I could actually sit in the water without sinking as long as I kept my arms outstretched.) Most of the bathing is from rocks. There is also shingle and a small amount of sand. Piccolo Marina is the most popular place until 4 p.m. when the sun disappears behind the mountain tops and any further bathing must be done on the other side of the island.

In Capri, the sun's rays are particularly strong and it is easy to go nigger brown in less than a week. After bathing it is only a matter of yards to the nearest little bar where tumblers of fresh orange juice and lemon juice, not to mention brandy, gin and whisky, are immediately available. Girls in maroon corduroy trousers and huge straw hats, more girls in white shorts and scarlet skirts or in Bikinis; men in white bathing slips and Panama hats, sunbathe, saunter or sip their dry Martinis.

For days I tried to find out what is responsible for the witchery of Capri. Was it the bougainvillaea, hibiscus, jasmine, lemon groves or vineyards? Was it the leafiness which you do not really get on the Riviera? Was it because Capri is further away? Was it the absence of the Mistral? I could find no answer except that unquestionably Capri is very pagan, beautifully, insidiously so. For, just as houses can be haunted, so is Capri by her libidinous past. Then I paid another visit to the Piazza and found my answer. It is not the dizzy heights and the

dizzy blondes nor the giddy youths and the giddy sights which act as such a magnet. It is not because everything is cheaper than elsewhere in Italy.

It is because Capri is the answer to the psychiatrist's prayer.

Very few of us have lived the kind of life we would have liked. How many people are there who, if they were asked whether they would like to have their life all over again, would say that they would? Almost everybody has a secret dream, never fulfilled. But, in Capri, visitors can behave exactly as they like, wear the clothes they like and generally behave in a manner which would cause them to be locked up or put in a mental home anywhere else. The amiable peasants are traditionally used to the odd and erotic behaviour from foreigners; so the Island has become not only a happy hunting ground for psychiatrists but, better still, for people who have the sense not to go to psychiatrists, but cure themselves of their frustrations and inhibitions in a much more agreeable way than paying fees in Harley Street.

I am quite sure that many of these mental invalids—for that is what they are—probably recover after a short period of self-expression. Others linger on after their original supply of lire has been exhausted and take odd jobs; only a few, finding that they can never capture their day-dream, jump off the various cliffs so admirably suited for suicides. Oh, yes, there is a suicides' cemetery quite well patronized on the island. There is also a good deal of cocaine-taking.

Some of the more superficial troubles are quite easily cured by wearing absurd, abnormal clothes. As a case in point, there was an Italian princess whom I saw on several occasions, She always wore a black stockinette skull-cap, sleeveless black pyjamas and enormous black sun-glasses. What is more, she slept every night in a black coffin. A man exhibited himself every day in the Piazza in a red cummerbund with a red tassel on his cap, blue canvas trousers, smoking a ludicrous meerschaum and carrying three embroidered baskets over his shoulder. A young American on leave from the U.S. sector of Austria walked round the Piazza for two days dressed up as a Tyrolean peasant, feather and all, and when nobody paid any attention to this rig-out changed into a full cowboy costume.

Yes, Capri is like the *Secret Life of Walter Mitty*. Almost everyone is 'working to be a type', as a cynical, observant resident explained to me. In the Piazza during the evening you see a small, dapper man with a Van Dyck beard, evidently a painter. So he is, as you discover next day, when you pass him painting the wall of a house. Another man walks round the Piazza with a straggling, black beard and straggling, black locks. Six months ago he arrived from the mainland—shaven and apparently normal. No doubt, however, he had always wanted to be a revivalist or a poet. Capri gave him a chance. First he grew his hair long, then his beard. All the time he hopes he will at last be noticed and possibly photographed. Occasionally he is, and that is good for him.

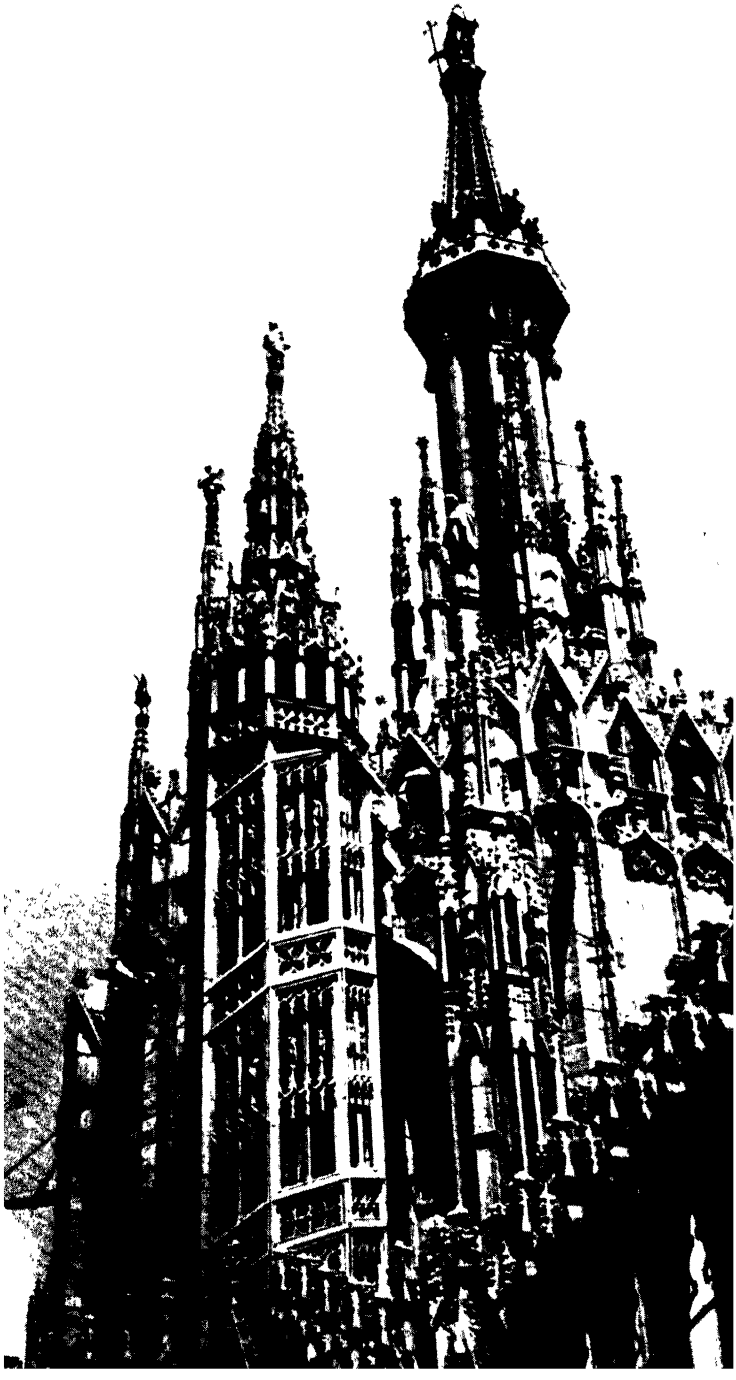
Capri, in effect, is the Mecca of the Has-beens, Never-weres and Never-will-be's—all blissfully happy if anyone shows the slightest interest in them.

For some days we succeeded in avoiding the importunities of the boatmen and their scouts to visit the Blue Grotto. But at last we succumbed, walking up to the Piazza and then taking the funicular down to the Grande Marina where we hailed a large, muscular barefooted youth in a red and white peaked jockey-cap, white singlet and blue trousers. There was a slight breeze against us, but it caused no discomfort. Keeping close inshore we trailed our fingers in the translucent green water. Motor boats which charge 300 lire a head, compared with 400 lire per head in a row boat, keep much farther out—so passengers miss a good deal of the game. The first sight pointed out by Giuseppe was the red villa with its own flight of steps leading down to its own beach, belonging to a shaving-cream millionaire. Almost straight overhead is St. Michele. Next comes the Beach of Tiberius with thirty bathing huts coloured red, green and blue and an alfresco restaurant. Mount Tiberius, from where the emperor cast children and women, looks a prodigious drop from below. A few scattered rocks, nicknamed the Straits of Gibraltar, are now negotiated. Huge cliffs are practically overhanging at this point. Ahead was a whole procession of row boats, looking like water beetles as they crawled along as near as possible to the base of the cliff. Giovanni told us that he has never done more than three trips a day and frequently got no clients at all.

A rusty red iron gate at sea level marks one of the five springs of fresh water on the island, but it is almost inaccessible. Above it grows a palm tree straight out of the sheer limestone cliff, a real freak of nature. Now comes the first of a series of grottoes given fancy names by the boatmen. The first is the Champagne Grotto, so named because the water bubbles out of the hole in rough weather. At the moment the surface of the sea was cobalt blue, molten. Little Vesuvius is followed by the Funicular Grotto, at which Giuseppe promptly burst into 'Funiculi, Funicula'. In swift succession come the Lion's Mouth Grotto, the Elephant Trunk Grotto, the Donkey Ears Grotto, the Skull Grotto; the Heart Grotto, the Eye Grotto and the Fisherman's Rest. Fisherman's Rest is so named because when a fisherman has had a good catch he often puts in there and has a nap before returning to base. There are still more grottoes, but apparently the peasants have run out of names for them.

Now comes the most entertaining spectacle of all. These are the floating junk shops, a series of boats the occupants of which try to sell you postcards, necklaces made from local coral, pocket knives, scarves and the like. From another boat you buy your ticket to the Blue Grotto

Milan: The Duoma
Photo: ENIT



which has a very narrow, low opening, so low that the boatman has to pull the boat in by a hawser, lying almost flat on his back, a position also necessary for his passengers until the Blue Grotto itself is reached. The Grotto is sixty yards long, thirty yards wide, and sixty feet deep, and has a tolerably high roof. It is the fantastic Cambridge blue colour of the water which is the attraction. About a dozen other boats were circulating it slowly when we arrived and one visitor had dived into the water.

The effect was startling. The swimmer's body looked like a pale blue negative. The opalescent water which turns phosphorescent when an oar is dipped into it is quite uncanny. If you merely put your hand into it up to the wrist your fingers and palm go bright blue. The explanation is, apparently, the reflection of the sun's rays on the water outside aided by the few electric light bulbs up above in the rocky roof. The Blue Grotto is certainly worth a visit. The only trouble is that the floating junk shops do not sell visitors an emblem to show that they have, in fact, done the trip. If they did, everybody would buy one to wear in the lapel so that he would be saved from the continuous requests from the boatmen during the rest of his stay on the island.

The row back was, for us, performed rather more quickly because of the following breeze. It was noticeable that many occupants of the boats wore bathing dresses and straddled the bows of the row boats, letting their feet dangle in the water, rather as if they were harling on some Scottish salmon river.

Another day we went to Anacapri and San Michele. By this time we had learned to be economical and instead of taking a motor car or fiacre for hundreds of lire we went by bus for fifty lire, starting from the Piazza. The road climbs swiftly and fairly straight in spite of one or two hairpin bends past vineyards, villas and cypresses. Down below the harbour looks the size of the one at Monte Carlo. On one corner stands the Hotel Caesar Augustus with a sheer drop from its terraces to the sea 1,500 feet below. (We went there a couple of nights later to dance. The so-called night club is rather like the pre-war Casanova of Biarritz. Pine trees, oleanders, fig trees and pepper trees look palely green in the concealed lighting. They surround the marble dance floor. The white bulk of the hotel is faintly silhouetted, like the statue of Augustus with his back to the dance floor. On a breathless June night with the perfume of jasmine in the air it is a great place for lovers. The orchestra is first-class and the singer is as gay as a lark as he sings his Neapolitan songs. With the full moon overhead, a bottle of champagne at the table and the crickets chirping, it is more glamorous than any scene out of any Hollywood film.)

The road grows narrower. At many points it is impossible for two vehicles to pass. A few hundred yards farther the autobus stops and the visitors emerge, either making their way to San Michele or into the little old town of Anacapri. After a tumbler of fresh orange juice under

Arezzo: A present-day "Saracen" jousting
Photo: ENIT

the trellised vines of the Cesare Augusto Ristorante—no relation to the Hotel Caesar Augustus—we had a talk with the proprietor. He told us that not only is the pronunciation and the accent of the Anacaprese different from that of Capri itself, but many of the words are not the same. The reason for this is that the Phoenicians occupied the whole of the island at one time. When the lower part was captured they retired to the tiny hill town of Anacapri, and the invaders could not be bothered to chase them out, especially as there were no roads.

The streets of Anacapri are very narrow, and at least one of the houses has a Greek inscription. Via Trieste Trento is embellished with a nice white colonnade. As we walked along, it was crowded with children returning from school with their satchels on their backs. Some of the houses are definitely oriental in character.

In the old days Anacapri was dotted with fine Roman villas, the marble masonry of which was used up to modern times by the local peasants if they were building outhouses or making walls. Axel Munthe gives a lively account of old Mastro Vincenzo hard at work in his vineyard digging deep furrows in the sweet-scented soil for the new vines. Now and then he picked up a slab of coloured marble or a piece of red stucco and threw it over the wall. Axel Munthe sat down on a broken column of red granite to talk to him.

Era molto duro, it is very hard to break, said Mastro Vincenzo. At his feet a chicken scratching in the ground in search of a worm unearthed a coin. Axel Munthe picked it up and recognized at a glance the head of Augustus. Mastro Vincenzo said it was not worth a bean. He had made the garden all by himself and had planted all the vines and fig trees with his own hands. Hard work, said Mastro Vincenzo, showing his large horny hands; the whole ground was full of ruins of Tiberius, columns, capitals, fragments of statues and he had to dig up and carry all this rubbish before he could plant his vines. He had split the columns into garden steps and of course he had been able to use many of the marbles when building his house and the rest he had thrown over the precipice. A piece of real good luck had been his when he had come upon a large subterranean room just under his house, with red walls all painted with lots of naked characters dancing like mad people, their hands full of flowers and bunches of grapes. But it took him several days to scrape off all this nonsense and cover the wall with cement.

The path to San Michele is narrow but shaded with laurels, with vineyards on the left and some fine villas on the right. Small boys were heading tennis balls remarkably fast and well as we passed. There is no football ground in Anacapri.

The view was superb. Five white fishing smacks looked like moths 1,000 feet below. Two miles away some peasant was singing to his mandolin. His voice was as clear as a bell. San Michele itself is a pleasant villa with a mosaic of skeletons at the entrance and a dining-room adorned

with Swedish pewter on the left. In the hallway was another example of *cave canem*. In the studio are some pieces of old Venetian furniture and ahead of Medusa. The conservatory is full of marble statues, many of them found in the grounds. The local guide is a small boy with hyacinth blue eyes—the exact colour of the belladonna blossoms flowering on the porch.

It is a pleasant walk through the pine trees, cypresses and cactus to the little stucco chapel of San Michele with its bell and sphinx (quite out of place) overlooking Capri. This bell has been heavily exploited in the neighbourhood. Outside the villa are a couple of open-air junk shops where various souvenirs, including a tiny silver bell, are pressed upon the visitor. We bought one and with it accepted a delightfully ridiculous brochure headed:

The Legend of San Michele's Lucky Little Bell

"Once upon a time a little shepherd lived at Anacapri and he was the poorest among the poor children of the place. His only welt were a small hut which he shared with his mother, who was a widow, and a tiny seep which he used to pasture on the slopes of Mount Solaro.

One evening, as it was getting dark, the child lingered to pick up flowers and when he turned to call the small seep he could not see her any more. He felt a pang of pain in his heart. What would happen now to him and to his mother? At that moment he thought he heard a distant and feeble ringing of bells and thinking that it could be the sound of the bell the tiny seep wore about her neck, he rushed to that direction. His tiny bare feet fled careless of the pebbles, of the thistles and of the night already fallen . . . until he got to the edge of a raven.

Here a sudden flash of light stopped the poor boy, and, wrapped up in a golden beaming light, splendid on his white horse, San Michele appeared to him:

'Mi boy,' said the Saint, taking of from his neck a small bell which hunc down on his breast. 'Take it and always follow te sound of it will keep you from all danger.'

The little shepherd, thrilled with emotion and joy, took the precious gift to his mother and the small bell came out miraculously from his shabby jaket anwrapped in the green frame of a vivid quadriphyllous.

Since then his life was filled with sweetness and happiness and everyone of is wishes was satisfied. On the spot of the apparition a villa was built which was called San Michele and the miraculous little bell, reproduced for You in a tiny amulet will be your talisman of luck and succes.

This bell, presented to the President Roosevelt, was rung on the day of victory at Washington.

Do not think of leaving the Isle of Capri unless you have Purchased the good Lucky San Michele's Bell."

On reflection San Michele is not particularly impressive. On the other hand it is a good example of the witchery of Capri. Axel Munthe was a young Swedish medical student when he came to the island and immediately fell in love with it. But unlike so many of the visitors who in the past have suffered from frustration and little dreams which never came true, he was able, after years of hard work in Paris, to turn his mirage into reality.

Among the other writers and artists who have flocked to Capri have been Sheridan's daughter, Caroline Norton (the prototype of George Meredith's *Diana of the Crossways*); J. R. Green, the historian; Lord Leighton; Joseph Conrad; Francis Brett Young; E. F. Benson; D. H. Lawrence; Elihu Vedder (who illustrated *Omar Khayyam*) and Norman Douglas, the only one to live permanently on the island.

Norman Douglas was one of the first people we saw on our return to the Piazza Umberto, where once again we sat out of doors at the Piazza Caffe and studied the people all round us. Opposite us was the big white, gold and blue ornamental clock on the clock tower which is as exhibitionistic as everything and everyone else in Capri. For no good reason it chimed eight times at 7.45 p.m. followed two or three minutes later by three more chimes. A silver-haired marchesa in voluminous white silk slacks, a blonde woman evidently dressed to look like Marlene Dietrich (she had probably had her molars removed to produce that famous high cheekbone effect), white uniformed municipal police, outside porters from the Hotel Caesar Augustus in their tomato juice coloured uniform, hunchbacked widows in black, small girls in clogs doing a hop, skip and a jump through the Square, peasants sauntering past with baskets on their heads (carrying anything from half a hundredweight of empty bottles to half a dozen cans of beans), youths with important-looking valises under their arms, Neapolitans in lumber jackets and pale blue trousers, peanut sellers, all kinds of dogs, but particularly boxers and dachshunds (no doubt a relic of the German occupation), youths carrying bath-tubs on their heads, a barefooted girl with flowers in the turn-ups of her slacks, a hot, rather ugly-looking party of Swiss tourists escorted by a guide, smart American girls with young men in white tropical suits, curly-headed blond Italians smoking pipes and wearing silk shirts covered with a kind of mosaic pattern in all colours of the rainbow, handsome Italian women (who deliberately refuse to shave their armpits) all lent colour to the scene.

On this occasion two New York girls were discussing their grand tour. One said: "I guess you've got to be in Capri at least a week before you get under its skin."

The second said: "Hey, when we get back let's have a cocktail party and wear these earrings—both of us."

Two young men approached them. The first girl said: "Say, have we had the grippe! We certainly have—all along the line. But after all, we are not the healthiest girls in the world."

Said the young man: "Where were you sick? In Monte Carlo?"

"Yup."

The young man turned to the other girl: "And you in Florence?"

"Sure, everything did everything. I guess it was the cheese in the soup."

"Say," asked one of the young men suddenly, "are there any snakes on this island?"

"Sure," said the first girl, "and they've all got lovely villas."

Just across the square is the Via Madre Serafina with a long white colonnade, out of which leads a series of whitewashed alleyways, among them the Via Santa Anello and the Via Abarte. This is the really old part of Capri and reminds one irresistibly of the soukhs of Morocco. Tiny shops, the headquarters of the Carabineri and the local blacksmith are to be found here. The old white church of Madre Serafina looks severely down on the crowded Piazza.

Possibly Capri is like one of those stage hypnotists who, if you give him your will-power deliberately, can make you do anything and look very foolish into the bargain. Nearby is a shop where hats of all sizes and colours are sold in hundreds to visitors who treat Capri as though it were a fancy dress ball of the soul.

One exit from the Piazza is by the Via Quisisana, a delightful winding little street which contains at least one excellent restaurant, the Taberna Rosa. This has only nine tables and its ceiling is hung with bottles of Chianti, rather like hams in an Irish farmhouse. There are carnations on every table. The marble floor is red and white and music is supplied by a wandering mandolin player. Smoked ham with fresh figs is a speciality here and so is spaghetti with mushrooms, clams and tomato juice. It was only because the silver-haired patron insisted on my trying the red mullet that I did so. In the past it has always seemed a most uninteresting fish to me. But he was right. A delicious sauce made it quite excellent.

The best known white wines in Capri are Patrizio and Tiberia but the Taberna Rosa's own personal wine was the best we drank in Italy, except, perhaps, for those bottles in Perugia. Incidentally, it is very difficult to get red Cinzano anywhere and the white variety is too sweet for the average man. There are several other good little restaurants, such as the Ristorante la Palma, which are easy to discover. The most magnificent is attached to the Hotel Quisisana where one can lunch and dine out of doors. The display table here is one of the best in Europe. There are also the Gatto Bianca, near the Tabu night club, the Gemma and Dimitri's.

The Tiberio Morgano was the hotel selected for Princess Margaret. It can only be reached by a long and attractive alleyway flanked with

tiny shops full of hams, peaches and lace. The proprietor, Signor Morgano, to whom I have already referred, is a great man in the international hotel world. Charles of Claridge's, so he claims, got his first job through him and Mero of the Carlton at Cannes was his assistant. There is also the Zum Kater Hiddigergi—a *café chantant*. Down on the beach the restaurants include the Vincenzo, Internazionale and Ciro's.

Among the villas there are the gaudy Villa Pompeiana, the late Teddy Gerrard's which she bequeathed to an Italian friend of hers, Gracie Fields's and the Villa Chanticler where Edda Ciano was staying. Not all the villas are attractive residences. An English girl was telling me how spiders and little red worms came out of the tap in her bathroom. The Ciano villa is not occupied. What looks like a huge castello is the Signal station.

At the Webber, by the by, it costs only 2,300 lire a day all in, or 1,600 lire for demi-pension. One afternoon I was sitting on the hotel terrace talking to an Austrian girl on leave from the American Legation in Vienna. For her, Capri was a most wonderful escape. Her life in Vienna was full of threats with the Russians all around. She, too, was talking about the strange attraction of Capri. The window-boxes full of geraniums, the small yellow flowers of the cactus, the singing of all kinds of birds and the saw-toothed Faraglioni Cliffs had a strange hypnotic effect on her. She talked in a low voice. "Everybody is something but often wants to be something better," she said. "What is normal and what is abnormal when war and politics are so abnormal? It depends on the strength of people whether they can become what they want to be. Very few people have the luck to do what they want to do. I have read that in some hospitals when a man thinks he is Napoleon, the attendant talks to him as if he himself were Marshal Ney and when someone says he is an engineer or an inventor they give him materials to play with. That is what Capri is doing for so many people here. I think it is very nice for them."

I agreed with her. She smiled sadly. Half an hour later she left for the mainland and the daily nightmare of existence in Vienna.

Capri is a place where time seems to be of no consequence. One day slides into another unconsciously. Morning after morning one plans to climb Mount Tiberius, but afternoon after afternoon one puts it off until the next day. In fact, the villa at the top is really worth seeing, though many of the rooms have not yet been excavated. It is advisable, however, not to ride Raffaelli. He will eat anything you offer him, daisies, convolvulus, roses (thorns and all), and then gallop down the long steps at breakneck speed, however much you try to stop him.

A pleasant walk is along the Arco Naturale. This is a stupendous freak of nature, a natural archway in the rock. The path winds through a number of vineyards and provides a lovely view of the mainland with Paestum and its temples on the horizon. On the way to the Arco

Naturale is the Grotto Matromania said to be an ancient temple of Mithras whose cult was so popular among the Roman soldiers that at one time it nearly dispossessed Christianity. It is a rough path to the fort of Campetello built during the English occupation of Capri and memorable for a major English defeat. In the absence of the Royal Navy the French surprised the garrison and forced the Commander, Sir Hudson Lowe, to surrender. Napoleon inscribed the victory on the Arc de Triomphe at Paris, but by one of those ironies of fate it was Sir Hudson Lowe who was destined to be Governor of St. Helena when Napoleon was exiled there, for the rest of his life.

It was not until 1861 that Capri became part of the Kingdom of Italy.

For botanists, Capri has really something to offer in the way of the rosemary leaved saffron, a local convolvulus with tufts of silver leaves and white blossoms shaped like fairy parachutes, Jove's beard and that rarity, the *lilium croceum*. Cyclamen, narcissus and a certain type of mauve crocus edged with buff and purple, white violets, grape-hyacinths and anemones grow side by side with about thirty different varieties of orchids.

Apart from its flora, but because of its imported fauna Capri has the reputation of being the haunt of all kinds of unnatural vices, dope trafficking and the like. I am perfectly prepared to believe that a few of these stories are based on fact. At the same time I must confess that I myself was, alas, not invited to any orgies.

At last it was time to leave. "You'll be back" said the charming owner of the Webber with complete assurance. I have no doubt that she was right. In fact we nearly did not leave, after all. It was sheer luck that we learned that a strike of ships' crews plying between Capri and the mainland was due to take place the following afternoon and that our only chance of reaching Naples was to take the morning fruit boat which left at 7 a.m. This we caught and within an hour and a half were back in Naples after a slightly bumpy crossing. Two English girls who travelled with us were due back in London that night. They were. All they had to do was to take the rapido from Naples to Rome and fly B.E.A. It seems incredible that one can leave the turmoil of London and arrive in the scented naughtiness of Capri on any day of the week.

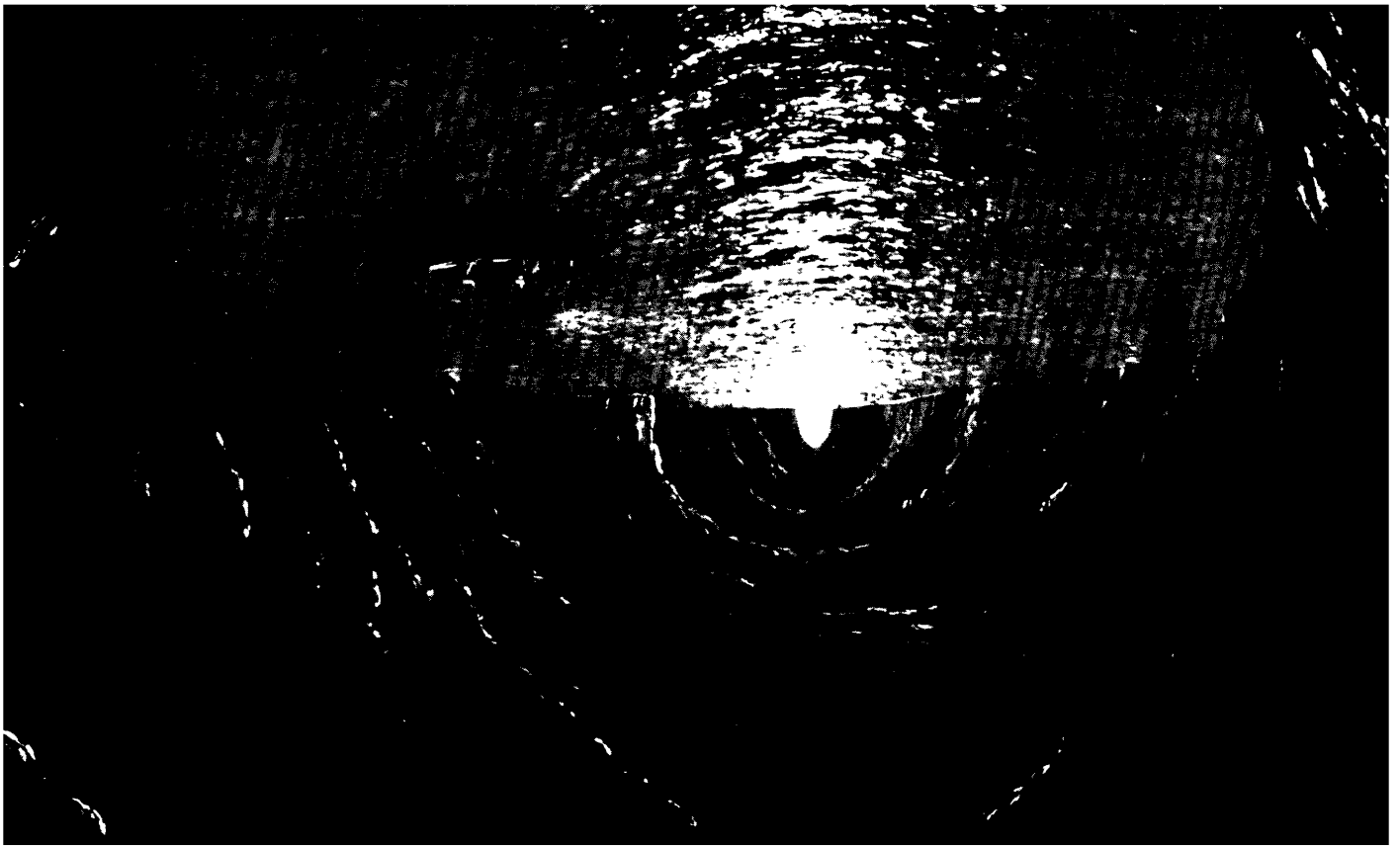
CHAPTER XII

NAPLES again. Fleas, bugs, museums, squalor, palaces, the biggest cinema in Europe (the Metropole, an ex-air-raid shelter still showing the *Mutiny on the Bounty* in 1949), the Royal Telephone Exchange in which 160 people were killed by a German time bomb, the Excelsior Hotel, the Via Roma and the Via Chiaia where a ten lire fine is imposed on anyone walking on the right-hand side of the street, the ruins of the Hotel Vesuvio and the Hotel Royal, Virgil's tomb which looks like the chimney of a lime kiln overgrown with moss, ivy and lichen. Naples with its jam factories, spaghetti factories, old taverns lined with cobwebbed barrels where the peasants play scopa and briscola with an Italian version of taro cards in which the suits are swords, cups, clubs and money, Piedigrotta with the Festival of the Miraculous Madonna and fireworks from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. from 6th September to 9th September each year. Posillipo's villas and royal residences. Naples with its Aquarium started by Anton Dorhn in 1870, where almost every civilized nation in the world has a table or two reserved for its most promising zoologist and the English representative has been teaching octopi to distinguish between hot and cold and blue and red as well as himself determining the baffling sex life of a shrimp. Naples with its hurdy-gurdies and hooting motor cars and slum-women who can carry on a conversation for ten minutes by mime without uttering a word, and its men who are regarded as the cunningest traders in the universe by their reluctant admirers in Milan. Naples is a solidified Neapolitan ice cream of a city with every layer a different colour, possessing a different odour and traceable to a different dynasty.

This, the most lively, town in Italy was originally a Greek colony as its name, Neapolis, betrays. Thereafter it was dominated by the Romans for 600 years. Following the fall of the Empire it was ravaged by anybody and everybody—Goths, Normans and Venetians—before it became part of the Spanish Empire for two centuries; after which it became Austrian, Spanish again, a local republic, French and finally Italian (thanks to Garibaldi) after several hundred years of separation from the rest of the country, for two centuries of which it was itself the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. No wonder that the Neapolitan has the quick wit of the mongrel, a cynical outlook and a 'Here today Gone tomorrow' approach to life. Dear, dirty, delightful Dublin has done nothing to deserve its adjectives compared with nice, nifty Naples.

In Naples a perfectly ordinary conversation in the street can easily delude the visitor into believing that the Camorra has started again, that knives will flash and that bloody revolution is round the next corner. Neapolitans really live. It is only surprising that more of them

(*Upper*) Pompeiian victims of Vesuvius
(*Lower*) A Pompeiian villa



do not die at a tender age. Faces are distorted with passion one minute and are wreathed in smiles the next. Neapolitans gamble their heads off, gesticulate like crazy, scream, swear, do everything except actually strike one another. They are incredibly superstitious and if proof is required the visitor need only secure a copy of *Smorfia*. But first it must be explained that at regular intervals, nine of the leading Italian cities conduct a State lottery at each of which five numbers are drawn from one to ninety-nine. Members of the public can go to a State Lottery Bank and 'play' any of these numbers. Payment is ten and a half to one for a single number, 250 to one for two consecutive numbers, 4,250 to one for three consecutive numbers, 80,000 to one for four consecutive numbers and 1,000,000 for five.

This numbers racket has flourished in Italy since 1717 and *Smorfia*, which is now in its thirty-fourth edition, supplies the credulous with the lucky numbers to select according to the gambler's most recent experiences. Here at random are a few hints to punters:

> "If you see a hermaphrodite play number six; if you see an apparition of devils in a nightmare play number forty-four; if a grilled artichoke is offered to you play number seventeen; if you see an admiral who has been arrested play sixty-seven; if you see a gasometer play fifty-eight; if you enter a dirty small apartment play forty-three; if you smell dung play seventy-one; if you learn about a priest in a scandal play four, and so it goes. There are thousands of different 'selections' but as the numbers only run from one to ninety-nine, hundreds of them clash. Thus you should play twenty-two if you see:
>
> (*a*) a defrocked priest
> (*b*) a man who sells water melons
> (*c*) a police constable
> (*d*) a fleeing tenant
> (*e*) a street cleaner.

The most recent edition of *Smorfia* also selects eighty-eight for any punter who has seen a man being electrocuted, fifty if he hears a jazz band play and seventy if he dreams about an iceberg. Oh, yes, and a priest in love is seventy-eight.

Naples is a great place for traditional fêtes. In addition to the Piedi Grotta there are the Carmine on 16th July, which takes place in the Rione di Masaniello with the usual fireworks; the fête of St. Antoine Abbaye which is the start of the Carnival when both motor cars and horses are blessed—and the usual fireworks are let off; the fête of St. Vincent with illuminations and processions on 5th April and the first Sunday in July and still more fireworks; the fête of Gigli di Nola on the last Sunday in June when gigantic towers of wood appear from nowhere carried on the shoulders of the crowds. (The symbolic towers

The Blue Grotto, Capri.

stop from tme to time while the men carrying them dance to the rhythm of the local orchestras); the fête of Monte Virgine at Whitsun and again in September which takes place on Mount Partenio, two hours away by car, but everybody goes to it—visitors and local inhabitants—in vehicles covered with flowers and garlands.

The fête of St. Januarius takes place on 19th September and not in January as one would expect. The Via Duomo is illuminated and the miracle of the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius which is kept in two phials, duly takes place, though sometimes the Archbishop has to shake it pretty hard before the congealed blood liquefies. There is a similar miracle at Pozzuoli on a stone said to be stained with the blood of St. Januarius. The cathedral in which the miracle occurs is French Gothic with some fine marble carvings dating back to the Renaissance. There is also a silver statue of the saint.

At least two museums ought to be visited. One is the National Museum, the contents of which are annually increased by the latest excavations at Pompeii. It already contains the Farnese Bull and the Farnese Hercules. As such it is primarily interesting as an archaeological museum, but it also has a very fine picture gallery which contains a number of family portraits of the Farnese princes by Titian. Another museum is the Royal Palace of Capo di Monte which has a very fine collection of local porcelain and medieval armour. There are nearly a dozen museums and picture galleries and there is also the Royal Palace of Naples which was considerably damaged by the Allied Air Forces in 1943. It contains interesting furniture dating back to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and in the niches of the façade are the statues of the founders of the eight different monarchies which have reigned over Naples in the past 1,000 years.

Nor should one miss the grim-looking Castel Nuovo built in the thirteenth century by Charles of Anjou. But it is much more fun to go to one of the last real marionette theatres in the world. This is in a tiny side street. The stage is rough; the balcony is made of unpolished tree trunks. The orchestra consists of a pianist, drummer and a violin and the whole place holds only eighty people. Three different one-act plays are given at each performance and as ten or twelve figures are required for each, it means a great deal of voice production and manipulation. A usual interruption is caused by a marionette representing a fat old man in a blue suit who says he is a stranger from far away. In fact, he has come from Caserta and then proceeds to attack the Neapolitans. A stooge from the audience goes on to the stage and grips the marionette by the throat, seizes an umbrella and belabours him until the marionette's head falls off. Meantime, his own trousers drop. This is regarded as wildly funny by the audience. In fact, the marionette shows are life-size, variegated elaborations of Punch and Judy.

Another place we visited was the British Consulate, though fortunately we did not require any money. It is only in very special cir-

cumstances that His Majesty's representative will advance any cash unless there has been a sudden devaluation of the £.

It is true that if a British subject meets with an accident or an illness which compels him (or her) to spend extra money on doctors, nurses and hospitals or is robbed of purse or pocket book, a visit to the Consulate will be beneficial—up to a point. In the case of a robbery, the victim must first lodge a report with the local police-station explaining in detail how much money is involved and what were the circumstances of its disappearance. If the victim can persuade the police that the loss is genuine he will receive a sympathetic hearing from His Majesty's consular representative and will be provided with enough money to return to the U.K. The victim will, however, be deprived of his or her passport, for which is substituted a Certificate of Nationality. The passport is temporarily impounded until the money involved is refunded from the U.K.

Similarly, a visitor who is struck down by illness or a vehicle is supplied with suitable funds during convalescence and further funds necessary for transport to England. In this case, too, the passport of the invalid is impounded until recompense has been paid. It is no good, therefore, thinking that you can 'blow' your £50, go to the nearest British Consulate and ask for your return fare, quite apart from money to cover the last few days of your visit in the foreign country which you have selected for your holiday.

No, our consuls-general, consuls and vice-consuls have no authority to salve you from deliberate monetary difficulties. In any event they are much too busy.

Let us take the case of the Consul-General for Naples, Italy. Every minute of his day is occupied by a whole series of different problems which he has to solve on the spot. Primarily his duty is to oil the wheels of the local authorities, to answer requests for information from commercial firms in Great Britain, to 'vet', refuse or give visas, to arrange the bulk purchase of fresh stores for ships of the Royal Navy which put into harbour at Naples, to organize Anglo-Italian social occasions, to pay pensions, register births and deaths of British subjects in the locality, to keep in touch with the war graves of British casualties—in fact, to carry out a thousand and one duties from conciliating the police to providing a monthly return of passports.

The duties of vice-consuls, consuls and consuls-general of course, vary enormously according to their locality. The consul-general in Lyons, Turin or Detroit will automatically be more concerned with trade returns and commercial conditions than with anything else in these cities. Naples being after Malta one of the chief ports of call for H.M. Mediterranean Fleet, the consul-general is naturally more concerned with the Royal Navy and incidentally with the Mercantile Marine than he would be if stationed at Rome or Milan. But wherever the Consulate may be situated, the Consular representative of His Majesty's Govern-

ment spends an enormous amount of time in dealing with visas. In Naples this is particularly the case because there are numbers of refugee camps where displaced persons are temporarily housed before being accepted by Australia and other parts of the empire. All applications for emigration have to be carefully scrutinized, although many of the inquiries are entirely superficial. True, there are apparently hundreds of English farmers anxious to re-employ thousands of Italian ex-prisoners of war who have now returned to their native land and wish to return to this country. Unless, however, the would-be Italian emigrants can produce specific requests and guarantees from employers in the United Kingdom or the British Empire they are merely wasting the time of the consul-general, vice-consul and his various subordinates. On an average less than 200 applications for emigration are granted out of 2,000 applicants who had been personally interviewed or written to the Consulate.

Mr. Ronald Watkinson is a typical hard-working consul-general who keeps careful record of all the activities of visitors to his headquarters. A glance down the files of his interviews and correspondence during any week shows a series of complicated items, all of which have to be cleared as quickly as possible. Thus, at the time of our visit, there were two Englishmen currently running a small hotel in the Island of Ischia who complained that their local rivals were doing their best to run them out of business, accusing them of being anti-Italian, of smuggling, of all sorts of things. It was the job of the British Consulate to see that they got a square deal and that the police protected them. Another item referred to the problem of the rank of the new tenant of the British Consulate at Bari. Should he be a vice-consul? An acting-consul or a full consul? If he is merely a vice-consul he would have lost 'face' and become junior to the local Greek consul.

A visit by the ships of the Royal Navy means the organization not only of football, swimming and boating facilities but access to the races, the temporary membership of yachting clubs and swimming clubs for the officers, contacting tourist agencies for excursions to Pompeii, and the giving of cocktail parties and dinners to which invitations have to be sent out in exact proportions to the local British Colony and Neapolitan socialites. Routine items include the problem of the British coloured seaman who 'skipped' his ship, got into trouble with the local police and had to be repatriated to Zanzibar. Immediately afterwards came an item concerning a British firm requiring a reputable agency which would supply it with ropes. Next came a notice of marriage which had to be exhibited for twenty-one days on the general notice board of the Consulate before the Municipal Authorities could be provided with a 'No objection' certificate enabling the couple to be married.

There are only 240 British subjects in Naples but they can create a number of headaches. They include four dozen wives of British ex-

servicemen, most of whom have never been to England and some of whom have no wish to do so, anyway. They all want their marriage allowance including those whose husbands do not ever wish to see them again. Another routine item is correspondence about war graves and a request for photographs of some loved one's cross. One regular trouble is letters from English ex-servicemen whose fiancées have ceased to write and what will the consul do about it? Occasionally a British subject is jailed and sends a note to the consul asking for his release. This is unusual, however. It is seldom that the Italian police keep a British subject in prison except for some very serious offence. Equally rare, though it sometimes happens, is the unexpected appearance of a British soldier who has deserted from our armed forces in Trieste and having failed to stow himself abroad to England asks for repatriation or to be returned to his unit.

The life, in fact, of the consul-general is a daily whirligig. He may receive calls from a peripatetic author like myself asking for local information. It may be a Home Office request for the exact legal position of Italian prisoners of war still incarcerated in an island off Naples for infamous conduct to British troops during the war. It may be a request from the Ministry of Health or the Minister of Food about available stocks of hemp, salami or fresh lemons available in the vicinity. It may be claims for insurance resulting from collisions at sea which have taken place since the ship in question left its last port of call. It may be a visit from the local police to settle an argument about their failure to permit British subjects to work although they are entitled to do so. It may be the stamping of Ship's Articles or the arrangements necessary to get an injured British seaman into the nearest naval hospital in the shortest space of time. It may be attempts to extradite a British subject who has been illegally imprisoned in Jugoslavia.

With Naples as one's headquarters it is possible to make a number of delightful excursions. Ischia is primitive compared with Capri but among its inhabitants are Mussolini's widow and son. It is famous for its pinewoods, vineyards, lemon groves and orange groves and a greenness which is positively startling. There is excellent bathing and though the hotels like the Lido, Regine and Palace are not luxury affairs they are quite comfortable and much cheaper than those in Capri. It can be reached in two hours from Naples, the steamers going twice a day. It has a reputation for natural mudbaths and radio-active springs. Within the next few years it will be a serious rival to Capri.

Paestum was a Greek city founded twenty-five centuries ago by the Sybarites. Three Doric temples are still standing, but the chief attraction are the rose woods which bloom twice a year. Two kilometres from the temples is the beach of Posedonia, described as 'a very suggestive place'

in the local guide book. Once again, as in Capri, I must have missed something.

Caserta, about seventeen miles away, will be always remembered by the British in connection with the invasion of Italy. The Palace built by Vanvitelli is the biggest in Italy, apart from the Vatican. Architects rave about it. It contains 1,200 rooms and twenty-six staircases and was probably full for the first time in history when it became the headquarters of the Allied Military Forces in 1944.

Nobody who remembers his Latin tag *Facilis descensus Averno* can afford to miss Campi Flegrei. Lake Avernus is undoubtedly a weird place, deservedly described by Virgil as the Entrance to Hell. The gloomy forests on the hillside, reflected in the waters of the lake give an eerie effect even on the finest day. Not far away is the so-called Solfatara of Pozzuoli, a small active volcano which provides the visitor with a miniature idea of what Vesuvius can do.

Vesuvius itself takes a half-day to visit properly. The summit can be reached by rope railway or by motor road and with a guide it is possible to enter the interior to a point quite close to the small cone of eruption. It is better, still of course, to persuade somebody with a private aeroplane to fly you just above it. From the air the crater looks like a huge basin in the centre of which is the core of a vast boil exuding matter and drifts of smoke. It is all rather yellow and bubbly and reminds one of a particularly revolting skin disease. The last real activity was in 1944 and it erupts about every thirty-six years.

The road up to the crater goes through the famous vineyards of Lachrima Christi. It might seem surprising that they survive the regular deluge of ashes and cinders which erupt from Vesuvius. Actually it is no miracle that the vineyards have not been gravely affected. Vines grow too old to produce good grapes after the age of thirty and new ones have to be continually planted to take their place.

The best-known local wines in addition to Lachrima Christi are Ravello, Epomeo (from Ischia), Monte di Procidia, Granano, Asprinio d'Aversa and Capri which, as I have already hinted, is a name taken very much in vain, rather like Liebfraumilch. Local specialities include two macaroni dishes, one with a sauce of fresh tomatoes and the other with an aromatic sauce known as ragu. In addition there is a peculiar vermicelli done 'alle vongole.' 'Pizza napolitana' is a savoury cheese dish cooked with anchovies, oil and fresh tomatoes. 'Zuppa di pesce' suggests fish soup. It is nothing of the sort. It is really a mixed grill of fish containing anything from sea urchins and baby octopus to *langouste* and red mullet.

Local restaurants vary so much from year to year that it is better to ask on arrival which trattoria to patronize, but you can never go wrong if you try the Transatlantico. Others to be recommended are Da Rafele, Da Angelo, Giardino degli Aranci and Da Giuseppone.

Generally speaking, Naples has altered surprisingly little since the

days of Frederick Hervey the fourth Earl of Bristol after whom so many Bristol hotels have been named on the Continent. Even the gestures remain very much the same. Thus the pointed thumb indicates the direction in which you should go. The forefinger means 'Let me tell you.' The middle finger indicates that the owner is the boss. The fourth finger means 'I have got a proposition'. The fifth or little finger is used for picking the nose or the ear, and may be described as the general purposes finger.

CHAPTER XIII

IT was in many ways a great pity that we left our motor car in Rome and therefore had to take the rapido back from Naples. In this way we missed Cassino and other historical places. At least, however, our first-class compartment was in the front of the train and the trip was far less jolting than the journey down. Once in Rome again we did not waste much time. The noise is too fatiguing, quite apart from the heat. In which connection the author of the major guide to Rome rather gives the game away in his foreword:

'In spite of the unfair and false reports on Rome to be found in foreign guide books, scaring visitors with imaginary tales of Roman fever, etc., Rome is the only capital in Europe, and perhaps in the world, which offers a healthy, balmy, sunny climate with a clear blue sky. . . . *In fact, if we except the two months of July and August which are occasionally rather unpleasant on account of the heat, the difficulty of which, however, may be easily overcome by going to the neighbouring mountains or to the sea. . . .*'

To this may be added the odd climatic phenomenon, by no means confined to Rome, that the mornings are usually far finer than the afternoons. This is noticeable on the coast even more than inland, but the visitor who has any excursions or sight-seeing in mind is well advised to go out in the morning. By contrast, it is seldom that a wet morning develops into a fine afternoon.

The road out of Rome to the north is the Via Aurelia, now known as National Route 1. Like the other major roads out of the capital it is very badly signposted and the first sign we saw was Civitavecchia 62 kilometres. The scenery, once the city is left behind, is completely undistinguished for several miles, but the traffic is always intriguing. In this section of Italy it seems to be the habit to attach three horses to a van rather like a Roman chariot. Vans and convoys of oxcarts alternate with other convoys of long-range lorries interspersed by those irritating super charged motor scooters which so clearly emphasize the average Italian's love of bombast. We also met a company of troops marching along the road with tassels hanging down their backs almost to their waists. These signs of martial splendour were awarded to them for fighting against the unfortunate Abyssinians in the '30s. More intriguing still was a couple of dispatch riders who wore cock's feathers on their steel helmets. . . .

After twenty miles or so the road approaches the sea at the pleasant little bathing resort of Ladispoli with Castello Odescalchi close at hand. Some of the buildings along the route still show signs of bomb damage, but the road, which is lined with palm trees, is as smooth as

silk. To the right lie the Sabatine foothills. To the left the sea approaches within a matter of yards, with a grassy verge descending to a pebbly beach. The next town is San Marinelle where the cornfields are only a hundred yards away from the sea. The road itself is barely eight feet above sea level.

A number of ugly block house-like barracks are the prelude to Civitavecchia itself. This small naval town had a very rough time during World War II, being the first place where the Germans attempted anything approaching a rear-guard action after they had abandoned Rome. The result is that a great deal of it has been very badly blitzed, including the famous old port designed by Michelangelo himself. Half the houses are down but people are still living in the ruins. Perhaps to give employment to the local shopkeepers, it is now being used as a kind of miniature Aldershot by the Italian Army. Civitavecchia is also the harbour for Sardinia which gives it a minor importance, as well as being the headquarters of the Italian long-range fishing-fleets.

One of the few new buildings is the Hotel Mediterraneo on the seafront. It is extremely comfortable and the charge was only one guinea a day for full pension, including all taxes. The manager was surprisingly philosophic. "First the Americans bombed us," he said, "and then the Germans blew up what remained."

The specialities of this part of the coast are triglia, a local type of red mullet only ten inches long with a delicate flavour, and fettucini, a type of spaghetti. At the Antico Grottino which specializes in fish soup, we drank a tumblerful of the local white wine at the equivalent of threepence apiece. The Antico Grottino is a charming little regional cellar, probably used as an air-raid shelter during the war, with a stucco ceiling and a regular clientele of amiable fisherfolk.

The Via Aurelia continues north past sour land, occasional olive groves and oxen with the biggest spread of horns I have ever seen. Where the corn has been reaped the landscape looks bare and sunburnt, though interrupted by occasional skylines of cypresses stretching half across the horizon to break the force of the wind. The Tyrrhenian sea is still only a few yards away to the left. Long distance lorries, many of them with six-wheel trailers, belching particularly foul black fumes, do not add to the attractions; but the three-horsed vans continue to remind one of Boadicea.

A few kilometres farther on lies the walled city of Tarquinia which still has large signs recalling the American advance up the coast during the World War II, such as "Off limits to all troops". Tarquinia is a real medieval little town and it is unfortunate that much of the museum was bombed flat. Known as the Vitelleschi Palace it contained a number of Etruscan antiquities dating back to the fourth century. Laborious efforts are still being made to restore the treasures. These include the tomb of a man showing a baby gazelle eating off a plate, a three-headed

Cerberus on a tomb, with lions at each end devouring a sheep, and a number of effigies of corpses shown half-reclining, instead of stretched on their backs. One tomb represents a large lolling magistrate holding a scroll. There is also a bas-relief of Hell with two demons hammering the brains out of a new arrival. Another sarcophagus is adorned by the plates of money with which the dead people could pay their fare to Charon when crossing the Styx. The Etruscan language, by the by, is written from right to left.

The first floor of that section of the museum which was not destroyed is reached by a series of very wide shallow steps specially designed so that Cardinal Vitelleschi could ride on horseback up to the first and second storey of his Palace. One of the best exhibits here is a couple of ancient winged horses in orange terra-cotta. They had been broken into ninety-six different pieces by a bomb, but have been put perfectly together again.

A typical, circular pre-Christian adobe hut is also worth inspecting, together with an eighth-century vase, the chocolate and cream colouring of which is still as bright as a button.

The town itself is delightfully medieval. The local farmers wear black hats. Mounted horsemen escort herds of long-horned cattle and their calves through the main street. The local chemist shop cannot have altered its *décor* for five hundred years. We entered it for the very good reason that I had a touch of the grippe which was almost instantly cured by a dose of bismuto-nitrato Basico con belladonna.

There are a number of tombs all round the ancient city, but we did not visit them. It would have been such an anticlimax after the Catacombs.

The Via Aurelia now proceeds past miles of tall green osiers specially grown for basket making, with the sea still only half a mile away to the left. But telegraph poles and huge electric pylons detract from the scenic effect as the road approaches Monte di Castro. Here it was Fair Day, with the result that the streets were full of jostling farmers and farm labourers. No wonder that the countryside had been looking so deserted all the way from Civitavecchia.

After a while the road goes inland for a few kilometres. Which means that it by-passes Orbetello. To the Americans, however, Orbetello is worth a slight detour. It was, before World War II, the seaplane base from which Marshal Balbo conducted his mass flight to the United States.

Out at sea are the island of Monte Cristo (occasionally visited by the Royal Navy men when on their Mediterranean manœuvres, but otherwise entirely deserted) and Giglio. Giglio is a charming place with wonderful beaches but a poor reputation for its local wines. It is about to become a very fashionable holiday resort in an exclusive Butlin-Holiday-Camp kind of way—a series of charming little villas, a rustic albergo, an alfresco night club, and every kind of diving-board and canoe associated with a lido.

Meantime the Via Aurelia crosses a putty-coloured river, with dark green hills on both sides. Orange-hued quarries dug out of fir-clad slopes, fleecy white clouds in an otherwise blue sky, oleanders, yellow flowering cactus and olive groves make the view attractive once again. But there is still another river to cross before reaching the arcade of tamarisks leading into Grosseto where, too, it was market day when we arrived.

The Piazza was crowded with stalls and country folk shopping at them. Once again it was quite apparent that visitors to Italy should buy everything they can in the local market where anything from dress lengths and hats to stoves and pots and pans are available at really cut prices. Personally, I bought a delightful pair of lightweight tropical trousers for the equivalent of £1, but discovered that they were too small when I tried them on at the Bastiani Hotel. This is a comfortable hostelry to be recommended and is close to a nice thirteenth-century cathedral decorated with red and white marble inside and out.

Grosseto is in the heart of the Maremna, a coastal strip ten miles wide and about ninety miles long, once prosperous, then put almost completely out of commission by malaria and now once again doing nicely. Drainage and reclamation begun by the Hapsburgs and continued more recently have driven out the dreaded mosquito. The after-effects, however, are still noticeable by the scarcity of villages and therefore of eating-places.

Outside Grosseto we saw some of our first vines since leaving Rome and, too, our first battlemented castle on a hill for many miles. The old road runs straight for quite a distance before it curves towards the sea again with a complete hill of olives planted in orderly rows to the right. To the left lies Piombino (said to be very Communistic), the harbour for Elba.

The voyage from the mainland is so short—about two hours—that the Allies were clearly tempting providence when they exiled Napoleon to this island in 1814. It is only astonishing that he did not escape still earlier. Students of Bonaparte will wish to see his relics, though rather dull ones, at Porto Ferraio and the villa in which he stayed. The chief hotel on the island which is named after him (the Palace Hotel Napoleon) is at Poggio, a thousand feet above sea level. This hotel has its own private bathing beach at Marina Marciana and if the weather is fine and the sea is calm it is possible to sail all round the island in the hotel's own yacht. The Sanctuary of the Madonna delle Monte, the villa of Maria Waleska and Monte Capanne and the natural mineral springs are all worth a visit. With its rugged coastline, clusters of neat villages and vineyards the island would be really charming, but for the iron-workings. Incidentally, Elba is the best place from which to visit the fabulous island of Monte Cristo.

As for the Via Aurelia, although it is not officially an autostrada, there are no side turnings for the next few miles to worry the motorist

and only an occasional Bailey Bridge to slow him up between Grosseto and San Vincenzo where a charming roadside albergo attracted our attention. Here we were served home-cured smoked ham, sogliala (a kind of sole), a splendid pork-chop grilled on charcoal and a nice dry local wine. The barmaid was so beautiful that we asked her name. It was Rosina Melai. What we did not try was "Rohland's Dry Gin distilled from selected Tuscan juniper berries and bottled by the Rohland Distillery", as advertised on a wall with a picture of a jockey in purple and white silks. And yet it is the best Italian gin.

San Vincenzo is a charming place, well worth a halt. A long arcade of plane trees with white bands round their trunks, as usual two feet above the ground, marks the northern exit. Now come miles of olive groves on the left and vineyards on the right. Every so often one sees a terra-cotta Casa Cantoniera, a small house marking the point where the upkeep of the road depends on the next local authority. Single-wheeled carts were surprisingly rare in Italy, but we passed quite a few of them on the approaches to Cecina, a comparatively large town blitzed in the centre and with a single traffic bridge. On the far side of it we were passed by sun-spectacled Italian police-officers in a jeep, apparently chasing a lorry.

Only a few miles separate Cecina from Rosignano, an ugly manufacturing town with tall chimney stacks belching smoke, and coal mines set in a forest of firs on the far side. From here onwards, however, the scenery becomes much more attractive. The Via Aurelia develops into a kind of Italian Corniche with a series of small bathing resorts like those between Cannes and Marseilles, the only difference being that there is very little sand and most of the bathing has to be done from the rocks. Sometimes the sea is 300 feet below the level of the road upon the left, as at Cavaliere. Sometimes there are red rocks, like those at Agay. The road itself is also interesting. *Lavori in corso*, which means that men are working on the road, is a frequent sign. At one point we passed an English hiker walking in the opposite direction, followed by two French cyclists with tricolors on their handlebars; after which came two sheepish-looking lorry drivers being interrogated by the Italian police whom we had seen earlier.

The approach to Leghorn (known in Italy as Livorno) is through very pretty wooded country with oleanders and a race-course. Ornate, elegant villas are dotted on the hillside to the right. To the left are kilometres of gaudy bathing huts. Unfortunately the sea is very shallow and even the swimming-pools have no real depth; so, while ideal for children, the bathing is not to be recommended for grown-ups.

The Palazzo Splendido certainly deserves a better beach. It is one of the best appointed hotels in the whole of Italy, with really spacious bedrooms and enormous bathrooms. The blankets and sheets all bear American labels, an aftermath of the hotel's role as headquarters of the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations of United States Forces,

which it continued to be until 1947. It has a first-class American bar and a delightful shady garden at the back. The hotel must have been deliberately spared by the American Air Force with a view to its use by their commanding general; for it was left completely unscathed in spite of its proximity to the harbour where nearly one hundred and fifty ships (as many as in Naples) were bombed and sunk.

Leghorn is not, in fact, a really ancient city. That is to say, it had less than a thousand inhabitants in the sixteenth century. Later, thanks to the Medici, it attracted every kind of refugee from various parts of the Continent—Roman Catholics from England, Jews and Moors from Spain and Portugal, and merchants from Marseilles. Thereafter it grew in importance very rapidly with glass-works, porcelain factories and oil mills and carried on a brisk trade with the Levant in cotton, wool and raw silk, and with the Black Sea in grain. I made several inquiries about the reason for the local fowls' popularity (white leghorns) in Great Britain, but could only discover that an Englishman named Henderson was originally responsible for popularizing the breed. To revert to World War II, I was informed by the hotel proprietor that the German Military Commander decided to house all his headquarters' staff and garrison troops in a square mile in the heart of the city. This fact was quickly discovered by Allied Intelligence Officers and the Black Zone as it was called, was mercilessly flattened. In the Via del Tempio huge blocks of stone lay tumbled in the street as if the bombing had taken place the previous day. In 1949 it still looked very much like the devastated areas of the City of London, except for the fact that huge new buildings were going up all round, with U.S. aid. Recently completed is the Astoria Hotel which threatens to take much of the clientele from the Palazzo Splendido where, however, we had a most excellent dinner on the terrace. Several five-storeyed houses had already been rebuilt and, if ever a first-class example of the futility of war were required, the heart of Leghorn supplies it.

Churches and cathedrals suffered like everything else in the holocaust, but these were being left to the last. In the Grand Piazza the huge equestrian statue of King Emmanuel II stands dented but erect among the desolation. Among the ruins children were playing *gyro d'Italia* with beer bottle tops. The Croisette of Leghorn is wide, long and shady with oleanders, plane trees and tamarisks. Here we saw the rather unpleasant sight of Italian policemen lassooing a stray dog because it was unmuzzled and carrying it yelping away to be summarily dispatched. Owing to rabies, dogs in many Italian cities are supposed to be kept on a lead, or muzzled if let off it; but this was the first time that we saw the law taking its course.

The largest café in Leghorn is the Galleria in the Piazza Cavour, but though we visited it on two occasions there was literally nobody there except ourselves. What is more, having ordered coffee and cognac, the waiter served both in the same cup. . . . The only picturesque part

of the city is the Medici Canal and the ancient fort bordered by some ruined walls. The streets are crowded and populous, with trolley buses rambling in all directions and no signposting except for the names of doctors or dentists on street corners.

English and Jewish cemeteries on the outskirts of the town are a reminder of the old days when Leghorn was a Free Port like Tangier today but, on consideration, the most interesting relic in Leghorn is the grave of Tobias Smollett.

The road to Pisa is lined by pines and fields of corn entirely overrun by poppies. Horses with sun-bonnets contrasted with civilian lorries still carrying the white star emblem of the Allied Forces. The road must have been heavily bombed during the German retreat, to judge by the numbers of small temporary bridges. Another aftermath of the war was a dump of U.S. lorries surrounded by barbed wire near the roadside. The approaches to Pisa were also destroyed and a number of fine old houses on both sides of the Arno remain flattened, though the bridge itself had been mended.

Fortunately the Cathedral, Baptistery and Leaning Tower were undamaged. The Cathedral erected by the local inhabitants after their great naval victory near Palermo in 1063 was restored in 1604 after a fire. It is made entirely of white marble ornamented with black and coloured bands on the exterior. Inside, the eye is caught, first, by the sixty-eight ancient Roman and Greek columns captured in war and, secondly, by the gigantic dome.The general effect is blue and gold. A bronze lamp hanging in the nave is worth inspection because its swaying is said to have given Galileo the idea of the pendulum. There is also an ancient and very curious lock on the bronze doors. But what chiefly remains in one's memory is the problem of how all those huge pillars were transported to the cathedral from the various cities which the Pisans looted after capture.

The Baptistery is also entirely marble and completely circular. The interior rests on eight columns and four piers, but is chiefly remarkable for the hexagonal pulpit.

A few yards from the Cathedral is the Leaning Tower, begun in 1174 and completed in 1350. The visitor feels a curious sensation when he walks from the level ground down the short flight of steps before entering the door. It feels just as if he is skidding to the right. The Tower is eight storeys high and there are two hundred and ninety-four steps in the staircase for anyone who has the energy to climb to the top and see the view all the way to Leghorn, the Tuscan Islands and the Apuan Alps. The exterior is all pink and white, like a chocolate box.

Pisa contains a round dozen of churches, but after the Leaning Tower they come rather as an anticlimax.

The Emperor Aurelius would be slightly taken aback if he came to life and saw all the Coco-cola advertisements on his Via Aurelia as it leaves Pisa for the north. They are a shocking sight among the golden barley and the vineyards.

Having crossed the Arno, however, the road shakes them off and shortly enters a forest. Forests are uncommonly rare in Italy. This one consisted of larches, firs, pines and cork trees and seems to be about the same size as the Forest of Fontainebleau.

A nice mountain range, usually with fleecy clouds on it, lies to the north-east. On the far side of the forest is the long, narrow undistinguished town of Torre del Lago where Puccini used to have a villa. From here the Via Aurelia drives straight ahead with lovely jagged mountains covered by green and black shadows in the near distance. To the right lies Lucca where Julius Caesar held a conference with Pompey and Crassus to discuss a five-year plan for the Roman Empire. Here the Cathedral of San Martino contains a small chapel graced by the Volto Santo di Lucca—an ancient crucifix made of cedarwood, traditionally carved by St. Nicodemus and transferred by a miracle from the Holy Land in A.D. 782. St. Frediano is a church named after that comparatively rare character, an Irish saint, St. Frigidianus, who was Bishop of Lucca in 560. In one of the chapels is an image of Christ, said to have been found in the sea. Elsewhere this redoubtable Irish saint is shown checking an inundation of the sea, rather like the little Dutch boy in Holland. The most attractive part of Lucca however, is the seventeenth-century fortifications and the grassy moat.

The Via Aurelia now approaches Viareggio, the Brighton of Italy and the Mecca of Italian waiters who have made their home in London. The approach is most unattractive—tumbledown houses, waste land, petrol stations and prefabricated houses. Viareggio took a severe caning from the Allied Air Forces, but it continues to be the favourite holiday resort for Florentines. Before the war it had over one hundred and fifty hotels and boarding-houses with all the attractions of lawn tennis, bathing, dancing and riding. Its beaches are still covered with gaudy bathing-huts, but it is on the whole too garish for English tastes. The air, it must be admitted, is peculiarly clear, rather like the air of California. Perhaps this is due to the proximity of the Apuan mountains and the sea.

After leaving Viareggio on the left, the Via Aurelia goes inland and it soon becomes evident, even if one did not know, that Carrara is close at hand. In every village like Pietra Santa, there are monumental masons. At Ponte Rosso where there was evidently some hard fighting on the outskirts, marble effigies line the road on both sides. Querceta presents the same appearance. Marble quarries line the road as it continues along the foot of the Apuan Alps all the way to Massa, a hot dusty little town with a squat prison and a policeman on a black and white tub gesticulating wildly at the oncoming traffic. Massa was also

blitzed in the war, but showed every sign of being rapidly rebuilt. More marble quarries alternating with palm trees precede an odd-shaped bridge over the road. Piles of Carrara marble lie on both sides of the Via Aurelia, now dotted with small houses, many of them pock-marked with mortar fire. This sector of the country is also remarkable for the number of mules one sees.

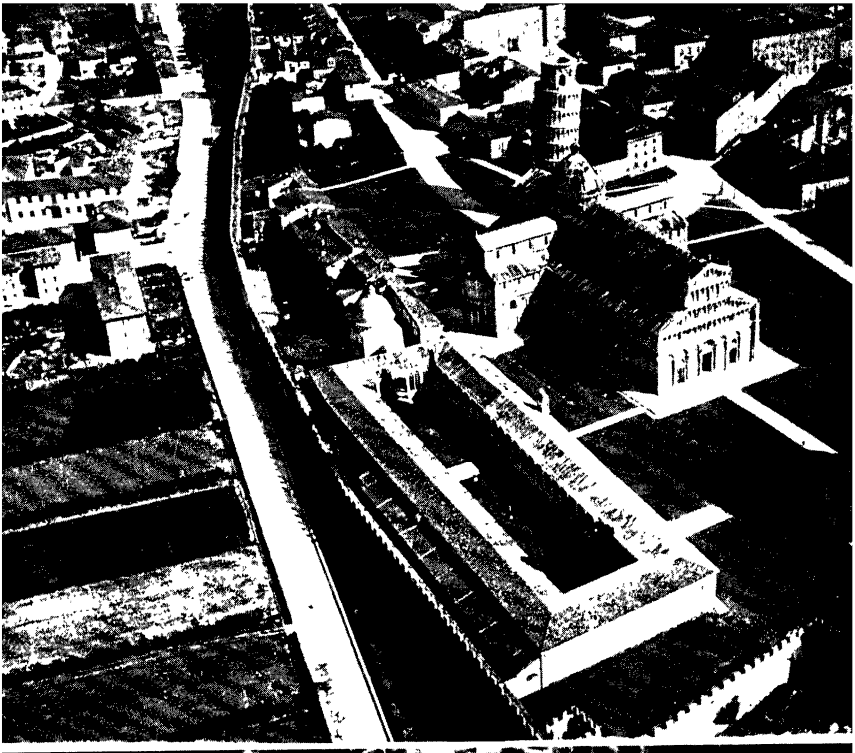
Sarzana is an attractive old city with a white marble cathedral, well-preserved town walls, vines trained on marble pillars, a particularly large statue of a marble deity carrying a shield, a double arcade of maples and palm trees, and the effigy of a hammer and sickle on one of the houses.

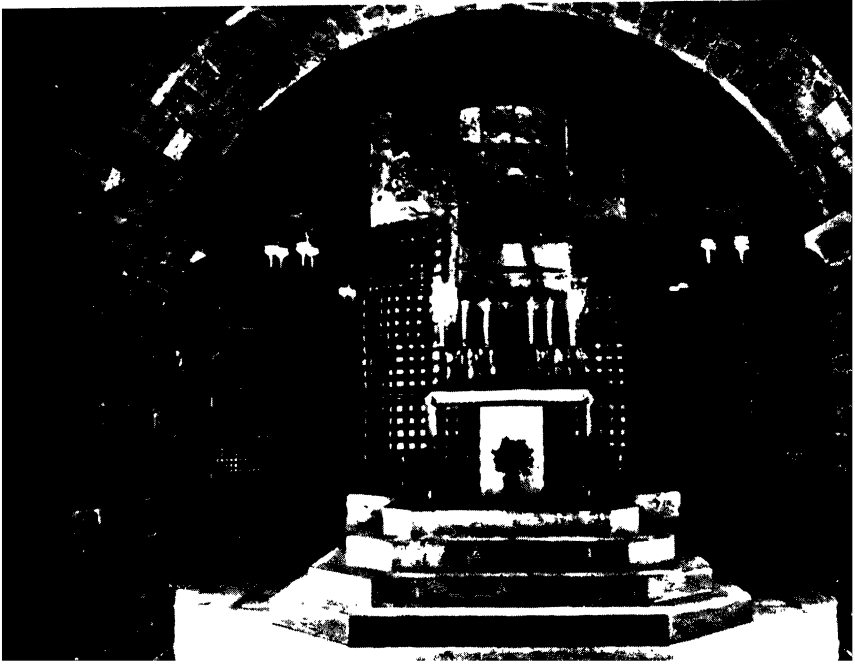
Two or three miles farther on the motorist has the option of going straight ahead or turning left for the panoramic route through a gorge of marble quarries to Lerici. We chose the latter. The road rises steeply and at the top there is a splendid view of the lagoon-like Gulf of Spezia with two small islands and the little pink township of Lerici itself. Throughout Mussolini's régime Lerici was practically out of bounds to foreign visitors, nearby Spezia having become the Portsmouth of Italy. Lerici was a favourite haunt of Shelley and his name has been borrowed by the chief hotel which has a restaurant overlooking the sea, with six trees growing through its roof. A very solid, almost impregnable, old twelfth-century fort formerly used as an official observatory, dominates the attractive little harbour. Alfresco cafes with coloured parasols, the Island of Palmaria, famous for its yellow-veined black marble, and Porto Venere just across the water from Palmaria, provide a charming background to the gay fishing village with its pretty girls, clean little osterias, fishing smacks, bathing beaches, paved alleyways and houses with green shutters painted on the walls. The inhabitants are amiable folk, as is evident from the fact that the local Socialists and Christian Democrats have their headquarters next door to one another.

To revert to Shelley—at the Shelley et Delle Palme Hotel the walls of the restaurant are covered with modern frescoes of Dante and the English poet inspecting a nude in a modern allegory of the 'Birth of Venus'. Here the management have the sense to print their menu in English and French as well as Italian, specializing in "Sea fruits" soup and cinqueterre, a dry local white wine. Lerici is certainly a place at which to stay for several days.

To the north of it lies the cream and green fishing village of San Terezo; after which the road climbs through a small green pass before negotiating a tunnel leading into Spezia with its huge derricks, warehouses, trolleys, trucks and naval barracks alternating with bathing huts. Now comes a fine view of the harbour full of cargo steamers. This, in turn, is followed by a confused combination of goods trains, lorries, dust, blitzed houses, bustle, smoke, cyclists, motor scooters, palm trees, *pavé*, trams, a canal and ruins. Spezia is a big city and street

(*Upper*) Pisa with its leaning tower in the centre.
(*Lower*) The tomb of St. Francis of Assisi.
Photo: ENIT





fighting must have been severe in it. Barbed wire still survives in certain sections. On the far side the road climbs a hill on the outskirts, passing tall, tatty Italian houses in yellow or pink wash, full of balconies and babies, clothes hanging out to dry and scrawled inscriptions of *Viva Garibaldi*. So steep is the climb that many a long-distance lorry falters on the sharp turns. It is still the Via Aurelia and one can almost hear the Roman muleteers cursing their mules and being cursed in turn by the Roman centurions. Yes, it is a really steep climb with tiers of vines almost overhead. These vines are trained on wire up the face of sheer cliffs only accessible by ladder or ropes.

The road now descends into a large green valley before wandering over the shoulder of a young Italian Alp and then going downhill again. Goodness knows how many tunnels the railway track from Spezia to Genoa has to negotiate. . . . It crosses the road three times in a few hundred yards.

Vineyards now climb halfway up the neighbouring mountains, while the Via Aurelia passes through a green gorge to the village of Padinarma surrounded by vineyards, with a lethargic-looking river to the right. It is, in fact, a lovely pass, rather like the one approaching Florence from the north. By now Tuscany has been left behind and Liguria has been entered. Vineyards and Spanish chestnut trees, Swiss-type villages with watch towers, big tankers groaning up the steep slopes, the horizon of green-clad pointed hills, the yellow of the broom, a tattered little hill town and then a huge split rock at the very top of the pass—all these are the prelude to a splendid view of the sea and a still more splendid drink at the Osteria di Barracchino.

Next comes a turn in the road and another magnificent view, this time of the Ligurian Alps marching across the sky for fifty or sixty miles. Another panoramic view of the Ligurian Alps and valleys dotted with orange-tiled cottages is spoilt by a series of roadside advertisements announcing the charms of Sestri Levante, emphasizing its serenity, beauty, hotels and other amenities. The road now suddenly loses height. Olives reappear at about 3,000 feet, followed by the first oleanders.

Sestri Levante is described by a pre-War Baedeker as a winter resort frequented by nervous patients, especially from Germany. Today it is doing its best to become another Rapallo and with considerable success. It is sited on a small headland, has already acquired a great reputation for sea bathing and, as the hotels become progressively less primitive, its tourists attractions may easily outweigh its local industries.

Trigoso, the next little town going north, evidently saw some sharp fighting. Several of its houses have been knocked down, but with its factories and chimney stacks it is no holiday resort and contrasts poorly with the green palms and purple parasols of Sestri Levante.

From now onward the Via Aurelia passes through a series of attractive holiday resorts. The first of these is Lavagna which has a sand beach and cacti and palm trees specially grown to conceal the

(*Upper*) Doing the tarantella at Capri.
(*Lower*) Peasant dance.

railway track. Lavagna has nice boulevards of oleanders and the usual piazza with a statue to some local worthy. It is very flower-conscious and tree-conscious. There are arcades of palm trees, olive trees, tamarisks and wistaria as well as big cream villas, big blocks of flats.

There is a steep exit to the north and here we passed a lorry carrying three large boats on its top and towing sixteen barrels of wine on its trailer. Now comes the first view of Portofino's promontory across the blue bay, but not for long. The road drives through a series of tunnels as it approaches Rapallo. Partly demolished houses at key points reveal that the Germans did not lightly surrender Rapallo. But olives, geraniums, palms, wistaria, oleanders and tamarisks make it very gay. No wonder it was twice used as the scene of a treaty—in 1920 between Italy and Jugoslavia when the knotty problem of Trieste was temporarily solved and in 1922 when Germany and Russia also came to a temporary agreement.

Rapallo is perhaps best known to the British as having been the home for many years of Sir Max Beerbohm—still pink and white, alert and cheerful in 1950. Of the hotels the most luxurious is the Excelsior which is, however, some little distance from its own private beach and has its dining-room on the second floor. It is much patronized by Americans who arrive in coach loads. Less expensive is the Miramare. The Savoia also looks nice. But the real social life of Rapallo centres round the golf club which has nine attractive holes and is the scene every afternoon of sessions of gin rummy and canasta which partially satisfy the gambling instincts of the Italians since the abolition of the casino. The Piccolo Bar is a curious place. It looks fast asleep all day but suddenly wakes up at 11 p.m. Bridge tables are put into position and cards played until 4 a.m. The Nettuno Café with its purple and orange parasols is also a pleasant spot.

Rapallo, by the by, is a great place for pure silk. At the back of the town is a narrow alley through which no motor car can pass but which contains a shop called Setta Veloute di Zoagli. Here one can buy lengths of sheer silk for shirts, blouses and pyjamas which are made to measure for the client within a week, at less than half the cost in England.

Visitors to Rapallo will soon find themselves—unless they are very idle—ascending Monte Allegro at the top of which is a shrine of the Madonna. This can be reached either on foot or by a distinctly terrifying teleferique which may delight children, but makes the average grown-up more than somewhat dizzy. The shrine has a façade rather like a Victorian wedding cake. The priests are by no means amiable and forbid entrance to people "improperly" dressed. In the heat of summer one would have thought that the Madonna would not object to the Faithful paying her a call in shorts, but unless the visitors' arms are covered and their legs encased in skirts or trousers they are refused admission.

Inside the shrine are a number of half-pathetic half-funny offerings very reminiscent of those at St. Ann d'Auray in Brittany (see *Deauville*

Taxi). Statues of silver hearts, silver legs and silver hands testify to these various parts of the body having been miraculously cured by the Madonna. There are also gaudy daubs showing "near misses" ascribed to the protection of the Madonna—a man being nearly tossed by a bull, another being nearly run over by a train, an engineer being nearly killed by an explosion on board ship, soldiers being nearly wounded by shells or bombs. There is also a picture of a crocodile with no apparent explanation.

The bay of Rapallo is very deep, as shown by the occasional presence of American warships close inshore. While we were there the *Coral Sea*, largest aircraft carrier and therefore largest ship in the world, lay at anchor barely a mile out, with an escort of destroyers.

Round the corner is unquestionably the most attractive seaside resort in Italy—Santa Margherita. Here, as at Rapallo, there is a large choice of hotels. We stayed at the Miramare, the first place where hot food was served on hot plates throughout our tour of Italy. (It is astonishing that the Italians have no feelings about allowing hot food to congeal on a cold plate.) But the proprietor of the Miramare had spent most of his life in Monte Carlo which was no doubt why he provided first-class food, one of the specialities being scampi done with cheese. The Miramare has its own bathing beach less than fifty yards away with deck chairs, parasols, raft diving board and cocktail bar. Nothing is more attractive than to be able to walk straight out of one's hotel in a bathing-dress into the sea, swim out to a raft, bask in the sunshine and then swim around or back through beautifully clear water. No wonder that we stayed for several days relaxing after such a plethora of picture galleries, museums, cathedrals, ancient monuments and churches.

Santa Margherita is an attractive small town linked with the harbour by a road on the very edge of the sea and a long colonnade, under the protection of which the fish market is conducted with voluble gossip. Scampi, triglia, prawns and all the other ingredients of *frito misto* lie on black slate tables. The peasant woman have their own personal scales, lifting them into the air as they measure the weight intently before telling the purchaser the price. Above the colonnade grow bougainvillaea, geraniums and red hot-pokers. A monument to six partisans and eighteen hostages shot by the Germans has a place of honour on the waterfront, near the monument to World War I. This represents a soldier whose steel helmet has fallen off. The little harbour is stuffed with sailing boats, row boats and small yachts.

The surrounding houses are coloured terra-cotta or café au lait, all with green shutters. One of them is the Trattoria dei Pescatori, a regional eating place gay with bunting and consisting of two long narrow

rooms leading into one another. Check table cloths, gay frescoes and a merry proprietor add to the enjoyment of the "fish soup". This consists of a mixed grill of red mullet, chicken fish, cuttlefish, mussels, priest fish, crayfish and capone served in an enormous bowl full of fish stock and crusts of bread—a meal in itself.

The main square beyond the harbour is dotted with palm trees and pines, and bordered with cafés. In the centre is a statue of Garibaldi, somewhat overgrown by privet which has grown up to the calf of his right leg. There is also a fountain with a statue of Christopher Columbus pointing to the sea. Among the palm trees is one real jungle palm from the Congo. Blue and rose-coloured table-clothed tables stretch right into the main street. The Café Colombo is heliotrope. The Café Vittoria has parasols of Scottish tartan. The Hotel Lido is cream coloured with battleship grey shutters. The Café Ligure delights in green tablecloths. Fiacres stand under the trees and the only discordant note is created by the burping little super charged motor scooters leased out for trial runs by the local branch of the Vespa people.

Not far away is an angry-looking turret dating back to medieval times. Farther along is the Capo di Nordest. This is a restaurant night club designed like a grotto, with a dance floor, orchestra, restaurant and cocktail bar inside, and the best bathing for miles in all directions immediately below. Few sounds are more lovely than that of the sea murmuring against the rocky foreshore. The only disappointment is the sight of girls with lovely figures, as seen in their brief bathing-dresses, looking very ordinary in evening dress.

Real walks in Italy are difficult to find, but there is one near Santa Margherita which is genuinely unique. Actually, it involves motoring a few kilometres on the road to Genoa and starting from Ruta up a flight of stone steps just short of a tunnel. This is the beginning of an old Roman road five feet wide and covered with flattish stones which must look exactly as it did two thousand years ago. After a brief steep climb there is a lovely view of the sparkling blue bay with vines, fig trees and cherry trees in the foreground. Then the character of the vegetation changes for a short distance to that of North Wales with brambles and oaks, dandelions, marguerites, lupins, clover, thistles, blackberries and convolvulus. Once again the fig trees appear, accompanied by olive groves. In some places the road is four feet below the level of the surrounding countryside. Elsewhere it has only subsided a few inches. Ligurian cork trees, parasol pines and an occasional jacaranda tree now attract the eye, followed by a superb view of both the Genoese and Ligurian bays stretching for miles in each direction. No wonder that the Germans brought up a number of their famous 88 mm. guns, the emplacements and trenches of which are still visible just above Portofino Vetti, where the only building in sight is the Grand Hotel.

By now the pedestrian is ready for a drink on the terrace. Incidentally, tea can be very good in Italy. Close at hand are a number of

morella cherry trees, the fruit of which are so scarlet that they look quite poisonous. Palm trees, lemon trees and fig trees also flourish, although at least 1,500 feet above sea level. The hotel itself was looking somewhat dilapidated during our visit but must be a popular week-end resort for Genoese families with children.

The Roman road now continues past the gutted ballroom, under Spanish chestnut trees, still climbing round the shoulder of a hill bordered by wild strawberries and bell heather, until in the distance a row of peaks emerge, looking rather like a Japanese scroll. Only now does it begin to descend; at which point there are two forks. Pedestrians should take the one marked Route 20 in order to reach Portofino in the valley below. It is also a good idea to make it an afternoon walk, not only to avoid the mid day heat but also to hear the singing of the birds. At one point on the old road is an inscription which reads: "Here the beauty of the world smiled for the last time for Guiseppe Amisani, the painter. September 8th, 1941." Whoever Guiseppe was, he certainly chose a lovely spot, for the view over the sea and the pine-clad valley is superb. A roadside chunk of volcanic rock makes an agreeable resting-place a few yards farther along and if one sits down the birds which have become silent on the approach of humans, burst into song again. All this, with the murmuring of wild bees, the slithering of baby lizards as they sun themselves once again in their favourite basking places, affords a real escape from the thoughts of the hydrogen bomb.

Shortly afterwards there is another fork in the trail and one must be careful not to return to Santa Margherita. Now comes the first cottage for miles, with vines and hollyhocks and a bowling alley, potato patches and a real little osteria. A straw hut with a red tiled roof, clucking hens, olive trees and peasants scything, two more farms, terraces and olive groves precede another wayside osteria swathed with geraniums under an olive tree with a trellised vine overhead—indicating another halt. This is La Besozza where a barefooted old peasant woman in a black skirt and a blue blouse brings the necessary jug of local wine to thirsty wayfarers.

The road now descends steeply past a villa with superb geraniums and another with a huge olive growing through the main wall. Thereafter it is only a matter of minutes into Portofino itself.

We had heard a great deal of this legendary little resort from which Richard Cœur de Lion is supposed to have sailed for the Holy Land and the patron saint of which is St. George of England, whose flag is always flown from the castelleto on the top of the steep hill overlooking the harbour. It seems that St. George was born in Cappadocia, killed the dragon in Lydda and was buried in Acre. The best collection of his bones have found their way, however, to Portofino and on St. George's Day, 23rd April, there is a powerful procession through the little town headed by a gold reliquary. The real association of St. George and England is said to be due to the purchase by the Treasury

centuries ago of the Bank of St. George of Genoa, a transaction which was also responsible for the adoption by the British of the monetary alphabetical letters £ s. d. which stand, of course, for libra, solidum and denarius.

Portofino is a picturesque Italian fishing village of the Fowey type with a small harbour chock-a-block with fishing smacks, yachts and launches, a cobbled piazza dissected by one or two smooth paths of flag stones, studded with small stalls selling bobbin lace and bordered by a series of cafés and trattorias of which the Delfino, Nazionale and Excelsior are the most fashionable. Amiable mongrels, deaf white cats (a local breed), girls with huge sun hats and red and white check dresses (the local law forbids women wearing their midriffs bare on the Piazza), bare-footed longshoremen in white caps sitting on stone benches, fat Genoese and Milanese merchants in town suits, and local fishermen as sunburnt as Red Indians, wearing blue trousers and white singlets create an agreeable atmosphere of bustle all dominated by the so-called Castello Yeats-Brown, once a formidable stronghold, halfway up the green-clad hill overlooking the harbour. The Piazza is, except for the seafront, surrounded by tall narrow houses, coloured green, rose and cream—with steep dark staircases. The hill and promontory were once part of the property of a former Earl of Carnarvon who left a clause in his will to the effect that only British subjects should be allowed to buy or build houses on what, at the time of his death, was his property —a highly English attitude. Thus it is that my nephew and niece own the castelleto and that Major Yeats-Brown, author of *Bengal Lancer*, who owned the castello has sold it to a compatriot. Some of the land still belongs to the Herbert family.

Portofino itself has been decreed a national monument, so that new houses cannot be built in its immediate neighbourhood without permission, only obtainable at a very high level. One daring character broke the law in 1949, but on the day he completed the building he was instructed to pull it down. There is one leading hotel, the Splendido. This lies in delightful grounds, swathed with geraniums, which almost clash with the bougainvillaea, and surrounded by lemon trees, palms, jasmine, hydrangeas, orange groves and wistaria. The disadvantage is that it is a considerable walk up to the hotel from the harbour and it is a still longer walk up to the nearest beach, unless one hires a boat and then bathes from it. Portofino, in spite of everything, is no bathing resort, unless the visitor chooses to jump into the harbour.

Goodness knows that it is pretty enough at night. The grounds of the Splendido are alive with fireflies and the mountainside is dotted with starry lights from the open windows of the villas. If, furthermore, the local Silver Band happens to be performing in the Piazza it is very gay. The bandsmen are dressed in sailors' clothes surmounted by peaked caps decorated with gold bands. Swarms of small excitable Italian children cluster around them. The scene itself would be ideal for the

cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*, particularly if the artist showed one of the disconsolate local musicians looking hopelessly at them. For Portofino is the home of remarkably unmusical musicians. One little man with baggy white flannels and a blue jersey plays a particularly unmusical saw which wails like a banshee singing flat, so flat that it gives one toothache. There is a woman who plays the violin almost worse. One can only guess that she is attempting to render 'Ave Maria', while a small boy in velveteens named Christophilo, dressed up like Little Lord Fauntleroy, also attempts to entertain the guests at the various cafés, but plays the violin quite abominably. Fortunately they are all quelled by the Silver Band.

The reason for all the excitement on this, our first visit to Portofino, was the famous feast of St. Peter and St. Paul. Somebody once worked out the number of public holidays in various civilized countries and proved that Italy won by a mile, or perhaps one should say by a couple of weeks. In the meantime, it is fantastic that a nation like Italy should allow these appalling itinerant musicians to inflict their flats and sharps on the public, before walking round as bold as brass asking for alms. It is sheer nuisance-value begging. But at least, as I have said before, the visitor can get rid of the filthy little notes which otherwise have no commercial value except for autostrade and lifts in public museums.

In spite of these beggars, we paid several visits to Portofino from Santa Margherita during the following week. By car it is only a matter of minutes although the road has a series of blind corners. Halfway between the two resorts is Paraggi, a scythe-shaped sand beach with a pension, hotel, cocktail bar and an alfresco restaurant which are well worth patronizing. Unfortunately the bedroom accommodation is usually booked months ahead; and no wonder, considering that the price is only 25*s*. a day all in.

Back at the Miramare in Santa Margherita we learned that Marconi undertook a number of radio experiments from the terrace of the hotel and that Mussolini had a villa a few yards away. Except for the Capo di Nordest there is no real night life, but after bathing three or four times in the same day the average visitor feels suitably drowsy by 10 p.m.

In addition to walking across the hills to Portofino or approaching it by road it is possible to take the local steampacket and go by sea. We did this more than once, continuing round the headland to San Fruttuosa.

San Fruttuosa, a tiny fishing village, owes its origin to a colony of monks who settled there in the tenth century. The early Gothic church contains a Roman sarcophagus and the tombs of some of the Doria family. Its primary charm, however, is its superb bathing. The water is so translucent that those miniature snorkel devices used for mullet-spearing are quite unnecessary. One can lie on one's face head down in the water and see everything for yards around. There is only one word of warning and that is avoid going there on Sundays when the tiny

harbour is crowded with pleasure craft and it is almost impossible to bathe owing to the complete lack of privacy. Not that the Italians mind undressing quite openly on the beach before putting on their swim suits.

The owner of the local trattoria must make a fortune. His prices are equivalent to those in Rome. At least, however, his fish and shellfish come straight out of the sea below him, so that they are wonderfully fresh. The village consists really of this—the Unica—and an ancient monastery which has been converted into a communal block of flats. The population is 105 men, women and children who derive their living entirely from the sea. Some of their bronze fishing nets hanging up to dry are at least thirty yards long. The Unica has a speciality of basil butter, a green sauce the ingredients of which are cheese, cream, garlic and young pine kernels beaten with a pestle.

On another occasion we made our way to San Fruttuosa by outboard motor boat. Its owner, Giovanni, was a typical Italian peasant, sunburnt, sixty years old, a veteran of the First World War and a real philosopher.

"War," said Giovanni as we sputtered along the coastline, "war is silly. We Italians are poorer because we lost the war; you British have won it but are so poor that you cannot use your own villas. The only reason for war, I suppose, is to kill off people. The Americans bombed none of the military points in Portofino (anyway, there were only twelve old Germans who did nothing). They knocked down our church and several houses. They killed a whole lot of women and children in broad daylight." He paused for a moment and then went on: "Another thing, many of us were asked to visit that American aircraft carrier. I refused. In my opinion it ought to be sunk. It was from ships like that that the aeroplanes bombed us during the war. Now we have to bow to the Americans who killed our children and have become our proprietors. The only people who gain anything are the Americans."

Our boat sputtered on again. "Our livelihood here is catching fish. What did the Americans do during the war? They bombed our fishing boats and we nearly starved. Yes, I know that we can earn money from tourists, particularly Americans, but nothing is now certain in Italy since Mussolini and Umberto. We were told that the King spent so much of our money and was so expensive to keep that we ought to get rid of him. Now he has gone and we find that there are thousands more bureaucrats who eat us out of hearth and home, instead of a few dozen in the King's Court. Italy ought to be a monarchy always. When the British won their Empire they did it by great and noble adventures. They introduced religion, education and schools. The Americans acquire colonies by buying them with their dollars. Not by bread alone lives man. We ought to create an ideology of our own or deny civilization and turn savage. If we have no faith, everything will be chaos," concluded this remarkable character.

Vesuvius "having a go".

On our second visit to San Fruttuosa we visited the church of the monastery—small, white and edged with a gold and silver altar, a number of religious daubs and the picture of a ship being wrecked in the First World War.

Again we lunched at the trattoria on tomatoes and anchovies, a plate of piping hot spaghetti covered with the special green sauce, langouste, strawberries dunked in fresh lemon juice and two bottles of wine. Afterwards we had coffee and brandy on the terrace under a roof of Spanish chestnut leaves, with gigantic butterflies fluttering in all directions.

Another day we climbed the steep path to the castelleto of Portofino, sold to a German princess in 1870 for 700 lire. Originally it was an outpost for the castello and was used as such in the Second World War because of its superb view of the Ligurian and Genoese bays, perhaps the best vista on the Italian Riviera. The castelleto is said to be haunted by a German soldier. If so, it must be one of the most modern ghosts in the world. It has its own olive groves and orchards and bathing beach. The latter is, however, exceedingly rocky and somewhat dangerous if there is the slightest swell. (I barked both hands and one shin without any trouble.)

Many of the pine trees in the neighbourhood were cut down during the war for firewood. It is, nevertheless, idyllic—like the food and drink. An excellent local wine costing tenpence a bottle, smoked ham (pale brown but delicious) and a local salami could not be bettered. Not far away is the ristorante Aurora with its own bathing beach. There is also the villa of Baroness Mumm, where the Kaiser stayed in 1912. Mr. Herbert's villa was temporarily unoccupied during our visit but there is nevertheless a considerable English colony, many members of which grow their own grapes and make their own wines.

Back in Santa Margherita we were walking along the seafront gazing at the palm trees and parasols, pigeons and *pavé*, cursing the motor scooters, and sniffing the indefinable smell of seaweed and mussels when I was tapped on the shoulder. "Mr. Graves, I haven't seen you for ten years," said a familiar voice. I turned round and recognized my interlocutor immediately—once a famous restaurant manager in London who went to Paris and started up a number of restaurants there and in the south of France. He told me casually that he had spent the last fours years "in college" with Vichy ministers, generals, and admirals after being accused of collaboration by supplying the German army with knives, spoons and forks. He added that he was fined 600,000,000 francs which, of course, was beyond his ability to pay. By the irony of fate, his son, a British subject, had served as a captain in one of our airborne divisions. He himself was very cynical about Italy.

"There are three types of people in Rome," he said, "priests, gangsters and hoteliers. And there are always two prices in Italy, one

(*Upper*) The harbour at Naples.
(*Lower*) Anzio beach

for the visitors and one for the Italians." We sat down at an adjoining café where he told us that after years of running night clubs his four years 'in college' was a real rest cure. Unfortunately he had been expelled from France and was unable to go back. . . .

South of Santa Margherita is Chiavari, an unpretentious little fishing village with a local furniture industry. The inhabitants are planning to add to their income by catering for tourists. They are, however, said to be highly communistic. The road from Santa Margherita to Genoa climbs through a conglomeration of villas, vineyards and olive groves before reaching the tunnel where the Roman road walk starts and then proceeds downhill with a splendid view of the Bay of Genoa ahead. Camogli, on the left, was badly damaged in the Second World War but the fine viaduct has been restored and the cactus, magnolias oleanders and wistaria are growing as luxuriantly as ever.

Another fine viaduct leads into Recco with its cypresses, palm trees and geraniums. After another tunnel comes Nervi surrounded by olive groves, orange groves and lemon groves. Here we met the first trams since Rome but the date palms and the coffee-coloured campanile of Sant' Ilario are most attractive. The road continues to be an Italian type of Corniche all the way to Genoa, on the outskirts of which we saw our first communistic slogans sprawled on the walls: "Viva Togliatti."

POLICE in white topees, huge blocks of flats built on a series of hills, a number of skyscrapers and pedestrian crossings prepared us for the tremendously impressive civic centre of Genoa with its huge marble Arc de Triomphe in a piazza surrounded by colonnades.

Genoa is a bustling city full of Franciscan monks and sailors. The harbour is always crowded with ships and the dock area has been rapidly rebuilt since it was blitzed by the Allies. The port installations are gigantic, many of them built in granite and marble, eight storeys high. From end to end Genoa is thirty kilometres long and it needs at least two or three days to digest. Its contrasts are as sharp as those in Naples—small, busy market squares, ancient barracks and fine piazzas like those of Corvetto and Tommaseo. But, whether, old or new, there is nothing shoddy about Genoa from the huge shipbuilding firms like Ansaldo's to tiny trattorias like the Angelo. Boulevards are scarce, but there are at least as many colonnades as there are in Bologna.

The house of Christopher Columbus who was born here still stands in the old quarter, dominated by the cathedral of San Lorenzo. This is a mixture of Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance. The lower part of the façade consists of alternate bands of black and white marble. Inside is the Chapel of St. John the Baptist, built in the fifteenth century. Women are not admitted to it for some reason or other. Of churches there are dozens. As for palaces, the Bianco and Rosso are picture galleries. The Palazzo Doria is also worth a visit. It dates back to Andrea Doria, Admiral of the Papal, Imperial, French and Native Fleets in the early sixteenth century, whose praises were sung by Ariosta himself.

Genoese history is turbulent owing to the feuds of the Guelphs and Ghibellines. When one side defeated the other the latter always invoked the aid of foreign mercenaries, with the result that the Kings of Naples and France, the Marquesses of Montferret and the Dukes of Milan were alternately masters of the city. The only stable element was the Bank of St. George.

In the seventeenth century Genoa was bombarded by the fleets of Louis XIV. In 1797 it was turned into a republic by Napoleon. Later it was annexed by France and after the Battle of Waterloo was attached to the Kingdom of Sardinia.

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From Genoa to Milan is less than three hours by train. (We passed within thirty kilometres of it on our way to Como but decided to visit it later.) I had been to Milan on two previous occasions—once on the

way from St. Moritz to Monte Carlo, catching the White Express from Milan to Ventimiglia, and once on the way from Paris to Venice where I stayed the night at the then brand new hotel Excelsior Gallia, next to the then brand new railway station, a real monument to Fascist town planning.

Outwardly, Milan has changed very little in spite of two particularly fierce air raids on 14th February, 1943, and 13th August of the same year. As a result of one or other of these raids the Ospedale Maggiore received a direct hit, the Poldi Pezzoli Museum was left a burnt-out shell, the Brera Picture Gallery and the Ambrosiana Library were severely damaged, the Scala Theatre was hit amidships and the Duomo received minor scars. The Basilica of Sant' Ambrogia was damaged like Santa Maria delle Grazie which had near-misses, while the Sforza Castello received a number of minor hits. Only five of the twenty-seven churches listed as national monuments remained intact. The pulse of Milan's prosperity, however, remained unimpaired and not only has the Scala Theatre been entirely restored but the famous Galleria looks as if it had never allowed a single hair to go out of place. Many other buildings, it is true, look completely undamaged but have not yet had their interiors restored—much like Gloucester Place and other streets in London where only the façade remains.

If it were not for the Vatican it is quite certain that Milan would be the titular as well as the real capital of Italy. Its public and private wealth was computed before the Second World War at £500,000,000. It pays one-sixth of the taxes of Italy and after the quiet of places like Florence, the bustle of its traffic, the evident wealth of its monumental banks built in neo-classic style, its factories, shop windows and hundreds of blocks of offices are tremendously impressive. It has been said that Milan's prosperity depends largely on the small towns outside its gates in the Plain of Lombardy; and yet when Arthur Young visited it in 1789 he could only see willows, ditches, mud and frogs.

Silk was the origin of Milan's wealth but today it has a dozen other flourishing industries. Fortunately for the sightseer most of its historic monuments and better restaurants are within five minutes of the Piazza del Duomo which, bounded on two sides by the imposing buildings, was designed by the ill-fated Giuseppe Mengoni. Dominating the square is the spectacular cathedral constructed in white marble and ornamented by over 2,000 statues and 135 pinnacles. These soar to different levels and terminate in the tall central spire 120 yards above the ground, with the gilded statue of the Madonna on top.

It is the most grandiose piece of Gothic architecture in the world.

The interior with its lofty arches and enormous stained glass windows is quite overpowering. Enormous pilasters divide the church into five naves. Of the many works of art the statue of St. Bartholomew is one of the best known. As Baedeker says: "it is anatomically remarkable

because the saint is represented flayed, with his skin on his shoulder" (in which connection many post-war travellers to Italy have found that the best guide for minor details of sight-seeing is unquestionably the *Guide Bleu* published in 1949. Baedeker was very much out of date as a result of the chaos caused by the Second World War). The interior of the cathedral is also notable for two mammoth columns of granite from our old friends the quarries of Baveno. Anyone who has the energy is certainly advised to climb to the roof and tower but, as with other tall buildings in Italy, visitors are not allowed to go alone for fear of their committing suicide.

To the right of the Duomo is the Royal Palace which was seriously damaged by both the 1943 air raids. It is still being reconstructed. To the north of the Piazza lies the Galleria. This remarkable glass arcade, though badly hit in 1943, was completely restored in 1948. Built in the 'sixties at a cost of £320,000 it is over 200 yards long, sixteen yards wide and eighty-five feet high. Its shape is that of a Latin cross with a glass cupola in the centre. This is the rendezvous of Milan, full of restaurants and cafés where everybody meets for a drink and talk. One of the restaurants in it which can be recommended is the Biffi; others worth visiting are the Bouecc, Barca d'oro, Giannino and the Tantalo. The top hotels are the Excelsior Gallia, Principe e Savoia, Cavalieri, Manin and Regina. There are twenty-eight leading restaurants and a dozen places where one can dance, including the Piccolo Bar. Other entertainments are provided by the Golf Club at Parco di Monza, the Palazzo del Box, the Palazzo dello Sport, a first-class race-course where the chief event of the year is the Grand Prix of Milan, cycle racing, motor-cycle racing, lawn tennis and motor-car racing.

But we are still in the Galleria. This leads into the Piazza della Scala with the monument of Leonardo da Vinci in the centre, and the Scala Theatre on the left. The Ambrosiana Library nearby contains 400,000 books and 30,000 manuscripts among them a copy of *Virgil* with marginal notes by Petrarch.

In the western section of Milan stands the Castello Sforza, one tower of which was destroyed by a bomb. The most famous picture in Milan is, of course, the 'Last Supper' by Leonardo da Vinci, painted on a wall of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie. The authorities had carefully sandbagged it but the force of the explosion of the nearby bomb in 1943 unquestionably did it an injury.

In the northern section of Milan is the Brera Picture Gallery, one of the finest in the world, with works by all the masters of the Venetian School.

Morbid visitors to Milan will probably make their way to the Piazzole Loreto where the bodies of Mussolini and his mistress Claretta Petacci were hung upside down in public. Milan has for years been a hotbed of communism and when a leading war-time partisan was removed from the Prefecture in 1947 there was a general strike, shops

were closed, all transport ceased and the military had some difficulty in coping with the situation. The previous year, by contrast, the Milanese decided to have a Smile Week during which all glum pedestrians were fined. Not a bad idea. Milan, in fact, is a city of great character. It is distinctly more cosmopolitan than Rome, but perhaps that is why it is so politically unstable. It was, after all, from Milan that Mussolini marched on Rome and where the *Popolo d'Italia* was published. It would not be surprising, therefore, if the first real attempt to revive Mussolini's memory was made in Milan where he was exhibited like a slaughtered pig.

Back in Genoa we soon found ourselves en route for Alassio. The exit to the north is still somewhat tattered, but palm groves, parasols and bathing beaches lend a pleasant air to the scene. The road now clings very close to the sea and on three occasions it crosses the railway line within a few hundred yards. Thereafter, it turns inland through a mountain pass for a few kilometres before returning to the coast past a handsome modern mustard-coloured factory and a hamlet with a bathing beach and the remains of a strong point. Granite quarries, vineyards, olive groves and jacaranda trees lead the way towards the elegant little resort of Verrazze, which has a sandy beach (comparatively rare along this stretch of the coast) and a good hotel, the Grand. On the outskirts is a small factory and a shipbuilding yard; but this does not interfere with a holiday any more than the Orphanage. Another attractive, but more primitive resort is Celle, swathed in oleanders, where the Albergo Ligure is a pleasant spot at which to stay.

Albisola, a few kilometres to the north, is a gay little town full of bathing huts and gaudy parasols contrasting strongly with the hideous industrial city of Savona. Savona seems always to be in full smoky blast. There are at least two dozen factory chimneys, quite apart from the shipbuilding yards. Soap (sapone in Italian) is said to have been invented at Savona and to have derived its name from this town. Considering its grubbiness, this is not surprising. It must be confessed, however, that the arcades of pink and white oleanders in the main streets are most attractive. The pretty Giardino Pubblico, a red and white striped lighthouse and a grey and white striped marble church are other attractive features.

A little farther on is the lovely bay of Spotorno with the charming rocky island of Bergeggi only a few hundred yards out. Spotorno, famous for its grottoes, has a sandy beach and visitors who want an inexpensive holiday could do much worse than stop at the Palace Hotel with its palm tree gardens and masses of pink and white oleanders. The water is particularly clear.

Next comes Noli with several ancient towers; but the beach is

pebbly. The Albergo Miramare looks good, like the Albergo de Stazione at Varigotti which the road passes after a series of huge granite cliffs and rocky tunnels.

Now comes Finale Ligure. This is more of a town than a hamlet and has one or two factories. Here the Albergo Principe is to be recommended. A whole series of quarries line the road as it drives north past Borgo Verezzi, a charming little place. This is quite undamaged, unlike Pietra Ligure, which has been smashed to pieces. Here, as in other small blitzed towns, the Italian principle seems to be to build new factories a few hundred yards away instead of attempting to renovate the old ones.

There are marigolds and flowering cactus on the way to Loano nestling in its vineyards and cherry orchards and dark red plum trees. For the next few kilometres the countryside is one gigantic orchard and vegetable garden. Artichokes, beans, pimentoes, cabbages, potatoes, cherries and plum trees grow luxuriantly and their produce is sent all over Italy. No doubt the series of small rivulets are responsible for the richness of the soil. Vines are used as hedges and are clearly regarded as less important than the fruit or vegetables. There is no particular hotel at Borghetto Santo Spirito, more's the pity. Nor does Ceriale, still in the heart of the vegetable garden country, possess a real albergo.

There are a number of glass houses on the way to Albenga which has an old Roman bridge, picturesque narrow streets and ancient town walls. This is a really quaint place situated on the River Centa with the island of Gallinaria out to sea. Unfortunately there is no good bathing beach. Now comes a Zone of Silence, officially forbidding motorists to hoot their horns, but the order is seldom obeyed. The general effect is rose pink, *café au lait* and terra-cotta, for we have now come to Alassio which has an older reputation as a winter resort for the British than almost anywhere in Italy. I do not, however, recommend the Albergo di Europa. Though the food is excellent—spaghetti, roast stuffed veal, a local cheese, fruit and peaches is a typical meal—the Director actually charged us 20 per cent for service, an extra 400 lire for hors-d'œuvres and when we complained, retorted that he had recently been in London and had been charged 15*s.* for luncheon; so why should we complain? There was gorgeous sunshine while we were there but previously it had rained for nearly six weeks. Alassio, in fact, is more a place in which to take a villa than to stay at a hotel. It owes its popularity with the English to the late Mr. Hanbury, who brought a great deal of property in the neighbourhood and whose memory is kept fresh by Hanbury Hall near the railway station.

The English Club had its name changed to the Internazionale during the Second World War but still functions. The English Library and Tea-rooms have reverted to their former use after having been the German Military Headquarters in 1942. Of the hotels the newest is the Vittoria, but the Palace Hotel is almost on the beach; there is also

the Mediterraneo. The smartest café is the Sylvani, where Antonio, the head waiter, has been looking after his clients for nearly half a century. Among the local characters is the newsagent who talks sheer Damon Runyon, a very fat woman who goes round the cafés selling American cigarettes and the ironmonger who sells door knockers at 5*s.* apiece. There is also Giuseppe the taxi driver who will drive anywhere at any time of the night.

The headland of Santa Croce is the scene of many a gay 'picnic'. The best dancing place is the Colombo; the chief meeting place of the Fascists, now emerging from their obscurity, is the Café Roma. The Saturday morning market takes place in the Via Dante near the cathedral, the old part of the town being known colloquially as 'The Drain'.

Alassio is, in fact, a thirteenth-century fishing village, which has become a fashionable holiday resort quite by accident. At least, however, the sand is very smooth and soft and is sifted every morning during the season for the visitors. At night the bay is dotted with fishing boats carrying lights to dazzle the fish, as at Capri. Up on the hill is the Church of the Madonna della Guardia. As her name suggests she is the guardian of Alassio, though a more practical form of protection in medieval times was provided by the Saracen-type watch towers to warn the villagers against approaching pirates.

There is only one warning—Alassio can be very noisy at night. In addition to the open-air night clubs, the bells of the churches and convents, particularly the convents, seem to toll every two or three hours.

A mile or two farther away is Langulegia, a narrow little place which had the honour of being bombarded by the British fleet in 1812. Andora comes next (but its beach is pebbly) followed by Diana Marino, a pretty place with a peculiar monument showing a staff on top of a blue globe of the world. The road now goes inland again through olive groves for a couple of kilometres before approaching Imperia, which had its name changed from Oneglia by Mussolini. It has a big mole, a sizeable harbour, and a narrow main street which widens into a broad thoroughfare with colonnades. Much of it was blitzed during the war though the north end is undamaged.

San Lorenzo, a few kilometres farther on, is chiefly notable for a church literally on an island site, but there is no visible hotel. At Armataggia the road broadens and becomes straighter. Up above it are the ruins of a village completely destroyed by an earthquake in 1887. The road itself is lined with geraniums and cactus and an occasional factory before it rounds a corner into San Remo.

This was the place to which before the war Monte Carlo croupiers used to flock in their off-hours to test their specialized knowledge of roulette; but history does not record any Monegasque Casino employee ever making a fortune out of roulette. On the contrary.

The Casino at San Remo has the usual big dance floor and stage, green carpets and silver pillars, a nice restaurant with orange blinds,

Brooding over The Eternal City.

sixteen roulette tables, ten *chemin de fer* tables and one *trente et quarante*. The gaming rooms are on the first floor. The decorations are yellow and white, though it is dubious whether any gambler has bothered to notice them.

Of the hotels Morandi's can be confidently recommended. The biggest is the Savoia followed by the Royale and Excelsior. Morandi's is quite small but gay with flowers, and the service is exceptional.

San Remo, in addition to its bathing facilities, has a golf course which was well kept before the war. It is also the scene of motor-car races which still attract a number of French enthusiasts across the border. The chief shopping street is the Via Matteotti, but the finest thoroughfare is the Corso dell'Imperatrice with a magnificent avenue of palm trees. In addition to the establishments already mentioned, San Remo has at least another fifty hotels and pensions of varying categories. For gamblers who prefer smaller hotel bills than those in the South of France, San Remo is ideal, but does not depend entirely on tourists for a livelihood. It is the centre of the flower trade of the Italian Riviera, specializing in hyacinths, carnations and violets.

Four miles farther towards France comes Ospidaletti, positively studded with palms and eucalyptus trees. Here the Regina Hotel can be recommended. From this spot to Bordighera the roadside is deliberately trimmed with geraniums and cactus and oleanders.

Bordighera itself specializes in bougainvillaea—walls of it. The promenade, is superb, with a splendid view along the sea. Figs and olives, oranges and lemons and every kind of flowering plant are also seen to their best advantage. In passing we rather liked the look of the Hotel Jolanda, though the Reale is more expensive. Palms grow in terraces like vines and the only sign of war is the relics of a big blitzed hotel. Bordighera claims to be a Zone of Silence, but not much attention is paid to the request.

For the next few kilometres there are evident signs of war damage. Houses are splashed with bomb fragments all the way to Ventimiglia, dusty and shabby and evidently the scene of severe street fighting during the Second World War. Here comes the first roadsigns advertising French hotels at Juan les Pins. The road climbs a hill out of the town before descending again with the sea on the left and rambler roses on the right to the village of Latte, where a sharp little skirmish must have been fought. The road is still flower-conscious with geraniums and cactus all the way to Mortola.

An expensive restaurant here attracts the attention of any motorist who has a few lire left and knows that they are of little use to him in France. Two miles farther comes the first view of Mentone and France, followed by a smart new Customs House with a huge quarry opposite. Normally one can expect a delay of over an hour between the Italian and French excise officers but once again the presence of a member of the Diplomatic Corps in our party enabled us to pass through without delay.

egatta at Port Fino.

CHAPTER XV

FRANCE again—with Mentone looking much more gay and prosperous than two years ago; the Pin d'Or doing splendid business and Madame Ricou very grateful for the references to her personally tailored perfumes which I described in *Riviera Revisited.*

The big hotel at Cap Martin had been entirely renovated though half of it had been turned into flats. In the Casino at Monte Carlo there was a new restaurant at the back of the Salles Privées overlooking the sea and giving the impression to diners that they were on the *Queen Elizabeth* or the *Queen Mary.* (The gold and black mottled glass tiles were most effective.) In another part of the Casino, croupiers were being taught how to conduct the craps game and in order to release one of them from the mechanical job of rolling the dice I was invited to take his place. Other novelties since my last visit were the open-air cinema and the night club designed to resemble an outdoor scene in Mexico.

Beaulieu had been cleaned up since 1947. The Reserve looked spick and span, like Villefranche. The harbour at Nice had also been tidied up and, though the far end of the Promenade des Anglais looked devastated, most of the 'devastation' was caused by work on the extension of the double carriageway.

The prices, however, were fierce compared with Italy. A double bedroom and bathroom at the Ruhl was 25,000 francs plus the various taxes and service charges.

I had been to Nice many times previously but never realized before that underneath the Promenade des Anglais there is a whole series of bars, restaurants and changing-rooms. The Ruhl has its own section of the beach which it farms out. Here I had more than one pleasant bathe.

Da Bouta was as gay as ever. Too much garlic was put on my fried fresh anchovies, the local speciality, but the *foie gras* and sole made up for this. As usual, there was a cabaret, beginning with the accordion player who sang my favourite song about the man who always cried because he was born when his mother was peeling onions. There were a number of other highly individual acts which included two girls who sang Provençale songs. One English party talked louder and louder as the cabaret proceeded. I asked the dark, good-looking proprietor whether he would charge them extra for the noise they made. He nodded "*Mais oui, certainement.*" When our own bill came he seized a sheet of paper and drew freehand the various dishes we had had—the pot of *foie gras*, the sole and so on including two bottles of champagne—and charged us very reasonably indeed.

The last time I had driven from Nice to Grenoble was less than a week before the outbreak of the Second World War. Peasants were being called to the colours with their horses, grinning black Senegalese troops cluttered the road. It was evident that Armageddon was about to begin. This time there was not a cloud in the sky as we drove into the valley of the Vesuvie, crossed a bridge and took a secondary road to Gattières. Peasants were spraying the vines with copper sulphate and there was a lovely view of the valley which we would have missed if we had gone on the main road. We also avoided the traffic. The air was as clear as crystal and scented with the lovely smell of burning wood. The hillsides were covered with terraced vineyards. Jacarandas, wistarias and rambling roses reminded us of Italy.

Passing Tourrettes, a red-tiled little town perched on a foothill of the Alpes Maritimes, we came to the Gorge de Loup, looking as grisly as ever. At Barsurloup the big pink factory had been enlarged since our last visit. Near it the roadside Lorraine crosses to the men of the Resistance looked well-kept. At Grasse we once again joined the Route Napoleon which climbs over a tall hill and drives through rocky scenery with pink wild flowers bordering the very wide, well-cambered surface. There were fields of lavender at St. Vallier and an immense roadside cross where a section of the low wall had disappeared, no doubt as a result of a road accident.

The scenery is truly mountainous. The road winds up, over and down a series of young Alps. Then comes a view of really rocky hillsides almost worthy of Co. Clare, and it looks as though the road will come to a dead end or be compelled to go through a tunnel. But not a bit of it. It climbs around, with no trouble at all, to Escragnolles and the Auberge Napoleon, a very pleasant place at which to lunch under the green creepers and orange parasols. It is 3,000 feet up and the local specialities are mountain trout and mountain hare. The view is superb —a conglomeration of rocky young mountains with glacier formations in the foreground, scrubby little pines and saw-toothed crags in the distance.

As the road ascends still higher, the uplands look as if they have been translated bodily from Switzerland and are in complete character with the yellow broom against the forest of pines. Cornfields and potato patches, a lavender factory, signs inviting one to buy mountain honey and a forest of larches lead the way to a partly cultivated plateau with a solitary farmhouse and then a view of yet another valley with the Alps marching to the horizon and a series of blighted fir trees near the roadside.

Two surprisingly fierce turns occur before the Route Napoleon enters a winding wooded valley with half a dozen farmhouses, which it leaves unexpectedly. After another glimpse of the previous valley the road sidles away to a yet finer panorama of Alps on the sky line and tall larches in the foreground. Now comes the mountain village of La

Garde and another superb view before the road descends to Castellane where the Bon Acceuil, can be heartily recommended. Here one eats out of doors under plane trees and terra cotta parasols. Gaston Tardieu the founder of the Bon Acceuil was shot by the Germans in 1944, as too, was Marcel Vasire, another patriot, whose name is inscribed on an obelisk in the leafy square.

The Bon Acceuil has three menus costing respectively 350, 400 and 500 francs. The 500 francs menu consists of hors-d'œuvre with charcuterie and crudities, a truffle omelette, mountain lamb and regional cheese. Including two bottles of local Rosé, the bill for four of us was well under £3. There we sat enjoying a moment of complete serenity, well fed, well wined, with a splendid view of the mountains and the hot sunshine pouring down from a cloudless blue sky. What the bill was for the American at the table next to us I do not know, but I have a vague suspicion that it is a mistake to wear those gaudy floral ties. They have a habit of increasing the 'note' quite considerably. What surprised us was that the Bon Acceuil was not mentioned in the *Guide Michelin.*

On the far side of Castellane there is a beautiful sight. This is the little chapel of Notre Dame du Roc which looks like a butterfly alighted on a peak. The chapel is on the top of a sheer crag hundreds of feet high and provides a spectacular view of the blue lake below. Indeed we stopped our car for some minutes to appreciate what was for me, at any rate, the most superb vista I have ever seen in my life—with Alps and massifs in all directions.

Starting on again we encountered another valley, a real gorge, more vistas, naked rocks and the first *canivau* since 1939. Came another valley lined with apple trees and plum trees, a straight run for three or four miles which was quite exciting after all the twists and turns in the road since the previous day, a handful of bright blue road signs, another *canivau*, yet another valley with cornfields and fruit and woods and the hamlet of Barreme where Napoleon stayed on the night of 3rd-4th March, 1815. A danger sign indicating a single traffic line bridge, another *canivau* followed by a cross of Lorraine and a semi-dry torrent led the way to Norante. Here again it seemed impossible that the road could escape from the clutch of the surrounding mountains without going through a tunnel; but sure enough a hidden gorge provided the exit to Chabrières.

For the next few kilometres there was not a farmhouse, not even a cottage, just an occasional barn; that was all. Traffic was also sparse. True, we passed a Dutch motor car toiling up the long climb out of the valley and then a lorry with logs and a red flag on its tail which was swinging right across the road. But nothing more. Another panorama of mountains of yellow sandstone concealed us from Digne where Napoleon lunched on 4th March, 1815. He must have been moving fast.

The last time we had been at the Hermitage Napoleon the hotel

had been full of agitated English and almost equally agitated French visitors, most of them Army officers rushing back to their units and scared that they might be overdue. The hotel staff tried ponderously to say that war was impossible, but a party of French Chasseurs Alpins officers with notebooks under their arms were doing a tactical exercise without troops, and the reservists were saying good-bye to their wives and sweethearts. This time Digne was peaceful enough and we had several minutes at a level crossing for a Casey-type train to go by. Nor was there any aftermath of war in the fruitful valley of the Durance with its vineyards, cornfields and orchards.

The Alps were shrinking as we drove fast along the bed of the flat valley to the bridge over the jade green river itself. A pink-tiled town on a hillside was identified as Chateau Acnoux. In the meantime we passed the charmingly named village of Les Bons Enfants. It is an undistinguished hamlet with no children, the usual bistro and nothing to explain the origin of its name. Next came Sisteron and its arcade of pollarded plane trees and beaded curtains over the entrance to the little shops. Nobody seemed to be doing any work either here or at Le Pöet a few kilometres short of that odd black rock formation near the Beynon Torrent. This volcanic rock is most unexpected, in spite of massifs lumbering into the sky in all directions. By the by, two or three kilometres back there is a *caniveau* which is unmarked and needs watching.

More axle-breaking switchbacks can be expected on the way to La Saulce. Since our last visit a small statue to the Resistance has been erected by the roadside. There are also roadside advertisements announcing '*Ici bon table*' which suggest that there is some local restaurant not mentioned in the *Guide Michelin*; but this is not the case. Haycarts and a flock of 500 sheep and four goats with bells round their necks held us up on our way into Gap. Here we lunched at the Restaurant des Colonies, easily recognizable by its blue and white awnings opposite the Cupid fountain and the Restaurant de la Paix. For 500 francs we had d'œuvres, river trout, roast chicken, cheese and fruit.

Gap is a long, narrow, hot town with a sharp climb up to the Col Bayard (3,738 feet) with the hamlet of Chauvet on top and a wooden palisade to act as a wind-breaker in place of cypresses. From here there is a straight run down to another valley with further Alps on the horizon to Brutinel and La Fare with its ill-named Modern hotel. A previous rivulet flowing alongside the road now becomes a decent-sized trout stream.

At the hamlet of La Guingette, swathed in red rambler roses, we saw snow for the first time on Mount La Grave. Le Motty, a small logging village, is dotted with lakes the colour of blue enamel. At Corps children tried to sell us lavender. Corps has a large church and an uncompromising café. Further vistas of saw-toothed Alps gilded by the setting sun, flocks of goats, La Mure and the Hotel des Alps, French-type pre-fabs, Pierre Chatel and a whole succession of lakes

escorted us to Petchet with its thatched cottages. Here we met a convoy of fifteen autobuses full of children brought on a summer outing all the way from Marseilles. Down in the valley, across the river Romanche, lies Vizille with its ironwork, statues, chateaux and vineyards. One of the chateaux is used as the *Ecole Supérieure*. Here a twelve-year-old boy observed us and proceeded to play 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary' on his accordion and did it very well, too. Vizille has always been one of the headquarters of the Chasseurs Alpins, as the war memorials show. From here to Grenoble is only a short drive.

This beautiful hill city was the first place on the whole of our tour where the first hotel of our choice had no accommodation available. This was lucky because it caused us to go to Les Trois Dauphins, a fine hotel with a splendid brasserie. Actually, we dined at the Bec Fin in the Place Victor Hugo, off mountain trout, *chateaubriant* with *sauce béarnaise*, regional cheese and fresh peaches. The brasserie is like a real German rathskeller, with an excellent cabaret. Everyone listened religiously to the accordion players and other entertainers. Next day we made a tour of the city and noticed that it is a centre for autobus excursions all the way to Geneva, Turin and Chamonix.

Grenoble is an ancient city, its original name having been Gratianopolis, but it has fine blocks of modern flats, broad bicycle tracks which are actually used by the cyclists on either side of the road, a strong literary association with Victor Hugo, Molière and other famous French writers, and makes an ideal centre for anybody who likes a mountain holiday. The Place Grenette is the local Piccadilly Circus. Elsewhere there is a fine museum, a cathedral and large numbers of fifteenth-century houses, though these do not possess much character. The local specialities are cherry brandy and cherry jam. There is also a university, which we discovered quickly enough when the undergraduates rushed round the town singing and cheering after having passed their baccalaureate examinations. The association with the Chasseurs Alpins was also made evident by the city band, which plays a series of brisk marches during the evening.

The road to Lyons, still the Route Napoleon, is broad and straight, driving through a rich valley full of vineyards, cherry trees and fields of maize with the mountain tops towering hazily on each side. After four miles it forks left and the valley grows wider and wider, ultimately becoming a plain covered with wheat and barley, occasionally reddened by poppies. At La Frette the road turns right near the Hotel de la Poste, climbs over the shoulder of a wooded green foothill and descends into a valley at Champiere where we saw a dead white horse in a field. Another wooded valley (rather like the Ardennes), La Combe, the crowded little market town of Moyrans, La Grieve with its fields of golden barley and potato patches, La Verpillière with its new Salle des Fêtes, follow in quick succession. It is a fast road but the scenery is attractive with low hills in the distance capped by intermittent pink-

tiled hamlets. At Mi-Plaine we saw our first oats for a 1,000 miles. This was followed by the two dingy hangars and clean white control tower of Lyons aerodrome and the by-pass into the city itself.

Lyons is very different from what it was in 1947. All the bridges over the Rhone and the Saonne except three, have been repaired; so we drove straight down the Cours de Verdun through the leafy Place Bellecour and along the river embankment with, on the far side, some fine eighteenth-century mansions which the Italians would certainly call palazzos, to the Mère Brazier.

Lyons has been famous for half a century for its three Mères—Mère Brazier, Mère Guy and Mère Fillioux. Only Mère Brazier is still alive; Mère Guy died fifteen years ago and Mère Fillioux died twenty years ago. We ate superbly. Mère Brazier has magnificent disregard for quantity. If you ask for mayonnaise it comes in bowls, butter arrives in huge hunks, wild strawberries appear by the bushel. The waitresses are dressed in simple black Botticelli costumes with white peter pan collars. The walls are plain white. The overheads must be extremely small.

After luncheon we went for a tour of the city, visiting the Opera house opposite the Hôtel de Ville, recalling the fact that Herriot was Mayor of Lyons for fifty years, and inspecting the tablet to General Brosset who commanded the First Free French Division and made his headquarters here. The main square is of the same period as Versailles. It has a terrific quadriga fountain and a museum notable for its Roman remains. Opposite is the Café Beaux Arts where we listened to four German Jews indulging in the gentle art of spivving. Far more interesting, however, was an angry blind young beggar in the Rue Hôtel de Ville. There he sat on the pavement with a tin full of francs which he banged in various rhythms to attract the attention of passers-by. Five times in two minutes he was given alms, but not once did he say *Merci* or show any sign of gratitude. He merely banged louder.

The police of Lyons are odd characters. At the request of the driver of a stationary tram we drove past it and were at once stopped by a gendarme who threatened to fine us. By looking meek, however, we managed to avoid trouble.

Nowadays it is quite easy to get out of Lyons provided that you know the difference between the Saonne and the Rhone. The cyclists ride on the smooth pavements to avoid the *pavé*, which is a further advantage. Selecting Route No. 6 we drove past Les Chères over a flattish plain covered with Napoleonic plane trees to give shade. At Villefranche a 'Meeting d'Aviation' was being held. It was with the utmost interest that we here inspected the Hôtel de la Sirène where we lunched before our accident two years previously. It was with still greater interest that we studied the little bridge where we were so nearly killed (see *Riviera Revisited*). In a way it was quite irritating to see no lingering sign of our crash, not even a dent in the stone ramp.

On we drove again past Belleville and the red and white awnings of the Hostellerie des Compagnons de Jehu and into the vineyards of Macon where we booked rooms at the Lamartine as a change from the Europe et Angleterre. That night we dined at the Auberge Bressard off iced melon with port sauce, creamed veal and raspberries, with still more cream.

This must have been at least my tenth visit to Macon but it was the first time that I had really walked round the town inspecting the Maison de Bois with its grotesque caricatures and fantastic animals, the Lycee and the Hôtel de Ville. Unfortunately the cellars of Piat et Cie, were closed, otherwise we would have been able to take away as a present a bottle of Vin des Moines, 1923. Unfortunately, too, the huge new swimming-pool was not complete, although numbers of the local inhabitants were bathing in the river. Still more unfortunately Macon was infested with mosquitoes and I was bitten several times. As for the noise (being on N. 6) sleep is almost impossible if you stay in any hotel which is not off the beaten track. In our case sleep was rendered all the more impossible by a fanfare of trumpets at 6.30 a.m. summoning everybody who was planning to go to the Fête des Roses to be held in a village fifteen miles south. "Yes, it was a trifle matutinal", apologized our proprietress when we complained at breakfast. By the by, we had found that no pillows had been provided on our arrival the previous evening and it took me all of five minutes to remember that the word in French is *oreiller*—an easy word to forget.

The normal road from Macon to Paris is by N. 6. But we decided to avoid it as far as possible and thus took the very picturesque N. 79 through the hills of the Côte d'or where all the best burgundies are grown. Passing La Croix Blanche we drove into Cluny which doubtless gave its name to the Museum in Paris, but is itself undistinguished except for the narrowness of the roads, the cobbles of its *pavé* and its curious war memorial. At Cluny we transferred to N. 80, probably an old Roman road to judge by the way it climbed to the tops of hills, past woods and copses. At Sailly an unexpected horse belonging to some gipsies tried to force us off the road, which is very steeply cambered. The scenery is lovely and deserted, with foxgloves and woods and no traffic nor houses until it reaches Les Perrons. Some of the fields have stone walls like North Wales. At Les Loges we forked right into Blanzy where we were unintentionally greeted by a French band led by a priest with the Croix de Guerre and the Legion d'Honneur.

The road now becomes a series of switchbacks towards Autun with Mont Cenis on the hillside and vineyards giving place to white cattle, cornfields and woods. At Marmagne we stopped at a convenient petrol station before continuing to Mesvres—one of the few French towns with three consecutive consonants in its name. N. 80 here becomes a leafy lane with occasional turkeys strolling across the road. At Autun itself are two huge slag heaps which look like pyramids. There

is also an ancient nunnery with a serrated spire, an avenue of chestnut trees and some medieval battlements. This is occupied by the Sisters of the Visitation and there is no admittance to the public. But the cathedral with its harlequinade stained glass windows, decorated with blue and orange lozenges is well worth a visit. On the east door is a representation of the Last Judgment showing the devil and numbers of weeping sinners. Autun is indeed a nice old town with an opera house, a leafy square, boulevards of maple trees and a huge Roman arch.

The slag heaps on the far side soon disappear in the rolling countryside which looks pretty enough with the green of the larches, the pale yellow of the cornfields, the golden brown of the barley and the pink-tiled cottages under the blue sky. Altogether N. 80 is a very charming road well worth following in place of N. 6 to which, however, there is no alternative at Saulieu. Here, the Hotel de la Poste and the Côte d'or looked completely unchanged except that the proprietors looked plumper than ever—always a good test of the food. The road was splendidly empty compared with that last hectic week before the outbreak of war when it was crowded with every kind of vehicle—commandeered lorries, motor bicycle combinations, Citroens, Simcars and Renaults.

I certainly would have liked to have known in 1939 that ten years later I should be driving along there again with Peggy.

This time, being in no hurry, we turned left at Avallon for the Moulin des Ruats under a geranium-clad bridge down a lovely lane to this delightful rustic auberge by the side of a trout stream. There we sat under the beech trees and lunched off river trout and *coq au bourgogne*. It was all very delightful but also very expensive. A bottle of local wine cost £3 and the river trout tasted as though they had come out of a tank. On reflection it was impossible for the auberge to produce sixty or seventy trout twice a day for its clientele out of so small a stream. However, the Livre d'Or contained a number of tributes, one by Sir Alexander Korda (accompanied by Brendan Bracken) who wrote in flowery fashion: "The Moulin is heaven and Madame Berthier is the custodian of it." According to Madame Berthier, she fed numbers of Maquis during the war and was in constant danger from the Gestapo.

The route from Avallon to Paris was just as familiar—past Semizelles, Nailly, over the Cure into Vermonton, where the old ladies were carrying black umbrellas as if they were sunshades, and Cravant where a circus was in full swing, over the pretty blue Yonne with the roadside apple trees and pear trees in fruit, into Auxerre where a fair was taking place and crowds were watching a gliding contest, over that dangerous bridge into Joigny, over the Yonne again with that charming little restaurant Mon Ami on the left, through the eighteenth-century archways of Villeneuve and so to Sens where we stayed the night and visited the cathedral where the wax candles, two feet long, cost sixty francs to light.

The Hôtel de Paris with its cream and green shutters and red and white parasols and plaques of every motoring association remained pleasantly unchanged. To most visitors, Sens is merely a long main street—not the cathedral or the parade ground or the chestnut trees or the struggling grocers or the tatty little cinema or the old smithy or the Café de Théâtre with its young couples dancing to the piano, drum and accordion. Sens is, however, a typical small town, the inhabitants of which pay little attention to the occupants of the big cars coming and going day and night. Sitting next to us at a café were a couple of peasants talking about war. One said that they had all been promised that the First World War would be the last and that the Government had asked them to give up their gold. They had done so, whereupon the franc had been devalued again and again. Another peasant told a sad story of how his mother-in-law left him the equivalent of £600 but owing to some technicality in the will it was all confiscated. The impression one got was that the little man in France regarded Pacifism as common sense. . . .

It was a hot, sunny morning as we covered the last hundred kilometres to Paris past Bray and Champigny and Grand Fossard and Moret with its ancient town gates, and the Forest of Fontainebleau and the obelisk where N. 6 joins N. 7, with the forest dappled in the sunlight and not even a cottage for miles, and Chailly-en-Bière (though we saw no beer at all) and Ponthièry with its chestnut tree arcade and Essonnes, that down-and-up little town. But the grey industrial haze of Paris was already visible thirty kilometres away. Along the road were a number of maroon and yellow prefabs, followed by the aerodrome of Orly with its big shiny aircraft and the sign of the Kremlin at Bicêtre; and so at last we came to the Louvre and its geraniums and the golden statue of Joan of Arc and the Ritz Hotel.

Next day we were back in London.

Good-bye now.

THE END

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