A PENGUIN BOOK

George Mikes

Italy for Beginners

Drawings by David Langdon

All you need know to be a tourist (nicer) or a native (cheaper) . . . Mikes strikes top form: stimulating, informative and dazzlingly funny.

PENGUIN BOOKS
2869
ITALY FOR BEGINNERS

George Mikes was born in 1912 in Siklos, Hungary. He studied law and received his doctorate at Budapest University. At the same time he became a journalist and was sent to London as a correspondent to cover the Munich crisis. He came for a fortnight and has stayed ever since. During the war he was engaged in broadcasting to Hungary and at the time of the Revolution he went back to cover that event for B.B.C. television.

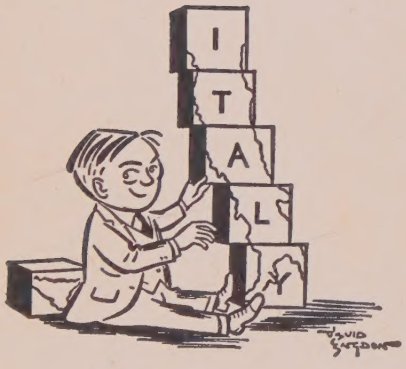
Mr Mikes now works as a critic, broadcaster and writer. His books include: *The Hungarian Revolution, Über Alles, Shakespeare and Myself,* and (in collaboration with Nicolas Bentley) *How To Be An Alien, How To Be Inimitable, How To Scrape Skies,* and *How To Tango.* These last four appeared in Penguins simultaneously.

Mr Mikes is married with two children and enjoys getting away from the countryside.

GEORGE MIKES

Italy for Beginners

Drawings by David Langdon



PENGUIN BOOKS

Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia

First published by Andre Deutsch 1956
Published in Penguin Books 1968

Made and printed in Great Britain
by Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd
Aylesbury, Bucks
Set in Monotype Baskerville

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

TOURISTS AND NATIVES

RICH AND POOR

NORTH AND SOUTH

INTRODUCTION

1 THE QUESTION

ONE morning I asked my wife:

'D'you feel the lure of the Mediterranean?'

'Do I feel what?'

I repeated my question.

She put down her brush and dustpan and looked at me. She was busy doing nothing so skilfully that it looked like feverish activity.

'No, I don't,' she replied and went on doing nothing with breathtaking zeal and accuracy.

This was unexpected. I decided to press the matter.

'Well,' I enquired, 'do you feel the lure of any other place? Any place at all?'

'Oh yes,' she said. 'I feel the lure of Kilburn High Road.'

Kilburn High Road is a shopping district not very far from us. I am told that no other lettuce or potato can match the lettuce and potatoes in price, quality or appearance, of Kilburn High Road. My wife travels to Kilburn High Road to do her shopping once a week, according to her, twice a day, according to me. She was about to go there that morning because we needed some table-salt and half a pound of onions.

My wife's answer struck me as a curious social phenomenon. All the people I had talked to recently were very conscious of the lure of the Mediterranean while none, as far as I was aware, felt the lure of Kilburn. It probably depends, I mused, on the way you look at it. I should hate to seem unpatriotic but to my mind,

in sheer natural beauty Kilburn – even with the picturesque Brondesbury thrown in – can hardly rival Lake Garda or the Bay of Naples. On the other hand, I know something about shopping in Italy. In this respect the whole of, say, Calabria, falls short of the low prices of Kilburn shopkeepers, the honesty of Kilburn barrow-boys and the probity of Kilburn costermongers. This was a fair and balanced view. The emphasis, however, on this occasion was on *lure* – on the lure of the Mediterranean which – disregarding the relative advantages of Kilburn – seemed to have infected everyone in our age with the single exception of my wife.

In ancient times it was the Roman tourist who frequented all parts of civilized Europe – and even some of its uncivilized regions, such as Britain. In later centuries, however, it was Italy's turn to become a great attraction for tourists, artists and scholars. But today's Italo-mania has very little to do with Italy's normal and well-deserved popularity with tourists. Italo-mania is a contagious disease. Britain used to be the centre of infection but the disease spread with alarming rapidity to the United States, Scandinavia and Germany. By now the case of Germany has become particularly serious. In July 1955 there were 158 persons left in the Federal Republic; the rest of the West German population were touring Italy.

Acute Italo-mania is easy to diagnose; the symptoms cry out. Utter the word 'Italy' and the patient will close his eyes and sigh; or roll his eye-balls and moan. If an advanced case, he will embark on a monologue in which you will be able to discern such phrases and fragments as '... the lure of the Mediterranean', '... the magic of the Southern sun', '... definitely

taking the place of France', '... Latin warmth', '... the song of the Sirens'.

Every disease – physical, mental or social – reflects a need. Acute and wide-spread Italo-mania, with or without spots, simply proves that there is something in the organism, blood and mental make-up of the modern man which needs a large dose of Italy.

What was that something?

Did a violent attack of Italo-mania make one happier or less happy? Was it good for one to feel the lure of the Mediterranean? Or was the lure of Kilburn preferable?

I did not know. So we – my wife and I – set out on the quest: 'What is Italo-mania and how to catch it?'

In any case, I thought I knew how to cure it. Go to Italy.

2 THE IDENTITY OF YORKSHIRE PUDDING

Before I went to Italy, a friend of mine – an editor of a well-known series of travel guides – sent me one of his products. I was taken aback when the gift arrived. I had myself contributed a number of articles to his other guide-books and was familiar with the series. Perhaps because of this I had always regarded guide-books as a source of income and it never occurred to me that some people might regard them as guide-books.

Eventually, it turned out to be a thrilling experience to travel with a guide-book. It is a superb feeling to arrive in a strange town provided with the local knowledge and the self-assurance of a native. Following the instructions of the guide-book, you may easily spot a street in any town, spot a restaurant (usually an

internationally known one) in any street, enter the restaurant, ask for Papa Roberto, shake hands with him as if he were an old friend and order his famous *tagliatelle alla Bolognese.*

The solid reliability of the guides is evident from the fact that should you by chance enter the wrong restaurant, Papa Roberto will be there all the same, beaming at you and he will serve you with his famous *tagliatelle alla Bolognese* even if he has never heard of it before. It is always possible, of course, that Papa Roberto is not Papa Roberto at all. What difference does it make? And – as T. S. Eliot so pertinently asks in 'The Confidential Clerk' – who is Papa Roberto, after all? And what makes *tagliatelle alla Bolognese* so sure that it is not, in the final analysis, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding? The task of a guide-book is to guide; it does not really matter where to.

*

I should like to mention that I went to Italy also to look for a street. I had seen that street at the age of seventeen and remember it more clearly than the street I now live in. It was a narrow, winding street, with grey, ramshackle houses and colourful windows and doors. Each house had a balcony and countless women were sitting on these balconies, all quarrelling with one another. Lines were fixed up between the houses, across the streets and clothes were drying on the lines. There was a beautiful fountain in the background and on the left a fire-station. There were more pants, shirts and ladies' underwear drying on the walls of the fire-station than on ordinary private houses. I remembered that street as a place of exquisite and unforgettable beauty. But in spite of its unforgettable quality, I had forgotten where I had seen it. Was it

Rome? Or Aquileia? Florence? Palermo? Siena? Stresa? Sorrento? I could not remember. Now I sought it in villages and towns, in the mountains and on the seaside but could not find it.

For twenty-five years I had looked forward to the day when I should return to Italy and find that street again. I thought that Italy was full of such streets. I expected to find so many of them that I should not be able to spot the real one among them. I was wrong. I did not find my street and I do not think I ever shall. When I saw something similar, it was not a place of unforgettable beauty; it was a place of forgettable ugliness and squalor.

Have these streets changed such a great deal? Well, it is possible, after all. But if I have changed . . . where shall I find a travel guide to myself?

I TOURISTS AND NATIVES

HOTELS

Do you want to be a tourist or a native in Italy? It is easier to be a tourist; cheaper to be a native.

I shall give my advice first to tourists and turn to the natives afterwards. Having been – as I have said – so deeply impressed by travel guides, I have here compiled, in the following few pages, one of my own. My travel guide is an immense improvement on all its predecessors and it ought to have a special appeal to our American cousins because of its brevity and conciseness. When visiting a cathedral with my guidebook in hand you need not bother to find out whether you are in Pisa, Naples or Venice. My description applies equally to all the cathedrals in Italy. The same goes for the towns. Maps – like life in general – have become much too specialized in modern times: it is a tremendous drawback of the otherwise excellent maps of, say, Perugia that they are practically useless in Modena. Or you may buy the best and most expensive guide to Ravenna only to find it is no good at all in other cities – not even nearby ones. My description on the other hand, though it may be lacking in detail here and there, is equally applicable to every town in the land. My travel guide is, in fact, like a modern electric shaver, which may not shave you very well but, in so far as it works at all, it works on every voltage.

*

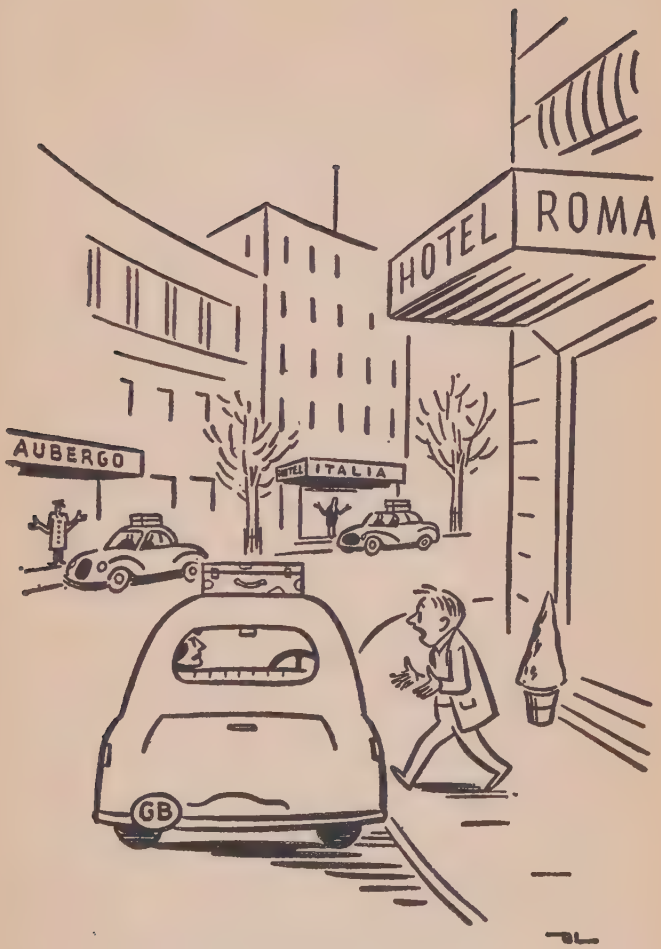
Let us begin with hotels.

The first piece of important advice I can give to the would-be tourist is, not to go to Italy with my wife. I don't mean to say she isn't a delightful companion; but she is a little fussy about hotels.

She decided right at the outset of our tour (we were travelling by car) that, to be on the safe side, we would go only to hotels which were (1) recommended *both* by our guide-book and by the A.A. book, and (2) were not too expensive, (3) not too cheap, (4) were not in the noisy centre of the town, but (5) not far away from the centre.

Arriving then at, let us say, Florence, she would read out an address: Hotel X, Piazza della Republica. From there to Hotel Y, Piazza Santa Novella. Then: Hotel Z, Via della Scala and so on, and so on almost indefinitely. In the first dozen hotels there would be no vacant rooms at all. In the thirteenth she would refuse an attractive room because the porter had a saucy moustache and might turn out to be offensive. In the fourteenth she would turn a room down because the ceiling was too high and she thought it might be difficult to heat such a room in February; in the fifteenth there would be another room bang opposite ours and 'What if there is a baby in that room that would cry all night?' Whereupon she would produce the address of the sixteenth hotel on the Lungarno Amerigo Vespucci. Then I would meekly remark that my early training had qualified me to become a lawyer in Budapest, not a taxi-driver in Florence. She would not be amused and off we would drive to the Lungarno Amerigo Vespucci.

If at the end of an eight or ten hours' search we had landed in the dreariest hole in the lousiest and most expensive guest-house in Tuscany, I was happy and



'Conferenza dei Ingenieri'

content because I felt vindicated; but whenever we did find a good room at a reasonable price (and we often did) I was very, very disconsolate.'

*

Although you are not travelling with my wife do not imagine that your position will be all that much easier.

Why are Italian hotels full all the time? Because of the engineers' conferences.

We could not get a room in Verona because – we were told – the engineers were having a conference in the town. We could not get a room in Padua because the same engineers – or perhaps other engineers – were having another conference there, too. A few weeks later I could not get a room in Trieste (I was then by myself). 'There is not a single room to be had in the whole town,' a hotel-porter told me. 'The best thing you can do is to drive to Udine or Monfalcone and try there. Even there you may find it difficult.' He added in explanation: 'You see, the engineers are having a conference in the town.'

In no travel guide is this basic fact mentioned that engineers are having a conference in all Italian towns all the time.

I saw many of these engineers – I could not help seeing them. We usually met at breakfast time. Every hotel restaurant was teeming between 8 and 9.30 a.m. with gay and lively engineers – ready for breakfast and eager to confer afterwards. They all wore a red or blue label of some kind in their buttonholes. They brought curious objects out of enormous brief-cases. The object – more often than not – consisted of a metal rod with a ring in the middle, in which there was a box-like instrument which could be rotated round the rod. At the end of the rod there was something they could pull out

and push in again. The object seemed rather dull and childish to the lay eye but it was a source of endless delight, fascination and awe to all engineers.

And what – I asked myself – if one cannot get a room in Italian hotels? It is indeed a small price to pay for the happiness of the engineers.

•

Of course, you may always have a room reserved in advance: and if you receive a confirmation from an Italian hotel stating that a room has, in fact, been reserved for you, that may mean many things. It does not even entirely exclude the possibility that a room has been reserved for you. But it would be almost enchanting naïveté to count on it.

In Rome, for example, they accept twenty per cent more reservations than the number of people they can accommodate. People who have rooms reserved often do not turn up; but then again they often do and that's just too bad for them. In the season hundreds of people are turned away from hotels in Rome – people who booked and were accepted. Many people are driven to the conclusion that it is simpler to be turned away from hotels without previous reservation.

In any Italian city after five or six in the afternoon you may see people in cars – foreign and provincial cars – slowly and sadly cruising the town. The car is overloaded with luggage; the husband is driving; his wife is anxiously scrutinising a clumsily folded map and directing her husband – usually in the wrong direction. This overcrowding of hotels and consequent desperate search for rooms, I was told, is extremely beneficial economically:

(1) the cruising motorist use up petrol thus helping the oil companies;

(2) they frequently stop for refreshments, thus helping the catering industry;

(3) they ensure that all the hotels are full all the time – and that is why hotel-keepers resist all attempts to build more hotels.

And what – I asked myself again – if one cannot get a room in any hotel in Italy? Is it not indeed a small price to pay for the happiness of oil companies, caterers and hotel-keepers?

*

Yet, however often one is told that it is impossible to get a room in an Italian hotel as all the hotels are always full, there seems to be a flaw in this reasoning. Hotels must be full of people who did actually succeed in getting rooms. Indeed, I should go as far as to say, that the fuller the hotels are, the more people managed to get in.

*

Finally, just one more word. Hotel bills are scrupulously honest all over Italy. If here and there in some of the smaller places they happen to add the date to the bill, it is an error, committed in perfect good faith. The only case which puzzled me occurred in Naples. I wondered whether they were justified in adding 230 lire for heating to my bill in early June.

THE CATHEDRAL

BEFORE entering the Cathedral take a good look at the impressive and wonderful square itself. It is the third largest square in Italy and was planned by Michelangelo himself. Or rather by a group of his best

pupils under Michaelangelo's personal supervision. Or anyway, someone just as good as Michelangelo or a trifle better. By all means have a good look at this magnificent square but do not linger, spellbound by all that immortal beauty, because somebody will sell you a Parker 51 fountain pen before you can say Jack Robinson.

The Cathedral of this ancient and beautiful city of .....* is of particular interest. It is the third largest Cathedral in Italy. It is a magnificent Gothic building (not pure Gothic but pure enough for the vast majority of tourists). It was started in 1123 and consecrated in 1611 but was not completely finished till the 16th July 1727. The Italians, in their outlandish way, like to refer to the Cathedral as *Il Duomo*. This is an ancient habit of theirs. It is in fact, the third most ancient habit of the Italians.

Inside there are 267 marble steps in the spiral stairway which is the third highest spiral stairway in Italy. (If you take the lift it costs 200 lire extra.) You will probably be struck by the vast number of statues and busts in this Cathedral: there are 673 of them altogether. There are only two Cathedrals in the whole of Italy with more statues.

On the right hand side, under the first arch of the main nave, you can see Ghirlandaio's world-famous picture, 'The Last Judgement'. Walk straight on and on the same side you will find 'The Wedding at Cana' by Fra Filippo Lippi. It is also worthwhile paying a visit to the Treasury (200 lire extra) where you can see a golden chalice given by Charlemagne to the Pope and a silver chalice given by the Pope to Charlemagne. There is also an ancient cloak which Philip II of Spain

* Fill in the name of the city with pencil. Rub it out afterwards.

Monetary Sacrifice

sent to the Pope. Its counterpart – the cloak sent by the Pope to Philip – can be seen in practically every Cathedral in Spain.

The wonderful stained glass windows on the left are the great pride of the *Duomo*.* They were made by Leonardo da Vinci himself. Or by a pupil of Leonardo. Or someone else just as good as Leonardo or considerably better.

Before leaving the Cathedral you must go down the steps opposite the stone coffins of the three 12th century archbishops. There you can see the tomb of the Saint. More often than not it is the tomb of St George who killed the Dragon. The popularity of any one Saint in Italy may be gauged by the number of Cathedrals in which he (or she) is buried. At the moment St George holds a comfortable lead with twenty-three tombs. St Sebastian is second with nineteen. There is a dead heat – if this be the right expression – for the third place between St Augustine and St Benedict (thirteen tombs each).

The tomb itself – in this Cathedral – is behind a magnificent wrought-iron gate. It is, as a rule, littered with money – coins and notes just thrown over the gate. According to the popular belief, the Saint will perform a miracle in return for monetary sacrifice. Small miracles can be performed from 100 lire upwards (50 lire for soldiers and children under twelve). Really miraculous miracles start at 1,000 lire per miracle (2,000 lire at the height of the tourist season).

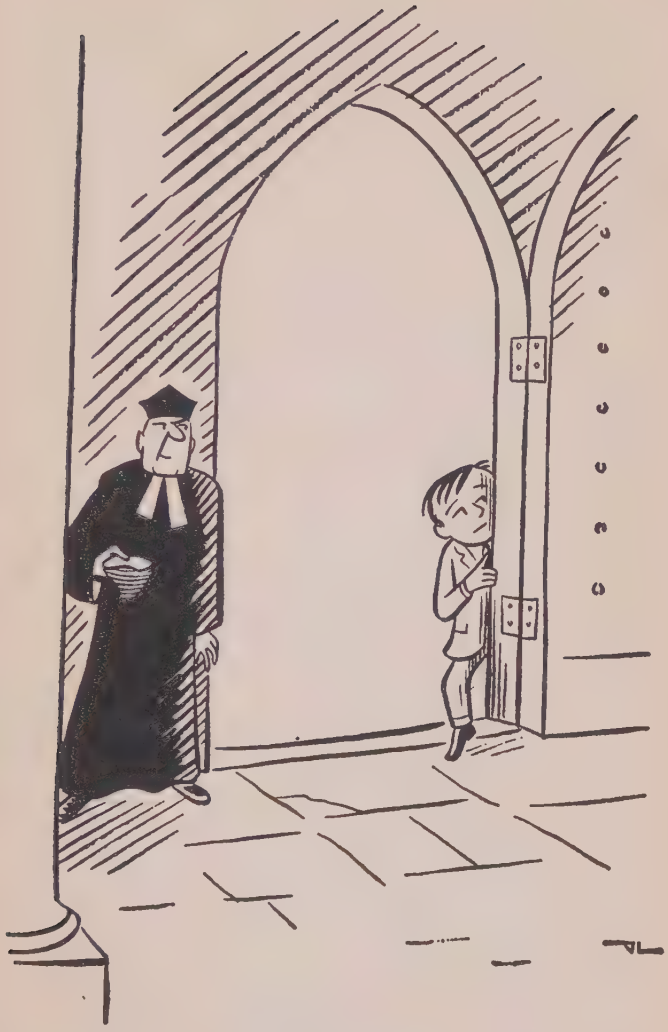
* Italian for Cathedral.

THE TOWN

LEAVING the Cathedral, cross the square and turn sharp left. You must not fail to make an intensive tour of the town which is one of the most beautiful and ancient towns in Italy. It was built as an Etruscan village but during Roman times it was inhabited mostly by the Romans. After the downfall of Rome, it was occupied by the barbarians from the North, then by the barbarians from the East and later by the barbarians from the North again. In the 10th and 11th centuries it was the battle-ground of feuding lords. In the 12th century it became an independent Republic and to celebrate its independence a large number of heretics were burnt alive in the market square. The town was occupied by Napoleon who put one of his brothers on the throne; later it was occupied by the Austrians who were succeeded by the French who were succeeded by the Austrians. The republic joined the Kingdom of Italy in 1860.

A large number of buildings which have survived centuries of strife and destruction are veritable masterpieces: a large number of other buildings which have not survived were also veritable masterpieces. In the third street on the right you find the *Museo* * containing one of the finest art collections in Italy. Coming out of the *Museo* turn sharp right again and go down the beautiful Renaissance marble staircase; turn sharp left and come up again. In the Church of San Giovanni (one of the finest Renaissance churches in Italy) you can see Tintoretto's masterpiece, 'Madonna with Four Saints'. In the Church of San Giacomo you can see Botticelli's masterpiece, 'Two

* Museum, really.



Side Door

Saints with the Madonna'. In the Church of San Bartolomeo do not miss Tiepolo's huge canvas, 'Madonna with Twenty Three Saints'. In the chapel of San Marco, the focus of attention is Perugino's small painting, 'Madonna with Just One Saint'.

Admission to most of these churches is free except for the few hundred lire you are expected to give the priest at the main door. (Useless trying the side door, there is another priest there.)

(In Rome, in the church of San Pietro in Vincoli – the home of Michelangelo's Moses – a priest stops you to enquire: why do you wish to go in? Should you say: to see Moses, you are required to pay 200 lire, which sum, however, is not an entrance fee but a voluntary contribution on your part. If your intention is to pray, entrance is free. If you want to go in both to pray *and* to see Moses, you pay half price.)

Proceeding towards the right you reach the fortress built between 1254 and 1355. Now it is used as a Museum.* Opposite is the Palazzo, ancient home of the Podestá, now used as a Museum. The next building on the right is the old Museum, now used as a Palazzo.

Leaving the Palazzo, you enter the Old Town which is extremely Mediaeval with a dash of Renaissance. In the Old Town, as well as in all the outlying districts, you can see a number of romantic people. Most of them are very hungry which is also romantic. They are clad in picturesque rags which in winter time become even more picturesque. Many of these people have a romantic smell.

Then you stop to think a little. Most of the riches and beauty of Italy have been handed down from ancient times. Not all, of course: Italian opera – to mention only one example – is a recent phenomenon.

* *Museo,* in Italian.

Yet, on the whole, apart from Italy's natural beauty which is eternal, her man-made beauty consists either of Roman ruins or else art-treasures the most recent of which are 300 years old. No country can match Italy's wealth; and few countries can match Italy's poverty. The problem the Italians seem to have solved with such dazzling and stupefying brilliance is this: How to remain poor on a rich inheritance?

PICTURE GALLERIES

THE Italian picture galleries are the pride of Western civilization. It is a great pity, if you come to think of it, that they make you sick of the arts in every shape for four or five years to come.

To think that those beautiful and famous pictures might be tucked away in private collections and hidden from the public gives one the shivers; the only thing that makes one shiver even more is the fact that they are not hidden away but are, in fact, there for you to admire.

One could select almost any three paintings in any Italian gallery and spend not only weeks or months but a lifetime in their company. But when you get all that beauty wholesale – dozens of Raphaels, scores of Titians, hundreds of Tintorettos – then you start longing for a Peter Arno in the New Yorker or a good London pavement-artist (if there is one) near the National Gallery. After your 500th 'Madonna and Child', however unbounded your devotion both to the subject and to the art of painting may be, a vague feeling may come over you that you would like to see just another five hundred and no more.

From the first Picture Gallery we visited (the Doge's

Four Minute Mile

Palace in Venice) my wife could hardly drag me away. In the sixth (the Palazzo Pitti in Florence, one of the true marvels of the world) I spent my time contemplating how to write a technical pamphlet on 'How to Run Through Picture Galleries'. And in the twelfth (in Naples), I am proud to report, I actually did the mile in less than four minutes.

TOURISTS

I SHALL shortly tell you how to look and how to behave if you want to become a true Italian. But first I have to tell you a little more about tourists. The position of the tourist in Italy is unique because they have made a strong impact on the natives. The Italians would not be what they are without the tourists.

Other countries have coal or oil or gold. Italy has tourists. Of course, other countries, too, have foreign visitors, but in Italy the tourists represent natural resources. Tourists are the greatest single blessing bestowed by nature on the land.

Tourists possess a number of advantages over coal or oil. On the whole they are cleaner than coal. Tourists, like coal, cause a number of problems of transportation but, unlike coal, they pay their own fares. Then, atomic energy may one day replace coal and oil, but while it may do a great many things with tourists, too, it will never replace them.

It is an arguable point whether it is more difficult to exploit coal-mines than to exploit tourists but, in any case, the two processes require different techniques.

*

What is the psychological influence of the crowds –

the endless legions – of tourists invading Italy? Naturally enough, they raise Italian self-admiration (never very low) to a higher pitch. They also create the impression that tourists are incredibly silly – just mugs, to employ an old Roman expression. First the Italian inhabitants of, let us say, Positano, find it flattering that people from every continent – literally from all over the world – flock to their small village to drink in its breathtaking and improbable beauty. They feel rather like the British aristocracy who open their homes to the public. But the British peer can stand at the turnstile and insist on every visitor dropping half a crown or a little more into his top-hat. Italian fishermen would never stoop so low as to charge an entrance fee to Positano. So they have to resort to other ways and means to charm cash out of the tourists' pockets (ways and means not altogether unfamiliar to our nobility either).

The fishermen in common with the other Italians think tourists silly to undertake long journeys across oceans and continents just to see what is (for them) just right there all the time. They are fully aware of the beauty of their village and their country. Yet it seems an odd whim that people should travel thousands of miles to see those familiar sights. And while the tourists only see the azure skies, the blue sea, the quaint church, the gay little shops, the steep and narrow streets and the lovely terraced houses which look as if they were just about to fall into the sea – the natives also know the inside of these houses. They also know that the tourist season is followed by winter. They wonder if all these foreigners have come to Positano to admire their poverty or their riches. It is natural for people – they feel instinctively – to be willing to pay an entrance fee to gain admittance to a

Natural Resources

more opulent and luxuriant world. But to see something dull and shabby? Should the Dukes of Marlborough and Norfolk ask my permission to come and visit my flat and offer me 5/– (2/6d. each, I mean) I should probably lead them through all my four rooms and recount the history of our settee and our drinking cabinet but their desire to see my flat would not heighten my respect for their Graces. The Italian fishermen, I am convinced, follow the same train of thought.

*

There is a further decisive difference between coal and the tourist. Coal stays where it is unless the mine is exploited with great skill and hard work. The tourist, on the other hand, goes away in no time whether he is or is not exploited with great skill and hard labour. The tourist is a temporary – fleeting – phenomenon and every lira he takes away with him is a measure of his host's failure and a dead loss.

There is nothing nasty in this mentality. When I speak of tourists as the natural resources of Italy I am not trying to pull off a facile paradox. I am being faithful to reality. Tourists are regarded as God's gift; as manna from Heaven; as a challenge to people's ingenuity to make the most of them. You cannot blame British miners for working too slowly and, at the same time, blame the Italian diggers for making short shrift of tourists; you simply cannot have it both ways.

While the majority of the Italians have nothing to do directly with tourists, this mentality is infectious. Women they want to conquer at lightning speed; in business they want to grow rich in no time. They are in the habit of regarding all opportunities as bulls,

taking them by the horns and milking them with impatient vigour.

You may object that one cannot milk bulls. The Italians try. And it would surprise you to find how often they succeed.

TWO ITALIES

I WAS fourteen years old when I first went to Italy. With my younger brother and sister I was sent to Grado to spend a summer holiday in an Institute. The bills were all paid by my father but I did receive some pocket money for the three of us. Handing it over my father warned me:

'Be very careful with this money,' he said. 'Go to shops where prices are firmly fixed and where bargaining is impossible. I doubt whether you'll find such shops in Italy. . . . And remember: always count your change.'

I thanked my father for the money and did not presume to argue with him. But I was keenly aware of the deep injustice of such a generalization.

Unfortunately, the effect of these lightly spoken words was strengthened a few minutes after our arrival in Trieste. I went to a Post Office to buy stamps for postcards. I did not count the change because it never occurred to me that my father's warning had applied to Post Offices, too. As it turned out I did not receive the right change. This was, of course, merely a regrettable coincidence. The Post Office clerk must have made a genuine mistake in good faith. Unfortunately however, he had made that innocent mistake in his own favour. In his haste he might just as easily have given me more instead of less. But, as it happened, he had given me less.

A very small and insignificant incident indeed. But I was young then; I was on an exciting journey; this was my first impression of Italy – so it made a deeper impression on me than its significance warranted. Still I only shrugged my shoulders:

'It's nothing,' I said to my brother and sister, 'nothing really. A few good lire gone – that's all.'

*

Now, almost thirty years later, I was walking with a Professor of Modern Art in a North Italian University city. I asked him many questions about the Italians but he kept talking about himself. Instead of all the Italians he talked of one Italian. But I was pleased all the same. 'One must build brick by brick,' I said to myself. 'Italian by Italian.'

Then quite unexpectedly he warned me:

'You must never forget that there are two Italies.'

'Two Italies?' I repeated his words trying to squeeze a little excitement into my voice as I expected now one of those customary platitudes one hears from helpful friends and acquaintances everywhere.

'Two Italies,' he nodded seriously. 'You see, there are North and South Italy. Then there is rich Italy and poor Italy. And there is also tourist Italy and the real Italy. Two different worlds.'

I looked at him in real amazement now but said nothing. He added:

'Yes, that's an old, old truth. There are two Italies.'

'Six you mean,' I remarked meekly.

'Six?' he asked. It was his turn now to be surprised. 'I've just told you: two.'

'Why two?' I pressed him. 'North and South, rich and poor, tourist and real. Surely, that makes altogether six.'

'No,' he said sadly. 'There are two Italies. That's an old, old truth.'

'It seems to be an old, old mistake,' I replied, trying to hold my ground firmly. 'Three times two make six.'

'Oh no,' he smiled, the superior smile of the patient teacher who tries to hammer something into a very slow pupil's head. 'Two. The truth is that there are two Italies from *whatever angle you may be looking.* Whatever your approach there are always two Italies.'

'I see.' I nodded with the stubbornness of the slow pupil. 'Nevertheless, if you approach the question from all the three angles you mentioned, the result, the sum total, will be six Italies. Three times two – as I remarked before and numerous others have remarked even before me – makes six.'

'That's a primitive arithmetical truth,' he said firmly and quite unshaken in his argument. 'Primitive and arithmetical. There are two Italies. Not six. There will always be two Italies.'

I tried to hum: 'There will always be two Italies' to the tune of 'There will always be an England.'

'I quite see it now,' I gave in. Then I suddenly remembered my experience of thirty years before. 'Short change,' I added.

'Pardon?' he asked.

I shrugged my shoulders.

'Oh nothing,' I said. 'Nothing really. A few good Italies gone – that's all.'

GENEROSITY

JUDGED by the business methods of the Bank of England, the treatment of tourists in Italy – and, as I have said, just as often residents, too – seems

unorthodox. (Of course, tourists at many places are treated with scrupulous honesty; but I am now talking of the many other places where they are not.) You must not jump to conclusions and believe that if you want to turn native in Italy you must become calculating, mercenary and mean. The very people who fool you, cheat you and rob you are, as a rule, kind, warm-hearted and generous.

We are too smug in assuming that our own standards are the only right ones. We are so certain that it is wrong to follow other prophets than our own; that it is uproariously funny to measure in centimetres instead of inches; and that it is barbarous to scalp an enemy or to put a coffee-spoon in the mouth. Similarly, we are always ready to believe that a man is ungenerous just because he robs us, that he must have a selfish streak in his character because he wants to feed himself and we rarely shrink from calling him dishonest for no better reason that he steals.

Is it mean to exploit a gold-mine? Or would it, indeed, be laziness and neglect of duty to leave it unexploited? The tourist – I cannot repeat it often and emphatically enough – is nature's gift to Italy like the sea or the eternal sunshine. Warmly shines the tourist on Italy. You are not robbing the gold-mine by taking its gold; you are not robbing the sun by basking in its rays. Why are you then supposed to rob the tourist just by robbing him? And aren't we all – foreigners and natives – tourists in a sense? Aren't we all wanderers in life – itinerants between two distant and unknown destinations? You are considered a bad husband and a miserable father if you let a tourist go unrobbed, a good, fat chance untaken. It is moral weakness not to cheat; a downright crime not to diddle.

No Payment

Bandits to this day are worthy and respected members of the Sicilian society. They go to church, pray for the success of their felonious enterprise and guard their daughters' virtue. They are the modernized and southern variety of the late Robin Hood. And Robin Hoods – with their endeavour to redistribute wealth – have always been invigorating factors in economic life. They do a grand job although they are more modest about their services to the community than most of their northern colleagues who have exchanged buckskin or Lincoln Green for striped trousers and the bow and arrow or stiletto for the fountain pen.

The same people who follow an alien moral code may be, and often are, touchingly magnanimous. Not only to their own kith and kin but to anyone. They enjoy the intoxicating pleasure of *giving* as anyone else does – though they have little enough to give. They do not hand out their gifts with a stereotyped smile, accompanied by stereotyped words on stereotyped occasions such as birthdays, Christmas, Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, Brothers-in-Laws' Day and other similar occasions destined to enrich the shopkeepers and enpoor the public. They give when they feel like giving.

Sitting in front of a little cave in Sorrento, my wife and I watched two ragged youths climb terrifying rocks for an hour or so picking wild flowers. When they had collected a large bunch they came to us and presented my wife with it. There was no question of paying for the flowers or even giving the boys a small gift to show our appreciation. On another occasion a young girl – with eyes as big and as bright as the Koh-I-Noor – ran after us in an orange grove and presented us with a green bough heavy with luscious, yellow oranges. No – it cost nothing, payment was

quite out of the question. . . . Unemployed Neapolitan tramps may walk with you half a day, guiding you through their beautiful city, and in the end they will indignantly refuse payment – and go without supper. The day before, the same man may have cheated the family fortune out of another tourist; the next day he may pick someone's pocket; but on that particular day you are his guest and you cannot persuade or cajole him into accepting a single lira.

A friend told me in Rome that a few months before he had visited Sicily with his sister. An old Sicilian peasant in a small but romantic village offered her – the sister – a clay pipe. She refused it with grateful thanks as she did not happen to be a pipe-smoker. The old gentleman was so deeply hurt by this rejection of his kind-hearted offer that he stabbed the girl with a knife. She spent three days in hospital.

There was nothing extraordinary in the old man's behaviour. Down there they are all as generous as that.

TWO REDEEMING SINS

THE Italians possess all the admirable virtues displayed by other peoples and in some fields they definitely take the lead. For example, they honour their fathers and mothers much more than the Anglo-Saxons do. The Americans revere their children instead of their parents and the English, on the whole, cannot get very excited about family relationships. England is the only country in the world where people discuss the eventual death of their parents with objectivity – sometimes bordering on gusto. The discussion very frequently takes place in the presence of

the parents concerned. Even my own son asked me once – just as a matter of curiosity – who would get my pencils after my death. (I felt inclined to reply that unless he was a really good boy I should not die.) When a parent dies in an English family mourning is always alleviated by such remarks as, 'Oh well, it's the best thing that could have happened to him.' Sometimes it is not quite clear why it should be so much better for the deceased. Frankness, however, rarely goes as far as to exclaim, 'Oh, it's so much better for us.'

In Italy the death of a cousin twice removed is a major disaster which throws the family into the depths of Aeschylean gloom for months to come. Parents are deeply respected, very often even loved; the father is the head of the family and the family itself is a closely knit unit. The death of a parent ninety-five years old, bed-ridden and senile for the last forty years, is not eagerly awaited but bitterly lamented. It is true that whoever dies it is always ourselves we mourn, being deeply moved at the prospect of our own demise. At every funeral we bury ourselves, which is why we all die more than once, indeed, fairly frequently in the course of our lives. In the case of the Italian, however, it would be wrong to say that when death occurs in the family he is grieved only because he is reminded of his own pending fate and weeps genuine tears of sorrow only for himself. It is more than this. He mourns the loss which has befallen the family. He is not the family; but he is a part of the family. The family tie is very strong everywhere but strongest of all perhaps in Sardinia. It is truly touching to observe how the *Orgosolesi* love and cherish their family connexions. A rude word to a great-great-uncle has to be revenged with the knife. Their stabbing is won-

Bereavement

derfully accurate; and if unusually offensive words have been used, the offender's ears are also cut off and his face mutilated. Outsiders regard the *vendetta* as barbarous and cruel; it is, in fact, the manifestation of gentleness, loyalty and family devotion. (A *vendetta* gives reason for a new *vendetta* and so it goes on for centuries. Life – whatever else it may be – is never dull.)

In contrast with this and other resplendent virtues, the Italians – fortunately possess two redeeming sins.

The first of these is conceit. They have a tremendously good opinion of themselves. In a way they cannot be called conceited in the ordinary sense of the word. A conceited person *thinks* he is wonderful; the Italian *knows* it.

English conceit is quiet, self-satisfied, often self-derogatory and always has an air of aloofness. American conceit is much louder, more boastful but it is specialized: an American is always conceited about something. This something may be his ability as a salesman, his prowess as a business organizer, his achievements as an athlete, his dexterity as a handy man or faculty as an after-dinner speaker; whatever it may be, it is *something*. Italian conceit is universal, all-absorbing; it is an all-round conceit. The Italian knows that he is a male beauty: an athlete; a clever business-man (whether he is the chairman of an industrial empire or a beggar); an ace racing driver; a brilliant conversationalist on the Voltaire-Dr Johnson level; an irresistible lady-killer yet the best of husbands; a man of political genius, etc. etc. On top of it he knows that his taste for food, architecture and women's clothes is impeccable, that he is unsurpassable in gin-rummy and has the best hand-writing in the provinces. Yet, I repeat, Italian conceit is not

conceit at all. It is hero-worship. Everyone is his own worshipped hero.

Other people are sometimes tormented by doubt. The Italians are tormented by certainty. 'How can anyone be quite as perfect as I am?' Yet, there he is, the living proof. That is why other people strive towards perfection while the Italians strive away from it. This Imperfectionalism is one of their most engaging and most human qualities. They do not have to *do* things perfectly; they *are* perfect – and that ought to be enough.

*

Their second and equally commendable sin is their selfishness. The Italian looks after himself and his family and believes that other people will look after themselves and their own families. This seems to be fair.

Selfishness is the recognition of the simple truth that everyone is the centre of his own universe and everything and everybody can gain importance only in relation to himself. To start with, the notion 'more important' is strictly meaningless. The constitution of Bolivia is not more important than half a pound of macaroni – as any Calabrian beggar may forcefully point out to you. No prince can possibly be more important than a pauper: just ask the pauper. And why not ask the pauper? There is an air of sincerity and straightforwardness in selfishness. Unashamed selfishness is a kind of frankness, the opposite of hypocrisy. The Italian male – nine times out of ten – will not beat about the bush: he will tell you quite openly that he wants one thing, and one thing only, from a lady – practically any lady. He will not dream of telling you that he is in business 'to serve the public'.

He is in business to serve himself. He is in business – amazing as it may sound – to make money. In England we are made to believe that certain benevolent gentlemen say: 'The public needs second-hand clothing (or radio-valves or justice) so I shall devote my activities to selling old trousers (or manufacturing radio-valves or setting up as a solicitor). The Italian remembers that he, too, is a member of the public. He devotes his energy to that one single member. Often enough that alone is more than he can cope with.

*

As you can see, whatever else an Italian may lack, he has an Ego. Sometimes two. It is nice to think that even the poorest Italian may possess two Egos while even the richest Englishman, as a rule, has none. England is a poor country in Egos. They are mostly imported. A good home-grown Ego has a great rarity value.

(Americans are prepared to pay almost any sum for a really good Ego. In the United States Ego-manufacturers have grown immensely rich in the last few years. The modern American Ego is chromium-plated and measured in horse-power.)

TIME

EVERYTHING in Italy is connected with the eternal sunshine. (*Eternal* here, as everywhere else, means frequent.) Things perish extremely quickly; light turns into darkness in no time; so one might as well take opportunities while they last. Be selfish and keep your own interests in mind; but not too seriously. It

is stupid, no doubt, to miss an opportunity; but, if it is missed, do not worry, another chance will come tomorrow. It is silly not to enjoy the sunshine but if you have something else to do, do it – you may be sure that the sun will shine again tomorrow. Sunshine is not a miracle in Italy; it is regarded as something almost natural.

Again there is no need to hurry. The sun is eternal; Rome is eternal; and if you miss one bus another will follow. Time is not the fourth dimension in Italy – it is, indeed, the only commodity that is plentiful. 'Time is money,' say the Anglo-Saxons. If this saying were true every Italian would be a millionaire. But time is money only for those who have not enough time. For the rest, time is not money; it has no value whatever.

'Half past eight tonight' in Italy means any time between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. If you have an appointment with someone at 4 o'clock and he turns up at half past six he will not say, 'Sorry I'm late.' He is not late. There is no such thing in Italy as being late. He may ask you, as a matter of curiosity: 'Have you been waiting long?' He wants to know whether you've been waiting five minutes or ten? It will never occur to him that as your appointment was for four you may have been waiting since four.

Nor is there any point in arranging a dinner party for Friday. Friday never comes. There is no such thing as Friday. Are you a fortune-teller or a prophet to know at noon, on Monday, where you will be at 9.30 a.m. on Friday? Is it not a challenge and provocation to superior powers to make arrangements so far in advance? If you want to meet your friends on Friday you ring them up on Friday and some will promise to come along, others will say they are busy. Now, discard those who promised to come: you

certainly will not be seeing them. But those who said they could not possibly make it, may turn up – oh not at the suggested time and place but somewhere else at another time. As you yourself are likely to have changed your rendezvous, too, you have every hope of a successful, indeed, roaring party. I, at least, still have to see an Italian party which is not a roaring success.

If you want to meet a senior official in a Ministry, or the Minister himself, just drop in at 8 o'clock in the evening – unannounced, of course. They will be there and they will see you. You will not find them in their office at 3.30 p.m. – at that time they are at home, fast asleep. Even 8 o'clock may be a very bad time. You cannot be sure of finding your man. There is one way, however, of making pretty sure of not finding him: make an appointment. In England an appointment is an engagement; in Italy it is a fair warning of approaching danger.

Engagement diaries are unknown. The Prime Minister may have one but junior Ministers have never heard of the thing. Diaries are pompous articles. Only people with a sizeable inferiority complex need engagement diaries; and those who mean to keep their engagements. The Italians do not belong to either of these categories.

MANNERS

You had better leave your impeccable English manners at home if you want to be a social success in Italy. Half tones will not take you even half way; understatements are taken at even less than their face value. If you are deeply worried about something, it

is no good remarking softly, 'I'm a little perturbed.' If, on the contrary, you run about the room berserk, beat the walls with your fists, froth at the mouth, turn purple and scream for half an hour then people may gather that you are slightly irritated though not annoyed. Unless, of course, you are simply tired.

The main characteristic of English conversation is that no one ever speaks; of Italian that everyone speaks at the same time. If someone manages to make a remark in an Italian gathering, everyone present will burst out shouting. The one with the strongest voice will prevail and make the second remark. One iron law reigns supreme in Italian conversation: the survival of the loudest.

It is no good saying, 'I am sorry.' If somebody kicks you, kick him back; otherwise he will have a poor opinion of you. Nor is it any good either waiting for 'your turn' anywhere. Your turn never comes. In Italy even the law of 'last come, first served' is not strictly adhered to. There are no rules. Incidentally, if in language difficulties, you can always confidently count on help from the last person in any queue: at the end of every queue you are sure to find an Englishman.

And, indeed, you often find yourself in language difficulties. I did. Italians prefer to speak Italian even if they can speak very good English. Theirs is a beautiful and melodious tongue to which it is a pleasure to listen even if you don't understand a word of it. I attended several dinner parties and other ceremonies organized – as I was informed – in my honour. I hate this expression 'in my honour' – it is a trifle grand and too pompous for my liking but my hosts absolutely insisted on it. At the actual parties, my hosts, after expressing their rapturous delight at being able to welcome me in their midst, also insisted on ignoring

me completely for the rest of the evening. They refused to believe that I did not understand Italian well enough to follow their conversation; or if they believed it they did not care. At the end of the party – usually in the early hours of the morning – someone would turn to me and say: 'Aren't we awful to keep talking Italian like this? ... But, you see, we are not formal with people we like.' That, of course, compensated for everything. It was gratifying to know that if they had loved me just a little less I should not have been allowed to sit five or six hours in utter loneliness in the midst of a happy, chattering crowd. (After the twenty-fifth similar experience, I came to the conclusion that it did not hurt me to be ignored but it did hurt me to be called at the same time the guest of honour. This was a very natural feeling: I did not mind being ignored; but I did mind that a major social event had been organized just to ignore me.)

Informal as Italian social life may be, there are certain rules which are very strictly followed. Such a rule is, for example: GENTLEMEN FIRST. I have never seen any Italian lady (of good manners and breeding, I mean; anything may happen in the lower orders) forget herself to such an extent as to enter a room before a man. If I may paraphrase an old Joke: an Italian gentleman can be defined as one who may enter a revolving door after a lady but is sure to step out before her.

Another strict rule for ladies: you must not let a man carry parcels, especially heavy parcels. Whenever I went shopping with my wife, she always paid for the things I bought. But, according to the rules of the land, I invariably received the change and she the parcels.

A third rule of this rigorous etiquette concerns

Manners

men: do not shave! Not that one has to grow a beard or moustache. Oh no. But one must always have a two days' growth of beard. It may be more; but it must not be less.

•

The Italians may not be very polite; but they are kind, which is better. Once I became involved in a noisy Roman street-quarrel. When the rioting crowds had broken up, I learned to my surprise that a man had asked a passer-by for the shortest way to the church Santa Maria della Concezione. The passer-by started explaining but another man suddenly thought of a still shorter way and butted in. In no time eight or ten people were kindly proffering their own versions. The fighting which ensued was not severe. There were only two casualties, both very light. The enquirer never learnt the shortest – or, for that matter, any other – way to Santa Maria della Concezione. But the sun was hot, the sky was blue and there are plenty of other beautiful churches in Rome.

ON THE ROAD

On arrival at the Italian border on the Brenner you walk to a small hut belonging to the Italian Automobile Club where you receive certain documents, including coupons for cheaper petrol. In the hut you may also join the Club as a temporary member and it is wise to do so. Membership entitles you to the free breakdown service. However small Italian cars may be, they keep running into you and the breakdown service may prove useful. But the main advantage of

your membership is that it entitles you to free parking throughout the land. In Italy you have to pay for street parking. With the Club insignia stuck on the outer side of your driving-mirror, you pay either nothing at all or less than others. There are, however, certain qualifications to this rule. The right of free parking is absolutely universal, the sole exception being the places where you actually do want to park. From the Brenner Pass I drove to Riva where, I was told, free parking facilities were not available. Why? The park attendant shrugged his shoulders. It was that way. Why do the planets follow elliptical courses instead of circular or octagonal ones? They just do.

(It ought to be added in all fairness that the cheaper parking facilities, as opposed to those which are free, are available in all the larger cities.)

Parking is just as much of a problem in Rome as it is in London, Paris or New York. Italians cars are small but the West End of Rome is small too, so the congestion is no better than in larger cities. In all squares – and Rome is full of squares – parking is allowed within clearly defined limits. If you park your car outside the white lines you are committing an offence. Now you must know that Italy has twenty-seven different kinds of police, wearing eighty-three different kinds of uniform – each more resplendent than the other. The traffic police (wearing hats worn by Canons and other high church dignitaries in less romantic countries) go around the city day and night sticking little green labels (the same things known as 'tickets' in America) on to the windscreens of Italian cars. As there are 300,000 traffic policemen in Rome (about three policemen to each car) this labelling is a rapid process and within half an hour you are sure to get your green label. Everybody gets the green label,

except ... well, except those who have already got one. This is a very important fact. I heard that a certain foreign journalist in Rome leaves his green label on the windscreen of his car and drives about with it all the time. This is a simple but effective device: you park wherever you please; the policeman arrives, sees your green label and says to himself: 'I've already dealt with that one – I'm certainly efficient,' and moves on.

This story made me very keen to obtain a green label myself so that I could give it permanent employment. I started parking my car in the most impossible places; I double parked; I treble parked – but the police took no notice of me. So I removed a green label from a friend's car – I knew she had so many of them that she could not possibly miss one. I related this incident in the Foreign Press Association and some of my colleagues liked the idea. Soon afterwards the purloining of green labels became a minor epidemic in Rome. I should like to believe that I was partly responsible for this new vogue but it is unlikely. At the same time the fashion also started in Paris and eventually led to legal proceedings against a gentleman who was accused by a lady of having stolen her 'private correspondence'. The charge may be legally correct but this jealously guarded privacy of police-summonses seems a little far-fetched to the uninitiated outside observer.

The reluctance of the Italian police to label foreign cars is understandable enough of course. If the foreign tourist departs before paying his fine – and there are foreign tourists who do not shrink from so doing – the police can still follow them up. All they have to do is, notify the Ministry of the Interior; the Ministry of the Interior then writes to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;

Green Label

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs gets in touch with the British Embassy; the Embassy writes to the Foreign Office; the Foreign Office contacts the Home Office; the Home Secretary writes to the Commissioner of Police who writes first to the appropriate Local Authority to find out whose such and such a registration number is and having received a reply he writes to your district and ultimately a policeman will visit you and enquire about the fine you owe in Italy. Your reply will be duly noted and sent back by the same channels. The whole process does not take more than about seven years – providing all the authorities concerned are expeditious. It is for this reason that it is not so easy for a foreign motorist to get a green label in Italy. But do not let me discourage you; you may be luckier than I was: perserverance and courage can achieve miracles.

Those of the Italian traffic police who are not busy distributing green labels are engaged in directing the traffic itself. They have whistles like the French policemen; their whistling, however, is not angry but melodious. They put nightingales to shame. These policemen also behave like P.T. instructors gone mad. They throw their arms up and sideways; they crouch; they shoot up; they crouch again; they skip; they hop, step and jump; they spin round. Watch an Italian traffic policeman for twenty minutes and you will collapse with fatigue and exhaustion.

Driving itself is not such a quiet and restful activity as it is in France. The Italians are not such cautious and careful drivers as the French and in addition they are much faster. But, at least, in Italy you do not need all the paraphernalia you need nowadays in England. Here it is risky to drive without a calendar, a watch and a yardstick. You need the calendar to find out whether

it is an odd or an even date, before parking on one side of the street instead of the other: you need the watch in order to move on within thirty minutes; and you need the yardstick after dusk to ensure that you are within twenty-five yards from a lit up lamp. One should not grumble, however, as one does not yet need a sextant, thermometer, hydraulic press or kaleido scope.

It is impossible to speak of Italy's road traffic without mentioning the motor scooters, appropriately called Vespas – i.e. wasps. Other countries have their motor scooters as well – but they are quite different. Just as one may think that people eat macaroni in other countries, too, but it's not really true. It is only in Italy that people really eat macaroni. In Italy the Vespa is ubiquitous; it is so conspicuous that it has, in fact, changed the face of the road and the cities. It is gay; it is noisy; it is fast – in heavy traffic faster than the car. Its significance is (a) sexual, (b) social and (c) political.

(a) You see the lovely, dark, Italian girls riding their Vespas, showing lots of leg. Their function is to distract the attention of motorists from the road. Not that the Italian driver paid too much attention to the road in the past; today however he pays still less. These modern Vespal Virgins keep an eternal light aglow; and many sacrifices of various kinds (human life included) are paid on their altars.

(b) The social significance of the Vespa is about as great in post-war Italy as the T Ford was in the United States in the twenties. It brings motoring to the masses. The Vespa, you see, is no glorified bicycle; it is a motor-vehicle. It has an engine, it makes an engine-

noise, it stinks gloriously, and it goes fast. Its rider does no pedalling: he is served by Horse Power – this pagan god of modern times. The cyclist is a pedestrian on wheels; the Vespa-rider feels sharp wind on his face and knows the intoxication of speed. Pedalling humbles you; Horse Power gives you a feeling of infinite superiority. Thus, in some respect, the Vespa plays the same part in Italy as television does in England. Both Vespa and television are exciting and exhilarating symbols of social advancement for the individual. The only difference being that while the Vespa takes you to a strange and distant world, television delivers that strange and distant land to your home.

(c) It is easy to see from the foregoing that the Vespa possesses an enormous political significance, too. I often heard references to the 'Vespist wing of the Christian Democrats'. This refers to a conservative layer of workers and the lower middle class who have made some advance in the world and are content with the government and the existing social order precisely as long as they can remain in the saddle – I mean, of course, the saddle of the Vespa. Television is a pseudo – or semi-cultural entertainment, quite harmless as long as the 'betters' of the TV-class are at the studio end; but the Vespa-wing of the Christian Democrats – and other parties – are simply the motorized lower middle-class. They choose their own programmes; they ride and steer their own machines along the wide open roads.

WOMEN

ARE Italian women really beautiful? Yes, they are. Do they deserve their high reputation? Yes, they do. But then, of course, French, Hungarian, Swedish, English and Spanish women are also beautiful – to say nothing of Greek, Irish, Portuguese, American and Indian women. Women of all nationalities are beautiful – provided they are beautiful; I personally have a strong penchant for dark hair and dark eyes. So have all the Italians. It is lucky indeed that the Italians prefer Italian women, the English English women, the Bulgarians Bulgarian women and that generally speaking, every nation thinks its own women the most beautiful on earth. It would be extremely awkward if the French loved only Chilean women and South Africans only Finnish women.

Many people know only two things of the Italians: that their women are beautiful and that they eat macaroni. Few people are aware, however, of the disheartening connexion between female beauty and macaroni. Excessive consumption of macaroni does not improve one's figure. This is the reason why one may see a fair number of beautiful Italian girls who – how shall I put it? – remind you of sylphs only in a sitting position but not when they walk in front of you in the street.

*

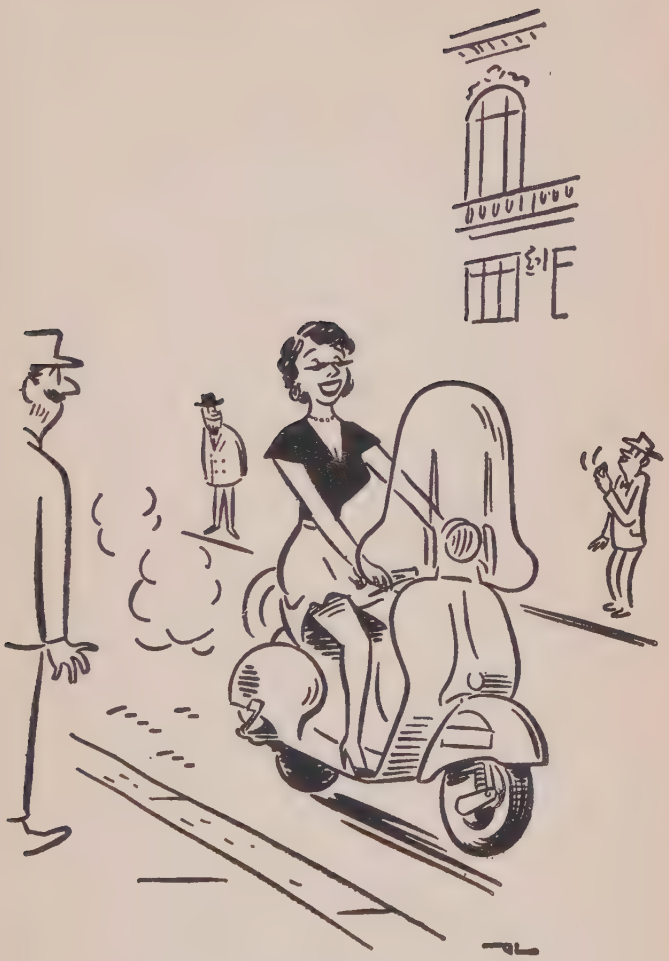
Are Italian women well dressed? Many of them are. Those who buy their clothes at the fashion designers of the Via dei Condotti are very well dressed indeed. Dior of Paris is not only a fashion king, he is a fashion

himself; but one day he – and all the French designers with him – may be dethroned by the Italians.

There is a second category of Italian women who go to small dressmakers – a dying out species in the West. These dressmakers work day and night in dingy rooms in bad light and charge very little for their unremitting labour. It is still the song of the shirt over there. ... They have taste and imagination; their clients have great beauty – more beauty than charm – and it is easy to dress them.

A very large number of Italian women are not so well dressed. In fact, they go about in rags. The better-off women in this class wear neat rags, the poorer, torn and filthy rags.

Italy's clothing industry is just about to enter on a new stage. In England (and in many other countries) the cheap chain-stores have created a revolution in female fashions. There are no longer any ragged women to be found here; everyone is well dressed, to the great sorrow of some people. Women wear the same simple, attractive clothes in London, in the Scilly Isles and in the Hebrides – thanks to Marks and Spencers and some of their smaller but faithful followers. 'Uniformity', of course, is frequently deplored; 'lack of individuality' is found distressing. It hardly becomes me not to weep with the mourners. Lately it has become almost compulsory for writers – and especially for humorists – to strike a despondent attitude and lament the arrival of an era of horrid mass-production. But this cannot be helped and, indeed, should be welcomed. General well-being implies a certain amount of uniformity. If all women started wearing original Schiaparelli models, it would still mean uniformity, all the same. Uniformity is simply a natural by-product of a marks-and-spencerized



Vespal Virgin

society – the alternative being picturesque, romantic and very individual rags. Picturesque rags, however, are rather cold in the winter. Once upon a time I was a Marxist; I am slowly being converted into a Marksist.

I know that many women heartily disagree with me. Many fight a desperate rearguard action against the idea that every shop-assistant should have pretty, well-cut dresses and every factory-girl an evening gown. Many rich women have enough poise, taste and charm not to worry; others are driven to using more and more expensive materials, going to more and more exclusive tailors and displaying larger and larger pieces of jewellery. It is true that men can hardly tell the difference between a £2 and £200 evening dress but men are fools and, in any case, women do not dress for the sake of men. Dowager duchesses and the wives of super-tax paying executives (with a fair number of exceptions) make a desperate effort to make themselves clearly distinguishable from factory girls and junior secretaries. Which is a fatal mistake on their part. They would be well advised to spare no effort to resemble them.

This Marksism, or rather Marks-and-spencerism is, as yet, practically non-existent in Italy. It is just gaining a foothold. It is in the groping stage yet – the picturesque rag is still holding its own.

*

Italian girls are admirably (and some wicked, wicked men would say: most regrettably) virtuous. The Roman Catholic Church insists on a rigid standard of sexual morality; and poverty always places a high premium on virginity. And in Italy the Roman Catholic Church unites its forces with poverty. (This

theory is logical; it is, alas, also untrue. The Americans attribute the same high value to virginity but the United States is neither Catholic nor poor.)

Italians insist absolutely on a virgin bride and the man who sent his newly-wedded wife back from their honeymoon and informed her parents by telegram: GOODS RETURNED – DAMAGED BEFORE DELIVERY may be exceptional in his forceful vulgarity but the mentality reflected is pretty general. A girl's virginity is her dowry; more often than not her only dowry. Sexual morality is, of course, a matter of lofty principles; but it is also a matter of cash.

As a consequence of all this, Italian men, in search of adventure, are more likely to try their luck with married women than with girls. For the same reasons, a great many Italian novels avoid romantic – or any other – love and deal with marital problems instead.

•

Italy is still mainly a patriarchal society. The men often go out in the evening and leave their wives at home. They talk politics; the ladies talk kitchen, children and dresses.

In every society where women are gently oppressed or kept in their place they are also put on a pedestal. Here again, the United States tends to spoil my theory by constituting an exception: there the men are oppressed yet the women manage to cling to their pedestal. However, the Italian pedestal, in the middle and upper classes, is of a different kind. In this case the women have not occupied the pedestal by force; they are put there for compensation. They stand on their pedestal, looking beautiful, wearing lovely clothes and a divine hair-style – but they may talk only when spoken to.

II RICH AND POOR

WHO WAS MUSSOLINI?

THE Americans had to destroy Hitler's eyrie in Berchtesgaden to prevent it from becoming a shrine; Mussolini's balcony at the Palazzo Venezia stands intact and, apart from a few cursory glances thrown at it by the more politically minded tourists, it has passed into oblivion. Why is this; Fascism, after all, started in Italy and lasted much longer than Nazism in Germany. Mussolini may have ended up as Hitler's flunkey but he none the less certainly started as his idol. And yet, is it true – as it seems – that Mussolini is so much more dead than Hitler?

This is no place to attempt an analysis of the nature of Nazism and Fascism and to determine their degrees of being dead. But I think it is fairly clear that while Nazism was self-expression (terrifyingly distorted but still self-expression) for the Germans, Fascism was something superimposed on Italy. This is not to condemn the Germans *en masse* and acquit the Italians – the whole problem is much too complicated to be settled or even properly discussed in such simple terms. Nevertheless, certain facts ought to be set down:

(1) Fascism was brutal, oppressive and inhuman enough but even at its worst it was almost idyllic compared with Nazism;

(2) Nazism was a horrible distortion, a gigantic caricature of the German character but it was, after all,

Who's He?

a poisonous weed that grew naturally in good soil; Fascism was an artificial growth. Hitler looked at his Germans through the distorting lens of paranoia and saw a subjectively true picture; Mussolini did not see the Italians as they were but as they – according to him – ought to have been. Hitler wanted to bring something out of his Germans; Mussolini tried to knock something into his Italians. Mussolini's job was much more difficult because the Italians lack the heroic pose almost completely.

They lack the heroic pose because they – even more than other nations – have learnt from history and have been to a great extent formed by their history. The British living on an island, could manage very well without a large standing army; the Prussians, living on the plains surrounded by many hostile neighbours, could not. Here lie the seeds of the British love for civil government and mistrust of the military power on the one hand, and of Prussian militarism on the other. The British built the biggest navy in the world and conquered about one fifth of the globe. As soon as this conquest was completed, they became more or less satisfied and condemned aggression. Poorer nations did not know the word 'aggression'; they spoke of certain 'sacred rights' – meaning that latecomers, too, were entitled to colonial expansion. Or look at another country: Poland. Having been placed between two – at some time three – great powers, her fate varies between oppression and non-existence. Polish history is a moving and tragic tale. Poles had to attempt the impossible and the superhuman so often that reckless heroism and vain sacrifice became their second nature – with a large dose of selfishness added. You can always count on the Poles to do the admirable or the foolish – or a mixture of both. What is then the moral history

for the Italians? First of all, they have noticed with some surprise that, after so many centuries, they are still alive. This is no mean achievement. Barbarians destroyed the Roman Empire – but where are the Visigoths? Many armies invaded the penninsula but they are all gone. As a rule, the invaders were neither beaten, annihilated nor chased out; they just left. Look at the last two decades: first came the Fascists – invasion of an alien spirit if not an alien army – then the Germans, then the British and the Americans. The Italians did nothing in particular; the various invaders destroyed one another and then left the country. Mussolini was executed, the Germans beaten, the Anglo-Saxons withdrew – and the Italian peasant, shipbuilder, doctor, tourist-guide, civil servant and bandit are carrying on as before. So the first great lesson of history is this: don't fight your invader; survive him. The people who come will eventually go. All of them. Shrug your shoulders and reach for your pipe, not your sword. Such experience may breed wisdom but not the martial spirit.

The Resistance Movement proved beyond doubt that the Italians are as brave and determined as any other people, provided they are fighting for *something* – not just for the sake of fighting. Or as it might be more fashionably put: not just for the hell of it. World War II seemed quite pointless to them. For the Germans it was really the second round in a struggle begun in 1914. The Germans knew perfectly well what they were fighting for although their aims changed: they started fighting for world hegemony and ended fighting for sheer survival. But Italy in the event of victory would only have become a German satellite, and even after the turning point in the last war no one wanted to destroy the Italians. It was for long

doubtful whether Mussolini would in fact join in at all and if so on which side. You cannot expect an army to put heart and soul into a fight if they know that a mere toss of the coin put them on one side instead of the other.

Nazism was an hour of nightmarish madness for the Germans; Fascism was a damned nuisance for the Italians. Hitler was a sinister giant; Mussolini – in spite of all his repulsive and unforgivable crimes – is also a comic blunderer. He probably deserves an unprejudiced biography – he was black enough but had his bright spots which are now completely forgotten. Hitler committed suicide in a somewhat amateurish parody of a Wagnerian tragedy; Mussolini and his concubine were hung up by the heels. The Neo-Nazis constitute a possible danger; the neo-Fascists constitute a lunatic fringe. Hitler in Germany is either not mentioned or genuinely condemned; Mussolini in Italy is forgotten.

MEDITERRANEAN POVERTY

THERE exists in post-war Europe a special Mediterranean poverty unknown, or rather wiped out, everywhere else. The poverty of Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece is the misery of hunger, squalor, stench, filth and premature death – under friendly, blue skies and in blazing sunshine. There is a legend – widely held – that the people of sunny and romantic regions like being hungry. It is thought that these people find it amusing not to be able to feed their children and themselves; and that they die happily of tuberculosis, singing *Santa Lucia*.

It is true, of course, that it is better to be hungry and

Special Poverty

sick than to be hungry, sick *and* cold. It is also true that it is more comfortable to be a beggar in Capri than in Novosibirsk, on the Siberian Plain. But it is a mistaken notion that starving to death or spitting blood in Naples is pure *joie de vivre* – or the Italian equivalent of it. The Italian is always a little lost in the town. There is something friendly in the village where one always can go to the neighbour and borrow a little flour or oil or something; and one can also lend – a slightly worrying yet magnificent feeling. Communal misery in some strange fashion almost amounts to individual well-being.

This kind of poverty used to be fashionable and fairly general all over Europe but it has not survived outside the regions mentioned. In Western Europe it is no longer necessary for anyone to starve or to beg for his bread. Poverty here has become a blushing affair – something to be hidden instead of exhibited. In the past it was only the impoverished gentlefolk who were bashful about their penury and distress; today all the poor in the West are. Poverty has climbed two or three rungs higher up the social ladder. Behind the Iron Curtain poverty is again of an utterly different quality. There you meet universal drabness – a kind of Utopian shoddiness. The Communists have not succeeded in abolishing poverty; but they have abolished riches. There is poverty on a vast scale over there; but some of the poor are reasonably well off.

As Italian poverty is a relic of the last century, so is Italian political life. It consists of an old-fashioned parliamentary game between the parties, polarized between Russia and America. There, in the middle of the see-saw sit a large number of earnest, honest and often very able men, trying to improve the conditions of the poor and the general economic position of the

country without turning it Communist, and trying to preserve its Western, democratic way of life without falling prey to Big Business.

The government coalition is dominated by the Christian Democratic Party – itself rather a coalition than a party. It includes some progressive and radical elements as well as a fair number of out-moded, Latin super-Blimps. On the whole, it is a strongly conservative body in which clerical influences are much too powerful. At the other end of the political spectrum are the Communists – an orthodox party of faithful Muscovites. Earlier hopes of Italian Titoism – national communism – have quickly faded and the Italian party is as subservient to the Kremlin as the Bulgarian party is. (The Party's individuality – of which I shall have to say a little more later – is determined by ethnic rather than political characteristics.)

Between these two big parties are the various liberal, nationalist, monarchist and, most important of all, socialist groups. The Social Democrats are divided among themselves: one half – the Nenni Socialists – cannot persuade themselves to support a coalition dominated by the Christian Democrats so they collaborate with the Communists instead; the rest, the Saragat Socialists, cannot persuade themselves to collaborate with the Communists so they collaborate with the Christian Democrats. The two socialist parties call each other fellow-travellers and reactionaries respectively and hate each other more than any of their enemies.

There are two central problems in Italian politics:

(1) Whether to keep in step with Moscow or Washington; (2) Whether to try to keep the rich rich and the poor poor or to achieve some redistribution of wealth. Each party has its slogans and catch-phrases

and some have a few ideas, too. Anyone who proposes radical changes is called a Communist by his adversaries and anyone who objects to subservience to the Soviet Union is called a reactionary American spy. In this atmosphere a well-meaning, if not too imaginative, government tries to do some good: gradually – very, very gradually – to improve the economic situation and to preserve Italy for the Italians. Political activity, thoughts, and immediate aims become, of course, blurred, as it is bound to happen in any country ruled by a coalition. There is too much of the absorbing and utterly pointless tactical parlour-game going on, struggle between personalities and parties, jostling for position, a little elbowing here, a little cleverness there and ... and ... wait a minute ... what did you say? ... do we want land-reform or don't we? Oh yes – we do but we say that we don't so as to weaken the A-wing and the B-Party and when C falls from power because of our objection to the land-reform then we step in and carry out a much more radical land-reform co-operating with the D-wing of the E-party. Unless, of course, the F-wing of the G-party, etc., etc.

Post-war governments have done much more for the urban proletariat than for the poor and landless peasantry. The strength of the Communists has forced them to do so. Labour conditions, labour-laws, wages and salaries are quite satisfactory for industrial workers and office-clerks. Indeed, in some cases they are farcically satisfactory. (I shall return to this subject.) The peasants have fared much worse partly because the Communists – until recently – have taken much less interest in them than in the factory workers and partly also because many of the big landlords (absentee and otherwise) were genuinely anti-fascist because of

the socialistic and anti-rich flavour of Fascism. Small land-reforms were carried out in Italy but achieved very little, except to make both parties – peasants and landlords – suspicious and malcontent. Land-reforms have been carried out under the pressure of the Communist Party. Yet, as soon as the peasant gets his land, he often starts voting for the Christian Democrats. The Communists, they know, may take the land away if they come to power. The Communist Party may help you to get land; but it is the Christian Democrats who help you keep it.

Italy lives, to some extent, in the last century. There is a great deal of Dickensian atmosphere in a country where the rich are really rich and the poor abjectly poor. You see provocative luxury and memorable Venetian parties on one hand and starving children living in putrescent, wormy slums on the other. Italy is a good place for well-meaning intellectuals like myself to pour forth their righteous indignation. But before you get righteously indignant, remember that after all we are living in the twentieth century and not in the nineteenth. Remember before you start shouting revolutionary slogans that you may succeed in bringing about the only possible revolution: a Communist one which only means a redistribution of poverty coupled with Oriental tyranny. So you give a 100 lire to a beggar-woman with a small child in her arms, buy some chewing gum and enter the nearest cinema to see how neo-realism is slowly giving way to Neo-Hollywoodism in the latest Italian film.

BISTECCA DI VITELLO

In Hungarian there is a proverbial 'little iron ring made of wood'. This is, of course, the Hungarian equivalent of the sow's ear made into a silk purse. The Italian version of the same idea may be discovered on every menu in every restaurant. You are offered a dish called *Bistecca di Vitello* which simply means *beefsteak made of veal.* If you do not fancy the idea of beefsteak made of veal, you may have beefsteak made of pork or of lamb, or even of beef.

The Italian Communist Party, in addition to being the second biggest Communist Party in the free world, is also *bistecca di vitello.*

•

There was a time during the forties when both the Italian and the French Communist Parties made a serious bid for power. They failed; and, for the time being at any rate, they seem to be resigned to this failure. A few years ago the Italian Communist Party was a revolutionary force; in a few years it may be so once again. At the moment it is one of the largest Liberal parties in the world.

I do not mean to suggest that the Italian Communists should not be taken seriously; or that there is anything Liberal in their programme. But the effect of their agitation is not at the moment revolutionary but liberalizing. What the Communist Party desires to do is pernicious; but its very existence is beneficial since it forces the government to press forward with legislation in the interests of the working population. The government is forced to do many excellent things which (a) without the existence of a large Communist

Bistecca di Vitello

Party it would never do, or only at a much slower pace, and (b) the Communist Party itself, if in power, would never do either.

The Italian Communists are as good Catholics as most of the people. In other words not very good, nevertheless Catholicism plays an essential part in their lives.

Catholicism in Italy is not a militant minority as it is in this country. It is not even a religion; it is simply *the* religion. There are a few Jews and a few Protestants, just as there are a few Buddhists in Britain and a few Hindus in Finland. The Catholicism of most Italians is a mixture of (1) traditional piety, (2) superstition and (3) social snobbery. (Apart from the usual minority of deeply religious people, Italians are even less religious-minded than the rest of irreligious Europe. The Italian is too much of an individualist to accept any set of rules and dogmas. 'Italy is a pagan country,' a Roman Catholic priest once told me with a deep sigh. 'There is religion in Spain but not in Italy. Why did the Lord choose Italy to be the seat of Christianity? He knows; I don't. Perhaps just because Italy is *the* most unsuitable country for Christianity; just as Russia is the most unsuitable country for Communism. . . .') The Roman Church takes a poor view of Communism for a number of political, economic and religious reasons. It was announced that those who voted Communist in 1953 would be denied the sacraments – in other words they would not receive the absolution even if they went to confession. It is known that in 1953 more than six million people voted Communist but as far as one can ascertain not one single person falls under this ban.

In some cases Communists entering upon marriage have to give written promises that their children to be

born will be brought up as good Catholics; only then are they allowed to wed in Church. First Communion is just as important for Communist families as for the non-Communists. Communists spend just as much on such occasions – on white gowns, photographs, gifts – as other people. A faithful Communist may (or again may not) die on the barricades for the Marxist-Leninist Creed; but to see his neighbour's daughter go to First Communion and not his – that just would not do. It is easy to face and defy the world; but to defy your village needs much more courage and determination. Besides, there may be, after all, and in spite of the teachings of Lenin, such a place as Heaven and it seems unlikely – both Lenin and the Pope seem to agree on this – that there is a special enclosure there for Communists. One will just have to try to slip in without breathing a word about how one voted in 1953. In any case, the vote was secret.

All this is religious deviation. Many Italian Communists are also guilty of marital deviation. They are all expected to lead a virtuous and puritanic life but quite a few slip up on this account. A fair, or more than a fair, number are entangled in divorce cases (in San Marino), living with another comrade's wife, etc. It would be no good remonstrating with them, taking disciplinary action and calling matrimonial irregularities Titoism (or whatever term they prefer to use nowadays). A large number of Italian Communists may remain faithful to one single Creed; but to remain faithful to one single woman is a tougher proposition. And yet . . . Moscow changes the Creed often enough; why should not a poor and humble comrade be permitted to change his lady? Such changes, after all, are purely dialectical.

Because of the Church's strong disapproval the very

poor but equally religious South long refused to join the Communist Party in large numbers. Of late the Communists have made significant progress in the South; but there are millions among the most miserable people in Italy who even today turn away from the Communists in disgust.

*

So this vast and powerful Communist Party – Moscow's most important and powerful spearhead in the West – is a revolutionary army, a deadly enemy of the established order and the sole hope of the poorest of the poor; but it is also a liberalizing influence, a large congregation of faithful Christians and regarded as a menace even by many of the most poverty stricken Southerners.

Bistecca di Vitello.

HOW TO BE KICKED OUT OF A JOB

BEING kicked out of a job is a major art in Italy. Few people excel in it.

Before I can explain the desirability, indeed necessity of being kicked out, I shall have to say a few words about the employed and the unemployed. First of all, I should like to make it clear that in spite of the shocking poverty of far too many people, a great deal has been achieved in post-war Italy and progress is continually being made. There are three large Trade Union Federations, formed on political party lines. The biggest is the Communist dominated Federation (claiming about five million members but no outsider really knows the true figure for this or any other

Federation); second is the Federation of Free Unions under the leadership of the Christian Democrats, claiming over two million members and the third is the Socialist (Saragat) dominated union with a membership of half a million. When I was in Italy, efforts were being made to form a monarchist trade union. I hope this attempt succeeded because the idea of a monarchist trade union appealed to me. Why the monarchists should need a special trade union was not quite clear; ex-monarchs, it seemed to me, stood in much greater need of one.

These various unions are, of course, in keen competition with one another. The situation is almost as bad as it is in England where the main aim of many unions is not to help their members but to harm their rivals.

*

The plight of the unemployed agricultural worker is desperate; the position of the unemployed factory worker is only hard. The Italians are not very good with figures and no one knows the true number of unemployed although it seems extremely likely to be around one million and a half. Figures are, of course, compiled; but they cannot be trusted. Many unemployed people do not register partly because registration is a nuisance and partly because benefits are in any case small and given only for a strictly limited period. Other people who are not entitled to register – some very old people, for instance – do in fact register. Then again it happens that many people change their minds and register and the consequent increase in registration has very little to do with any increase in unemployment. Finally those who are only partially employed, or under-employed, are not taken

into consideration although they cannot live on the money they earn.

*

The position of the employed – whether manual workers or black-coated – is quite good, the position of the skilled worker – as in many other countries – being better than that of the average office worker.

There are many benefits (social insurance, accident insurance, health insurance, etc.) and the various services work well. All the contributions are paid by the employers, all the benefits enjoyed by the employees. Paid holidays are nowadays almost universal, wages are adequate and money is plentiful in industry. The Italian worker is engaged in the important and significant social process of getting onto his motor scooter.

A complicated situation arises, however, when you want to leave your job. When an Italian worker is given notice, he is entitled to almost incredibly generous benefits under a number of headings. Without going into details, your dismissal is your dream come true; if, on the other hand, you resign, you are throwing good money out of the window – although, even in this case, you are entitled to some benefit. Naturally you must have another and better job waiting for you. Assuming that you in fact have, your task now is to get yourself kicked out of your present employment, collecting in the process a huge, almost punitive, sum from your employer. You must not beat up your employer or rob him or set his office on fire; but everything else is apparently permissible. There are many employees in Italy at this very moment who are doing their best to get themselves kicked out but alas to no avail: an otherwise temperamental em-

A Major Art

ployer swallows every provocation, and smiles indulgently at the most insolent remarks. Whenever a hitherto reliable clerk commits an idiotic mistake calculated to ruin the business and land its owner in prison, the latter pats the clerk in question on the back, and invites him out for a drink to cheer him up. When you start behaving like Groucho Marx at his worst; arrive late in the office, leave early, answer your superiors back in the most insufferable fashion, make a mess of your work and try to seduce your boss's wife and daughters, your employer says to himself: 'He has the offer of a better job. He's decided to take it and he'll have to resign soon; no job will be kept for him forever. Patience. Patience. And more patience.' But you talk to yourself, too. 'There is a limit to human endurance,' you say. 'A point is reached when a man becomes so objectionable, disgusting, loathsome and repulsive that Shylock himself would prefer financial sacrifice to breathing the same air as such a monster. With perseverance and devotion I can turn myself into such a monster.' The whole thing thus becomes a battle of wits. And when in the end you are kicked down the stairs, you pick yourself up with a broad and happy grin: you have conquered.

*

The reverse of this may also be true.

A new job may be offered to you and if you are a trustworthy, loved and much appreciated person in your old job, your employer may do you the great and signal honour of kicking you out. This is about the highest tribute any employer can pay a good man at the end of long and honourable service.

*

Italian employers are sorely tried by such behaviour. They are not used to it. You can find in Italy – mostly among the vast concerns – some of the most progressive and generous employers, second to none in the whole world. But on the whole the Italian employer is still paternal; he regards his relation to his employee as that of master and servant. He gives orders, the employee obeys. Every concession for improvement had to be fought for; the employers gave in only to the inevitable and even then only grudgingly.

Italy is a very good country to grow rich in. In most other countries the tax collector relieves you of the irksome problem of what to do with your money. But in Italy you do not pay taxes. How is this? It is all very simple: you just do not pay taxes – that's all.

I read in the *Manchester Guardian* (4 July, 1955) that Miss Gina Lollobrigida, the film actress, was 'fortunate' because the authorities added only £10,000 to her own estimate (declared income) of £24,000 for her annual income. A leading surgeon, Professor Pietro Valdoni had his estimate almost quadrupled – from £11,000 to £43,000. Even this was pretty advantageous compared with the case of Italy's biggest landowner, Prince Alessandro Torlonia. 'The assessors,' wrote the *Guardian*, 'multiplied his declared income by more than thirty. The prince had told the tax authorities that he had earned only 26 million lire (£15,000) in the year. When the assessors stopped counting, his official income stood at £460,000.'

It would be hasty to jump to conclusions and to say that the English are 'more honest' than the Italians. Theirs is an altogether different conception. The state is fair game and the Italians do not regard it as a crime to cheat the authorities. It is a sport, rather like hunting in England. It is a sport of the rich; it has its

season; and it has its small dangers – but it is great fun. The English, for their part, love paying taxes. Paying taxes is, in fact, the second greatest national passion of the English – queueing being the first. Do not be misled by the Englishman's complaints and grumbling: by paying his taxes he does his duty, he shoulders the burdens of what is left of the Empire, he is a good citizen and derives great satisfaction from the fact. Paying income tax is one of those excesses of self-discipline the English need so badly. It is a noble passion; but a passion all the same. It is costly and unique and the Italians just fail to see the beauty in it.

ON GLOBAL SLUMS

WHILE in Italy, I felt constantly ashamed. I liked the Italians – and in the final chapter of this book I am going to say something of their neo-humanism, their most likeable and admirable quality. I was also duly impressed by many aspects of their great and thriving industry – in many engineering and other enterprises the Italians are second to none. Yet, I was also ashamed, all the time.

You see, I felt myself personally responsible for Italian poverty. And, indeed, I am responsible and so are we all. If we had a Socialist Party in Britain instead of having two Tory parties, many more people would agree with me on this point. In England, of course, everything is a little mixed up and everything is a little bit the other way round but, basically, a Conservative Party is – or is supposed to be – a party which wants to conserve things – first of all to conserve privileges. A Socialist Party is – or, again, is

I Blush Alone

supposed to be – a Party which wants to change things for the better, for the sake of the toiling masses (as the Russians would put it), ordinary folks (as the Americans would put it) or the ordinary working people (as, perhaps, the British would like to put it). Today the British working man is satisfied, indeed, complacent. His fighting élan is blurred and all that is left of it is a capacity for grumbling. Older and middle-aged people remember unemployment, hunger and the cruel selfishness of many employers at a time when they could afford to be cruel and very selfish. But what does the ordinary British worker care for Italians and other foreigners? The real Blimps of this decade are not the retired generals but the active trade unionists. The British workman – as far as the Italian, Indian or Indonesian workman is concerned – is a ruling class; and he acts as the member of a ruling class. When Italians try to come here to work in the mines they are kept out at the instigation of their British colleagues. Coloured bus-conductors and drivers are deprived of the opportunity of work by people who call themselves Socialists and who can be very indignant when they read about *apartheid* in South Africa and racial segregation in the United States. Or do they really still call themselves Socialists? And are they really indignant about such things? Or do they only read the sporting pages of the tabloid papers?

The British Labour Party is dominated by the Trade Unions from which most of its money comes, so the Party – with few exceptions – does not even dare to criticize the Unions. The Trade Unions, in turn, too often give in to the noisiest elements, hot-heads, trouble-makers and Communists, and at no level are Trade Unionists any too keen on criticism. The Tories

do not dare to be outspoken about these problems because too much straightforwardness on their part would be regarded with great, and mostly justified, suspicion and would further harm relations between employers and workers. One might be inclined to say that too many people lack the courage of their convictions. But this would be an undeserved compliment. While it is true that too many people lack the courage, the truth is that they lack the convictions as well.

One is driven to the conclusion that there are few people in Western Europe and in the United States who really believe in anything at all. There are few problems nowadays about which people get excited – and in most cases even these concern people thousands of miles away. As I have already mentioned, many people in Western Europe are outraged by South African *apartheid* and American segregation; Americans feel very strongly about British colonialism, etc. It is true that questions, nevertheless, even the problems of Cyprus and Morocco seem remote problems to most people in Western Europe, including England and France. What other questions are there? German rearmament seems a distant and theoretical question to most; Communism used to be interesting in the past but its interest is fading quickly and M. Krushchev has to ride white elephants in India or say very silly or rude things to hit the headlines in a big fashion; poverty and hunger? Well – somehow other people's poverty and hunger are always less worrying and pressing than our own and we are neither poor nor hungry at the moment. What is left? Religion? It used to be quite a point four hundred or even three hundred years ago. But today? Everyone agrees that religion is very beneficial for the other fellow. We all agree that

he should go to Church and pray. Even the controversies between theologists and rationalists died out long ago. Not because rationalism is 'old-fashioned' (religion is much more 'old-fashioned' if we come to that) but simply because the old fervour is gone and – apart from a very small minority – people (among whom a few Catholic converts are the most conspicuous and most articulate) – if I may quote a great theologian – do not care a hoot.

In this intellectual atmosphere – if this be the right word for it – the British working man cannot be blamed for his Blimpism. For the first time in history he feels happy and secure, intends to enjoy life and conserve – yes: conserve – the attainments and prizes of long drawn-out, desperate battles. Who then is to be blamed? I, for one, for not shouting louder. Many others for not saying at all what they believe to be right. First of all, Labour Party and Trade Union Leaders for seeing the signpost and not following the road because certain steps are 'not practicable' (in other words, to advocate them would endanger their personal popularity) or because the British working man 'has to be educated' (i.e. left to his football pools).

No one can be expected all the time to act unselfishly. But why not act then selfishly? Why cannot people recognize their own, obvious interests? The world has become a tiny place. Italy and India are not far away, distant countries as Czechoslovakia used to be, but suburbs of Western Europe. Italy is, in fact, just round the corner. The slums of Pimlico and Lambeth were cleared up but the global slums must be cleared up, too, otherwise their stench will hit our noses before we can say Jack Robinson – and we are unlikely to say anything more conclusive.

The old-age pension in Britain is, of course, our first concern: but what about an old-age pension in Morocco? Housing in Willesden and Glasgow is bound to interest us much more than housing in Calabria or Caracas but we cannot quite wash our hands of any part of the world. It is no good saying that as long as our Health Service works with reasonable efficiency, we do not really care how many Africans die of leprosy. Ours is a dangerously tight little world and it is still shrinking fast. To have created a Welfare State was a great achievement; but we must go on to create a Welfare Planet. If people are disinclined to help the Dago, the Kike, the darkie – I do not know all the repulsive names reserved for them – they should at least help themselves. Why not turn the Dagos, etc., into consumers? Has anyone calculated how much Coca Cola India could drink? A whole Ocean of Coca Cola in one single day. Hundreds of thousands of small motor cars could be sold to Indonesians and millions of pounds of soap to the people of Southern Italy.

As long as British Socialism refuses to be international, it will remain what it is now: the Toryism of the working classes. As long as we refuse to clear the global slums and as long as our working men and women regard themselves not as comrades of the Italian, Indian and Indonesian working men but as their betters, they will be guilty of a foolish crime. And I, for one, will remain ashamed for all of us, even if I have to blush alone.

LUCK IN NUMBERS

I FEEL that to say more about Italian politics would be outside my province. To complete my vague and impressionist picture, however, I have to add one more fact.

The ideological mix-up is a natural, exasperating and, at the same time, endearing feature in this country of fierce individualists. There are seventy-five political parties in Italy – although not all are represented in Parliament. Most of these parties are very small but even the smallest can boast of a sharp and unbridgeable ideological split. There is a party which has only one single member. But he is schizophrenic; and often quarrels with himself.

PRICES

THERE was a time when Italy was famous for her bargaining. It was well known that in all Italian shops you could push the prices down by skilful and persevering negotiation. (i.e. by deprecating the things you really want to buy and long to possess, calling the meal you are about to order foul and nauseating, declaring that you would not accept it even as a gift; the seller meantime praising the very thing he wants to get rid of up to the skies; swearing that he has just changed his mind and will not part with such wonderful goods at any price etc. etc. In those days the prospective buyer had to run out of the shop in disgust, laughing sardonically, at least three times during the course of a normal transaction. An expert bargainer,

Walk-away Technique

I was often assured, could obtain considerable price reductions even in postage stamps.)

I personally hated all this. I am not what the Italians call a born bargainer; I am, in fact, what the Americans call a born sucker. I never even made an attempt at bargaining but I often found myself, all the same, involved in fierce battles without having uttered a word. This unilateral bargaining still exists in Italy. You stop in the street and ask an antique dealer what the price of, say, a jug is. He tells you: 40,000 lire. You move on. When you take your first step, he tells you that you may have the jug for 35,000. By the time you reach the corner – without having uttered one single syllable – you have managed to push the price down to 15,000. In Italy walking away is also bargaining; indeed, it is one of the most effective arguments.

By now the situation has changed greatly. Prices have gone rocketing up and there they stay: bargaining is on the whole quite useless. Prices in Italy are only slightly lower than in France, which means that Italy is a very expensive country for everyone, natives, visitors and tourists, with the single exception of my wife. She never bargains either and yet while in Italy she was able to perform constant miracles. In Rome she would go off to shop on 180 lire. She would stay away for hours and return laden with goods of every description, with 80 lire still in her purse against hard times.

I am no economist and I cannot tell you why prices should be high in one country and much lower in the neighbouring one. But if a layman may be allowed a guess, I am inclined to think that the fact that many Italian shopkeepers aim at a profit of 500 per cent has something to do with this. On one occasion a shopkeeper told me – and I know he was speaking the truth

– that he bought nylon stockings at 400 lire and sold them at 2,000. I asked him whether he was a notorious and exceptionally rapacious robber. He assured me that, on the contrary, he was well known and widely honoured for his moderation and self-denial.

Nevertheless, not everything is expensive in Italy. In Venice, for example, you may sit down in the Piazza San Marco and for the price of one single espresso or ice-cream you can listen to two (sometimes three) orchestras at the same time.

Italy is a country where people keep shopping. First of all, household shopping has to be done every day, and often twice a day, because of the heat and the scarcity of refrigerators. But people keep on buying all sorts of other things, too: large things and small things, necessities and luxuries. This is made possible by that latter-day blessing of ours, hire-purchase. All over Europe and America thousands of millions of pounds are owed to the hire-purchase companies – many of which are decent firms doing a perfectly legitimate business while many others again are simply money-lenders and a fair number, equally simply, usurers. All the same, all of them, the decent firms as well as the usurers (the usurers, indeed, more so since they are more ready to accommodate doubtful customers) are true benefactors. They make it possible for many people to possess things they should otherwise have to do without. The usurers are, after all, one of the most ancient benefactors of mankind. And according to an old truth it is the very poor who can make one very rich.

INTELLECTUALS

ITALIAN intellectuals are few and far between. This is not a derogatory statement; nor is it praise.

We all know something about the peculiar habits of words. An ordinary, harmless and neutral word may suddenly become invested with a pejorative or laudatory meaning. The word 'intellectual' belongs to a small group of words which has put on both shades – a pejorative and a laudatory – at one and the same time. A number of people use the word 'intellectual' in the complimentary sense; others employ it as a slight, as a word of disparagement, gibe, sneer or downright abuse. Intellectuals themselves, of course, endow it with favourable qualities, nevertheless I have yet to meet a man who seriously describes himself as an intellectual. And if he does – he isn't one. It is always the other fellow who is supposed to be an intellectual and the expression, even when applied by one intellectual to another, is a word of approval and irony, of challenge and apologia, of commendation and defiance, at the same time. For other people, the intellectual is simply an odd mixture of a third-rate prophet and a first-rate crank.

Italy can boast of a number of intellectuals – brilliant and witty. But their number is small – much smaller than in France, England or Germany. The Italians, as a nation, do not read much. Observe a rush-hour crowd in London or New York on the one hand and in Rome on the other. In London and New York one person in ten will be without a paper; in Rome one in ten will have a paper. The Italians will watch the women in the bus or tram, the crowd in the street or the passing shop-windows but they do not


CONTRO I REUMATISMI
TENTAZIONE IRRESISTIBILE
Solo in Farmacia
CERTI
VIETATO FUMARE
IL TEMPO

One in Ten

read. Italy's population is not much smaller than Britain's yet the circulation of the largest Italian newspaper is a mere fraction of that of the largest British paper. The same applies to books. Publishers and booksellers complain that Italians do not read enough and they are quite right. The Italians do not read: they watch and talk. There is no permanent theatre in Rome while there are over ten in Oslo – the capital of a country with just over three million inhabitants as opposed to Italy's just under fifty million.

The Italians may be clever and quick-witted but they are not intellectual. They lack *wanderlust,* indeed, most of them lack intellectual curiosity in almost every shape and form. The Scandinavians wander away to the mountains or to Africa on the slightest provocation; the Italians, as a nation, sit at the window and look out. If I may use a military metaphor: the Scandinavians try to inspect the world; the Italians sit at the window and take the salute at a march past. And the world – at least their world – certainly does march past under the windows of all the small, narrow and often smelly streets. And if it is not the whole world, if they miss some of the best sights – well, at least they see whatever they do see, from a comfortable seat. One may argue that it is wiser to try to learn all the secrets of the Via San Pietro than to rush across continents in order to catch hurried glimpses of the Sphinx, the Taj Mahal and the Empire State Building. Yes, it may be wiser. And it is also much less trouble.

The inhabitants of the Italian slums however do not neglect the Taj Mahal because they are lazy or because they are wise but because their financial position, as a rule, does not permit trips to Agra. Yet, the general outlook of the poor and the not so poor is one of

infinite wisdom and infinite laziness. 'What can possibly happen in the world at large that cannot happen in the Via San Pietro?' Sex, money, crime – it is all happening there all the time and one personally knows the whole cast. As for reading newspapers? ... What can a statesman say anywhere in the world that the Romans did not say much better many centuries ago? ... *Wanderlust*? ... With all due deference to the Scandinavians, the sun rarely shines in Narvik but hardly ever stops shining in the Via San Pietro. So the Scandinavians wander about and the Italians stay at their windows. And as soon as theatre performances may be watched from one's window, Rome, too, will have its permanent theatre.

THE CLIMATE

I LIKED many things in Italy but I found the climate unbearable. Perhaps I am spoilt having lived too long in England.

'That's very silly,' you may object. 'The weather is, on the whole, fine and warm in Italy and to compare it unfavourably with English weather is plain nonsense.' But it is not.

Please note that I am not speaking of the weather at all; I am speaking of the climate. The Italians do have, of course, much better weather than we do: more warmth, more pleasant breezes and more sunshine; and, much less fog, smog, sleet, rain, hail, gales and deadly greyness. They have lovely weather but a rotten climate. What can you do, after all, in the sun? You can sun-bathe, of course, and you cannot sun-bathe in smog. And after sun-bathing you can have a

siesta and after a siesta you must have a really good rest. Work is torture in Italy – the Italians ought to be admired for doing as much work as they do, whatever the amount of that may be; thinking is difficult, keeping an appointment a nuisance, and even reading is tiresome. For work, for reading, for thinking, for keeping appointments, give me the lovely English fog, the charming English rain and those adorable gales and blizzards of ours any time. One may ask, of course: who wants to think, to read and to meet people? I am ashamed to admit: I do.

In Italy we could say much more frequently, 'Lovely weather, isn't it?' But the weather is not important; it is the climate that counts. And for all our smog and blizzards and rain and occasional floods here and there, we ought to greet one another every morning with a bright:

'Lovely climate, isn't it?'

III NORTH AND SOUTH

THE LINE

In Italy people talk a great deal about the Line – meaning the sharp and clearly perceptible dividing Line between North and South Italy. Some put the Line north of Rome, others a little to the south of it. Some say that at a definite point you suddenly leave modern, industrial Europe and find yourself in the Middle East with its donkeys, orange groves and palm-trees. The Line has many different names and this I found rather confusing. I am pleased to report that I can clear the matter up. The Line runs actually right through Rome and its correct name is: the *Parker* 51 *Line.*

It was at the Spanish Steps in Rome that I first became aware of its existence. A blonde English girl of distinction and charm – the type that never utters a harsh word and never raises her voice even at Wimbledon Centre Court – was standing there, her eyes flashing and, her face suffused with passion, she foamed at the mouth as she screamed at a gentleman who had just spoken to her:

'No, I do *not* want a Parker 51.'

I looked at her in amazement.

'Poor girl,' I remarked to my wife. 'Off her head!'

But I found out soon enough that she was not off her head. We had hardly walked thirty steps when a gentleman approached me and declared:

'I have a Parker 51 for sale. Only two dollars.'

I declined with thanks. He walked on by my side extolling the virtues of the pen. When I persisted in my refusal, he offered me Swiss watches, Dutch gin, a consignment of dried fruit and a new kind of rubber sponge. This conversation was repeated about two hundred times a day.

The situation really became a little irritating when we reached Naples.

There I stopped a gentleman to ask the way to the Corso Garibaldi. He told me that he would gladly give me the required information if I bought a Parker 51 from him. Two dollars only. Very good. Very cheap.

In three hours in Naples I could have bought about 400 Parker 51 pens; I was urged to visit about three dozen restaurants; I was practically dragged into three churches and five horse-drawn carriages for sight-seeing tours. Seven people offered to take our photograph, more than fifty regaled us with truly beautiful Neapolitan songs and whenever we approached a door, about nine people opened it for us and bowed deeply. The crisis came in Pompeii where as I passed a public convenience, a lady emerged and invited me to try out her establishment, emphasizing its incomparable advantages over her nearest competitor.

That was a little too much for me.

We jumped into the car and drove southward – away from people, away from so-called civilization, away from Parker 51s. We reached Sorrento where hordes of hotel-porters dressed in police-like uniforms tried to stop us and drag us into their hotels or at least their restaurants. When we did not stop they shouted after us that they had Parker 51s for sale.

We passed through Sorrento and reached a tiny village nearby. Not a single porter tried to abduct us

'Parker 51?'

so – for that very reason – we stopped and took a room. When we went out for a walk the porter, dressed like a policeman, was busy in front of the hotel, trying to stop cars.

We started walking briskly and walked for an hour till we reached the top of a cliff – a kind of terrace over the sea. There was a priest deep in prayer among the rocks taking no notice of us, indeed, of the material world, around him. Below us rolled the deep blue sea, above us stretched the deep blue sky; around us towered the great bare rocks and in front of us knelt a priest in deep and pious prayer. Here, at last, everything was peace and quiet.

I was lost in the sheer, enthralling beauty of the place.

Suddenly I started. Someone was talking to me. It was the priest. He had a deep, mellifluous voice. He said:

'I have a Parker 51 for sale. Two dollars only. Very good. Very cheap.'*

* I cannot resist adding a footnote. This chapter appeared a few weeks ago in the Dutch weekly, *Vrij Nederland*. Soon after its publication I received a letter from Amsterdam. It looked rather bulky and when I opened it, I found a pile of disgusting inky dirt in it – the remains of a fountain pen. This horrid mess ruined our tablecloth – I had opened the envelope at the breakfast table – also it ruined two pieces of toast and covered my hands with ink so effectively that it took me a fortnight to get rid of it. There was a note attached from the Parker people in Amsterdam, explaining that they only wanted to show me what worthless imitations were sold in Italy disguised as Parker 51s. Now I know. And I am so grateful.

NAPLES

In Naples a friend of mine said he would take me to see someone I would probably be glad to meet.

'He's a business-man,' he added. 'He used to be the managing director of a vast and prosperous concern. His name is Giuglio Something. You just call him Giuglio.'

'What kind of concern?' I asked. 'Steel? Oil? Textiles?'

He reflected.

'Textiles,' he said at last. 'You could call it textiles.'

'You seem a little vague on the point,' I remarked.

'I am,' he agreed. 'But I daresay it was textiles.'

We drove out of the centre of Naples, turned left before the long tunnel and stopped very near a busy tram-terminus. We found Giuglio in the street, sitting on a stone, near a fence. He spat on the pavement when he saw us approaching but there was nothing personal in this. We talked about various things, my friend acting as interpreter whenever my Italian broke down. As soon as the word 'business' was mentioned, Giuglio denied hotly that he had anything to do with any business concern. We entered a little nearby inn, had something to eat and drank a lot of wine. The wine loosened Giuglio's tongue and soon he was telling me all about his business ventures.

'It happened a long time ago . . .' he began. 'It was after the Salerno landing. Naples was occupied by the Allies. The town was swarming with Americans and we were poor. We are always poor but then we were much worse off than usual. So we stripped Negroes . . .'

He breathed a reminiscent sigh and started another bottle.

'We had to form a company for that, hadn't we? I was made general manager as I had more education than the others. But the rest of them were all very nice and decent chaps. Competition was fierce in those days. And we were only a small firm. A modest little undertaking. Economically unimportant – yet we prospered. We had no reason for complaining. But we had to work hard.'

He needed no more prompting now. He added a little technical detail:

'You couldn't strip more than one Negro a night, you see. That's not much, is it? And I have a big family. And I had many partners.'

So far this was all too quick and much too involved for me but soon enough the whole story became clear. The American troops were in dire need of warmth and human contact. So Giuglio and his associates gave them warmth and human contact. Having somehow acquired decent clothes and tolerable shoes for themselves so as to inspire confidence they would get acquainted with a Negro soldier – a task easy enough as the coloured troops were all kind and friendly. Later in the evening they invited the Negro to supper. He usually tried to insist on being the host but Giuglio and his friends would not hear of it. It was rare – they would say – to meet such a splendid fellow and he simply must do them the honour of accepting their invitation. They – a party of three or four people – went to a good restaurant. Giuglio ordered some food – the choice was modest but for good money you could always eat quite well even in those days – and also a few litres of heavy red wine and then a few litres more. When the Negro warrior was sufficiently drunk, they suggested a little walk. Supporting him on both sides, they took him to a bombed site or into a bombed

Textile Business

and derelict house, undressed him completely and then disappeared with his clothes, boots, watch, cash etc. – leaving the poor man there stark naked in a drunken stupor.

The goods were auctioned next morning at a regular auction market organized by various Neapolitan businessmen. The takings were equally and fairly divided between the partners of Giuglio's firm.

'But why auction?' I asked.

'There was no other way,' Giuglio replied. 'We could not divide the goods. We could not give the boots to one and a pair of trousers to another. The boots were much more valuable. Only cash could be properly shared out. But we would not trust any member of our partnership to go and sell the goods. At an auction we were all present and all of us saw what was going on. One had to be fair.'

'And honest,' nodded my friend.

'Quite,' Giuglio agreed.

I learned that the auction market – used by scores of similar business undertakings – was as strictly and formally organized as the better known and more reputable auctions in and near Bond Street.

'Poor chaps,' I said. 'Knowing the army and the military police one cannot fail to suspect that it was rather embarrassing for a soldier to return to his unit stark naked.'

'Stark naked?' said Giuglio angrily. 'But he was not stark naked.'

'I thought that was what you said. . . .'

'Not at all,' Guiglio protested. 'We always left their identity discs round their necks. You can't call that stark naked. We never took the discs otherwise the poor fellow might have landed in trouble.'

'That's true,' I nodded. 'With the disc he could

establish his identity. His identity – the only thing left to him.'

'Even so,' my friend joined in, 'a certain amount of embarrassment could not be avoided. Luckily, the Negroes soon found out about the auction market. In many cases they managed to borrow enough money to go to the market and buy their belongings back. So all ended well and everybody was happy.'

'Sounds like a fairy tale,' I said. 'But tell me, Guiglio, why Negroes? If there is one thing I dislike in your story it is its racial flavour. Why do business with poor Negroes only?'

'No discrimination,' Giuglio said, raising his hand. 'No segregation. No persecution. It's just that it was cheaper to make a Negro drunk. White Americans cost more. Englishmen – well, quite impossible. But the Negro was cheap. I had to think of my overheads.'

'That you owed to your partners in common honesty,' I conceded. 'And to your own reputation as an efficient business-man.'

'Later,' Giuglio continued, 'the Negroes became suspicious of our human warmth and then we had to invest more money. And at times our cordial invitations had to be extended to white soldiers. But by then we could afford it.'

A short pause followed. Then Giuglio went on:

'It was nice while it lasted. But it did not last long enough. Well,' he shrugged his shoulders and reached out for his glass, 'all good things come to an end. Only misery lasts.'

'And, if I may enquire,' I asked Giuglio, 'what are you doing now?'

'I am still in business,' he replied modestly.

THE DEAD HELP THE LIVING

I AM not very fond of macabre jokes although I have nothing against them in principle. The last time I attempted anything in this line was quite a few years ago when I was still a student at Budapest university. My brother and I compiled a neat little collection of true stories under the title 'Amusing Deaths and Funny Funerals'. Funny funerals made up the major part of our book – stories of gaffes, blunders, *faux-pas*, Spoonerisms or downright idiocies perpetrated by priests, parsons, rabbis and other orators which had reduced mourners at the graveside to helpless laughter. Valedictory orations at the open grave are a favourite custom all over the Continent and every speaker proudly counts the tear-drops he has succeeded in squeezing out of defenceless relatives. People at a grave laugh very easily because they are all terrified at heart. Every funeral we see is, basically, our own funeral and Heavens! don't we all feel a deep, selfless, human sympathy for ourselves. An undignified sneeze in the middle of a grandiloquent passage brings a wide and happy grin to the faces of the mourners; when the parson refers to the deceased as 'unforgettable' and half a minute later forgets his name and calls him Leonard instead of Ludwig, joyful giggles and happy chuckles arise; and when the rabbi quotes Goethe or Chaucer in Hebrew he is rewarded with a side-splitting roar that any music-hall comedian might envy.

I was reminded of all this in Naples where death is not only a source of fun but also a source of credit. Hiring babies and going begging with them is an ancient trick discernible by even the most naive and

The Death Trick

good-hearted American tourists from Kansas City. A simple 'I'm hungry' is not only unimaginative but completely ineffective when said to one who has just treated himself to an enormous meal. After a hearty supper most people are incapable of grasping the meaning of the word 'hunger'. So death is drawn into the armoury. When a Neapolitan tells the tourists, 'My mother died two days ago. . . . Please give me a few lire so that I can bury her. . . .' – surely that is grim enough to open the most closely guarded purse. It can hardly fail to bring in a little cash and fooling the susceptible foreigner is a source of endless merriment for the perennially bereaved.

The death trick is also the only one which succeeds with the authorities. Not that the authorities don't see through it; yet in certain situations they must give way. When the sheriff comes to take possession of a room – or several rooms called somewhat euphemistically a flat – bringing his men with him to carry the furniture out to the street because the inmates owe four years' rent – well, in such a situation no excuse is of any avail except the sudden tragic death of a very near relation. The sheriff is received by a wailing crowd of children and adults and told that grandmother has just died. He is led into the room and sees grandmother's corpse laid out, the face covered with a white sheet. He may or may not notice that grandmother's corpse is shaking with mirth under the sheet – but what can he do? He knows perfectly well that the old lady will get up and laugh her head off with the rest of the family as soon as his back is turned. All the same, one cannot kick a corpse out, not even a dummy corpse, not even a corpse that is roaring with laughter. Thus the family gains another three or four days' possession of the filthy den; and also gains self-

confidence. They feel radiant and successful. Three or four days? Many things may happen in three or four days.

For example, grandfather may easily die, too.

VENICE

VENICE is, of course, one of the immortal marvels of this world; it is also a provincial city. It has the qualities of an earthly Paradise; it is also about the size of Leeds. To spend a week in Venice is a dream come true; to spend a year in Venice is hardly endurable. The art historian may be an exception but most ordinary people are ashamed to confess to one another or even to themselves that they are at a loss as to how to spend the afternoon of their third day. One dreams throughout a lifetime of getting to Venice and when one gets there . . . is there anything so disappointing as the dream come true? Not that Venice does not live up to your dreams. The trouble is she goes far beyond all dreams. . . . Poor Venetian housewives – they go to the greengrocer for potatoes in a motor-boat and they fetch the sausages by gondola. . . . In Venice I felt full sympathy with Adam and Eve who by hook or by crook, by fair means and foul, got out of Paradise.

Not that I, personally, was bored in Venice. In addition to the Piazza San Marco, the Canale Grande, the Academy, Palace of the Doge and innumerable other wonders which I admire with the rest of the world, I know in Venice the two or three best coffee-houses in Italy. Give me three good coffee-houses and I can bear three thousand original Titians without a

B–r–r–r!

murmur. (This is not a boast; it is a humiliating confession. I am a debased, Central-European, anthropoid coffee-house dweller. Thank God, there are very few left like me.)

*

There is nothing new I can say about Venice, except to point out that it is one of the coldest cities in the world.

Most people think that the sun keeps shining over Italy and over Venice. I used to believe so myself. Unfortunately, the sun knows nothing of this. There is no country in the world – with the single exception of Spain – where people freeze so much as in Italy – particularly in Venice. The inhabitants of Siberia drink tea and vodka and try to heat their houses as best they can. The Eskimos build cosy little igloos and wear several furs. But the people of Venice declare 'This is a wonderfully warm, semi-tropical city' and they build marble floors in their houses and do not give a thought to stoves or central heating. A few years ago when I visited the Arctic Circle I nearly fainted under the blazing sun (true, it happened to be the greatest heat-wave for seventy-six years) but I almost caught pneumonia in one of the best hotels in Venice. With chattering teeth I dreamt of those admirable boarding houses in Bayswater and Pimlico where you drop a shilling in a slot every two or three minutes and light a gas-fire. There are no gas-fires in Venice; there are no electric fires in Venice; in that city of permanent sunshine and Adriatic lustre you can freeze like sparrows on the Siberian steppe. While doing so, you may sing *Santa Lucia* in your agreeable tenor voice.

BOLZANO

THE Italians in Bolzano are mostly Germans. Or Tyroleans. Bolzano lies in that part of Italy which is still Central Europe, or rather Mittel-Europa – i.e. the Germanic part of Central Europe. The picturesque Old Town is purely Italian but the *Konditorei* (confiserie), with its *Kaffee mit Schlag* (coffee with whipped cream) is still the Empire of Francis Joseph, translated into Trentino – or Alto Adige – Italian and revived by a good amateur company.

•

It was after midnight when I was crossing the Piazza Madonna and heading towards Via Andreas Hoffer that I saw a solitary female figure studying a shop window intensely. Being an experienced traveller and man of the world, I had a fair inkling of what her profession might be. Hers was an old, old profession and she was an old, old girl. She turned as I approached and seemed about to address me. I did not change my course. First, because I am unwilling to give unnecessary offence to anyone, secondly, because I was curious to find out what phrase she was going to employ. What she actually said surprised me and pleased me to no small extent. She simply said:

'Grüss Gott.'

This greeting means roughly, 'God greet you!' – but its flavour is untranslatable. 'How eloquent must the parish priests of Bolzano be,' I said to myself, 'if even the ladies of the street greet you in God's name?' It was a passing thought only. And yet the greeting had cheered me up immensely. 'There is something incorruptible, something basically naïve, endearing

'Grüss Gott'

and chaste in everybody,' I thought. I knew very well I was being silly and sentimental. But must a humorist be hard-boiled and cynical 365 days a year? In Bolzano I had my day off.

Grüss Gott.

SAN MARINO

I WAS about to park my car in a little square facing the Hotel Titano. A passer-by warned me not to.

'Why not?' I asked. 'I can't see any 'NO PARKING' sign.'

'There isn't one,' the man agreed, 'but that doesn't mean you can park there. Yesterday the Minister of the Interior was very annoyed when he found a car parked there.'

'The Minister of the Interior?' I said. 'I want to have a word with him about this. Can you send him along?'

It was my expectation that the few people gathered around us would greet my remark with a roar of happy laughter. They did not. The man just nodded:

'One moment please ... I think he is at the tobacconist's.'

He went off to fetch the Minister. My fellow-passenger warned me:

'The Minister of the Interior is a very temperamental man.'

No harsh words had ever passed between me and the Home Secretary of the United Kingdom, I reflected, on account of my parking habits, although I had spent more than seventeen years in Britain; was I now to start a quarrel with the Minister of the In-

terior after five minutes in San Marino? No, it wouldn't be fair. So I moved my car.

My fellow passenger was an interpreter. I had crossed the San Marinese frontier (no guards) and had been welcomed by a huge board to 'The Ancient Land of Liberty'. I had climbed up to the top of the majestic sugar-loaf shaped Mount Titan. On reaching the town of San Marino itself – the capital of the republic of San Marino – I had stopped at a terrace to feast my eyes on the magnificent, indeed, in some respects, unique sights. It was then that a gentleman ran up and addressed me:

'You are English?'

'Yes, I come from England,' I replied.

'Good,' he said. 'I am the English interpreter here. I am the only man in San Marino who speaks English.'

'Can you direct me to a hotel?' I asked.

He was already getting into the car.

'Sure. I'll take you there,' he said. 'We'll go to the Hotel Titano. The manager there is the only other man in San Marino who speaks English.'

On our way to the hotel the interpreter told me:

'By the way, you owe us £400,000.'

I had been touched before in Italy (though not so far in this Ancient Land of Liberty, San Marino) but the sums had always been more modest. I replied cautiously:

'I don't think I've ever met you before.'

'Besides,' I continued after a moment's pause, 'I cannot quite recall ever running up a bill of £400,000 anywhere.'

'It's not you personally,' he informed me. 'It's Great Britain. She owes us £400,000 war damages. You made an offer of £26,000 *ex gratia* payment. That's just not good enough. We need the money.'

'Well,' I told him firmly, 'don't count on me. I am a careful man. I'm not in the habit of throwing my money about.'

He took me to the hotel. I was just about to go up to my room when the manager called after me:

'I say,' he said, 'you know you owe us £400,000?'

'My attention has been drawn to this,' I replied. 'And I have already made it clear that I am not going to pay up. Not even half of it. Not even the £26,000 *ex gratia* or otherwise. I should like this to be clearly understood between myself and the population of San Marino.'

It was, however, not clearly understood. I had to refuse payment on many subsequent occasions. The origin of the claim is this: in 1944 retreating German forces took refuge in the republic and the British found it necessary to bomb the Germans, causing considerable damage to San Marinese property. The British subsequently repudiated all legal obligations in connexion with this damage but offered an *ex gratia* payment. The damage, according to the San Marinesi was £400,000; according to the British, £26,000. The discrepancy seems to be not insignificant and pending a settlement I have to advise British tourists not to pay even the smaller sum however hard they may be pressed by inn-keepers, ice-cream vendors and waiters.

•

San Marino has the reputation of being the smallest and most ancient state in the world. With her 1600 years of continued existence she seems, indeed, to be the oldest. But she is certainly not the smallest: she has twice as many inhabitants as Andorra and with her territory of thirty-eight square miles she is a verit-

'You owe us £400,000 . . .'

able great power compared with Monaco's 360 acres. According to history – mingled with legend – a Dalmatian by the name of Marinus, an early Christian by profession, came to Mount Titano in the 4th century to escape persecution and founded the republic. San Marino is now governed by statutes dating from the 13th century (the period of Magna Charta) and it is emphasized in all pamphlets, tourists guides and brochures that she is an autonomous state with full internal and external sovereignty and enjoying all international rights in complete equality with the United States or China. San Marino has about 12,500 inhabitants, about as many as Horley, Surrey. Sutton Coldfield has about four times as many, yet Sutton Coldfield cannot even contemplate sending an Ambassador to Washington; San Marino could if only she had the money.

The San Marinesi are conscious of being the citizens of an independent republic, however tiny, and they claim that they are not even of Italian stock. They are proud of their long history and of their love for, and defence of, liberty and independence. San Marino as a state is not a joke; or if it is, it is a very good joke.

■

Everywhere you see San Marino's main products for the tourist trade: an excellent but very sweet Muscat wine, a *torta* – midway between a cake and a wafer and the green Titanium liqueur. They have an attractive line in ceramics too. A reference book in front of me describes San Marino's main industries as 'wine, cereals, cheese, olive oil, cattle, ceramics and lime.' San Marino may, indeed, possess all these but these are not her main industries. Her main industries are:

postage stamps, divorce, gambling, mediaevalism and tourism.

(1) Let us begin with tourism. It is entirely a post-war development started by the Casino. Before 1938 very few ordinary tourists ever thought of spending a holiday, or even a day or two in San Marino. After the war, however, the tourist trade developed by leaps and bounds. An official gave me these figures:

'In 1949 we had 74,500 tourists,' he said. 'In 1950 61,000 only. In 1951 the blockade was in full force so we had very few visitors indeed. But in 1952 166,000 people came, next year 315,000 and in 1954 more than 600,000. We can only count registered tourists who spend at least one night here. We reckon on another 200,000 day trippers. That makes 800,000 for 1954. This year – 1955 – we hope to reach the million mark.'

That means about eighty-three times the sum total of the inhabitants. The corresponding figure would be about 4,150 million tourists a year in Great Britain, much more than the population of the globe.

Most of the tourists are Italian but there are also many Germans, Swiss and Austrians; Scandinavians form a sizable minority. There are as yet very few English and American tourists. But I am sure they would like San Marino's majestic charm and playful grimness. This quaint, Lilliputian world possesses a unique beauty all its own. It is also one of the best preserved mediaeval communities extant and although San Marino rather trades on her mediaevalism there is nothing artificial about it; it is really there in every church, fort and rock.

(2) The Casino. You have probably wondered as I did what the official quoted above meant when he spoke of the blockade in 1950 and 1951. It was in 1949 that the Government of San Marino hit upon the idea

of increasing its revenue by opening a gambling Casino. Tourists – mostly Italian visitors from Rimini, Ravenna and other towns – started arriving en masse and they found the place irresistible. Many lost money, as in all Casinos, and many lost much more than they could afford. So the Italian Government stepped in and – in Signor Scelba's words – refused to allow the Italian citizens 'to be bled of their savings'. San Marino was asked to close the Casino. San Marino being the Ancient Land of Liberty refused to close the Casino. So the Italian police blockaded the frontiers and the republic was forced in the end and after a heroic struggle, to close the Casino. All the same, the Casino played a glorious part in San Marinese history since it laid the foundation stone of tourism. Today, if Italian citizens still desire to be bled of their savings, they have to travel to the Lido, Genoa or Naples, where, however, the revenue of the Casino goes into the pockets of the Italian, not the San Marinese, government. Which makes a great deal of difference from the moral point of view.

(3) Legend has it that San Marino – before opening the Casino – sent a study-group to Reno, to examine the celebrated and efficient gambling institutions of Nevada. The study-group, so I am told, studied roulette and baccarat with zeal and devotion but, at the same time, could not fail to notice Nevada's second flourishing industry: divorce. So the San Marinesi started publicising their own famous and ancient law-courts where divorces could be obtained at a reasonable price. The population of Italy once again became feverishly interested since divorce does not exist in Italy at all. Of course, only residents of San Marino could obtain a divorce in the republic but – fortunately – anyone could establish residence there after a

month's stay. Once again the Italian Goverment stepped in. San Marinese divorce is still held valid in Italy but it takes a year now to establish residence. It seems to me that San Marino goes out of her way to offer the Italians all sorts of fun but the spoil-sport Italian Government always interferes.

(4) The Italians cannot – and do not even try to – spoil the fun San Marino has with postage stamps. A treaty exists between Italy and San Marino, according to which Italy makes an annual payment (it is now £90,000 but the sum is the subject of desperate bargaining every year) and in return San Marino forgoes her right to print money, grow tobacco, distil alcohol or impose duties of any kind. She is, however, allowed to print her own stamps and this she does with a zeal and vigour unparalleled since the days of Montenegro. Magnificent and impressive stamps pour from the printing presses every month or so to the delight and despair of collectors. You can buy postcards in San Marinese shops with varied and colourful stamps (the grouping chosen by experts) already affixed.

*

There are seventy shops in the republic and eleven restaurants. Garibaldi once stayed in one of the hotels, and President Lincoln wrote to the Captains Regent in 1861: 'Although your dominion is small your state is nevertheless one of the most honoured in our history.' President Roosevelt also spoke of San Marino with admiration. Apart from polite phrases about ancient liberties and fortitude etc. San Marino has indeed a splendid record in sheltering political refugees. During and after the last war more than 100,000 refugees passed through the little state – about eight times the total population. If I may revert to my

statistical comparison, the corresponding figure would be some 400 million refugees in Britain, and 1,040 million in the United States.

San Marino has no daily newspaper and only three or four weeklies. She has an army of 200, mostly part-time, soldiers. Service in this militia is, in theory, compulsory for all males between the ages of sixteen and fifty-five. It is rare for people to be called up for full-time military service. In 1944, at the height of the world war, San Marino had to strengthen her armed forces by eighty men. They proved unequal to the task of keeping out the retreating German divisions because – as I was informed – they had not been properly mechanized. Indeed, I was told, not one of the eighty men was mechanized at all. San Marino also has a police force of fourteen and there are another six secret policemen, all personally known to, and liked by, every citizen.

*

I visited Government Palace and sat on the twin thrones of the two Captains Regent – San Marino's Heads of State, elected for six months and not eligible for another term for three years afterwards. This was the first and, I fear, the last time that I ever sat on a throne.

San Marino, by the way, was ruled at the time of my visit by a Communist-Socialist coalition which possessed a very small majority in the Council. A great deal has been said about the 'red rule' and the 'Communist regime' of San Marino but the little republic is quite unlike a People's Democracy. There were elections in 1955 and someone hit upon the wonderful idea of bringing San Marinese voters back from America and Belgium (a number of San Marinesi are

working in the mines of Belgium) to oust the dangerous reds. About sixty people came from Detroit, thirty more from France and Belgium – ninety altogether, a number thought sufficient to bring about a Christian Democratic landslide. The surprising result, however, was an increased majority for the left, not because the people tend to be leftish but because they are good San Marinesi. It appeared to them that the Socialists and Communists might be better guardians of their ancient rights and constitution; and they feared that the Christian Democrats would be too subservient to Italy. The painful memory of one of the outstanding events of recent San Marinese history still lingered on – the Casino episode in which the Italian Christian Democrats had been the villains of the piece.

During my visit to Government House I told the junior official who accompanied me that I should like to speak to the Foreign Minister. We were informed, however, that the Council of Ministers was in session. I was about to withdraw modestly but the young official informed me that the Cabinet meeting presented no difficulty as one could have the Foreign Minister summoned out to the corridor, and Signor Giacomini, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, actually did come out to see me in the Debating Chamber of Parliament.

There was some excitement and expectation in the air; the Cabinet was expecting a telephone call from Paris. I asked Signor Giacomini to give me an exposé of San Marinese foreign affairs. He told me he was just bargaining with Italy to have the yearly quota increased. He added that he was also bargaining with Britain which, he explained, owed San Marino £400,000 for war damage but had offered only £26,000 *ex gratia* payment. Signor Giacomini hinted that he

might accept £100,000 if the money were paid without any further delay. I behaved as though I had not quite caught his meaning and left without paying the £100,000, *ex gratia* or otherwise.

*

Next day I had to flee San Marino in haste. Events had taken a somewhat unexpected turn.

During the morning I was talking to an official in his room when his telephone rang. Whatever he was told on the line quite obviously had an electrifying effect on him. He turned to me in great excitement, covering up the mouthpiece of the telephone:

'I am told that the Duke of Gloucester is on his way to San Marino. Is that true?'

The Duke of Gloucester was visiting British war graves in Italy at the time and, according to this worried government official he had changed his route and was now heading towards San Marino.

'Are you expecting him?' I asked. 'Were you notified of this visit?'

'No,' he replied. 'That's the whole point, you see. We must make some preparations if he is coming. My colleague who has just rung me says that the Duke has heard that there are British war graves in San Marino and that is why he is on his way here now.'

'Oh, you have British war graves here,' I said. 'How many?'

'Two.'

Then he asked again:

'Is the Duke coming or not?'

'How should I know?' I asked him.

'He is your Duke,' he said firmly.

I pointed out that I was not really authorized to act as spokesman for the Duke of Gloucester. I said that

the two British soldiers buried in San Marino deserved as much respect as the two, or twenty-two thousand buried elsewhere. But – I contended – these royal tours were planned months beforehand and it seemed unlikely that, on hearing of San Marino's two war graves, the Duke of Gloucester would upset his plans, cancel his other arrangements and drive into a foreign state unannounced. But – I added emphatically – I really had no idea and they must not rely on my advice or information.

He nodded and picked up the receiver.

'Look here,' he said. 'I have an Englishman here in my room. Some sort of semi-official person. He knows all about these royal tours. He says we needn't worry. It is absolutely out of the question for the Duke of Gloucester to come here. He says he is prepared to take full responsibility.'

I returned to my hotel, packed my suitcase, paid my bill and left the ancient republic in a hurry.

Just in case the Duke turned up after all.

NEO-HUMANISM

LET us now return to Italy and try to answer the question posed at the beginning of this book: 'What is the reason for the present outbreak of Italomania?'

I believe it is due to a quality in the Italians which I should like to call neo-humanism. It is not an altogether admirable trend – it has its darker side – but it has enough endearing qualities to make it specially appealing to the rest of the people of Western Europe. What are then the ingredients of this neo-humanism?

(1) The basic essential is warm, human contact. Bargaining, quarrelling, hating some of your neighbours and loving the others, telling them off, treading on their toes – these are all human contacts of a rather informal kind. In England and in Northern Europe – and, although in a different way, also in America – all human contacts have become frigid and cold and the temperature is still dropping fast. The man whose home is his castle sincerely wishes it wasn't. His instinctive desire is to open his castle to the public but he cannot do so for a number of reasons: (a) he is rather shy of showing his interior decorations to strangers; (b) he is afraid that it is no good inviting the public because no one would turn up – so he takes up a defensive and superior attitude and keeps the gates closed; (c) he was brought up to believe that his home is his castle so he clings to this notion. Unlike the owners of vast and stately mansions, he can stick to his private castle since it does not collapse over his head for lack of entrance fees. So there he is, pent up in his fortress, private and lonely – but he longs to be pushed about, elbowed in the stomach, bawled at and, the next moment, warmly embraced.

(2) Neo-humanism also means individualism. The English are of course individualists but somehow in our age of mass-production even our individualists have a mass-produced appearance. Many people seem to cling desperately to their individualism; they sternly refuse 'to be like the rest'. This refusal may be well justified but it is also well planned. As Goethe used to say: 'I discern the purpose and it makes me sad.' In Italy things are different. An Italian political party manages to represent more views than there are members; every Italian has his own idosyncrasies, his own ways of doing things and, somehow, remaining his own

Neo-Humanism

master. The great industrialists of Milan, the civil servants of Rome and the beggars of Naples, they all do, within limits, as they please. People are not the slaves of their employers, nor of the people next door, nor even of their own conscience. Or at least, this is the impression they give to the wistful and slightly envious foreign observer.

(3) There is a lack of hypocrisy in this neo-humanism which is very refreshing. Hypocrisy is the plague of our age. It is not the sanctimonious cant of a former age; ours is a curious kind of hypocrisy coupled with a large dose of indifference. There are no values about which we really care but we still insist on keeping up fairly good and reasonably virtuous appearances. We are not religious but we are not vociferously anti-religious either. We are not even 'scientific humanists' – we simply leave the subject alone. While not too moral, we try not to look immoral. We disregard many rules but do not disclaim them. We do not rebel – we are too lazy, too indifferent and too conformist to rebel – we simply do not comply with the rules and hope that no one will take the trouble to notice it. That is why we find the almost childish (and that also means crude and cruel) sincerity of the Italians so pleasing. They are not in business 'to serve the public' but to make money and get rich quickly. When they play a game, they want to win, they start a riot on the slightest provocation and sometimes they beat up the referee. Some of them are deeply religious but the rest make no secret of their conviction that religion is bunk. Women are there to be conquered – completely and expeditiously. All this, in spite of its crudeness, has a breath of fresh air, a rush of sincerity. We are not better than they; but we are surprised to find that they do not want to look better than they are.

Italian neo-humanism also possesses a fundamental optimism and this is an essential part of its wide appeal. The modern attitude by and large is true or feigned pessimism or – in the best case – a shrug of the spiritual shoulders, an acceptance of the gloomy future which (some of us fear) may not turn out quite so gloomy after all. Today even the humorist finds it almost obligatory to try to imitate the attitudes struck by a number of able American comic writers: I mean the attitude of lofty disdain, of despondent disgust, of melancholy aloofness. The Italians reject this attitude and we love them for it. Nor does their neo-humanism rush to the opposite extreme of hedonism – which is just the reverse of despair. They simply say or imply: the hydrogen bomb may be a distant threat but it is none of my business. My business may be to be blown up with the rest but that does not need my immediate attention. Nina and Giovanna command my immediate attention; that job and that dinner. Wouldn't I look a damn fool if I missed that kiss, lost that business deal or that dinner and then wasn't even blown up? I should look pretty ridiculous and that is the one thing I abhor. Anyway, life is Nina's smile, Luigi's job, Giovanna's dinner; and not that bomb. Life is life; life is not death.

This is the simple message of Italian neo-humanism. It is a vague, odd but sincere and cheerful mixture of things spiritual and material, vulgar and superb. I was thinking of all this walking in the streets of Rome, when I was suddenly confronted with a neon-sign on a large bank. It read:

BANCO DI SANTO SPIRITO

'Bank of the Holy Spirit'.

'That's it,' I nodded. A pointer to a curious but happy future.

In *Italy for Beginners,* George Mikes writes with a flagrant disregard for guide-book conventions to give you the inside information on Italy you really want to know . . .

How the Living help the Dead; How to be Kicked out of a Job; Two Redeeming Sins; Prices, Hotels, Women; a portmanteau guide to any Italian cathedral and any Italian town . . . highlights of a humorous classic in the inimitable Mikes manner.

United Kingdom 4/-
Australia $0.70
New Zealand $0.55
South Africa R0.55
Canada $0.85