

NON-FICTION

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ITALY

'Letter From Siena'

From

DAVID HIGHAM ASSOCIATES

LIMITED

76 DEAN STREET, SOHO
LONDON, W.1

LETTER FROM SIENA

BY

Maurice Bowdon

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1.

The road outside hasn't been asphalted and is a blinding dusty strip in the morning sunlight. I've seen a salamander twice, darting across the pebbles; and a Little Owl sitting on a milestone in broad daylight, staring at us, craning his neck round; also a grass-snake, and a weasle. There are many cuckoos in the woods behind us, and sometimes they sing on the lower note only, three straight notes like a train-hooter; and nearly always there is a nightingale at night, quite close to our window, quite alone. There are foxes in the woods but we never hear one bark. Sometimes a pheasant or woodgrouse flaps away close to the house, with an echoing cry of alarm. There are warblers and wheatears and stonechats; many house-martins, but I've only seen one swallow so far. The house-martins swooped over the house for a few days after we arrived but they seem to have lost interest now. I was surprised to see a jay yesterday with its win^e-coloured breast, flapping down heavily from one branch to another. We look straight across at a wonderful property where there are vineyards, cornfields, grass for forage, olives, tomatoes, maize, and a stream hidden among saplings; the crop grows between vines. Two families work this land, which divides a valley and two hills in a checkboard way; and the padrone lives in town. From here

the house looks Austrian, shaded with trees, with a steep slope in front of it. The owner has let it go to ruin and won't allow the peasants to use the vacant rooms. We went over these yesterday---the beams were propped up with tree-trunks, the windows were hanging open and birds had made their nests in the hinges; there were rat-holes everywhere and the furniture was encrusted with filth. All the pride has been knocked out of the land for both the owners and the peasants. They are in the hands of middlemen, who pull strings and influence the politics. The cities are living on the Italian earth like vampires, giving it nothing back. Hence you get a big communist vote, because the communists promise a state agricultural programme.

I suppose the charity and harmony in Italy come from the common people. The aristocracy was all but destroyed by the Counter-Reformation. There was some faith activity in the eighteenth century---the baroque; but the cause of this was in the north; it was European. After the Renaissance there remained only the common people. They were the presence that pervaded the land. That was how Italy became the land of sound nerves. The aristocracy had been anything but harmonious; they'd been sane and sound for themselves, like the Germans; but not for others.

Our house stands at the top of a short rocky path above the road, and has a tall cypress outside, shading a haystack. There used to be a gateway into the courtyard but there is only a bare space now between sturdy walls where weeds are growing, and the cobbles of the little courtyard itself are sunken and split. When we first came into the courtyard, on a sunny afternoon, with not a sound in the whole valley, it seemed a

world on its own, glittering and quaintly talkative in its silence, especially with the pigeons that flew from one perch to another over our heads, gazing down at us with slightly turned heads. Brick steps led up to our door, under an arch which must be four hundred years old. The brickwork and plaster are crumbling, and the tiny windows of the house, looking down into the courtyard like ancient people, are crooked and filthy. But upstairs a ^apalazzina has been made, which ~~now~~ means a few rooms with marble floors in bad taste instead of the lovely old red brick. The narrow balcony upstairs, with french windows behind it, makes the house look as if it had a steeple as well, and one expects a clockface and bell. Under the balcony there is the stall, with two oxen, and on the other side of the courtyard, humbled and dark, are the peasant-rooms; these, too, lead from the archway at the top of the steps. But no peasants live here now. A man called Manelli comes here every day from the village on a motor-cycle; our padrona calls him Manelli and the peasants all round Gigi. He looks after everything---the oxen, the ^cchickens, and ^{also} the podere that lies on the other side of the road, a field of about three hectares which slopes gently towards the stream among the saplings. We often lean on the terrace-wall---hidden among the ^emellow roofs of the house (it has two levels)---and stared across at this field in its mysterious shadows, with inclines and sudden ^ddips that make it impossible to know, even if you walk in it for an hour. And immediately underneath the terrace-wall is the roadway, curving round the side of the house. Over to the left stands the terracotta-painted palazzo and peasant-houses of Altopasquale, to which we belong, so to speak: they cluster together and dominate our

l.c.)
valley in a way that sometimes seems fussy and sometimes, especially on a moonlit night, immensely serene. And up the hill behind us, in the woods, there are one or two other houses, including that of Paolo the shepherd, at the very top, on its own cool plateau. A narrow rocky path goes up from our house, covered with fossilised seashells and snails and mussels, all in perfect ^{form} ~~form~~, only rock now. From its field below the road, our house looks like a miniature castle, behind massive sloping walls; it might have been a defensive position at one time, in the Middle Ages. This was the road to Volterra, and there was an unending feud between that town and ours.

In the darkness last night, ⁿ ~~o~~ the rocky path above the house, we met Giovanni for the first time. He lives in one of the houses hidden in the woods, near the shepherd. Even in the darkness we could see that he was blond in the Italian way, with rather curly hair and freckles: his eyes were large, and he had a frank, gay face. He made a sort of speech (the first of many): we must come to see him and his family; he had heard we lived in Rome; certainly the air here was invigorating and healthy, far superior to city-air; his family would make us welcome; we would find them friendly folk, and in this part of Tuscany, once you had made a friend, he was your friend for life. He shouted all this across the darkness rhetorically, standing on one of the bare, slippery, volcanic stones that mark our hill. His voice rang out in the still air, with the sky clear and bright overhead. We nodded in a bewildered way and the moment his speech was finished he ^a ~~s~~ [^] stalked off up the hill with a dramatic 'Felice notte!'

The speech gave no idea of his gaiety, and of the soft, flexible intimacy inside him: of his frolics and puns and devil-

may-care laugh. We put him at twenty-two or twenty-three.

We saw his home today. Everyone calls him Gianni. The house is tiny, long, intimate-looking, with an outdoor stone staircase like ours. The dwelling rooms are above. It must be mediaeval. They hate it: 'dirty and inconvenient'. A worker from the town who happened to be there said with a scowl, 'I wouldn't live here if you paid me! I'd blow the whole lot up tomorrow.' They can't understand how we can admire it, and they laugh.

He has two brothers, Lorenzo who works in town at a wood-factory, and Alberto who looks after the podere with his mother. They have oxen, and three or four large fields with grain, vines, olive trees and some fruit. The woods slope up directly from these fields, making them look idyllic. The wheat is just beginning to get high. Alberto is tall and gangling next to Gianni: he smiles, shows bad teeth. 'A good lad!' his mother cries. 'He works hard!' And Gianni (who doesn't work hard) smiles and winks at us. She is a tiny, dark, wrinkled woman with blazing eyes and no teeth. She shouts and makes everyone laugh---'Madonna cane---' (a favourite curse)---'where's the sickle?' They work endlessly, even while we are there. Gianni's mother is shrivelled and dried-up with work. She lost her husband in the war and has brought up her three sons alone.


The two oxen are kept roped up in their stall under the staircase. Gianni calls them 'veal' and, smacking one on the rump, says they will fetch over a hundred and fifty thousand lire each when they're ready. They never see the light of day, never have done. At the age of ten months or so they will die. They tug at their chains. He says some people put them out to

pasture, but they fatten better in the stall. He clearly hates them and beats one of them with a switch for breaking away from its chain. The chains are weighted down with iron loads so that they won't move too far. They have just room to turn their necks and look at the door, but they can hardly raise their heads, unless they lie down.

We walk outside to the vines which are growing like trees, separately. Gianni wants cleaner work. He strolls along between us, rather poutingly, flicking at the grass with his switch. He has bright eyes that flicker quickly with amusement. He responds to everything with amazing quickness. He has dreams: the land is a drudgery that never stops, he says.

With no religion to mitigate it working on the land is hard and ugly. Peasants know this, in themselves. They'd like to go to church again, I think---though most of them wouldn't admit it. Only one or two do: seeming to speak for the rest. The men hang about outside the church doors in great dark clusters on Sundays. It is a matter of pride not to go in: you're a fool, but more than that a betrayer, if you do. When you go into a church you betray your class. Sunday used to bring softness into the week---thought and art. They look wistfully at the church-doors, some of them. There isn't softness in the country any more.

The longer we live here the more I think of certain things in the city---the intimate light in a café in Vienna, the settee by the window of a Salzburg tea-room, the glow of certain streets in Paris on a rainy evening. Before, I never thought I would ever see a valid reason for the city: through being born in one, I suppose.



It has been raining for days with low misty clouds hanging round the house, and there are uncanny thunderstorms at night, lasting for hours, rumbling continuously among the dense clouds, with sudden blinding flashes, and crashes that shake the house. I'm here alone for a few days. The oxen underneath the bedroom stamp and shift their chains, breathe out with a great puff every now and then; when they feel peace, after the silence of the night has fallen, they slump down with a thump into the sitting position. The pigeons flutter their wings suddenly, shift in their loft.

Last night Gianni and I went to the local film. Totò the comic was playing. It thrilled me being in the long bare hall, like a palace dreamed by people far away, with youths down in the stalls whistling, talking at the top of their voices, chewing chocolate, smoking, putting their arms out on the back of the seats, crossing their legs over the seats in front.

Before the cinema we went to Poggibonsi, which two years ago (people say) had ten thousand inhabitants and now has over forty thousand, though this is an exaggeration. The roads are being torn up, there are smoky trains passing through, an air of hurry and commerce, crowds going to and from work, cars jammed in the sidestreets, the cafés full. Italians love this and their faces look different there, lively and optimistic. Noise, light, company---these are what they yearn for. Their lovely valleys have no culture.

By the time the film was over the clouds had gone away and there was a full moon in a clear and serene sky. The air was brisk and biting, as it often is before a dazzling sunlit day. The valley outside the house looked marvellous and rapt, in the hush. There were deep shadows under the olive-trees, and the saplings in

the dip looked black and mysterious. The lights of the town four kilometres away looked bright like lamps hung out to celebrate something in a biblical country long ago.

When I went to sleep the moonlight pouring into the room through two windows seemed to fix everything, including myself, into a single motionless unit.

Yesterday I watched a chicken pecking away outside the wastepipe from our kitchen and thought to myself, 'You'd better look out---the shops sell poisons freely nowadays---detergents, washing soap.' And this morning the chicken was dead. There was a great clucking from the other hens which brought me downstairs, and she was just moving her claws for the last time, lying on her side. The others were already in their dark house, in silence, and they haven't emerged all day. Their silence is real and active, as I feel when I go through the courtyard. Animals have a world of feelings we neither know nor respect. The beasts due for slaughter know more, perhaps, than we think. We are so gross and numbed that we depend on the slaughter, in concentration-camp conditions, of millions of creatures every day; and sometimes with such cruelty that if we knew about it we'd renounce meat overnight, some of us. In the old days an animal was killed in its due time, after a life in one place. How can we go on feeding the world with ghosts---from our wars, our famines, our slaughters?

The pigeons were curious and awed at this death. They gazed towards the corpse from the barn roof and didn't flap about as usual. Then Gigi the peasant came and threw the corpse away. The pigeons flapped about again and went to and fro from the olive grove across the road as usual: the hen had ceased to die.

The barber on the square said yesterday that the unusual weather was due to missiles. He said the scientists knew it influenced the weather but ~~still~~ kept quiet about it as they had done about the effects of atomic experiments while it suited

them. 'They want to advance,' he said, 'even if it means sacrificing humanity.' He said he'd never in over sixty years of life known weather like this. It has been raining more or less continually for six months now, and there was a two-month freeze-up in the winter. Nothing like it recorded in Italian history, either.

Gianni, on his way this morning to cut forage for the oxen, said he thought the cause wasn't missiles but nuclear weapons. 'There's an enormous explosion,' he said, 'which displaces thousands of acres of air, and moves dense blocks of cloud.' He made a little speech about it: the missiles were, however, a logical necessity of the exploration of the universe; but the nuclear weapons had no justification.

Gigi and I stood talking last night about oxen, after he'd put them in the stall. I said I wondered why the yoke was put across their necks, as it always looked so uncomfortable. He said, yes, it was a funny place but it had always been done. A horse, on the other hand, pulled with his chest. We stood there wondering why this was when we suddenly tumbled to it: the ox like all horned creatures fights with his head, butting forward, so that his maximum strength is there, in the collar; while a horse fights with his hoofs, rearing, and his main strength must lie in his chest.

Sometimes I step back in astonishment at what I have done in life: I mean, in horror.

The worst was when I had instruments of murder at my fingertips. I never committed a cruelty ^{in the war} but I committed blunders. Since horror was at your feet you stumbled into it all the time

and only woke up afterwards. The memory of this didn't terrify me in the years immediately following the war: more so now, when they are all but forgotten.

The best thing I did, standing by a machine-gunner, was to put my hand on his arm and stop him firing when a dozen or so Germans passed unsuspecting a few yards in front of us, a helpless target. I thought, in that instant, of wives, children, front doors with people standing by them.

I thought I had found that house the other day, a few miles from here. I saw the hill those Germans crossed, in front of the barn-window where the machine-gunner and I were watching, our breath tense. Nothing seems to have changed. I saw the tiny courtyard where other English troops left their armoured car abandoned, after being blown out of their house by German bazookas; we watched the Germans come in on the tail of the English, and peer about in the car, picking up maps, unaware of us so close.

It isn't the actual look of the Cathedral in Siena that makes it the most serene church in Italy for me but the mystery that seems to combine bitter struggle and thought and commerce, like a dust that drifts through the air; a certain sternness and ferocity together with a compactness that come from uninterrupted intimacy, and also fineness of imagination, in a bewildering amalgam. The shaft of dusty sunlight on the wall reminds me of where I was born---the tramlines, the squalidly vivid shopfronts of London, the grimy houses, with that same air of travail and intimate thought, combined in a strangely mystical way. And the square outside the cathedral was like the stern backyard of a factory. It throbs with struggle.

And there is a sense of university as well, pale and lonely work, the glow of lamps over tables, books, and the tinkling sounds outside, a soliloquy with the past; and silence. Commerce, study, independence. But I shall never grasp the fascination of Siena. Perhaps she has been deprived of so much: defeated by Florence, waterless, at the edge of a desert, unvisited by any of the main military routes through Italy. With the sturdy, dusty, intimate air you get from being neglected.

I noticed the women in Siena: a certain light curiosity and expectancy that reminds me of French women.

Paolo the shepherd appeared yesterday with a calf of seven or eight months. He had arranged with Gigi to keep it overnight in our stall, as it must go for slaughtering in the morning. 'People want tender meat nowadays and are prepared to pay for it!' he said. It was a cow-calf---still tiny and babyish-looking, with loose skin round the neck, and sensitive legs, her eyes wide and round. Today people ate meat as never before, he went on. So one had to kill the animals before their time: this calf would fetch twice the price in another ten months. Not so long ago meat was a special dish---for Sundays and holidays. That had always been the ^ccase in his family. It was how he'd grown up. Now everybody, including his own family, ate meat at least once a day and sometimes twice. And the huge cities had to be supported. So more and more beasts were slaughtered, in the most uneconomical way, as in this case. It was a

situation, he said, that couldn't go on---unless they found a way of manufacturing meat in factories! They'd found ways of producing wine without grapes so---! The result, of course, was that the feeding of the animals was forced. What used to take six months, in terms of weight, now took two or three. This couldn't have a good effect on the quality of the meat, which lacked taste and fibre, and in the end it might have an effect on the race itself. What was the result when you not only inseminated cows and oxen on a large scale but reared the young by forced feeding, with special foods, and even--- they had started this in some countries---kept them in batteries like chickens, away from all natural light and air? You needed nature to make bones, liver, tissue, circulation--- how far could you play about with her? In the old days you put your animals out to pasture and they were slaughtered when they were strong, heavy, full-grown beasts. The meat was tasty and substantial, and if the pasture happened to be good it was tender as well. But nowadays there was a madness for meat and the madness had to be satisfied.

'But what a pity!' he said. 'What a pity to send this beast off to slaughter when you could get twice or three times as much weight out of it later, and more tasty meat, too!' And he flicked the creature with his switch.

In the end, he said, it must lead to animal factories, where the breeding, feeding and slaughtering went on in the same place. But what would happen to the race? It must get degenerate. Disease would start. The doctors, as fast as they got round to one disease, would be faced with another.

The effect of overfed meat was also apparent in people: to be healthy for the human digestion meat had to be healthy too. Just as we would go down the drain if we didn't take exercise and never saw the light of day, but only gorged ourselves, so will the animals. But people won't think of that side of it. They prefer to leave everything for the next generations to solve.

Paolo has a sharp, wide-eyed, Etruscan face, and shows no interest in anything but money. He would sell me and my wife quite mercilessly for a few thousand lire if he could. When he takes money he makes a kind of ^a gasp. Gianni says he has become quite a rich man in the last few years, calculating every cent.

He gave us bad cheese the other day, and also he charges us ten lire more per litre of milk than the shops do; and Gianni says ^t quietly, 'Philistine.'

Paolo only talked on the theme of healthy meat because we started him on it: he doesn't give a damn about it in fact.

I remember when we were issued with gas-masks at the time of the Munich crisis, a year before the last war started. They came

in square cardboard boxes rather like Easter egg boxes (the ones with lots of caramels inside the egg). I leaned out of the window on the warm September day and watched them being delivered at the houses opposite. Our turn didn't come the first day and I remembering ~~ing~~ wondering what would happen if a war suddenly started and they used gas: the people on the other side of the street would be saved and we wouldn't. Then they arrived. One per head, which meant we got five. I was alone in the house when they came. The gas-masks seemed flimsy, a bit of rubber and glass, and I tried mine on in front of the mirror in the room we used on Sundays only. I tried to measure the gravity of the situation by gazing at myself with the gas-mask on. The elastic held it round one's head and one could adjust the little metal strap at the back to one's size. I stared through the great glass goggles. The mouthpiece was round and pierced like that of a telephone. But it was impossible for me to penetrate that lovely autumn weather to the point of gravity. I couldn't make it real. Not only this but everything seemed in a strange way impossible: a dream---all life. The shops were full, the streets were hot and dusty, London was vast and full of the most intricate systems---of transport and commerce and electricity and thought and amusement---which it seemed impossible to interrupt. Being brought up in a city was like being brought up in a dream. The trams and buses and trains worked by themselves, the meat and vegetables that came to the table had no connection with the fields; Monday was washing day, Thursday ^{was} the day we had sausages. And the gas-mask was also something in a dream. The political pamphlets I used to read said they were useless---they wouldn't even protect you from a cold-germ. And so they were doubly unserious: first because the war would

never happen, and secondly because they were useless. They were perfect dream-things. I stood in front of the mirror trying to look seriously like a child in a gas-raid. But ~~it~~ ^I only looked like someone in a rubber gas-mask. I gazed across the street, wondering. I seemed to spend all my time wondering. I wondered about reality: what was it? It never seemed to come down our street. Everything we did was surrounded by a fond and devout dream, that had grown out of the ages and had its ecstatic climaxes (usually on Saturday nights, though Fridays were good too). 'Lettuce' was what you chewed on Sunday afternoons, at tea; 'sugar' was what came in thick blue bags. But there was a perplexed pause now and then ^o Were there wars? Was there death? I used to ask my mother both questions and be astonished that she couldn't reply for sure. Some people clung to the dream all their lives---the real born city-people. They even seemed to hide their eyes. The afternoon was the cup of tea they had in it, *they seemed to say.*

Sooner or later the city-dream grows too big and the perplexity in people's faces grows, until no one is capable of making reality any more with his own hands, and his own brain.

It has been raining again, with thunderstorms and wind: nearly three weeks of it. People keep mentioning last winter: the deep snow Tuscany has never had before, the recurrent frosts, over a period of two months. Biting winds as late as April. For years now the old Italian spring that should begin in its first intimate signs as early as February or March has been lacking.

A dream: lying back in a cart behind the great flanks of

a horse, on the road outside, so that the cartwheels make a grating and rumbling sound on the gravel; on a hot, still day; my hat tipped forward over my eyes, the reins loose in my hands. And the Elsa valley ^{outside} in her noonday hush.

Paolo the shepherd won't leave milk any more because we complained to our neighbours about the bad cheese he'd given us: it was a peccorino cheese two or three weeks too young, so that quite three etti of it in weight were liquid.

I met him in the village yesterday, on the feast of Corpus Christi, and asked him, 'What about the milk today?' He was dressed in his best, with a neat trilby hat and feather.

'Ah,' he said, 'I forgot it---today being a holiday.' They were just strewing flower-petals down the middle of the cobbled street for the procession. I made a mock lunge at him and he laughed in his bashful way.

The peasant across the valley who is sometimes called il mafioso because of his stocky, piratic look told us yesterday that at one time, before the last war, the procession of Corpus Christi was a marvellous affair, with the square in front of the church packed with people, and the church itself a mountain of flowers. But the pope of that time decreed that communists were to be excommunicated, he said, so---per forza!---all the men began to stay away; now you see the churches half-empty, and the Corpus Christi procession is a thing for children, who go carrying their lilies, dressed in their communion white. People weren't communists because they didn't believe in God, he said, but because they wanted better lives.

His eyes shone when he talked about the old Corpus Christi

processions.

I took a bath in the village-hotel yesterday and was excited at the feeling of civilisation. I looked at everything as if I'd never seen taps and tiled walls before. Our house has no running water or bathroom.

There were books in the hotel^e dressing room and when I opened one of them it seemed like an essential part of that glittering and fabulous world. And just outside the window lay the village where we were known to everybody, the lanes dusty, the walls crumbling, with chickens stalking about. Everything shone in the room: the ~~fake~~^{ply} wood (called compensato) covered with veneer, the uncomfortable signorile beds which were made to impress the peasants outside but not to sleep tired visitors, the wardrobe handles which were already half off, chairs impossible to sit in.

I lay in the bath and dreamed about a pleasant city: towns are the achievement of dreams, I ~~suppose~~^{thought}; then people flock to them, to participate in the dream, and everything collapses---the tender requirements of dreaming have gone. And art tends towards the town---towards its creation. I hadn't realised this before.

As I lay there the sentence came into my head, for no apparent reason, puzzling me, 'Christ had an Etruscan smile.'

I remebered^m a visit to Babylon. I had a sense of marvellous liquid richness there but don't remember if this was from the trees and the actual place or from the words 'By the waters of

Babylon I sat down and wept' that came into my head.

I saw no water there. Only trees and rich foliage, following a river-course that seemed to have dried up. And a dusty village near by. Only the dream of the city remained, hanging over the golden ruins. A woman with her abba drawn up to her eyes watched us.

Going to Babylon~~g~~ was like driving towards heaven all morning. The road was bumpy and if I remember rightly went between trees at certain places, close to a wadi, and across open desert. I saw no one all the way.

I imagine Babylon, the city, marvellously cool after the desert, with the sound of cattle-bells, and the air sparkling between the roofs, with the same flat terraces that you see today in Baghdad, Cairo, Beirut.

Gianni and his brother Lorenzo burst in this morning---are we going to Siena? Yes. When? In half-an-hour. Can Gianni get a lift as far as the village? Of course he can! Lorenzo will go on his motor-cycle. 'Be careful!' I say to him with a laugh and a wink. 'Ah!' Lorenzo says, taking my meaning. 'I'm loaded---son caricato---devo scaricarmi!' I must unload myself!

'He isn't capable!' Gianni shouts. 'His pipe is that small---!'

'But full---Dio buono---full!' Another great laugh, swinging round on his toes, plump and red-cheeked with health, his eyes beaming.

'No, no, don't believe him---he isn't capable---he doesn't know what to do with it---it just isn't big enough---if there's a vertical entrance or a horizontal one, he doesn't know the difference!'

And here Lorenzo gives a bashful glance up the stairs to

see if there are any women about who might have overheard.

Then, with another burst of laughter, they are gone. It reminds ^{me} of sunlit Sundays ten years ago near Rome, before Italy broke completely with her past. The same loud and vigorous tones, and the stillness outside, the sparkling light.

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Gianni claims that he goes to Poggibonsi twice a week and spends a thousand lire each time on a tall, handsome whore with fine legs. He told me, out of earshot of my wife, that she took him home with her, from a bar where they met. And he laughed flippantly, described what a comfort her breasts were when he drew her towards him, and what a fine thing a woman had---'though not pretty perhaps.' He made a little ironical speech extolling nature, a smile making his lips tremble as he talked. ~~He is as clean as the yellow corn outside, all through.~~

He doesn't like the idea of 'going home' with a girl, he says. 'Going home' means being officially engaged: you approach the girl's father, and if he agrees to your being engaged he invites you home, and this is the first of many long, tedious visits throughout life. He doesn't want that, he says.

^{His} Gianni's mother shouts, 'When are you going to marry?' When is he going to do a real job of work? He leaves the work of the podere, as well as the cleaning of the stall, to Alberto. Gianni is 'rash' and 'forward', they say. But he has imagination, fantasia. He used to paint marvellously as a child; and they respect this.

He has a special path to tread, they say, and they don't know what this is. Nor does he.

He came with us all the way to Siena. He suddenly decided

to, on the outskirts of the village. He seemed to feel it as a great liberty: and at the same time to want to hide it from his brother. His family doesn't know about things, he says. He noticed everything outside the window as it flashed by--- piecemeal, in the Italian way; without sustained inner themes. And when he wasn't noticing things he was asleep like a child, with his hand round out dog's neck.

On the outskirts of Poggibonsi he got excited at the hideous new factories going up in the fields. 'Bello!' he shouted. 'Bello da vero!'

Gianni said when we first met him, 'I'm looking for a job. There's no money here. I can't find work.' It was a dark picture: the ancient Italian dirge, that no longer seems to apply. What are the facts? His padrone is a generous man from Torino who owns a number of factories there: the produce of the land---grain, maize, wine, olives, fruit and vegetables--- all goes to Gianni's family; and fifty-ththree percent of the money derived from selling the cattle (about four head a year) goes to them as well. So they have a house (which though they despise it is solid, with massive walls and a sturdy roof) standing in a field perched high among the woods, for which they pay no rent, plus all the food, wine and oil they need for the year; plus an income from the cattle; while the padrone pays the taxes. For this they have to work like dogs, but only because it is a dog's life for them, spiritually. Worked out on paper the family is better off than most industrial working families: though it is true that these get sick benefit and pensions, which the peasants don't. This is the great source of peasant strikes this year.

The peasant still doesn't know what it means to be disinherited---to pay for everything he needs, to get nothing by habit or love or natural right: he only sees the cars flash by and says, 'Ah, signori!' The city-world is 'gentlemen'.

Give him palaces of gold, remove every trace of miseria from the countryside, and he will still lie and dream, 'The city, the city!' just as I did the other day.

When we got back from Siena it was dark and we found Gianni's brother Alberto working on the rocky path with Paolo the shepherd. The endless flows of water this year have ruined the gullies, and they have to be cleared every week or so.

Gianni had got out of the car fifty yards back, to visit Altapasquale: he knew his brother was working here, and wanted to avoid reproach. Alberto said quietly to us in the darkness, pushing at his long spade, 'Did my brother come back with you?'

Everyone seems to grudge Gianni this journey to Siena. I believe he makes much of his journeys with us, even the ones into the village: it is a kind of new social position. Sergio who lives a little further down the road with his wife and son joked about it as Gianni got out of the car: he was standing in the darkness, spare and sunburned, and cried to us with a smile, 'If you're going to take him to Siena, take me as well! I love Siena!'

Siena shines for them, distantly. And it has begun to for

us, too.

Yet everyone has a car or motor-cycle locally. Paolo the shepherd has a car. Lorenzo has a motor-cycle; so has Renato, Sergio's son, who works at a marble-yard in Certaldo and is plump, shy and jovial, taking after his mother. Yet they never go to Siena, much less Florence, much less Lucca, Pisa. Sergio told us one evening that peasants have only been going to the village since the war: before then ~~the sight of~~ ^{their presence} ~~them~~ in the ~~village~~ ^{town}-streets would have been ^a remarkable ^{event}; they looked, behaved quite different ^{ly}, wore quite different clothes. His wife, Caterina, seems frightened of the village. She won't go there. She must stay with her chickens, she says. And her husband laughs at her, making her turn her head bashfully and stiffly away.

Gigi ~~cried~~ ^{shouted} as we were starting out for Siena with Gianni in the back, 'You're not taking him? Let him walk!' Then he laughed in his boyish, throaty way, through cigarette smoke, half spluttering. He has a thick, soft neck and quick eyes that sometimes look delicate, belying the gruffness of his voice. He has ~~brought up~~ ^{reared} two sons and two daughters perfectly: he satisfied the ~~dream of the town~~ ^{town} early, and moved there over five years ago. His family is polite and optimistic, as if they were the product of all his silent aspirations as he worked in the fields, cursing the oxen and puffing at his cigarettes. He isn't really a peasant. He worked as a kind of fattore for a time, a farmer, though perhaps more a go-between, selling and buying cattle. But it wasn't steady enough. So now he works on a day-to-day basis for our padrona, who lives in one of the tall houses on the village-square and never visits the land except once a year when the demijohns of wine are weighed and

sold; she stands by with a little notebook, writing the weights down as the men balance the stake on their shoulders and hang the demijohns between them.

The thunderstorms continue. Rain more or less night and day, with bursts of very hot sunshine. Danger for the vines: and the grain is late.

Paolo the shepherd brings the milk again: down ten lire per litre.

I notice that everybody is delighted and flattered by Gianni's presence. The peasants smile and chuckle---unwillingly. Renato, Sergio's son, who is stolid, unbends slowly under Gianni's banter. Gianni's lips always quiver with suppressed joy when he talks. He says to us, 'How strange you should have come here! How strange!'

He looks a little Scandinavian. I remember the same look in a young Roman girl---the same wild, freckled, clowning nature, with blue eyes that seem to open into space when they laugh. Blond Italians---dashing, reckless people. They will burn life right through. Gianni's father came from the Veneto, and so (people say) he may have a touch of Austrian blood. His father died young in the last war, transporting ammunition for the Germans; he was walking behind the cart when one of the wheels went into a mine; the oxen were untouched---had he been walking in front of them instead of following he would have been unhurt.

In Siena we saw boys rehearsing for the palia: beating drums, throwing flags high in the air and catching them, swinging round with their flags whirling. People looked on in an un-

concerned way. We were fascinated by their costumes which are identical in every way with the original medi~~v~~aeval ones. The Siene~~s~~e are fierce: you can see it in the eyes of their young---a ceratin daring and impulsiveness, which isn't used now except in quick family encounters and at the annual palio, where the winning horses are said to be fixed, sometimes cruelly maimed, etc. The city itself has changed little since medi~~v~~aeval times. The middle ages were its baptism, as they were the baptism of all Europe, except that we can hardly see it now.

I was excited to hear that the Etruscans settled this valley, along the road that runs outside, immediately underneath our walls.

I went cherry-picking with Gianni yesterday, along narrow, dusty lanes, high up among thick woods and cornfields, where the sun goes down late: it was just setting when we left, disappearing behind a vast plain, like a table over the world. We passed the lane where his father was killed, and they have put an iron cross there, over a marble slab. 'B---- Vittorio, died here tragically in July, 1941.'

Then we went on to where the family lived twenty years ago: a grey, tumbledown house with all its bricks and stones showing, the courtyard overgrown with tall grass, the steps up to the door entangled in weeds; a man's jacket half-hanging out of an open window. We climbed a tree and picked a basket-full of cherries, not quite ripe because of the late summer. Vines were tangled with the tree, and there were clusters of grapes in embryo. Noises came from the woods which I involuntarily throught were traffic-noises, but they were birds. Everything stands quiet and withheld, in a dignity that quite excludes us.

On the way back Gianni was suddenly stricken with fear that we'd been stealing. Perhaps he should tell someone---in one of the local houses? But when we'd got to the road again he settled in his seat and laughed: 'We're safe!'

In the middle of the rain and thunderstorms last week a priest said on the radio or television, 'Summer will come---and stay---on June 17th.' That was three days ago: since the morning of the 17th it has been hot with a blazing sun, and the temperature is now normal for this time of year. I've been reluctant to write this down, for fear of tempting the gods to bring the storms back.

Two guesses about the priest: he has divine insight; or he knows somebody in a missile-factory.

Due to the hot weather Gianni is working again. A day's work makes him disgruntled and resentful. He came after dark yesterday, on the back of Lorenzo's motor-cycle, to deposit two bags of flour in one of our outhouses, to be picked up later by Paolo the shpeherd and taken up the hill. He tugged at Lorenzo's sleeve and said, nodding towards me, with his flickering---and this time rather hurt---smile, (Which of us is fortunate, eh? Is he all right or not?' And Lorenzo disclaimed the question, turning away. The work is an affront for Gianni: a personal insult. Like many Italians he has a horror of getting his hands dirty; the best thing about my work in his eyes is the fact that I keep my hands clean. Hence the exodus to the towns. Actually they get their hands dirtier in a factory or garage, but it's fashionable dirt.

This morning he came bright and early, as I was washing

the dishes: his face was clear and untroubled again. He'd slept well.

Clouds again. I looked out of the window just now and my first thought was, 'I shouldn't have written anything about the weather.' (This is how paganism justifies itself).

And now the sun has gone completely.

Heard some Renaissance music on our portable radio: dances, with pipes, cymbals. It was so lovely that all I could think was, 'The grace and tenderness have passed out of us; we don't know how bleak and damned we are; and we can't discover---except by a chance comparison like this one.' A man who three or four centuries ago split someone's head open with his sword had more tenderness than we have with our peaceful hands. How many of us can weep?

The sun is out and resplendent. I lie on the terrace naked, gazing at the woods that rise above the house.

The butcher the other day: 'You should go to Certaldo--- it's very interesting, the house of Boccaccio, and some wonderful ruins!' Absent-mindedly, not really intending it, I said, 'E bello?'---is it nice? 'Bello!' he said in a baffled tone, staring into my eyes with his mouth open. 'No, no, not at all--- only the modern can be bello for me!' Solo il moderno!

Gigi has long arguments with the oxen when he arrives in the morning. 'Good God---Dio buono!---what the devil have you

been doing here?', as he pushes the door open and enters the dark stall. 'Your chains all twisted! And look---look! The mess down there! Up! Up! What a fine night you've had! Porca la Madonna! Dio cane!' Of course, they don't reply.

When they're led from the stall to be put under the yoke they look like queens coming out into the light, tall and pure and white, blinking and wondering.

After he'd taken the yoke off them this morning the taller one stepped up into the stall without waiting, trailing her halter-ropes behind her. Gigi watched her in silence and then said quietly, 'All right---now you're going in---what are you going to do?' He meant to say, how was she going to extricate herself from the ropes? And for answer the beast stopped, gazing before her, vast and queenly, letting out an enormous breath, a tower of white in the dark stable, admitting that she was puzzled: and Gigi then bent down and untied her.

The romanic church at Cellole^e is dark like a tunnel, with thick pillars down either side. At the door there is the sign of Solomon's knot. Not one of the pillars is uniform. The altar is dark, dark---only just developed from a sacrificial altar. Everything lies in the darkness of first thought. There is the first calm and astonishment of Christ, after paganism---the first moment. The pagan itches to sacrifice perhaps---a twinge from the past---but inside there is this calm. He has to learn it slowly.

There is a young priest with glasses, like a Russian in

his quick movements, with his talkative mother, tiny and clear-spoken. He works on his two poderi and rarely seems to wear a cassock.

After that first moment of conversion everything wakes up slowly, like flowers in the morning. The sunlight begins to pour through the open doors, down into the tunnel between the pillars, towards the rounded altar, where there are slender ancient columns.

Gradually the hill-top wakes up: outside the door there is an avenue of trees, in line with the pillars. The sunlight will be hot and blinding. It touches the church like a baptism. It seems like the first light there ever was.

Paolo the shepherd is going to move soon. He has made millions, Gianni told me. He did it by means of 'sacrifices'; a shepherd's life has no holidays, and Paolo never had less than a hundred sheep at a time. Five years ago 'he was nothing'. He isn't on mezzadria, like most of the peasants here, that is, committed to giving his padrone half---now forty-seven percent---of his yield. He has made his money slowly, trickle by

trickle

on his sheep's cheese, his ricotta (butter-milk curd), and his cattle, sheep and pigs for slaughtering. He pays little for the rent of his house, land and outhouses---perhaps sixty thousand lire a year. He has a regular deal with one of the local hotels to sell them his cheese. Now he'll move to the village and become a butcher.

There are three families on the hill above us---Paolo's, Gianni's and a family working on mezzadria. In a few months' ^{time} only Gianni's family will be there: the other two are moving.

Paolo's wife, a pretty young woman, has just given birth to a child, and looks exhausted: the cheeses have to be pressed every day, the sheep and cows milked, while she is nursing her own child as well. ^{He} She has a flinching, self-doubting look, as if yearning for society. 'It's so isolated here!' she says. There is only the forest at the edge of their land; and the sound of pigs rooting close to the house.

Paolo seems quite unItalian. But then a determined money-maker never seems to belong anywhere.

Sunset: we walked up the hill and looked across the whole vastness of the Elsa valley. The few light clouds were bright yellow, like all the midsummer afternoons one had ever known as a child, overlooking endless plains. And towards the sea the sky was deep-blue on one side and the colour of the sea itself on the other, an astonishing limpid green. The hills over the Pesa valley were dim and peaceful in the distance. The houses down below, including our own and those of Alt^opasquale, shone red. There was a nightingale close to Sergio's house, and a few cicadas, and the raucous sound of frogs, still enjoying the wet.

We were surprised to hear last night from Sergio that he also is leaving soon with his family. That will leave us with no near neighbours at all. His house, the closest to us, will stand ^e empty and abandoned. Together with three other men ^{he} Sergio has bought some land on the outskirts of the village, and a house for all four of them, with separate flats, is being built. He will have no garden to speak of; and he'll be five miles further from his work. But he will have two rooms, a kitchen and bathroom: ^{and} he's never had a bathroom before. He works on a vast podere further down the valley: they have machines and the property is paying its way. He is on daily hire and therefore has more money in his pocket than the other peasants: he is a worker, as opposed to contadino, peasant.

With friends yesterday at a tiny hillside church. Standing in the garden there was a large terracotta coppo, a pot once used for storing oil and now quite fashionable for ornamenting gardens. Our friends wanted it at once, to stand in their courtyard. The priest, a small, resentful-looking fellow, without much heart, crisply said that he'd bought this one from a nearby peasant and didn't want to sell it. But, he said, we could try a certain Antonio down the road, in the house beyond the wayside shrine: he had several, and one of them was as large as this.

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We went down and inspected the thing in the man's chicken-house: black with filth but still serviceable. He would give it a clean-up, he said. He was a thin, dark, erect young man with the large Etruscan eyes; his face was able---I've noticed this more than once here---to look suddenly questing and joyful, though in fact it is neither in itself; ~~but~~ it seems a throw-back to those first Etruscan years ~~of~~ centuries ago.

Even the common people had a culture than, or so it seems from their naked dances; because nakedness has to be shared, it can never be turned into privilege.

We asked him to name a price: no, no, he said at once, laughing shyly, he didn't have an idea! He would enquire, and we would enquire, and then we'd come back after we'd both enquired.

We did enquire, but no one had any idea: the pots used to be made at a place called Imprunetta, near Florence, and a few still are, people say. But now they aren't used. But originally they would only ^{have} cost a few thousand lire. They were only terracotta after all, without much design. It was only their largeness and bowl-shape that ^{were} ~~was~~ attractive. So we returned to the priest, ^{but} ~~he~~ who was out working. Down to the peasant again. He hadn't shaved for two days, and considering that he worked in the fields all day he could have looked healthier. ^{His} The strange Etruscan light breaks on his face as he smiles---yes, he's cleaned the pot! We must come and see it! There it stands, remote and mellow-looking, in the forecourt. How much will we offer? I say five thousand. No, no, una sciocchezza! A trifle! Much too little! How much, then? Well, he's heard from the priest that, well, these things are---well, quite in demand... We stand there patiently, waiting for the dirge we've heard so often ^{before} ~~to end~~. I ask, 'How much?' And he says softly, 'Una trentina di mila lire.' About thirty thousand. The priest, he says, gave that much for his. (Extraordinary this!---a priest in his condition gets forty thousand lire a month and has to keep a family on it, ^{usually} his parents, sometimes a sister). He couldn't, by the terms of his own conscience, let it go for less than thirty---certainly not less than twenty-five---or twenty at the very minimum. Such things were precious, he said, and he was sure

of being able to sell the thing at his price later on. And, he said, to tell the truth (this meant he was going to tell a lie, which he did), he was only offering it for sale because he was moving house soon and didn't want to take it with him.

So we turn away. 'Niente da fare!' After a few brief goodbyes, during which he offers us something to drink and we refuse, we leave. A telephone-call to the friends: 'Offer him fifteen thousand,' they say. We go to the priest a second time. Again he's out: at work on his land. But just ^{as} we drive out of the courtyard he drives in: he doesn't pause when he sees us but drives straight to his door. Nor does he even turn when we walk over to him. He's used to visitors---in fact, they plague him, because his church is of historic interest. When I spoke he turned from unloading the car and seemed to say, Oh, so you've come to coo at my bare stone walls, have you, and gape at dirty pieces of clay and broken torsos which should have remained buried, and at my filthy villa that leaks water, and at bits of manuscript and painted canvas that should all have been burned long ago in the name of sanitation? For he didn't recognise us: we were Foreigners. And, Very well, he seemed to go on, if you want to put on these airs, and play the signore who is really interested in such things (I myself haven't the money to spare for touring the world to cut a figure), I shall smile too and play my part, and coo with you, and show you my charming Italian teeth (apparently you find us charming!), but by God I'll make you pay for it, if there's any paying to be done!

And I asked about the coppo. What price should we pay? He stood there with his sleeves rolled up, his arms frail and pale underneath the day's sunburn, and then he talked: first, he was busy, he said, very busy---and therefore didn't know as

much about these things as he should. Yes, I replied, you're very much in giro---you go around a lot. 'No, no!' he was quick to reply. 'I'm not going round---I work!' And he gave me a sort of fanatical look through his glasses.

'I've offered the peasant five thousand lire,' I said. 'Not that it's my affair.' At once he replied in his dry, hard way, without a trace of charity, 'No, no, five thousand is a sciocchezza! No, no, they're worth much more than that!' I said to this: 'I offered him five thousand, and he said thirty, so perhaps we both erred, in opposite directions.' No, no, he didn't think the peasant had erred at all: thirty thousand was quite right. After all, these things were coming into great demand (a lie), his mother told him how every day tourists came and exclaimed over his pot (a lie); they weren't producing them any more (a lie); they had great historical interest (a lie) because they were hundreds of years old (the biggest lie of all).

I said they might be only about twenty years old: thirty, perhaps. 'Yes!' he said. 'They might be thirty!' 'Or less,' I said. 'Even less!'--(he is confused for a moment).

'But the price of a thing,' he went on, his glasses flashing fanatically, 'depends on who wishes to buy it and who wishes to sell! It depends on the need and passion of the person buying, and the more he wants ^a the thing the more he has to pay for it!'

(A peculiar philosophy, but he seemed to be able to square it with his conscience.) He then demonstrated what liars both he and the peasant were (as if it ^{had} needed ^{to} demonstrating) by saying that in fact he hadn't bought his own coppo at all, but---with a round, shrewd gesture of his fingers---'I simply acquired it.'

So we shrugged and started moving off. We'd heard that old dirge too often to even want to hear it ^{through} ~~through~~ in politeness.

There was a great silence on the hill. I told him again that it wasn't really my affair, I'd only agreed to 'treat' for someone else. 'Ah!' he said with his little glint, 'it isn't for you!' And then he turned away as well: 'I'd better get the car unloaded.'

Sergio and his wife Caterina came to us in the evening and sat in our kitchen. We happened to tell him that we'd been looking for coppi, and about the priest with his trentina di mila lire: he cried, 'Pots---I've got two of them---at least two---beauties!' And he laughed: 'Why don't you come to me first? Everything is on your doorstep, and you go miles away to argue with priests!' Tomorrow morning, he went on, we would walk together to Alt^opasquale and look at them.

We talked about the Church. He asked what kind of church most of the foreign tourists belonged to: the Germans, English, for instance. Were they all Christians? Yes, we said, many of them were Protestants, many Catholics---all Christians. 'How do Protestants differ from us?' he wanted to know. We said, mainly in the matter of confession: they don't confess. 'Ah,' he said quickly, in his direct, intelligent way, his eyes gleaming in a ruddy, lean face, 'they don't believe the priest has a special position---!' 'Exactly,' we said. 'The pope isn't the vicar of Christ in their eyes---the priest is only another man for the Protestant.' And: 'The Protestant believes that every man's conscience is his own, that he can't go to another man to free himself from blame but must find his own way, through self-examination.' At once Sergio cried, leaning forward in his erect way: 'Then they're more religious than we are! They examine everything they do! That's why foreigners seem so responsible compared with us---so polite and thoughtful! Whereas we think, Oh, I can swear and behave ^lbadly today because tomorrow I'm going

to confess and purify myself! I know men who think like that,' he went on. 'Religion is the reason why they're bad! Can you imagine that?'

Next morning he and I strolled along the path in the first heat of the day. We were talking about dung for some reason, its use on the soil. I told him how my father had always collected the horsedung from the road outside for his garden---in the days when there were still a few horses. 'Ah,' he said, 'then your father must have been peggio (worse) than you?' 'How do you mean?' I asked him. 'I mean, he must have done more work--- he was poorer!' 'Yes,' I said, feeling confused. I wanted to say, 'But I work, too!' But I stopped.

The pots were much better than the priest's, or the peasant's. They were lying on their sides in the mud by the house where Sergio was born. We rolled them into the stable-yard and cleaned them up a bit. The oil had eaten through their bases, but since they would never be used for oil again, that didn't matter. The peasant's wife, who has wondering, quick eyes, and a face capable of the most extraordinary bursts of tenderness and passion (when she is arguing about the price of her chickens, for instance), said to me doubtfully, 'They're belli, aren't they?' And Sergio echoed her: 'Yes, they're nice!' But until that moment they had been rather shameful junk.

A few days later our friends sent their man over in a small truck to pick them up. There were three pots in all. He roped them round securely, and when Sergio asked him what trees were going to be planted in them he said, 'None.'

They'll just be put on the terrace. Empty. As ornaments.' And Sergio looked wistfully surprised. From being a receptacle for oil to being a vase for trees isn't such a step: but to being just an ornament means a step into another world. There was silence.

Before he drove back again the man had lunch with us: he has liquidly black, penetrating eyes and a mild way of speech, reflective and patient. He said there was a feeling of rebellion all over Italy, but 'vague' rebellion: no one was sure what he wanted to rebel against, or indeed if there existed anybody to rebel against; he just wanted to move---into the towns if he lived in the country, to another house if he lived in town. It came from centuries of misuse in the padrone's prerogative, he said: 'We have to go through that phase--- I myself felt rebellion against the padrone once, but I've passed through that now.' He is paler than the peasants here, though he used to be a peasant himself: he seems more delicate, withdrawn, quietly discriminating, and they look up to him---I was aware of that, when he and Sergio were talking; they see something different in him, to which they aspire perhaps. He has the air of thinking life out all the time. And there is an air of quiet charity about him. If an Italian has a real transformation of experience, which is very rare, it is always basically religious, I think.

Italy seems the most unfathomable country in Christendom to me. Motives, decisions, moods are an enormous pool of mystery,

^{even} /to the people themselves. There are a thousand explanations--- Greek, Etruscan, Roman, Moorish, Phoenician, Christian, Gothic, feudal, Inquisitorial, Spanish, Austrian---far more than any one creature can know.

Everyone here has something devout in him---Gianni, Sergio, even Paolo, even Gigi who lives in the village and disowns the past. They're all quite clear about it: they don't go to church, nothing would induce them to, but it has nothing to do with the mystery.

Gianni when he enters a church makes a pleasant noisy kiss towards the altar when he is crossing himself, as his hand comes up to his mouth from his breast. When he was fourteen he painted a remarkable Madonna and Child: they've put it on the wall of their kitchen, with a little light in front. An amazing sweetness pours out of the Child's eyes: in the Madonna there is a lingering grace and forgiveness, something specially gentle that makes you look up at her again and again. It is a bit stylised---from centuries of style, and it has ^{the} a Siene^se attention to detail. His drawings of Christ are exact, stern. He hasn't painted or drawn for eight years or more. Not enough time, he says with a laugh.

He looks sad and oddly distracted sometimes: he hasn't been near this house for three days now. I saw him yesterday at Altapasquale: he came into the stable-yard with a quaintly delicate-looking shopping bag in his hand; he was going shopping, he said. 'No work!' Sergio cried with his clear, charitable, objective laugh. 'No work again?'---then he added: 'Strikes aren't necessary for you---you're on strike every day!' Gianni

smiled and turned away, then we saw nothing more of him.

His mother is devout in a natural way, though I imagine she despises the priests like everyone else. She is strict, with patient, darkly flashing eyes that take in everything at a glance, with direct intuition; she's half the size of any of her sons, and they obey her like slaves.

For Gianni, swearing and behaving badly are like assaulting his own mother. This is what stops him.

Every evening when he comes home from work Sergio's son Renato goes to the madonnina at the side of the road and says a quick prayer and crosses himself.

Sergio seems to insist on this as an act of decency and uprightness.

Signor V. and his family came today for a few minutes. He owns a large vineyard near Florence, and a wine-factory. He told us he was selling his share of the business, as it was hopeless to try to work and live by the land now. All the houses on his land were empty, there were no longer any peasants. And he was obliged to follow the current 'madness' and move to Florence, where he will find a city-job. He said he knows men who have moved to Florence to earn half as much as they used to on the land, and to live in miserable rooms, but they're happier.

He said that those who had moved to the city first, among the peasants, had made most money: that the hunger for city-life didn't come from miseria; 'People want to be machines now.'

Only in one or two optimists like Sergio---rare men of the

older generation---does the land not create horror. But the others feel cheated and insulted. Today I tried to imagine what this feeling was. I thought of a time when I worked on the land briefly, in England, to earn a scrap of money. I was digging turf. I watched the mounds of turf rise all round me every day. There was a fearful blankness in the field, even when the sun shone, even at dawn, which I otherwise love. I felt horror of the blankness, like a chasm. My mind had nothing to grasp on. It seemed in the wrong rhythm, the wrong time. I hated the land as if it personally insulted me---as I see Gianni doing now. I was working with no one. There was no community: no farmhouse to go back to, no great fire in the hall; the land wasn't mine. And so it is in Italy. The dream has gone, perhaps longer ago than we think, perhaps centuries ago. There is nothing precious to cling to---nothing gay, no intimacy. Nothing that flatters the human creature. And the mind is developing another rhythm, another time, that belongs to the city.

The peasants really do live like dogs. This is true of Gianni, of Sergio---they expect no more, but they dream of more. Only the town can give them the flattery and ^{en}attention they need.

They want a dignity they've always felt thwarted of. This is what 'modern' means for them, and the reason why they'll take half the pay, in town.

We went to Colle Val d'Elsa today: there are typical mediaeval lanes, intact, with the houses shere and flat on either side, their walls containing the minimum number of windows, and

those small; and tunnels that disappears far under the houses, joining one lane to another; and hidden squares which are still not asphalted and where people ~~still~~ sit outside their doors talking, the women knitting. The streets are clean; a massive villa---occupied now by dozens of families---sits astride the road, dominating two valleys: there is a sense of order and even contentment. Down below is the industrial part of the town, with tall chimneys and pastel-coloured blocks of flats: noisy and crowded, with no order, but not really separate from the old town that perches intact on its hill; ^{and} giving it life, in some way, ^{perhaps}. Will everyone want to move down to the new part now? It has happened in Castel Fiorentino: they have left the splendid old houses on the hill, with their mysterious arches and barred windows, and gone to embrace the noise and smoke below; what used to be a wonderful old town ten years ^{ago}, with clean cobbled streets, is now an abandoned slum. And it will probably happen in Certaldo, which has the same mediaeval quarter perched on its hill, with the industrial part below.

And then perhaps, after twenty or thirty years, or perhaps much sooner, middle-class people will move into the ancient houses again, as part of a fashionable movement coming mostly from abroad; they will prefer the lack of traffic, of noise and fumes, in the old part, and there will be a swing-back; the cobbled streets will look smart again. And people will move into the country, into the old abandoned houses (as we've done): and furnish the countryside with a dream again.

Yesterday we went to see Sergio's new flat on the outskirts of the village. It stands a little away from the road and overlooks a cornfield, with a view of a corner of the Elsa valley.

The walls have to be distempered, the doors and window-frames varnished, then it's ready. Catarina has never seen it and refuses to go until they actually move in. Her excuse always is, with a dark, ~~laughing~~ timid look, 'I have too many chicks!' 'Always chicks!' Sergio cries with a laugh.

He was anxious to know what we thought of it. There is a bathroom with green tiles and a flushing lavatory, even a little spray, and next door there's a large kitchen. He plans to put a bench in the corridor with cushions, to sit and talking ^{there} in the evening, when the kitchen is too hot. The building was clearly done with care: there is even solid wood for the doors instead of the usual veneer-covered compensato; and the design is pleasant---humble and gracious. It was done by an old friend of his, he said: no architects came into it, which is perhaps why there wasn't anything silly in the design, and nothing botched about the work; all the money went into the building. He was relieved when we said we liked it. 'What a calamity if you hadn't!' he said. There's nothing to pay for twenty years---no taxes, rates of any kind; a special government concession, this. We stood gazing out of his windows. Soon he'll be sitting on a real lavatory, lying in his own bath, putting on lights that are strong enough to read by, gazing at television. I tell him, 'A man with his own house is a king!', and he says, 'Yes, yes!', his eyes fixed on me with a tremendous fierce enthusiasm.

We left him in town and drove back alone. He came to us later that evening and said with a beam, 'The town's a beautiful thing!' He said he'd been in the café on the square watching television. 'You find out what's going on in the world!' And he added: 'Here---of course!---one can breathe good air,

there are things we all need here, but it's outside the world, we're cut off!' He didn't want to be right inside the town: he just wanted to see it when he opened his eyes in the morning, and to hear its noises; he wanted to be able to take a stroll into it, after work. That was why he'd chosen a place on the outskirts.

Outside his new house, just before we left in the afternoon, he pulled a great bush aside and said, 'Here---look!' It was a wayside shrine, and we were amazed to see that it was the same ⁱⁿ Madonna that stands at the side of the road here, Our Lady of Pancole. 'A good sign, don't you think?' he asked. He'd only discovered it after he'd bought the land and planned ^{the} ~~this~~ house. So he felt he'd done right.

He has been on strike for three days: the mezzadri peasants struck several weeks ago, unsuccessfully, and now it's the land workers. ^{They} They're asking for a seven-hour day, which means a forty-two hour week as Saturday is a full working day, plus a rise of three ^{hundred} lire a day. They say they think they'll get the rise but not the ^{reduction} reduction of hours. Sergio believes that the strikes will go on until the government produces a decent plan for the land, *and there may be violence.*

Gianni returned yesterday, looking quiet and numbed. He said he'd been working nearly all the time, on the ^{Vines} ~~maize~~. He hardly smiled.

The work tears him from his ^{real} life, which is still in darkness, forming: he talks from a great distance. A day's idleness is enough to bring him to life again. For the peasants all round this ^{means} ~~is~~ just a taste for idleness.

Sergio said last night that he thought the great shame of the Italian countryside was still the mezzadria system, though he and Gianni's family and Paolo and Gigi are free of it. Tuscany, he said, a marvellously rich and fertile land, is being abandoned like the desert, because of this system. People won't work land that doesn't give them a decent living. He himself had a good employer, so he worked hard and willingly. But the big house on the other side of the valley, where we go to fetch our drinking water, and the group of houses called Altapasquale, are still mezzadria: 'The people work like dogs, yet their lives are at a standstill!' One of the padroni, nicknamed zampa--- paw or hoof---because of his limp, never keeps accounts, and always pockets the yield from any sale. His part should be forty-seven percent, but it works out at nearer seventy or eighty percent; ^{remains} the ~~rest~~ had to feed two families (about seven people) who do all the work. On the other hand, some say that this is quite untrue, and that Zampa is a good man, and that to do more for his peasants he would have to run the land at a total loss, that is, find money elsewhere to finance it. (In fact, the 'good' padroni, like Sergio's, derive their money from other sources and live in town).

'But why are they all absentee landlords?' I ask. 'Why aren't there men who not only own the land but keep the accounts and pay the wages and arrange the sales, house-repairs, machinery---real landlords?' 'Ah, you mean the fattore!' he replied. Every padrone had a fattore, a man who administers several pieces of land and takes a percentage for his services. He is what we would call an agent in English; farmers in our sense don't exist, or at least they are very rare. The fattore or agent is absentee as well: he invariably lives in town, *at least nowadays.*

Padrone, landowner, means signore, gentleman, in Italian: that is, somebody who doesn't work.

Just as the peasants abandon the farmhouse, so the landowners abandon their lovely villas. High and low despise the land.

We begin to see the difference between the mezzadria families and the others---like that between light and dark. Whenever we go to the well on the other side of the valley we stop and talk at the big house, where there are two mezzadria families; we've spent an evening with them, we drink their vin santo. But we don't know them by name. They always seem bowed in work. They are shy, speechless and remote, though slowly they gain confidence with us. They don't present themselves to us personally and individually ^{yet} ~~do~~: they neither enquire our names nor ask too many questions. Only the lovely child, the youngest boy, do we know by name.

And you can see the difference in the cattle, too. The bull at the big house is 'bad', and has to be castrated soon; the oxen there are tied too close to the trough and look---are---overworked. But at Altapasquale the calves look innocent and undisturbed, as the people there do. A sense of panic and drudgery seems to accompany mezzadria---transmits itself to the beasts.

A dream no longer surrounds this house for us, now we've lived here some time. It's real to us, untouched by dreams of any kind. I remember how we came early one morning, before we moved in, on our way back to Rome, and stood in the tiny courtyard looking down the road; the whole valley was just waking up, and the spring-light sparkled; there was perfect stillness, and

a few birds sang in the woods above the house. The courtyard enclosed the house perfectly: we could imagine sitting in a corner of it, in the blazing sunlight of an afternoon, for tea; the light would glitter on the windows upstairs. But now we only go there to draw rainwater from the well; the courtyard is a work-place---for oxen, chickens, bags of grain, empty demijohns, carts and ploughshares, Gigi's motor-cycle and our car. As for our rooms, they are flatly real, too---the place where we work, ~~or~~ eat, ~~or~~ sleep. Gigi goes to and fro outside all day; the dog barks at the oxen and frightens them. The country looks the same as before---vast and serene; but there, too, is no dream. It only enters you; it isn't a matter of sight or pleasure, or indeed anything felt at all. The silence of the country at night is the silence of your own sleep: it isn't the scene of hopes, desires, memories. There is no country idyll. The delight of English countryside isn't there: nothing like Bavaria, the Tyrol, Carinthia; no dreams and follies have been weaved, life hasn't been drunk deep and recklessly.

Yet the stupendous valley lies there like a garden specially made for you, which sometimes you can hardly bear to look at, it has such a dignity: not a pleasant or restful garden, in the intimate sense; no roses, except the wild ones; no hum of talk that you might hear on a Provencal farm, with people ^{sitting} ~~seated~~ round a table; only needs are served here, and perhaps not all the needs, either.

We've lost interest in comfort---the little rituals of home that mean so much to us in Rome. Only in Rome has a dream been made. Here we hardly go in ^{to} our tiny sitting-room. We're either working or at table, eating. The kitchen is where we live, leaning over the table, a bottle of wine in front of us, in the

dimness, with a shade drawn over the window against the sunlight.

Sergio promises to take us to where he works, several kilometres up the road, on the other side of the valley. 'You'll say it's beautiful!' he cries. But for him it's just there. Yet we feel the same, now: no positive delight---even in the shattering early-morning light that pours down on the vineyards and cornfields opposite; there is only the touch of it on one's skin, and the glow that lies right inside you; you aren't separate, which you must be for delights. The countryside produces you: its sun brightens you, a dark sky darkens you. You're no longer aware of your place in the world, quite: there is only work in its purity; and one part of the day leads to the next unawares, as things grow in the fields.

Only the priest provides a dream here: he has made such a monopoly of it that humble dreams and follies haven't spread and coalesced among the people naturally, to make delights. Nature bestows, defends, enriches. There's only her to lean on. Well, she seems quite reliable.

Another strike today, this time of the peasants again, the mezzadri. They are all collecting in the town as usual, and there are endless rows of motor-scooters outside the south gate.

Went to Florence. I had a strange impression that city-people haven't full human presence. The city is alive ^{on their} ~~for~~ ^{behalf} ~~them~~. Their eyes, cheeks, chins, not to say bodies, aren't quite developed. The restaurants seem only to symbolise ~~the~~ ~~act of~~ eating. Cities are mad congregations now---stampedes,

at deadlock. Perhaps they'll become death-traps of disease: just as the Plague was the climax of the towns.

If you live in a city you have to forego self-government. You don't know where you're being led. This is how it seemed to me.

Early morning: the sunlight pours down, fresh and glittering. I empty some ashes on the dump outside the courtyard. The dog lies half in the shade, where the fledgling-pigeons are. There is the sound of bees. The whole valley lies dreaming. In any other country this would be an idyll.

Gigi will take the fledgling-pigeons down soon, before they can fly, and wring their necks and eat them roasted.

Yesterday three men came, dressed in town-suits, with collars and ties. They stepped out of a car and after some murmuring advanced towards the courtyard. A telegram had arrived at the same time, and my wife was downstairs signing for it. The dog, attached to a long rope that extends just to the edge of the courtyard, started barking like mad. The three men drew nearer and stood by what would be the gate if the house wasn't falling to pieces. One was young and plump; another slim and very dark; and the one between them was rather shrivelled and tired-looking---he was apparently the leader. He spoke first, with the muzzle of the dog close to his trousers: 'What is this dog doing here?' We stared and gaped at the impertinence. Caterina, Sergio's wife, was in the house and came on to the balcony with me. We watched my

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wife gather up the dog's line and draw the dog inside. The three men then advanced, their faces ~~quite~~ expressionless. Some rapid thoughts went through my head: were they police? had they come to arrest somebody? had we done something wrong? They advanced like Italians sure of their power. The leader then stopped in the middle of the courtyard and, looking up at us--- he had decided to treat my wife as a shadow, and her removal of the dog as a duty---^{le}said he understood a peasant came to the house every day, and what was his name? Caterina answered him with her childish half-smile: ^{Gigi.} Where was this ~~peasant~~ ^{Gigi} now? He'd gone home, she said. Had he left a key? She didn't know. He then advanced a few paces further and said, taking a piece of paper out of his pocket, 'Voi poyete legere?'---can you (plural) read? Caterina shook her head and said, 'No,' in an intimidated way. He turned to me: 'E Lei?'---and you? I said with a touch of irony, 'Yes, I think I can read,' and the other two made agreeable noises through their noses, like henchmen. He then extended his piece of paper: 'Perhaps you can read this, then!' I went downstairs and took the paper from him. It was signed by the owner of the house and said, 'These gentlemen have my permission to enter the house.' I tried to hand the paper back to him, not quite understanding, but he held up his hand: 'No, you can keep it.' There was a silence. He stood there. The others stood there. I stood there. The thoughts were still in my head: had something gone wrong? were these police? had the owner, hitherto a friend, gone mad and decided to throw us out? I returned indoors with the letter: after all, ~~they~~ ^{it} seemed to know what they were doing, so I could leave them to ~~it~~. And we went on with our lunch upstairs. But they continued standing there. Caterina remained on the balcony. Then the leader called up: 'Has the letter been read?'

She came into us and repeated the questions at which I shrugged and said, 'Why, yes!' 'They want to see you again,' she said. This time---I had my mouth full of the best risotto we'd made for months---the fury broke in me and I dashed down with the note in my hand. 'This is addressed to no one!' I said. 'Secondly, I think you've been very discourteous, you've no right to ask educated people if they can read, or question the existence of my own dog in my own courtyard, I've rented the house and I'm paying good money for it, also the law---Italian law---forbids you entry without my permission, you haven't asked my permission, the landlady's permission isn't enough!' etc etc. At this--- said in more or less one ^{rush} ~~mouthful~~---there was much shuffling and scowling, and he replied that he hadn't known I was acquainted with Italian law.

But, I went on, all this having been said, he could now enter the house courteously, with my permission, which I now courteously gave. But he turned away at this, sweating profusely. No, it was all right, he wouldn't come in.

So they went off again: the young man---at a safe distance---called out to me that the signore had only asked if we spoke Italian because he knew we were foreigners, and secondly that the dog was dangerous---era scritto in faccia, danger was written in its face.

A most mysterious incident. Caterina said she thought the shrivelled man was il maestro, the village schoolteacher; and meanwhile we had recognised the slim man as the local bank-manager. We realised they must have come to view the house for a possible sale; or perhaps the schoolmaster was an assessore for mortgages---we knew thw owner wanted to get one.

All at once we seemed to have had a glimpse into the lower

Tuscan seams, where fascism lay. We realised what a superficial part of fascism politics had been. To this day, in Italy, a fascist can be recognised at once: there are several types, but they're all clearly recognisable. It may be a walk, a way of lifting the chin, a peculiar defensive and hurt arrogance, or a brilliance and dash with a dangerous edge---for some of the cleverest people were drawn to fascism; or sometimes it's a sort of faded competence and authority, or bitterness. They are of the schoolteacher's generation---the over-fifties.

Yet I know that, being Italian, this man is forgiving and gentle at some point. The terrible thing is what he could provoke others to do. He provoked me to anger: could he provoke me to dreams? What did he provoke as a young man? The Italians have had a dangerous genius since their natural genius was broken three or four centuries ago. He had the petty fascist irony---a small man picking and digging at the world. Fascism was only a game but the rest of the world took it in earnest, for or against. A flick of the wrist and twenty-five million people were dead.

How ready we are to feel, The police have arrived---the van is waiting outside!

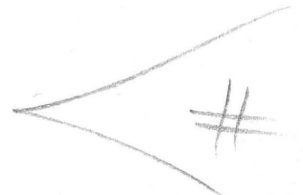
I noticed their fascist technique, so common among the middle class in Italy: the sudden arrival, the arrogant slam of car-doors, the chins pushed forward, the threatening voices. Yet it's a game.

We were told yesterday that the reason why there are so many

vipers this year, especially in the woods, is that the peasants no longer keep herds of pigs. As the land is abandoned, and the pigs that remain are kept in stalls, the vipers thrive: they are a delicacy for pigs, and their sting has no effect on them. At one time herds of pigs were left to roam in the woods. (This is a tiny effect---dangerous for us---of a great change. What others will there be?)

We met the owner of the house today and she told us we'd done well to send the three signori away. Her daughter had written the note, she said, and then had come to her most shocked afterwards saying we'd refused him entry. 'I'm so glad,' she said, 'but don't tell my daughter so!' It was true---he is the local schoolmaster; an unpleasant individual, she said. In any case, he had offered her too little for the house!

She speaks with tired eyes that flash dramatically now and then, opening her mouth wide to enunciate her syllables. Her expressions would have been the same six ^ccenturies ago. Her face, sallow and drowsy, her mouth drawn down with permanent sorrowing introspection, is in the early frescoes, the work of the so-called primitives. When she wraps a scarf round her head to go to church, she makes it seem like a cowl. The village has hardly changed since the fourteenth century: its prosperity suddenly ceased, and it fell under the heel of Florence, because it loved its own internal quarrels too much.



The Sieneſe are ſo like the French---quick, intelligent, proud, with a touch of their tendereſſ. I'm ſurprized to ſee them ſometimes actually looking into each other's eyes, in the light, poſt-Reformation way.

At ^{one of} the ~~village~~ ^{local} ~~monastery~~ ^{ies} today with a guide. The friar, who is like a man out of Boccaccio, with a vaſt belly and his ſleeves rolled up, hardly able to breathe, told us, 'Let him (the guide) take you down to St. Jacob's---there's nothing intereſting there---but it's quite nice the way the ſunlight plays on the alabaſter windows. The nuns will give you the key.'

And inside this church, which ſtill has the look of a pagan temple, built in the middle of the ^{eleventh} ~~eleventh~~ century, we found perhaps the moſt extraordinary thing in the ~~village~~ ^{town}. There behind the altar, faint and almoſt gone---as if by its own will--- was a wall by Bartolo di Fredi, the Chriſt white and delicate, with ſuch an unbelievable tendereſſ that you couldn't take your eyes away from him; the Madonna preſſes her face cloſe to his, he lies in the laſt agony, his face contorted; their faces are preſſed ſo cloſe, they have ſuch a yearning expreſſion, that they could be lovers; they have ſuch a tired and truthful look that it could have happened yeſterday, you feel the crucifixion as it was, the terror; and alſo the ſimple grief.

The guide waited patiently at the door, wondering what the devil could be holding us ſo long; he'd ſhown us the alabaſter windows after all.

As I ſay, the colours are almoſt gone, more than they are in di Fredi's freſco at St. Auguſtine's in San Gimignano; there,

the wings of the angels seem to beat and make a wind in the background, behind a rapt crowd, and Christ, ~~his mouth open yearningly~~, stands close over the dying Madonna, holding a child in his arms. The Madonna seems to shrink into death, frail and tiny, ~~her face so lovely that it makes you shudder~~. I couldn't understand why Christ was holding a child; I supposed it was Christ the child, in flesh.

After dark yesterday we went up the hill to the mezzadria family, above Sergio's house; their place is hidden behind cypresses and used to be a monastery, with a great natural courtyard in front. There are three of them, a couple and their daughter; they were still working in the darkness, getting the forage into the stall. This is the hard part of the season, when first the grass has to be cut and then the grain: the wheatfields have already turned yellow, with the first real heat, after being olive-grey for so long. In the dark stall, behind the flanks of the oxen, we talked about conditions. They were leaving at the end of the summer like everybody else, the man said. 'Soon the whole of the countryside will be empty, then where will the food come from?' He knew of a great podere up the road where eighty people or more would soon be leaving. He himself could no longer work eight hectares with his wife and daughter alone, and look after the beasts as well. The owner of the land is good to him, but that doesn't reduce the work: they will go to a smaller podere, of two or three hectares, still on mezzadria. The woman leaned in the doorway, a rake in her hand, and said that she wondered at the food people would soon be expected to eat. The animals no longer lived properly, and this meant that the meat was bad: who knew if it wasn't harmful, too? She didn't believe in

allevamenti for chickens, the broiler-houses: she could tell a broiler-house bird at once. All their birds, she said--- they'd had nearly a thousand at one time---were healthy and free to ~~romen~~^{room} where they wanted to. We went upstairs with them and sat at table while they ate their late dinner. Their daughter told us that at a baker's near by an inspector had found a great sack of plaster, used in the flour to make up weight. Many of the bakers use starch, she said, to whiten the flour. Was that why there were so many complaints today, among people like themselves who seemed to live and work healthily---complaints of the liver and stomach and kidneys? The penalty for putting ~~ox~~^x's blood in wine to give it colour was six months' imprisonment, but what about all the other chemicals they put in? If you drank trade-wine you could feel it circulating round your stomach in a burning way: this was the acid they put in. It really did burn your insides, and the result after ten or twenty years of drinking ^{it} could be imagined! Real wine never made itself felt in the stomach like that. If it warmed you, it warmed the whole of ~~your~~^{you} ~~body~~.

Gianni is lost again in the whirl of work. He came for a few minutes this morning at seven, and he won't be back from work until ten or half-past this evening, when Lorenzo will pick him up on his motor-scooter at Altapasquale. The harvest is just starting: the wheatfields are golden, and many of the fields in the valleys have already been reaped. Everybody is up at four now, and ~~to~~ⁱⁿ bed not much before eleven, after a quick dinner.

Today is St. John's day, and we gave Gianni a present of three tiny books of reproductions, Dufy, Cezanne, Breughel. He picked up the Dufy first and said quietly, 'How simple the

drawing is.'

We went up to his house yesterday and had salami and wine with his mother and Alberto. She leaned over the table, tiny and black, with her blazing eyes, and told us that she had no appetite these days, she had to force the food down. There was too much work---she always felt better in the winter for that reason. We promised to show her how to prepare a vegetable broth for the day, as a basis for wholemeal-soup; then she could absorb enough substance to work, without really eating. But she won't do it; the poor don't change habits. She hasn't a tooth in her head, and won't go to the dentist to have new ones fitted; she eats on her gums, which are now nearly as hard as teeth. Alberto was her best son, yes! Lorenzo and Gianni were both birbanti--- rascals. Gianni was also a serpente, snake: he was never so happy as when he wasn't working! He wanted to find a profession, but what? The poor creature! Poverino! He had to work in the fields to bring in a little cash, but he was too bright and clever for that work!

Gianni keeps asking me if I know of any better work for him. Well, we'll go to Rome together soon, and see if there's anything. I suggested he should try at one of the airports: good money, the illusion of constant flight~~x~~, the presence of foreigners--- perfect ferment for the Italian soul.

I talked with an American immigrant in the village-square. She's doing Italy like a tourist, though she was born here, in Ancona: an art-historian. America is 'young', she said, a young nation. America has the problem of whether she will ever 'grow up'; the people are 'children' and they 'need Europe' so

badly.

All the old stuff, I thought.

She also gave me her version---the one she'd learned to qualify for the oath of allegiance, she said---of how America became independent of England and why. A group of English pioneers settled in Virginia: morally, America came into being with that act; yet it continued to be taxed by the English king, at a great distance, and fought for its independence against overwhelming English forces.

I looked up the history of that period later. A group of Puritan English gentlemen settled the country as colonists; their first struggles to establish themselves were shielded by English colonial troops---particularly against the French, but also against the natural dangers of unpioneered country; when they were safe and established, taxes for the maintenance of these forces were still expected in London, without representation in London, which a large section of English opinion thought unjust; a rebellion was staged against the tiny and bored English force, with French help this time. I had the impression that the war of independence was fought as much at Westminster, by men like Burke and Fox and Wilkes, as in America; only weak forces were kept in America because of George III's weak conviction.

America as a 'young nation': but she became a nation long before Italy or Germany did. Perhaps she meant young ethically---whatever that may be.

Italians and Germans go there, and perhaps find freedom for the first time in their lives, and think it started

there. They come from countries which were basically rural even in the Thirties, and find 'modernity' there, and think it started there.

The cathedral at Siena: people pottering about and peering at stones, pillars, frescoes, inscriptions, the famous pulpit by Pisano etc. They all look so hard that it seems impossible for them to see anything. Better to close one's eyes in this strange and mystical church.

We went to the Etruscan tombs behind Cellole. A narrow path that was clearly ancient went along the side of a wooded slope: there were long ruts in the cobbles as you see them at Ostia Antica and Pompeii, made by wooden wheels. A peasant told us that we had a walk of two hundred yards to the tombs but there was no sign of them. It seemed characteristically Etruscan---to hide like that. A path went off right, turning back on itself, and my first feeling was that its unobtrusiveness, suddenly slipping away from the road between trees and bushes, meant that it led to the tombs. The road we were on had the same mystery and quiet as the approach-road to Veii, where the Etruscan Apollo was found: the path hugged the side of the hill in the same way, and you entered a special immensity of countryside, with a deeper silence, as if marvellous things had gone on there, at the dawn of life. The hills rolled away to the sea with increasing light. The sea had been much close then. You find pure sand there---you can pick it up and it will leave your hand clean, like the sand of a beach.

We got to the end of our ancient road and found a tall villa among cypresses; and then, under a great wall, thoroughly enclosed and sheltered like something in a child's tale, there were a few mediaeval houses huddled together. The place was strange and ecstatic, with towering, dark trees, some of them lime-trees in blossom, which one hardly ever sees here. We asked an old man where the tombs were, and my guess proved right---they were at the top of the unobtrusive path.

So we walked back. The hill where the open tombs lay looked rather sad: there were only holes in the earth, as if a number of shells had exploded there; some of the holes had rough steps leading down to them. An air of sacrilege. There were no paintings. In one or two you saw the complete form of the tomb, bared of its sarcophagi, domed, with a raised bank of earth round three sides. We found pieces of hard terracotta which must have been from statues or buildings or tools. As always in Etruscan places, there was a sheltered valley, locked from the outside world. We wondered where the town had been, and guessed that its site lay under the villa and the mediaeval houses, which now bore the restful name Buon Riposo; the spot seemed hallowed---with an ancient security about it that seemed to address us directly.

A group of American women and girls in the square at Siena, from a tourist bus. The girls bewildered, timid; the women stock-still, seemingly immovable. These are the people the immigrant calls 'children': on the contrary, they have a terrible maturity.

They seemed to shed a light on the square---a sense of clarity and directness. A sort of blond light among the dark,

natural Italians... The Americans are wide-awake---wonderfully so, and too much so. They make the Italians seem passive: the Italian rhythm of acceptance, as against the American one of getting things done, creating life as you go along. These Americans make it seem that life is only a basic material, to be wielded by each person according to his desires. So they seem broken away from life as well---watching it in some way, a little frightened perhaps. They seem far more subtly Christian than the Italians, more morally Christian: another reason why they shed a sort of light in the square---a morally searching light. They're good in the way Italians never are: they're good by conscience, and by principles so deep that you can see them in their eyes and the shape of their mouths, ~~even---perhaps most---in their delinquents.~~ They make me feel safe, standing in the square: they're peaceful, unegotistic; they don't push, live for themselves. They make the natural Italians seem closed in their desires. Italian girls are like flames---they burn at the touch (I don't mean sexually)---in comparison; dangerous material---they would exact power from the smallest sensuous thrill they gave. The Italian girls, passing confidently and easily, seem unscrupulous compared with the Americans. They aren't friends; whereas the Americans seem hurt and, above all, unwordly^l; it strikes me suddenly that America is the most spiritual nation in the world---even their gadgets are a moral expression. These American girls would offer equality in their sex, first and foremost; they stand the same height as the man; they choose their sex, as they choose everything else. But the Italian women fall into it by passion, or suffer it, or use it. The Americans gave me a wistful yearning for Anglo-Saxon society---so light, objective, optimistic. They're creating life as they go ^{al} ~~along~~---their vigour lies in this, and

their impenetrable sadness: their suicide.

Yesterday evening we strolled down to Sergio's to tell him we were going away for a few days. We found his brother's family with him for the harvest. The atmosphere round the house was dark and heavy. Only Sergio himself showed a little spirit. They hate to show themselves bowed by work. He came to the foot of the outside stairs with his brother, as if to warn us silently not to come in. The evening-meal was just beginning. It was dark now and they'd just got in from the fields. Caterina didn't call down to us as usual, and the rest of the family sat huddled on the steps at the top, in silence. I thought of the harvest-time in England, Germany---the flares at night, the excitement of working late, the food and drink in the fields, the smell of the hay, the lovely painted carts. Sex and flirting are associated with the harvest; there are long traditions of harvest merriment, it is the crown of the farming year. But not here.

We heard Renato call down to Sergio with a growl to come up and eat his food. And as we were walking away we heard Caterina shout, her mouth full, 'Maiala, why can't you come when you're called?' They all sat down to eat; not to feast together, but just to eat. In a few seconds it would all be over, they would be on their feet again to prepare for the last act of the day---throwing themselves on a bare bed.

Sergio's brother had a word for it: he said, 'This is an ugly moment for us'---è un brutto momento. They had to sell the grain at prices lower than they should be, he added: the millers abused the situation and took advantage of the sudden great supply. Everything is bald, deguttet; dog's work.

2.

We'd only been away four or five days but everything inside the cool, dark, closed house looked strange to us. It had all lost its smell. We put the chairs out on the terrace again, started the refrigerator which makes the lights blink and fade, opened all the shutters. Gigi said it had been hot---in somma, he added; he always says this, with his peculiar bull-like duck of the head; meaning by in somma something like 'more or less'. There was no relish in getting back: there were just the facts; the things to be done. But gradually the nerves began to take their silent comfort. We found ourselves staring before us again, across the massive Elsa valley. The nerves seemed nearly ^f fibres ^{that} we could feel in our bodies, physical: ~~they are~~ getting sturdier all the time. The silence enters into the body slowly. It comes down the hill like the wind, through the woods, a cool breath rustling the trees.

Most of the grain has been cut now. Sergio's is in sheaves--- what they call barche, meaning stacks piled rather like Arab mud-huts, the ears pointing inwards, to protect them from the rain. Our own grain hasn't been scythed yet: Gigi is always last, being alone. Most of it will be done by machine, leaving narrow rows which the wheels can't manoeuvre because of the

vines and olives dotted everywhere.

We'd been away for a 'rest'---a few days by the sea. After the first day I caught a chill and spent the rest of the time in bed. The resorts were crowded and sticky, with cars clustering the narrow roads like a city. Luckily we lived inland, close to the mountains. After my second or third bathe my ears closed up in a strange way. Perhaps it was a defence against the noise. With every hour I heard less and less. In a panic one night, not long before dawn, I heard bells in the farthest distance and realised that in fact they were just down the hill, usually deafening. I leapt up, shaking my head, which brought back a little hearing in one ear. And that day I went to the doctor. He produced a magic pill---in this case, a suppository---and said that the congestion was caused by a combination of sea-water and cataarh from the chill. I wanted him to syringe my ears with warm water, but he said it wouldn't be necessary. The world looked strange to me, because dumb---a strange, unhinged world: I could see people's faces all the more clearly; their naturally distraught expressions, the heavy pouts, eyes that strained and squinted. My comfort in those few days was hanging round the bookshops. I came back every evening with a little pile of books which I put all round me on the bed, in an effort to keep sane. Nervous diseases will perhaps grow in our world: there may even be nerve-plagues. The causes will not be ascertained: from being too general and too numerous. Diseases like herpes, with its strange and vague pains, may spread like the common cold, as wrecked city-crowds congregate more and more, even in the summer, in the fumes of their own cars, feeding on manufactured and semi-manufactured food, and recovering from the collapses with a manufactured antidote. Each country may have

its plague in accordance with its character: Germany, from the remorse and self-horror in the young; England, from neglect of the body and bad food; America, from abstraction, sheer detachment; France, from excess of savoir faire; Italy, from the imitation of foreign life (therefore, because an imitation, the least of all).

In my bedroom I looked at the packet the doctor had given me and was aware of a lot of ^{chemical} ~~xxxxxxxx~~ names. He said it would cut out the catarh. I hadn't asked him for a magic pill, but it was second nature in him to give me one. I left him as deaf as I found him. I stuck one or two suppositories in my backside and a few hours later began to feel a good bit worse ^a than before. In fact, I felt poisoned, all the way through. I hadn't taken drugs for years, and was surprised at myself for having suddenly accepted one for a mere chill. Chills should be indulged and given way to: they are the body's excuse for taking a rest, and the body should be obliged. And I knew my body: at least, I felt I did, after years of learning patiently. Above all, I wanted my blasted ears cleaned out! But I couldn't get anybody to do it. They suggested sticking things into me---injections or more suppositories---or taking a strong drink and going to bed, but the ears were never mentioned. And I got deafer and deafer. A ^YEHudi Menuhin record, where he plays the Bach solo sonatas, nearly brought them back again, by sheer marvel and splendour. But next morning I was as deaf as before.

It was a Sunday morning: I was lying in bed---the sunlight looked sickly as it does when one is queer---and suddenly, in a moment of revolt, I jumped up with the words in my head, 'I won't have a spell put on me!' I felt as if I were on a tropical

island where the tribes lay spells, ~~somebody close by, in another house, up the valley.~~ Anyway, I shaved myself and made an immediate appointment at the local hospital. In a few minutes I was there, with the doctor waiting for me, his eyes like a boy's, and a nun at his side. 'Ears?' he asked, and I shouted Yes! with a dumb smile. 'This way.' And to my delight he actually sat me down to look at---my ears! He shone a light into them. 'Completely bunged up,' he said. 'Effect of the sea'. Then, to my further delight, the nun bore a familiar semicircular tray towards me, to hold under my ear, and the doctor took out the familiar glass syringe. And then, lukewarm water: squish! And ah-h-h-h! All three of us said, 'Ah-h-h-h!' together. I could hear! Hear! I could hear the world! I wanted to hug him and dance ^{him} ~~him~~ round. Endless tiny pellets of wax came out into the tray. Then the other ear. Again, I could hear! Hear! Hear! Like bells across the valley. I was free--- free to walk about in the world, not peer at it any more like a visitor! And my body felt better, too. The chill was still there---after all, I was resting by the sea---but what was a chill? Back in my bedroom I packed at once, ate a bit of lunch, and drove off. Right away from the scene! My wife followed by train.

Back here, ~~where~~ the tiny courtyard lay in silence and the rocky path up the hill seemed to look a little reproachful...

Later that evening, after dark, when everything lay in the night-hush, I heard Alberto come up the road behind his two oxen. The wheels scarp[ed] and rumbled over the stones. He cried, 'Va! Via! Va! Camina! Cam-i-na! Va! Forza! Forza!', sometimes in a soft voice, encouragingly, and then with sharpness as the wheels took a steep incline. He said, 'Va, va, va', in a strangely deep and absent way, as if his voice came out of Etruscan

times. I followed him up the hill, hearing his soft cries and the scrape of the wheels all the way. Half-way up I met Gianni and Lorenzo on their way to the village by motor-cycle, and when I told Gianni I'd been in bed most of the time he shouted in a burlesque way, waving his arms, 'You should have stayed here with us! You're better off here! We have aria pura---and peace---we're free from diseases here---don't leave us again!' He'd become thinner in the last few days, and his face was bronzed. All their grain is in now. He said the work had cost him two kibos of weight. And now they were off to enjoy themselves. The air was soft all round; the village-lights shone on their hill, like a crown held up. I walked on up and came to their house just as Alberto was turning into the stabelyard with his oxen. It was now past ten and Gianni's mother was still working, bringing in ^{forage} forage from the fields. The bull-calves made a great din when their mothers walked into the stall, and the fattest of them broke loose from his chain and fed at the nipple: Alberto indulges this and gives the beast an affectionate smack on the rump---'He's fatter than the other one,' he said, 'because he gets more complimenti---more affection---and ^{he} ~~it~~ always manages to get free!' If an animal didn't get proper affection, he said, it didn't put on weight properly, and its meat was much less choice.

After the oxen were haltered to their troughs he had to help bring in the forage. The electric bulb failed, in the hot, dark stable, and they used a candle. Then there was the cutting of the grass at a circular scythe worked by hand---first the soft clover and maize-leaves, for the young, and then the coarser, dryer grass for the grown oxen. Alberto turned the wheel while his mother fed the grass into the chute, in great armfulls, plunging forward with her whole tiny body, that only seems skin

and bone. Alberto was elated, a bit drunk, and swung the wheel carelessly, telling his mother that the grass was no good, too dry! He'd been working at another podere all day, and this seemed to have excited him: he almost never goes to town. His face is long and striking, in the stark Etruscan manner, not good-looking like Gianni's. When he's dressed up on Sundays in a ^u superb suit, with everything in perfect taste, he has such a commanding presence that you might think he was an actor, with his dark, oily hair and straight back and eyes that flash; only his bad teeth, and the fact that he talks all the time out of sheer awkwardness at being ^e dressed up, show that he's our Alberto after all.

They gave me a glass of wine and piled me up with fresh eggs, and I began to walk down again.

In the meantime our dog, which was on heat, had escaped, and I had to walk up and down the hill in the dead of night calling her name and peering about among the bushes and trees. I went to the top of the hill where Paolo lives, in a rambling, tumbledown farmhouse, but didn't go into his courtyard for fear of alarming him and also perhaps getting some gunshot in my ear. Then I gave up and came down. The result would be a litter of mongrels---but---oh, well! I went to bed. And after an hour or so she appeared, with a mean, yellow-looking half-breed in tow, Paolo's 'hunting dog', trailing a long chain that sounded like ^{all} the prisoners in Fidelio ~~in the bush.~~

I felt hot from wine, over-tⁱred. The nightingale who always perches close to our bedroom window made his familiar call: one long, soaring whistle, and a few warbles, then silence; just the beginning of a song---never more; he brings enormous comfort---

the world is suddenly calm.

The moment I heard his brief, and endless, call I felt better and fell asleep.

I remember walking down to the sea from the road one evening, near Ancona, in the war. The column had stopped and the trucks were all drawn into the side of the road. It was dusk, and I was surprised to find the sea so close, and a smooth, deserted beach. Everything seemed impossible to me then, except what was. I had a peculiar sensation on that beach which made me linger. I can't even tell what it was now: a sense of the exotic perhaps, of independence---of some adventure I couldn't name but which belonged to me intimately. I had only taken a few steps and was quite away from the army, quite alone. I think we were coming up from Greece to join a new attack. I thought it might be a premonition of death. The sea was smooth and quiet; the beach seemed such a luxury---'seaside' meant a crowded place for me. Or perhaps my body had the premonition that it would be here again, a few miles from this spot, some years later. For a moment I was quite alone, as if in tune with my identity as it would be after the war. But my mind didn't believe for a moment that I'd ever see Italy again.

My first visit to Rome was short, ^c cursory: that was strange---not to know that I would make my home in the city. I hardly looked at the city itself. Yet the seed must have been sewn then. Otherwise why did I go back---hardly thinking? (as everyone goes back to Rome). The seed was cast so deep. perhaps, that my mind knew nothing. I stayed at the ^a hotel in the burrow of

streets in the Spanish quarter, on that first visit in the war. The thing to do was to ask the hall-porter to fix you up with a woman for the night. All Rome was copulating. He fixed up myself and a friend: we had to travel to the outskirts of the city in one of those tiny war-buses which consisted of a canvas box built on to a motor-cycle, so small that you couldn't stand up in it. I went alone to do the arranging: I was surprised at myself---at the methodical way I arranged our pleasures; we would bring the food and wine, enough for four; I saw both girls and approved. And in the evening we went. Those outskirts must have been quite close to the Vatican: the city was much smaller then. There were tall blocks of flats that stood alone: they seemed to me exotic and beautiful, like rocks in a strange, mystical, glittering zoo of humanity. The women had a flat, well furnished. One was serious and delicate in her movements; the other plump and giggly. We sat round a small table, eating and drinking without appetite. Then, with a little wine inside us, ~~we~~^{the men} began to find the maid more attractive than either of the women and, to their horror, and the spellbound outrage of the maid, made advances at her. She was ~~ushered~~ and hurried out of the flat. The night was distraught and ridiculous. I had instilled in my friend a horror of the clap which had begun---I was so fluent about it---to exercise a real terror over me. So neither of us did anything, to the bewilderment of the women: ~~so~~ there were four people aching with desires, on a hot night, lying with the very person who couldn't satisfy them, while the mysterious and smiling city lay outside quite dark and silent. That was a strange beginning for a city. Yet I felt happy in the morning. The light was clean and sparkling as I'd never seen it in my life before. It gave promise---with the bustle

> in the street far below---of wonderful events. <

At half-past five this morning, soon after we woke up, there was a fierce storm and a tremendous wind swept through the house. We rushed about closing doors and shutters, and getting things in off the terrace. The dog was terrified and kept close to us. The water cascaded down off the roof in a great chute. Our rainwater-well filled up again in no time. There were blinding flashes of lightning. Then, as we lay in bed waiting for it to stop, we heard the first bird sing, and the clouds began to draw away. Sergio had gone to work at four, though it was Sunday---the strikes have delayed the harvest and make overtime necessary---and we watched him tramping back at seven soaked through, his food-basket still full. Gianni came down later and said he'd been soaked from head to foot. He'd been building barche of wheat-sheaves and couldn't leave them before the 'roofs' were on; he had wrung the water out of his clothes. At four that morning, when he'd started work, the sky had been clear and there'd been bright stars; dawn brought the storm. He said he hadn't arrived home before one in the morning from the cinema, and then he hadn't been able to sleep because of the great heat and the mosquitoes: he lay smoking, then leaned out of the window; now and then he gave his brother Lorenzo a good kick, he said, for sleeping so deeply.

> It still isn't real July weather. The usual heat hadn't come, although there are bursts of wet scirocco-heat that seems to come from the sea. The coast this year is hotter than inland, in a permanent scirocco. Yet the Val d'Elsa should be one of the driest and hottest regions north of Rome. They say that half of Italy's grain has been lost this year, through the abnormal winter and the heavy spring-rains. <

One of the oxen here is sick with tuberculosis, and Gigi has had to sell her at a loss of forty thousand lire. But she is still there in her stall, looking delicate and apprehensive.

The padrona complains about it in her singing, wan, mediaeval way.

6
The padrona
She has been putting a fine story about that this house is a 'villa' or even a 'palazzo'---for which we pay a pittance. Since we are foreigners, people find our living here incredible: foreigners are signori who expect bathrooms and polished wardrobes wherever they go. I scotch her stories by saying we are 'camping' here---it's just like being in a tent; since camping is an admissible foreign pursuit, ~~this is understood.~~ When I explained to a shopkeeper yesterday that far from having a bathroom we had no water and little electric light, and no lavatory to speak of, he seemed relieved: he'd been worried that the general conspiracy to charge the foreigner fancy-prices might have been undermined. Naturally, he likes to keep us all on an upper-^{class} ~~class~~ level: ^{it} ~~because~~ ^{justifies his prices.} ~~this is more profitable.~~ And it makes him feel safer. 'If,' he said, 'you'd like a really nice place another years, in Assisi, four rooms with a bathroom, kitchen and all conveniences, I have it. Furnished as well. No camping there.' I asked ~~him~~ how much it ^{will} ~~would~~ be and he ^{makes} ~~mades~~ the classical Italian reply, which never differs so much as by a word, in whichever province you happen to be: 'Ah, quello non posso dire---that I can't say. But certainly we would come to some arrangement...'

The July weather has settled in---for the moment. The rocky path up the hill is beginning to look blinding white, and the cicadas are louder, echoing across the valley. But there is always a cool, balmy breeze that comes down through the woods from the sea (without that the Etruscans would never have settled here). This breeze is cold sometimes, especially in the evening. Unusually so, even in the heat. There seems to be another weather

interfering with the real Italian weather.

When I walk up the hill I scan the path in front of me for snakes. The vipers can go right across your path, as they can't see or hear. A dog will stop short when it is aware of a snake on the path, and sit down, quite still. The heat makes the walk uphill slower: the dog plods along with head drooping, tongue hanging out. There are greatvells from Luciano at the foot of the valley, egging his oxen on while he shakes about in his seat: 'Dio buono, camina! Madonna troia!'

Yesterday we saw the fattore of this land: he is to be the go-between for the owner of the house and us. There are misunderstandings about when to pay the rent and to whom, about the pozzo nero, the 'black well' which means the lavatory, just a hole in the floor, and lastly---the biggest bone of contention, on which I refuse to yield---the bill for 'disinfecting' the house, that is whitewashing it previous to our entry, which she would like me to pay. As Caterina says, 'It isn't as if you can take the whitewashed walls with you when you leave.' The fattore told me with a clear, confidential look that he was sure he could settle matters properly. I think he underestimates his padrona. Anyway, I ^{paid him} ~~pay~~ two months' rent and left. She is setting up a great moan about the sick ox, he told us; it should never have happened, she says. 'But we're all losers on that deal,' he murmured. 'And she's right, misfortunes shouldn't happen.'

On Sunday we walked in the hills beyond the woods, which always remind us of the Isle de France. It was just after a storm. There are rarely two or three days without a storm

now. Sudden chills come into the air, like the currents you feel in the sea sometimes. The sun isn't safe as it usually is from May onwards. The sky can cloud over in a moment.

The path winds between cornfields and lava-rocks and saplings, and emerges at the crest of a hill from which one can see a thickly wooded mass of hills, falling into a deep valley. It always seems as if no one has ever really been there---not since centuries ago, at least. In France or England that path would be full of reminiscences---Louis XV had once passed there with his mistress, it used to be a stagecoach road in the time of Jane Austen, Henry VIII loved to hunt there, the Scots or Burgundians were defeated there after a battle lasting three days, a charter of freedom was signed there... But here, if there is a touch from the past at all, it is classical. And so you have a sense of pure countryside: ^{that is more} nature worked over ~~and formed more~~ perhaps than any other in the world, and yet bare. There has been no aristocracy, except one which plundered the land. No magic has baptised the paths and woods, except in ancient times.

No picnics---no tender little ceremonies. Gianni's brother Lorenzo said we must come up and have a merenda with them, perhaps at the edge of the woods. Merenda is a lovely word, at least it sounds lovely: meaning snack or picnic. But nothing would be done with tender relish. We would snatch at a lump of salami and drink a glass of wine, probably standing; and then make off. We sat in Gianni's kitchen a few days ago and ate a few mouthfuls, washed it down with some excellent wine; and afterwards I suddenly thought, 'Well, we've had the merenda!' The Italians are so ancient, not in time but in feeling: it is their quality, always was. They're ancient like cicadas or salamanders. There isn't real tender regard for the human creature: no flirtation, delight,

folly---and these make up the picnic.

Sometimes I think that Italy is nothing but classical: the Renaissance, certainly the baroque, seem nothing. Florence, Siena, Parma, Ravenna---the towns of the Renaissance: nothing. Tuscany is as bare as any other part of Italy: only the towns are like jewels, set in the plains. There hasn't been magic in the country: except before Christianity.

Perhaps this drive for the town which they all have now is ancient. The town provides the only meaning, always has.

There aren't the great country houses that you see in France and England. They haven't determined the shape of the land. When you find them they are closed and hidden---turning their backs. They don't frown on to a valley like the (schloss). They don't stand elegant and mild like a Queen Anne house in the Cotswold country. Their touch hasn't entered the people.

The Etruscans had the magic.

Letters from New York---bright, thrilling, crackling with work and prospects. The promise of heaven on earth.

This wilts us secretly: a bondage. Like the Second Coming, which never came. There's to do here and now. We can wait---we think we can: but our bodies, nerves, can't be kept in abeyance.

no promises, no beyond.
This is the Etruscan---'here and now', Did the Italians inherit this? They have no 'beyond'. No truncation of life into past and future: into time. Remember how indifferent the Sicilians are to time and age. Is that classical? Is that why the Italians have no reminiscences? their past and future are the now? And so their earth doesn't change: in speaking once it

spoke for all time? Were the Etruscans Italy's baptism?

From our 'Isle de France' hills we saw a great wall sticking up from a wooded valley, broken and jagged, surrounded entirely by thick undergrowth. And beyond it, where there were fields, lay what they call the 'old castle', a group of farmhouses perched on a bare hill. Paolo's brother lives there, we are told; he also is a shepherd. And there are ruins. But what ruins we can't make out. Is this strange towering jagged wall, suddenly thrusting out of the bushy woodland, part of the ruins? Is it ancient or mediaeval? The map tells us nothing.

We decided to drive there, or as near there as we could get. It meant taking the road to Volterra and turning right. There was another road, an easier one that went direct through the woods from here, but we ^{would} never been able to locate it; people talked about it vaguely, in the way they have in the country. So we took this obvious road. It climbed up and up, ^{dominating} ~~overlooking~~ the strange and stirring hills below Volterra, that sometimes look as though a massive freezing wave had passed over them and ruffled them. Mist and clouds floated in the valley. There were thick, dark woods, and then bright fields, all laid out like an immense map as far as we could see. At the top of the hill we asked for Castel Vecchio and were told we'd passed it: there was a path to the left which we hadn't noticed. And we drove back down the hill carefully. There it was, going surreptitiously away from the road at an angle, sloping down between trees. We noticed a shepherd at the corner, his face much like Paolo's, and guessed he must be the brother: then we drove on slowly. The path began to hug the side of a hill, with a small valley on the other side, in exactly the style of an Etruscan approach. And I began to feel the sunlit

happiness I always do on an Etruscan path: a special golden sensation, as if ~~one were~~ at the edge of a great event. As always with an Etruscan path, nothing ahead could be seen: but suddenly we came to a vast opening, and spaces. There before us, shining on the crest of a hill, were two farmhouses, and beyond them were rolling hills as far as Castel Fiorentino, on the road to Florence. We drove up to the courtyard and asked two peasants who were sitting outside, leaning on their sticks, 'Is this Castel Vecchio?'

Yes, it was. Were we after the ruins? they wanted to know. Yes, we were. Ah, well, they were further on, along the path that ran at the side of the house (also mysterious, and clearly a continuation of the other ancient path), and it had to be done on foot. A car would be no use. The path went through woods, over rocks and streams; and it took about three-quarters of an hour, before one reached the 'towers'. What were the so-called 'towers'? Ah, that they couldn't say! But certainly they were interesting for those who understood such things. There were holes in the ground---tombs, people said. 'They must be Etruscan,' I told them. They shrugged, and one of them said with a smile that he'd never ventured inside one: he was always afraid the roof would fall in, and also, there was danger of vipers---they lurked in holes, under stones, and he wasn't in a hurry to be bitten by a viper! Once, he said, a lawyer---a small, fat man---had spent a month there looking at the ruins day by day, a book in his hand; and when they'd asked him what there was of interest in the towers he only said quietly, with a smile, 'You wouldn't understand---non capite, voi!' We must come another day, they said, because it was already too late in the afternoon; it would be dark in an hour or two and it wouldn't do for a cristiano to

get lost in the woods! And they made faces and laughed. Was Paolo's brother there? we asked. Yes, he lived there, and he'd just taken his sheep up to the road. We explained that we lived near Paolo and got our milk from him. Then we must be the foreigners who'd taken the house at the ^efoof of the hill where Paolo lived? Yes, they'd heard! Apparently the news had got across the vast, pathless, wooded valley, to their isolated post.

Then they talked about the war. Moroccan troops had been there---fearful fellows, they said, who cut off ears and never spared Germans when they caught them---they cut their throats from ear to ear. English and American troops had also been there: they had bartered wine and eggs for tinned food and sugar. A German had stayed up a tree with a machine-gun for two or three days, until the English or Americans brought the tree down from under him.

They spoke as if the war had been the last thing to have really happened there. And the place seemed not to have changed a stone since then. The troops might have been there yesterday. They talked about them as if they were still young, still the same troops, only they were somewhere else now. They talked about the Morrocans and their French officers as if their faces were still before them. The silence was immense on that hillside: I suppose one startling event would fall into that sparkling immensity and be enough for a lifetime. Youth, they said, is unmindful of things in war: boys lose all sense of family, and homes, crops, other people's belongings, are meaningless to them.

It was getting chilly and the sun had started to go down. We would come back another day, earlier. As we drove away they sat with their eyes still on us, calm and inquisitive. ^{Perhaps} We seemed (e. s.)

to them only another aspect of the war-experience that had fallen into the silence yesterday or twenty years ago.

A letter from the padrona---an answer to my conference with the f fattore. Will I please not take our business to 'third parties' to settle? But I shall. The words run close together in one round, breathless scrawl, as if from centuries of cajolement and legal wrangling. She won't specify precisely what she thinks I owe her, over and above the agreed rent: if you define your position too closely you can't move out of it later. A wise Italian instinct, this.

When we go to see her she talks about the Pope, or her son, or how intolerably untidy her daughter is, or about the religious experiences she has had; she saw her son fall---the image suddenly crossed her mind when she was standing before a madonnina--- and later that day she found he'd had an accident. She talks rhetorically, opening her mouth wide, with flashes of humour and irony. By the time she has finished we are all tired and too hungry to think about bills. We've been wrangling mildly for two months now. Some deep Italian wrangles go on for five, fifteen years. Sometimes they go from one generation to another, abolishing time.

Sergio told us that to get to the 'towers' we needn't take the road to Volterra at all: we could walk from a point just beyond the woods here, where a narrow path cuts straight into the hills; this must be the mysterious path we've been after. It means a difference of one or two hours walking, he said.

So yesterday we tried it. We packed up some bread and cheese and wine and drove to the nearest village, then took the rocky path into the hills behind: he'd told us to go as far

as a villa that stood alone in its podere. We found the villa and left the car in the courtyard, at the end of a drive of cypresses. Then we spotted someone to show us the way--- the peasant's wife. She was nursing a child on the grass, surrounded by tiny ducklings. There were two ways to the ruins, she said, one [^]straight through the woods, and difficult to keep to because of the undergrowth, and the other a real path all the way that would take at least two hours. We could see the ruins protruding out of the woods on the next hill, jagged and split. They seemed remarkably near. In the winter, she said, the path through the woods was easy enough because the trees were bare, but in the summer you needed a guide: on Sundays her husband was available but today he was working. 'Anyway, I'll show you where it begins!' she said with a smile. We walked across the forecourt of the villa; a Roman family owned it, she said, and came only for August each year. The shutters were tight closed, and the walls were in good order; the fields were ^{flat and} ~~perfectly~~ still all round; and the villa with its mellow, painted walls, and tiny balconies, gave it all a touch of splendour and grace that had perhaps always been there, from the time of the Etruscans.

The path was almost invisible and it meant treading through thick bushes the whole way. What about the other path? we asked. And she pointed it out: wide and well-shaded with trees. It would take too long, but we decided to try it. It looked so inviting, sloping down between the trees. A scirocco had started and the sunlight was very misty and yellow; the usual cool breeze from the sea had dropped. A few clouds were forming. The path went shere down towards a dried riverbed, like a Tyrolean valley except that the trees were less tall. Embedded in the path were boulders and the polished roots of trees, which some-

times provided a stairway down. We were soon sweating. There was hardly any air. The dog rushed along excitedly, yawning and puffing.

The stones in the riverbed were covered with shining mud, yet the moment you touched them with your foot you found the mud turned to dust at once. There was a great silence in the woods, with the occasional flap of wings and the cry of a bird, and the endless rattle of the cicada.

At the riverbed we collected sticks to walk with, and an ascent started, through darker woods than before, the boulders of the path mottled black and grey with lava, and large smooth pebbles now and then. We wondered if this had been a modest roadway in Etruscan times, leading from one valley to the other. Storm-clouds were forming in land and there was the hushed sound of thunder in the distance. It wasn't likely that the storm would come to us as the weather was clear in the direction of the sea.

The trees grew smaller as we went up, and the ^evegetation became thicker on either side, with the sun gleaming through the leaves on the jagged path. It reminded me of biblical countries---I couldn't place exactly where, but it had something to do with the light, a certain dim yellow sparkle that fell through the trees, a sense of dawn, but dawn in history, something exciting that had happened collectively long ago, with the glow of a wonderful story told at night: Babylon, perhaps; the arch of Tesiphon; the orange-groves near Tel-a-Viv, ~~Haifa~~, that send out their overpowering fluffy scent; the mountains of Kurdistan, the Lebanon; a Syrian wadi where there were only gleaming boulders as dry as bone, and the rolling desert as far as one could see. It reminded me of Lake Galilee, as one looks shere down on to it after a sudden turn in the road. And there ^{was also} the Mediterranean glitter---^{iers}Algiers, the

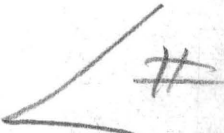

squalid Philipville, Bizerta.

At the top of the hill we seemed no nearer than at the beginning. Then in a clearing we suddenly caught sight of the towers. The tallest of them gleamed in the light like a ruined temple you might come across by the sea in the south, from Greek times, its tracery near the top still faintly visible; and it had that light, dusty fineness of great age. Yet at the same time it didn't seem ancient. Mediaeval, perhaps. But there was something marvellous about the place itself: the dense heath clung all round it, and hid everything at the base. We were still a long way from it, and the path had trickled out, taking us in the wrong direction.

At the side of the tallest tower we could see a squat building, its four walls intact, only roofless: the pointed end-walls showed that it wasn't classical; it could have been a priory, a chapel. The 'tower' could have been part of a castle-wall, the round watch-tower at one corner. A ruin from ancient times would have sunk further into the earth: but these stood their original height, we could see that.

We plodded on, and every glimpse we had of the towers showed that we were going further away. At the end we found ourselves once again at Castel Vecchio where we had talked to the two peasants. And we knew that the path leading from there to the ruins was another good hour's walk, over very rough ground; the evening was already drawing on, so we decided to return home and try it again early one morning, taking the path that cuts straight through the woods, for which we would need stout shoes and sticks.

If there was anything Etruscan over there, besides these mediaeval ruins, it was right that we should have to fight for it: the Etruscans don't like to be fathomed.



n.p.) [Paolo brought us milk yesterday that went sour at once. This followed an affable conversation with him; the more affable we are the more we lay ourselves open to be deceived. Here is your pagan, intact from ancient times. He goes about his lonely devices on the principle that they're invisible. As he can't see into your mind he supposes you can't see into his.

I remember a Greek village under a dry, gleaming hill of boulders, again in the war; I stand on the wooden balcony of a house with an interpreter, looking down into the street which is covered with pebbles like a beach at the sea and has no pavement. We have been searching houses for arms. To my surprise a pretty girl of my own age is standing below. She is blonde and slim, with a delicate, rather French face. I speak to her, and she answers in French. The interpreter is ribald: he is an old, pot-bellied, razzled man. She tells me, gazing up mildly in the sunshine, surrounded by the silence of a treeless countryside, that she lives in the nearby city. I promise to come to her home. Then she is gone. The interpreter says he has never seen her before. How she can have come from the city, without a car, in war-time, we don't know. He says she must have walked--- with a dirty laugh. But the road is lonely, through foothills, unpaved, and there are partisans and brigands about.

I meet her at her home in the city. This is a large house near the bay. At the door downstairs I am shushed quiet by a maid---she puts a finger up to her lips, then draws me by the hand up two or three flights of stairs, in darkness and silence. At the very top we emerge into the open air again. It is the roof and she whispers to me to stay there. Then she leaves, closing the door behind her.

I wait there for some time. Not a sound or movement comes from the house. I can't even hear the city outside. The night is quite dark. Then the girl appears, swiftly, with great mystery, suddenly opening the door and standing before me, like a blond shadow. We

talk in whispers. Can she come down to the square? I ask. No. Can she walk along the quay with me? No. Can she invite me into her house? No. I shrug and wait. But she can drive out to the village with me, she says. I nearly jump with astonishment. 'I live there,' she says. Live where? In the village where we first spoke. Her family has a tiny house there; she can invite me, quite alone. Not tonight, however. I must take her to the village the following morning, and come to visit her in the evening.

She was to be in the village-house alone, except for her maid, who went everywhere with her. She gave me an exact description of where the house lay. I was to find the house without asking passers-by

I walked through the village in the dead of night, passing silent groups of men, and found the house, down a little incline, perched on the side of a hill. She and the maid were waiting inside. The maid was sent to bed, and we sat the table together, in the dim light of an oil-lamp. I made approaches to her, but every approach brought me a smack on the face. Yet she immediately provoked me to approach her again. Every movement on my own initiative, even a movement of my fingers, brought me a fresh smack on the face. After an hour my face tingled and was as red as a radish. But I kept on smiling. When I'd had enough I staggered to the door to leave, and to my astonishment she said in a hoarse, bitter voice, 'Some people can never finish what they start!' I've asked myself again and again what the meaning of this experience was.

Reading Erasmus. He calls it 'this raving world'. He and

Thomas More shared the same hope for a time, of an impending marvellous civilisation. Thomas More was beheaded by the English reformation (1534), Erasmus's work was ruined by the German reformation (1520 onwards).

I glimpsed a possible civilisation at a concert in London. Or was it Salzburg? The faces were young, quiet, inquisitive, even when they were old.

We saw the Duccio panels in Siena, placed in a kind of sealed room with curtains and conditioned air, under specially placed lights. Rather like a mortuary. The attendant explained some of the colours to us: gold meant faith or holiness; gold thread or a cloak of gold separated the disciples, Our Lady and Joseph from the others; purple was the colour of royalty. The colours, he said, ^{had been} ~~were~~ ground from precious stones. He added that one could spend days on each panel unravelling its symbols. We stared and listened. Duccio was called 'the Greek' sometimes: and there is a late-Greek finish to his work. None of the turmoil of Fredi: it is all symbols and scholarship. The fixed, bright colours seemed to have found their destiny in this sealed, artificial room.

I was glad to get outside, and as I predicted to myself while inside, I couldn't remember a thing of what I'd seen. Except the lovely expression of a Madonna panel, about which nothing had been said.

The attendant had also showed us a needle behind the main panel which records the entrance of each person by measuring the increased humidity, and makes the necessary adjustment to the atmosphere. Apparently, the panels have been rescued from

various churches when they were hidden in side-chapels or behind altars. Then they were cleaned, most of them. They would have done better to stay there, in their intimate corners, half-hidden, rarely noticed.

Our ^{local} art-restorer says that these attendants are chiacchieroni ---gas-bags---and that 'some' of the colours 'might have been' ground from precious stones 'perhaps'.

He also told us that he'd been responsible for bringing the Bartolo di Fredi frescoes to light in San Gimignano. It was about thirty years ago and he'd been paid five hundred lire for the whole work. He said I was wrong to think that Christ was holding an image of himself as a child, in the St. Augustine fresco: he is holding the spirit of the Madonna as she dies; the spirit, departed from the body, was always represented as a baby in arms with a halo.

He said he didn't know anything of the mural we'd seen in St. Jacob's, the tiny convent-church. I described it to him warmly, but he still shook his head. He said it was certainly not a Bartolo di Fredi, but probably from the same period, the same workshop.

Some hideous atonal music on the portable radio. Like having your tooth pulled. This is what we get for being in the intoxicated grip of German music for so long (in the grip of the Germans for so long?): the impasse produced by German abstraction. No more dancing or singing, nothing intimate, not the slightest rhythm from the life we know: just clatters produced by the mind, on a striking mathematical basis.

Gianni's lips show signs of ungoverned passion in childhood. It was the first thing I noticed about him. His lips are actually the shape of lips closed hungrily round a nipple: extra flesh

has formed on both sides. Today he mentioned it and said he was going to have a little operation some time, to remove the extra skin. He said with a laugh that he'd taken too much milke as a child, and had sucked sugar or thumb in between times!

This morning he brought down a live chicken and a basket-full of marrows for us. Gigi says, trying to make a laugh out of it, that we're spoiling him, by always taking him in the car. Renato, Sergio's son, said yesterday---not realising what he'd said until he'd said it---that Gianni occupies the 'dog's place' in our car.

The girl up the hill, who lives along with her mother and father, in a slough of work from dawn till dusk, gets moral about Gianni: 'Even signori have work to do,' she tells him. 'Why leave everything to your mother?'

We took our bread over to Luciano's family this morning for baking: they have an oven outside and our two loaves will go in with theirs. They all gape at the wholemeal: why isn't it white? Yet they grow and cut and thresh the wholemeal grain themselves, in the fields they ploughed with their own hands; they will take it themselves to the 'mill' where it will be smashed about until robbed of taste and value, when they will get it back looking like french powder! They say wistfully, 'Who knows if it's our grain we get back?' Of course it's quite a deal for the 'mill': they sell the rest of the grain back to the peasants as chicken-food and as wholemeal flour to reinforce the ox-forage in the winter. All the old stone-mills have been closed up. There isn't one locally.

The weather strange again. Every afternoon at roughly the same time there is a storm with lightning that darts straight down on to the fields, with deafening claps of thunder. The rain is

sudden, brief and torrential. Then there is a clear evening. It happens regularly every day---a fine, hot morning, the storm, and then the serene evening sky.

There was a slight ~~erath~~^{earth}-tremor along the coast a few days ago. Gianni told us that a streak of lightning had come within four or five metres of his mother when she was bringing in some grass. He himself was standing by the house, about ten meters away, and it struck between them. The noise was immense. He asked her when she got back to the house if she'd been frightened and she said, 'No, I didn't even see it!' He spoke about her in a musing way. 'She would have been frightened all right if she'd seen it!'---with a laugh. He probably didn't tell her about it.

Last night, an opera in the village square. During each interval there was violent hammering and sceneshifting: lacking a curtain, they had hit on the ugly device of shining arc-lamps in the faces of the audience, so that we should be blinded. There was a woman-conductor wreathed in a tight black gown down to her feet that made her look snaky and bizarre. The effect of her conducting was to make it seem like a school-performance: she appeared with the main singers at the end of each scene, like their school-mistress. Her movements were round and graceful, and sometimes her hips moved in a dancing way---like in a foxtrot. She was competent and clever. It was Verdi,

but minus the drama: a shell. We nodded and dozed. In the ballroom scene the chorus knocked together like farmers bidding for livestock: the men's idea of aristocratic fun was to tie paper streamers round the necks of the women, who then bared their teeth in an aristocratic laugh while they were being throttled; the conspirators were dressed quite inexplicably in shiny green night-dresses and sleeping caps, like old women out of Dickens, with swords and daggers underneath. In the minuet they formed a crowd so that you couldn't see the dance itself--- for the good reason that it wasn't going on. Whenever the tenor got applause his face broke into a delightful boxer's grin. The music was all there: but the conductor seemed to be teaching it to the orchestra as she went along, morally---here were the notes, this was how it was written, and this was how it must be played; obvious! When she did interpret the music it was 'emotion', showing-off: but luckily she got tired of that very early. The soprano sang like a peasant-woman calling her chickens; in passionate moments she was like a peasant-woman being tickled. When the tenor was dying at the end the chorus looked on like a queue in the post office. The thing dragged on until one in the morning. Gianni was with us, dressed to the nines. Two seats away was the fattore who found us this house---he shouted 'Brava!' after one of the soprano's arias as if she'd just bought an ox for half its value (he admired her without thinking her honest). The smell with which everyone here is impregnated---Sergio, Gianni, Gigi---of sweet grass, oxen and volcanic soil, drifted across the audience from hundreds of men, mixed with cheap cigarette-smoke. All the people with windows looking on to the square had their lights turned off, but of course they had to look for things urgently now and then, in the Italian way, and every few minutes

(Ital)

a light went up self-effacingly and then out again. Flags were draped out of the windows across the stage for the last scene, and incomprehensibly one of them was an old map of the Atlantic coast of America with the word Boston written across it. At curtain-call the stage was a chaos, the principal characters mixed up with stagehands while the applause was going on. The bass, who had got the biggest hand of the evening, had his thermos flask with him and was busily opening it. Poor old Verdi: but perhaps he would have enjoyed it. They got the music right, more or less. Being Verdi performed by oxen, there was something natural about it: but of course oxen have no sense of drama.

It made me think, 'No sense of aristocracy, no art.'

Aristocracy means the ability to show yourself naked (that is, in any state): to be a living and walking denial of original sin.

More reading about the Humanists. John Colet, Thomas More and Erasmus in the sixteenth century wanted the 'restoration of theology' after centuries of thinking in symbols, allegory, number, that is, thinking in the Old Testament way.

The Humanists, in the course of two centuries, brought the middle ages to an end: they did it by reviving Greek and Roman texts, but equally by reviving the New Testament, that is, the story of Christ. Humanism---or the 'revival of learning' or the Renaissance---was a kind of victory over the Old Testament, by means of the ancient world.

Basically the Humanists found in Greece and Rome freedom from the darkness of a predestined life: a release from the Second Coming. Greece and Rome supplied a relief from the doctrine of original sin.

Greece had pointed to Christ. Greek statues were lifelike (and the basis of our art, through the Renaissance) not because the Greeks wanted to imitate the human figure but because, for the first time, the human creature could be a god. For the Egyptians gods were animals or effigies, but for the Greeks, in a dawn of new life, the human body depicted and repeated in every detail that of a god; the most private parts were depicted with loving care, in the statues; all sense of sin and stain was absent; the body is for the first time a marvel in itself.

And Christ seized on this when he said---almost the only words at his trial---'ye are gods'. It was as opposite to the doctrine of Adam's fall as necessary. And we, perhaps, have been engulfed between the two. Christ produced for us a kind of struggle between that first Greek sense of marvel in the human creature, which he inherited, and that doctrine which described the creature as naturally stained, the Fall described in the Old Testament. He said that even heathens, criminals, whores, even those who weren't Jews had the breath of God in them. It was this that broke the calm of his own society.

And what we call Humanism was a revival of that first sense of marvel, as a new support for Christ. It seemed a revival of paganism---this is what it was sometimes made out to be, and what it sometimes fell into---but it sprang first and foremost from a new sense of Christ. Hence you had the maximum classical scholarship and the maximum devoutness in the same men. They were 'Humanists' because they repeated Christ's revelation of the human creature: and the later epochs of 'equal rights' and humanitarianism and philanthropy flowed from them.

This is why the Renaissance of learning in Italy was the reformation of religion elsewhere. It brought in the literal

and rational reading of life, and miracles, indulgences and priests' mumbo-jumbo naturally suffered.

Another strike of the mezzadri. There were dozens of motor-cycles outside the town-gate. They are asking for some form of peasant-ownership: the state should take over the responsibilities of the landlord. Gianni and I passed a field where the grain lay uncut: the thick, golden ears were drooping; perhaps twenty or thirty thousand lire were lost there, for a day's work.

Gianni came in the evening and gave us a little speech on the need for agrarian reform: the grain-production in Italy had gone down unbelievably in the last few years, he said; as more and more people left the land, and there was less wine, wheat, barley, oil, corn, livestock, so prices went up; as a result the workers made more pay-demands, and this sent the prices up still further. End-result: Chaos! He said we needed a system like in Russia, where the state controlled everything. I said to this that the state could be a cruel landlord, too: with which he promptly agreed. (Once he has made a speech he will often agree with the opposite argument: the speech was only a rhetorical exercise which mustn't be interrupted---like a statue, which for the Italian must be martial or monumental, to mean anything.)

Nobody seems to want to buy the hundreds of hectares of abandoned land. Paolo the shepherd, for instance, dreams of becoming a butcher, whereas with the money he has saved he could buy a good piece of land which would never lose its value. The fattori---the agents who in any other land would be the new class of landlords now---are simply entrepreneurs who have flats and houses in town and want to stay there.

Italy had a weak and divided aristocracy, which also preferred to live in town. Much of England's stability came from her aristocracy keeping to the land.

The Italian countryside aches for another dictator---benevolent this time and without connections in Germany---who will fix prices and create a stable market. Dictatorships seem to hold no terror for the Italian: every man we know locally is a member of the communist party, or says he is; it has become the mark of social decency. Its appeal is above all 'organisation.'

A lot of reading these days, closed in my room.

Christianity is all an intimate story of one man, a laying-bare: first Christ, then St. Augustine. (Because Augustine's work was Confessions it was the basis of Church-theology. Nothing short of that would have done.)

The truth puts us on the path to knowledge, not knowledge to truth. Truth is a state in ourselves, not a body of facts. The dress of truth may change a million times. Truth is the light first established in us by the Greeks.

For truth, we only have to lay ourselves bare: for the untruthful knowledge is always an encyclopedia ('education'); thus the nineteenth century (the climax of the reaction against intimacy or laying-bare of any kind) was the period of encyclopedias and massive collections---'world-knowledge'.^(*)

You see that light in the first Apollos and Athenes; you get it in the Greek sky, even now; you had it in the Etruscans, who brought Greece to Italy, to the north; a kind of golden joy--- that broke through the middle ages.

The Reformers of the Church grew out of the Humanists by a strange process of contradiction: given the new stature of the

human creature, as free, they wanted, ^{*predestined*} this freedom ~~used~~ to root out the stain of guilt; thus they combined ~~the~~ two opposite doctrines, or tried to. (5)

Original sin changed its meaning under the Reformers: in the Church it had always meant the natural fate to which men were condemned---sickness and death; but the Reformers turned it into a self-destiny, in each man, to sin.

Reformed original sin was thus a peculiar combination of predestination (men condemned to sin) and free will (they sin by their own choice). We, the products of reformed society, have exactly that feeling---of being both more imprisoned than those before us and more free.

If you couple Christ's 'ye are gods' (that is, you have the power to create your own lives) with the conviction of original sin (that is, you are stained in your intimacy), you produce---out of an unworkable contradiction---the desire to create a new life free of stain: that is, to re-form it. Thus, the Reformers of the sixteenth century started from an acute consciousness of original sin.

What we call the middle class sprang from Puritanism. The ordinary merchants and shopkeepers of England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the backbone of the Puritan tradition: that is, they showed a desire to remake life by industry and thrift, leaving as little as possible to original nature.

The industries that they slowly brought into being were an effort to clean up natural life: that is, to create abstract conditions in which intimacy languished. This is why industries started in England: it was the land of undivided reform.

America seems to me the climax of this determination to

re-create life. She began as a moral idea---an implicit criticism of the rest of the world, the 'old' life. Then she developed as a land and home, like everywhere else. So there are always the two Americas---the moral society and the actual land. And frequently the two clash with violence (sometimes in the same man). Every wave of immigrants helps this contradiction by reinforcing the moral society (with their hopes and dreams) at the expense of the actual land.

I thought of the immigrant I'd met: how she turned American history into a moral struggle, a 'progress'. In the same way the Victorians in England distorted history into a 'progress' from the time of Henry VIII's sacking of the monasteries, the first act of reform or re-creating life. *Only Disraeli exposed the rubbish.*

We think of the Victorians as vigorous and full of beans. But if you read their books you find a strange lack of stamina and consistency, and great ambiguity of values. This applies as much to George Eliot as it does to Jerome K. Jerome: in fact, the more serious the approach, the greater the ambiguity. The world seemed too much with them. They had great public energy---hard work, thoroughness, will and enormous driving ambition---but real quiet (the fibre of thought) was lacking. The last writer you had it in was Jane Austen. After that, in Thackeray, Dickens, Hardy, Wordsworth, Tennyson, you get a 'broken world. They seemed not quite alone enough, yet terribly lonely. Their tone of speech wavers between virtuous public comment and private uncertainty. They aren't sure of the powers of silence any more.

That was the height of our own moral society.

I watch the pigeons outside: the two squabs are dark and soft-feathered, and are fed by their parents until they have a breast full of food. They are then ready to fly. They pester their mother to bring them food as before, pecking at her neck. But she refuses. And they are constrained first to fly, and then to begin pecking of their own accord---to 'do their own shopping', as Gigi says. Now how would they re-create their lives if they wanted to? Could they improve on that routine? Could they depart from it? What could they do but interfere with it? It would have to end in suicide and madness. The first to suffer would be the young. The work of re-creation would have to start from the checking of impulses.

A town has to be in the country, to be alive. Once the separation takes place, from the country, it no longer has any thrill or glow. The culture has gone. It becomes a city. This is what I felt in Siena the other day: the walls of the narrow streets are dark with car-fumes now; the traffic has abolished the connection with the flat, still, waterless country outside, that gave Siena her mysticism and sullen ferocity. There is no more authority. The light of the countryside has to flood the dark rooms and the cafés; it has to shine down into the courtyard of the Chigi academy, hot and uninterrupted;

its sounds and ^lsmells have to penetrate. Let go of that authority of the timeless, and life quickly falls to pieces, as ours is doing: the face loses its repose, the supply of divinity is cut off. You may get a bit of delight as a child, an adolescent in these towns. But time is a cruel master.

5 We've elected ourselves morally and civilly into being (Gods). Two thousand years of Christianity have seen to that. But the god has gone out of our bodies and nerves. We're re-formed, but something went wrong.

close up (The town ^{is} ~~was~~ the monastery enlarged. Originally There was the thrill) (c.c. of thought in lighted cells, in the darkest countryside.

For a moment, at dawn, even the hugest city acknowledges another authority. Then it succumbs to time again.

Yesterday we drove to the sea through Volterra and found a scrappy bathing-place called The Little Boat where the beach had an amazing brilliance, like white bone shining in the sun. They've made a pleasant dark restaurant of wood, low and wide like a plantation-house. The sun was misty and burned quickly. And the usual storm came up inland, reaching us in the early afternoon, with a little rain. As we were strolling along the beach a young girl came up to us from a convent-group and said, 'Per penitenza siete di carnagione bianca'---as a penance, you have white skins---then hurried back to the other girls with a giggle; and when we returned they were all saying their Ave Marias solemnly.

Suddenly, this afternoon, on the radio, the grave and terrible tones of Beethoven. As if we'd not been ^{really} serious before.

The storm this afternoon brought more rain than usual and less lightning. The heat is all inside the house now. The storm seems to move from place to place every day, according to a timetable. First, while the sun is still strong, at lunch-time, there is the first distant rumble of thunder: we take in everything from the terrace---chairs, tablecloth, cushions; then the sun gets mistier and hotter, as the thunder draws nearer, in the course of about an hour; and the storm itself breaks sluggishly, with perhaps only one or two fierce moments. The clouds lie over the valley until early evening, when sunlight returns for the last red glow. The effect of the rain is to make a thick heat-mist the next day, which hangs in the valley in the morning and turns the village into a shadow, hanging on its hill, burnished slightly by the sun.

When we came back from the sea today there was still sunlight here, and no rain had fallen. The courtyard was a blaze of yellow light, and the tall cypress outside was like a great black cone against the brightness of the haystack.

Paolo the shepherd came by with four sheep and tried to steer them into our empty pig-house with a stick: they were too frightened and one escaped, but returned from alarm at finding itself alone. He had to carry them in one by one, holding them by the rump and the scruff of the neck. And there they stayed, in darkness, with hardly room to turn in, all night. I put a tin of water in, and they drank thirstily, with a long, noiseless, sucking motion. In the morning they were loaded on to a truck with other goats and sheep---thrown roughly in like bags of grain. They are for tinned meat, being sick animals---so Paolo told us.

Gianni senses our concern about the sheep and laughs at us.

The chicken he brought us last week is still walking about the courtyard alive: our excuse is that we want it to lay eggs, but he says it's too young, and probably male. The other hens resent the newcomer and take a peck at it now and then.

When we were settling down to a meal after Paolo's visit with the sheep Gigi called up to us and the dog started barking like mad. When I went on to the balcony I saw the priest standing below at Gigi's side. This was his first visit, and we hadn't met formally yet. He has the tiny cura to which this house belongs: his village is a kilometre away, a cluster of houses which are the colour of the earth, ancient, on top of a hill. He saw we were eating and said he wouldn't disturb us, but ^{would} wait in the courtyard until we were ready---there was no hurry. He spoke calmly and quietly, with timid glances of the eyes. He is a pale, thin man in his late forties, and moves in a strangely pained way; he is more like a monk than a priest. Sergio had told us that he was the son of a peasant, and had worked in the fields himself as a child; and was good---so good!

We insisted on his coming upstairs, and he sat with us at table on the terrace, with a glass of our wine in front of him. He had brought us a bag of pears, the first ones of the season, small and green, from his own trees.

One of the first questions was, were we Catholics? No, Protestants. 'But the same Christ,' I added. I ^{told him} ~~said~~ 'Protestant' really meant we were in---that we found ourselves in--- a kind of 'historical situation' we were powerless to alter. History had cut us off from Rome in such a way that while we felt at home in an Italian church we couldn't belong. I described how the old churches in England, because they were now

reformed, were nearly always empty. He told us he'd been reading a book of meditations by a Dutch priest that afternoon, in which it was said that to try to bring the different churches together was 'an act of God'. (I felt that this was what had brought him round to our house) In the ecumenical council in Rome, he said, they were discussing the possibility of the queen of England agreeing to the status of political head of state while acknowledging the pope as the head of Christianity. He spoke in a strangely simple way---as if the queen would in some way be forgiven her past; and Protestants, he hoped, would be 'received' into the church, again as if they would recognise their errors, and see the natural superiority of the pope as their leader. 'That would be wonderful,' he said, 'to bring all the churches together'.

caps)
" He looked at the wholemeal bread we were eating and asked in a curious way, 'Is that special bread?' I think he was quite prepared to hear that it was a queer Protestant dish. We told him we had it baked for us, and mixed it ourselves. 'Invece noi---' he said, 'now we, on the other hand, have a different habit: we eat white bread. We're used to it.' And there seemed no way, for him, of ever eating anything else.

J When we got to the dessert-stage we asked him to join us, and offered him some peccorino cheese and one of his own pears: to our surprise he said calmly, 'I'll try your bread---just a little slice.' I went and cut him two varieties---one baked at the village shop and the other ~~and the other~~ from Luciano's farm across the valley, where they have ^{an} ~~the~~ outdoor oven. But he didn't like either; he said they tasted of the 'seed' of the wheat. It had happened in Italy, he went on, that at one time people had eaten a darker bread, but then after the last

war the Americans had come with their 'pure white bread', and everyone began to prefer it. That, again, seemed an irrevocably^e thing: the richest country in the world had set its seal on the rightness of the thing!

By that time Gianni had joined us---with a polite nod at the priest and 'Buona sera, reverendo.' 'Yes,' Gianni said, 'I believe white bread is lacking in vitamins---it has none of the substance of theirs---!', pointing to the wholemeal on the table. 'Our priest doesn't think so,' I said. 'No,' the priest replied, 'It's a question of habit---bread for us is white, and I don't think we could ever get used to the other.'

Gianni was restless in his presence. He kept looking across the valley in a yearning sort of way, as if for freedom. The priest gave him a kindly^o but constrained and perhaps wary smile whenever he spoke. Gianni got up from his chair frequently and ^olooked over the balcony, lit a cigarette, tapped his foot on the ground. 'Gianni is seen at church very little,' the priest said with a smile, pale and quiet; 'I don't think he's been since a child---?' And he turned a questioning look at him. Gianni smiled charmingly and said nothing. I broke in with, 'But he's religious! Gianni's religious!–' 'Oh, yes,' said the priest doubtfully. 'He's good. His mother's a fine woman. She's really religious. She's done everything for her children,' and he gave Gianni another quick look.

He then returned to our first subject and said he was interested in what I^o had said about our finding ourselves in an 'historical situation'. He gave us what seems to be the official Italian version of Henry VIII: that this king had asked the pope for a divorce from Catherine, but of course the pope hadn't been able to grant it; and then through 'patriotism' Henry had cut

himself off from Rome and declared himself spiritual head of England.

l.c.) Only ten or so people come to His Sunday-morning mass, he told us with the trace of a determined look, as if he'd long ago got used to the hurt this offered him: and he felt himself lucky to have these ten, he added. Even fewer came to his other church in the hills, where he holds mass two hours later.

Clearly, he can't understand it. He seems to try to, his head a little on one side. The Christian story is so clear to him: why should people want to offer it offence? It seems a story of respectability for him---touched with simple grace and goodness. Obey and offer respect to those above you. And all round him there are people who refuse to do that.

He asked us if we'd met the family up the hill, the couple we rarely see, with the daughter. Yes, we'd met them, but they were always sunk in work, I said, having eight heatares of land to look after. He paused, as he nearly always did after a statement, as if to let it enter his head slowly and painfully ^{and} then be noted down. 'Ah, yes,' he said, 'they have a lot of work. Too much.' Then he added, 'Now they're religious people. They come to church. They're good. Very responsible.' Yet to me they seem less good, in their hearts, than other people here. I nodded non-committally: after all, how could I know? But my impression remains.

We must come to see him in the evening, he said, to sample his wine and his fruit. And he would take us round some of the little churches---one of them went back nine hundred years. He had a fourteenth-century ^{crucifix} ~~altar~~ of wood in his own church, he said, which we must see.

We felt settled in a strange way by his visit: as if he'd brought us the first dream. After all, he was the first person

of leisure we'd spoken to in this countryside. That means books, a little thinking in the afternoon... Only the church has a dream in Italy. It governs and administers the power to dream. And so, at this time when the Church is cut off from people, there is no dream: the land lies waiting and very still. Only the tiny church, and the pastor's house hugging it like a miniature villa, without that rather stern look of the farmhouse, is a possible starting-place for idylls, fancy. So we felt rested: it was like belonging for the first time. Even if he comes to look on us as 'unreligious', we shall still belong, in that intimate category, looked askance at with kindly eyes, like Gianni.

Then after he'd got into his tiny car with the last goodbye he pushed open the door again and called out to me, 'Here!', in his slow way, as if waiting to be rebuffed; 'I've brought you something to read.' And he gave me three magazines, two of which dealt with the past life of the new pope in a rather insipid way. Partly church-^{politics}, partly state-politics, all mixed up together in a dirty mess of propaganda that a duck wouldn't swallow. I flicked through the stuff later, smiling and scowling. These are the people who've wrecked the Italian countryside. The landlords and the peasants are equally impoverished, while the cities (notably, Rome) are rich: yet this is an agricultural country. Are these, also, religious people? Well, they could be, but in that case so could all the peasants who never go to church and who would like to spit in their eyes. And did our priest vote for them? Yet he knows the details of the disaster. He's the son of a peasant himself.

What can he offer Gianni? I mean, what ^{can} ~~could~~ he offer Gianni that ^{Gianni} ~~he~~ wouldn't scoff at and disdain? Well, his own

frailty and goodness. These are enough, perhaps. But apart from that only old maid's tales: such as that if you spell God with a small 'g' you are showing Him disrespect, or that if you stand on your feet and say the angelus at twenty minutes past dusk you are more religious than someone who doesn't.

It is because of Gianni's goodness, and Sergio's, and Luciano's, and Gigi's, that every church in Italy hasn't been rased to the ground. And it is due to the goodness the Church has given them.

The Church is at the climax of an internal reformation: its mumbo-jumbo, its petty hierarchies, its dogged philistine ritual, its club-morality, have to disappear to save the story of Christ from being lost, that is, from becoming an item in the encyclopædia.

It isn't that people won't believe in God, they can't. The sky is---well, mathematical. That's simply how it is for us!

Another strike of the mezzadri. Gianni came in and told us about a big meeting he'd been to in Siena, organised by the communists. And he gave one of his speeches. He said that it was right to work, and work hard, but to work hard when there wasn't a crust of bread at home was wrong! (A bit out of date, this, considering that people are better-off than they've ever been.) Was it right, he asked me (sipping a vin santo to prepare his tummy for the gigantic meal he would send down an hour later at home), was it right that the man who cultivated the land and did all the work should give half his produce to someone who did nothing? Here I

interrupted:

I said that the mezzadro system he worked under didn't seem so bad, as his employers took none of the produce, and less than half the proceeds from the cattle; but he only smiled at me conniv-ingly and went on. The speaker at the meeting, he said, ^{had been} ~~was~~ molto in gamba, very capable, and knew as much about the rural situation as any peasant: he had told them all, with some humour, about the ^ctired and overworked ^oox that started its journey in the Marche at a hundred and fifty lire a kilo and ended in Rome at one thousand, five hundred lire a kilo and renamed 'veal'; 'Marvellous the transmigrations that take place nowadays!' he had said. And then there were the taxes and levies on the land that went into the government coffers and never came out again: millions upon millions of lire had been put into a 'fund' to provide the peasants with pensions and medical benefits, and to modernise the land, but at the end of this month the government would have to account for this 'fund' and how it had been spent, and the government couldn't! The 'fund' had been lost by a certain Secretary-General---a nation's agricultural future had been 'lost'!

itals) Where they had been lost, those millions? into whose pockets had they been lost? had they been lost into nice villas in the country, with swimming pools and servants, into various 'land-modernisation schemes' which were private in nature, and benefited only a handful of rich and unworthy people who should be dragged before the bar of law and ^cindited for the equivalent of treason?

No wonder, Gianni said, that 'we communists' had such success at the last election, when things like that go on. 'And the Church can't help us! They just follow on. Now they're reforming themselves---because they've got to.'

A wonderful humanity plays on Gianni's face sometimes, when he gazes into the distance. The light was almost finished as he

talked on the terrace, and the valley below lay still and shadowy. Luciano who was passing on the road ^{below} called up to us, and we stood talking to him. He'd been to a reunion in the village, he said, connected with the strikes. He has been ill recently with kidney-trouble and looks thinner, less like the 'brigand'. He spoke in a tired and disgruntled way.

The sudden access of gravity and seriousness, hearing Beethoven for a moment, was due to the fact that any theme in Germany, any line of thought or continuity, comes from one man in his lonely efforts, so that he almost seems to talk to God. There is no form outside him, only law. He has to make it all himself.

We shudder at him like we do ~~in front of~~ ^{at} an enormous chasm--- he is nearly nature itself. He's at the edge of madness, at all times. He dare not lean back---into the vacuum. The German is an inspiration that derives not from before the Enlightenment only, not from before the Renaissance only, not from before the Christian conversion only, not from before the Roman empire only, but from the depths and barbarian nature of Europe herself.

He is like a terrible guarantor of our health, while the Italian is the witness. At the slightest chance he becomes a force; and is beyond our recall.

close up (The ancient societies of England and France come from the predominance of the friars, the long scholastic tradition that was fragmentary elsewhere: here was the seed of their aristocracies.)

In the churchyard of St. Bartholomew's, behind Smithfields where heretics were burned, schoolboys used to go in for disput-

ation as a game; one would outdo the other and take his place over the crowd.

Reading about grace in St. Augustine. He says it isn't a reward. That is, you can't will yourself to the truth. You give way to it. And, in fact, this is the basis of effective will.

Will isn't forcing and questing. But this is what it became. And grace did become a reward in Christianity. You said prayers for it, you made good resolutions to achieve it. It was an abuse of the original theology, but a logical ^{one.} It was forced on the Church by the people perhaps; they had no time for subtleties. If you claim that the human creature is by nature stained, he will want to struggle out of it, especially if you ^c cap it by telling him he has free will.

This quest plunged us into false time---marked out by past failure and future hope (grace), so that we are stranded helplessly between the two, ticking off the seconds as they pass. We've been robbed of present time---of here and now---by religion, of all things!

The corrupt man often seems nearer the heart of things than the moral or reformed man. He has a better rhythm. His corruption has something timeless and natural about it. We remember his body, his plump, red cheeks perhaps, the way he puffs and blows when he gets up from his desk, his quick glances.

Morality scathes and burns, in the midst of riches: not in spite of riches but in their midst, because they are its main physical aspect. The moral society has riches as its main spiritual power: it tries to convince itself that power and riches are ever the reward of goodness... It is the false spiritual power that burns and tortures the young. Victorianism spared hardly a ² corner of England: you can't go a mile in the country without seeing its ravages---in people's faces, too: the legacy of a new life that was going to clean everything up, with permanent

riches.

If you try to re-make life from top to bottom you must expect a reward: and the reward can only be in life. Quickly, the world has to be remodelled---take the stain away! Nothing can remain uninvestigated.

Grace means the truth, or freedom from shame. Really, it is a state of reminiscence. It can't be in time. ~~One might hope, to be able to speak, for grace twenty years ago...~~

We have to search for it in depth, not backwards and forwards in time. It means a state here and now, like a source that can be tapped under the earth. It isn't a new condition, or the crown of effort, or the prize of old age: it can be plucked at any time, by the simplest act, that of laying oneself bare.

But if we live in time---if we put all our hopes on time, that is, on the gradual unfolding of a reward---we make grace a hope: a reliance on the future. We continually postpone ourselves. Our lives are continually lost, every second, on a moving belt of time that never ceases.

Real spiritual power transcends time (that is, behaviour): Buddha, for instance, ^{taught} ~~showed power to~~ his pupils ^{by} ~~that he~~ simply ^{holding} ~~held~~ up a flower---that was his lecture for the day. But the moment holding-up-a-flower became accepted behaviour, it would be false power, that is, condemned to time. Buddha's power was that of timeless ness. He brought timelessness into the room.

At about ten the other night, just after we'd gone to bed, I felt a tremor under the earth that lasted ten or twenty secondsP

at first, half-dozing, I had the illusion that we were still in Rome and that this was the rumble of a lorry in the street below, shaking our palazzo; then I realised we were in hushed countryside.

The next day we heard that at dawn there had been an earthquake in Yugoslavia killing, according to first reports, about five thousand people.

Later there were reports of earth-tremors along the Italian coast close to France.

Sergio told us that Luciano and his brother, with their families, are also leaving this valley. Their old padrone--- whom they call a crook, while Sergio calls him 'a nice old stick'--- will be left with a large house and a podere of over ten hectares with no one to work it. He asked Sergio despairingly today, 'What can I do to keep them there? I haven't the money to employ workers by the day. Where can I find another family? Why are they moving? I'll give them anything! But I can't give them my blood!' And Sergio's answer was, with his broad optimistic smile: 'Town's the fashion now!'

We spent the next evening with Luciano and his brother but they said nothing about it. We talked about the last war. Suddenly Luciano burst out with, 'The trouble with Mussolini was that there was only one of him! There ought to have been fifty thousand Mussolinis!' People need to be told, do this, or backs to the

d
wall! 'Then you'd see them fly!' And he flung his brother a resentful look. His brother, who is tall and thin and said to be 'nervous', replied in a mild way, 'Oh, you know, Mussolini made a big mistake getting mixed up with a German madman, and trying to create a world empire.' 'That's right,' his wife said, 'he ought to have put Italy in order first.'

When they leave---and if no one takes their place---nearly the whole valley between here and the village, apart from the podere belonging to Altapasquale, will be abandoned soil, used for sheep-grazing at best, if the shepherds don't all decide to move as well, like Paolo. For miles around the vineyards have begun to deteriorate. There are almost no young people working on the land.

close up (Luciano looks more and more discontented. When we strolled over there this evening at dusk we found him lying on a grass bank by the house, silent, slumped there. 'Hullo,' he said softly. 'We've just eaten. I'm taking the cool air.'

I can't understand why they don't go to the padrone and make a deal with him: the padrone would agree to almost anything. Luciano would do it, I think, but his brother insists on moving to town. They're well-known for not getting ^{on together.} ~~on with each other.~~

Luciano's brother talks about industries as if they will save everything: he asks, why can't factories be built all round the village? why are there regulations limiting factories to the outskirts, just to preserve the villages' panorama? Because of tourism, we say: because factories can be put anywhere; and because they're ugly, which the village-panorama isn't. 'But,' he goes on, 'I'd like to know something, and I've heard the point discussed in the village, in piazza, how is it that people can

plant as many trees as they like? Pines, for instance. A whole forest of pines has been planted just outside the village in recent years, and this has begun to obscure the panorama. Why is that allowed and factories not?' Pines and splendid panoramas aren't a contradiction, we say, but factories and panoramas are; pines can be cut down, and they don't pollute the air. 'And then,' I add hotly, 'We've destroyed enough already! Where I was born there wasn't a tree in sight, and the sky was always dark with smoke, and people were supposed to live like machines!' But this is lost on them. They simply gaze at me. Industries mean il progresso: they are ^{ter} interchangeable words for them. Unlike the English labouring classes, who fought industry step by step and smashed the machines, the Italians await it with excitement. Only certain people in the middle class see the danger-signal.

Sergio asked us to come and see his new flat again, this time in honour of Caterina's first visit. Now the walls ^{are} ~~and~~ finished and the doors are screwed on.

When you ask Caterina what she feels about moving she never replies, only shrugs and makes a slight puzzled smile. We took along a bottle of spumante as a surprise for them, and when they were looking through the rooms I opened it with an enormous pop which brought them hurrying into the kitchen. It was sticky and undrinkable muck, aerated sugar-water, an Italian 'champagne' that was never near a vineyard in its life. The explosion was so loud that nothing natural could have produced it. I suppose what we pay for goes into the nation-wide publicity to make it the poor man's idea of the right drink to celebrate with. Of course, it no more warmed our hearts than a laboratory-experiment.

Caterina was doubtful all the time, peering about the place at the bright new taps and shining tiles and marble floors and light plastic shutters; and when Sergio asked her at least to say a word---in his erect, laughing way, his head thrown back stiffly, reminding one of warriors and emperors in ancient times---she simply averted her head, still with a half-puzzled smile. And she wanted to inspect the other three flats in the place, to see if they were better: she came to the conclusion that they were, though Sergio's rooms have the best view and the best air, and are on the ground floor. Just before we left she found a tiny defect in the bathroom, and Sergio gave her an admiring look, saying he'd passed it over a hundred times, ~~without noticing anything.~~

From one of the windows overlooking^h the valley he pointed out Altapasquale far in the distance, shining red. And near by he pointed out a small, fairly modern house: 'That belongs to a pilot,' he said. 'He's leaving the house and he's going to let all the land---' His hand swept across half the valley--- 'go to waste.† He doesn't care!'

Caterina seemed faintly distracted and sad on the way back. The bathroom, she complained, was 'so small' (never having had a bathroom in her life before, even a bath). She will hardly use it: rarely take a bath. I think she means that as figura---as a toy to display---it seems ^sto small.

What will she do without her chickens? After we dropped her at home we heard her calling them lovingly, for half-an-hour or more, as if to celebrate her return. She has over a hundred chickens there. She cuts grass in the fields opposite our house, ^{for her rabbit,} and walks by with a load on her shoulders every day. She was born and brought up in the hills behind the woods, at an isolated farmhouse, and she seems to share its remoteness. Perhaps she

never discouraged Sergio from buying the new place because she had no idea of any life but the one she lives: now she sees before her a different world. Sergio and Renato are the ones with the town-dream. But it means nothing for her to bring in water on her shoulders---two cans hanging from a staff, or to build a fire of faggots for cooking. The town-flats save work: but in truth they're only a dream. And she hasn't dreamed it---only Sergio and his son have.

We promised our priest that we would go to his Sunday morning mass and did, with Gianni. The church is tiny, no bigger than a barn, overlooking the hills that go towards the sea. The fifteenth-century crucifix he'd told us about hung over the altar, black and smooth like ebony. There were six people in the congregation, all women or girls, and nine with us; and there were two boy-servers, sacristani, with white smocks shoved untidily over their ordinary clothes.

Our priest looked even more like a monk than before. He spoke softly and remotely, as he does in conversation; his face pale and a little distraught. One of the boy-servers has the job of reading from a scrappy pamphlet in his hand, describing in Italian every step in the mass: he says, 'The priest now says a prayer of gratitude... To your knees... We will now say together... Stand up. The pater noster, on your knees... Stand up. The priest now offers the bread and wine, which turns to the flesh of Christ. On your knees.' He read it in a halting way, like an illegible shopping list, and every time he made a mistake he looked up and turned a most delightful broad smile towards one of the girls in the congregation, as if he'd done it for her, to please. Sometimes there was a long pause while the

priest, half bowed at the altar, turned and whispered to him what he should read next, and there followed long seconds of page-turning and finger-licking and shrugging and sighing; then, in the shopping-list voice, 'Let us pray...' For an hour or more we were bobbing up and down like corks.

There was no religion, except once when the priest prayed silently. Perhaps this is because he's really a monk in feeling. He hasn't the easy power of communication that a priest needs. I saw for the first time that a priest mustn't be too meditative. I remember an old English priest, at a Christmas mass in a tiny barn of a church in the Cotswolds, opening his sermon with, 'I've given my leg a nasty bang again. I went right down the stairs this time, and stopped when I got to the bottom. Every time I move a pain shoots up my side,' and there was a murmur of sympathy from the congregation; he had a plump, red face and fine eyes; we were clustered together in that dark barn, cold from the snow outside. He had the glow of religion, which drew us all together.

Afterwards we walked round the empty church and our priest showed us the vestry. He told us that the crucifix over the altar had come to the village in the last century---the local priest had bought ^{it} off one of the Napoleonic troops who were passing through. No one knew where it had been stolen from originally. In the vestry we found another crucifix which he said was made of plaster and 'inartistic'. But if anything it was nicer than the other one, and we found it was made of wood; only a thin~~x~~ layer of plaster had been laid on it, to take the colours. He showed us his vestments, which were surprisingly splendid---a whole wardrobe of them; and there were magnificent brass candelabra. He gave me more magazines, with their veneer of

fake concern: in one of them, an attack on André Gide as 'shameless'; a scurrilous paragraph on a man 'who calls himself a communist, yet has a chauffeur'; and a diagnosis of communism in Italy' which makes no mention of the agrarian problem or the fund which is supposed to have been 'lost'.

He showed ^{us} ~~me~~ an archway of red bricks outside, in the wall of his house: the relic of a mediaeval hotel, he said, from the twelfth or thirteenth centuries^y, when the little track we were standing on, now only used by oxen, was the road to Rome; probably, at that time, it went from monastery to monastery across the hills. The tiny village lay silent all round us. We paid a visit to his house and met his sister. There was a pleasant cool hall and a bare room with a television-set at one end; no books or easy chairs, no sign of thinking, which is the best decoration a house can get; the kitchen, as always, was the centre of life, with an old chimney in which you could sit---'There,' the priest said, pointing to the inglenook with the slightest ripple of enthusiasm across his face, 'is where I like to be best of all, in the winter.' And his sister affectionately dusted some chalk off his sleeve. We had the feeling that his mind lurks somewhere behind in the shadows, undeveloped; not one idea seems to have gone right through his life, changing him; not a habit has been dislodged or challenged; he seems an easier dupe of publicity than the peasants round him. This is what they like about him--- his 'innocence': and it means they can discount him, and need not fear him.

He's numbe^d: something has been erased from his account of life.

For the first time in many days it hasn't clouded over in the

afternoon or rumbled with thunder in the distance. The heat-mist (which began to spread a harmful fungus among the grapes) has disappeared and the day is clear and still, with the first faint suggestion of autumn; the sunlight glitters like water. We can see right across the valley as far as the hills above Siena.

The ox with tuberculosis is still here and refuses to put on weight, in spite of bran and wholewheat and linseed added to her grass diet. She has ~~such~~ a sensitive, wide-eyed air. She dislikes being alone and is against being moved around, and all Gigi's efforts to sell her have failed. It's more economic to try to mend her: so she stays. The other oxen are bought and sold, but she stays. She eats little when she's alone in the stall, but the moment another ox returns she eats heartily again. I think she knows our sounds, too---the dog, the car, the sound of the cans when I bring water from the well. She wants a real home. Now she has two other oxen with her: they do the work and she's a guest. This morning I went in and spoke to her, and she looked round in her wondering, slightly fretful way, the whites of her eyes showing. And she made me a sort of grunt, after I'd paid her a special compliment. Two nights ago we were away, and apparently she didn't eat in that time: but half-an-hour after we were back, with our familiar sounds, she put back several loads of forage. When I told Gigi yesterday that the classical treatment for tuberculosis was plenty of open air, and that it was ridiculous to expect the creature to mend ~~if~~ she ~~were~~ kept in darkness night and day, in the stifling stall, he shook his head quietly and said, 'Well, you see, it isn't our habit to keep them out of doors.' Partly this means he would feel ridiculous if he ~~kept~~ ^{did keep}

her outside; ~~in the yard,~~ but ^{partly} ~~perhaps~~ he doesn't want to treat her as a living creature at all. It seems to me that the peasants hide from considering their animals as ~~real~~ creatures, because then there is the obligation of considering what kindness ~~you~~ ^{they} owe them.

Gianni sat in the back of the car and gave me another speech--- on who^s this time. He said he hadn't touched one since his army days. There were three reasons against having a whore: first, they cost money; secondly, you had to wear a contraceptive; and third, they didn't give a damn for you.

Later on he strolled up the hill with us, and the three of us sat at the side of the rocky path, in the stillness of the afternoon. Round us there were sea-shells of every size, some of them barely fossilised, so that you could break them in your hand, just as if the sea had been there the day before. Yet the sea is over eighty kilometres away. At Gianni's house the earth is a flaming red, so remarkable at first sight that you have to gasp. He tells us that this was due to the ~~earth~~ being burned by lava in the prehistoric eruptions. We've seen the same flaming earth near Siena, but in the plains, so that the lava must have flowed there. Our rocky path could have been at the edge of the sea at one time, raised by a volcanic eruption; some of the sea-shells are buried deep in laval stone. We found a snail, completely fossilised.

We talked about these things until we were giddy---the ice-age, the vast animals that stalked about, the volcanic eruptions, the earthquakes that threw up whole mountain ranges. It was warm and sunny, and we gazed drowsily across the valley. Gianni said he'd seen lots of films on the subject. He jumped to his feet and showed us how a dinosaur looked as it disappeared slowly

into a crack in the earth. 'Pauroso!' he cried. 'Fearful!' His eyes seem blue when he talks like this, though they aren't: they seem to have the sea in them. He looks Etruscan, as I imagine the Etruscans. And, strangest of all, he has their slight smile on his face, naturally, in repose. If you sculptured ^{his} ~~a~~ head ~~of him~~ it would have the same smile as the Etruscan head---as the Apollo of Veii, ~~for instance.~~

When you think of those dark, cold ages before the human creature, you see we're one people: the Etruscans were only yesterday.

Gigi told me that he'd been called to a kind of conference by the padrona: she said she couldn't continue the farm as it is now, with him taking two thousand lire a day while producing nothing like that in yield. He on his side said that not only was he unable to manage all the work alone, but he must have other hands, particularly in the wheat-harvest and the vendemmia. And she was still angry at having a sick ox. He must sell it, she says, sell it quickly, quickly. But instead he sells one of the others, because it is pregnant, and has bought another two for little more than the same price.

The tiny podere here yields a modest amount of wine, oil, wheat, fruit and vegetables every year, but not enough to ~~be worth~~ ^{justify} transporting ^{it} to the market (though of course the wine and grain are sold), nor enough to pay the taxes on it; certainly not enough to allow for improvements. Like most Italian owners, she is reluctant to spend on improvements in any case. The sale of the oxen probably covers Gigi's wages---just. She says she will leave the land to go to ruin like everyone else. Gigi asks her ~~if~~ in that case ~~he~~ might rent the land for his own use on an annual

basis? But she won't hear of it, as it would only bring her an annual forty or fifty thousand lire. But he may bring her round. She will be forced to it, perhaps. All the abandoned land is being let in this way, gradually, to individual peasants: the peasants will return as owners, and so perhaps the land will readjust itself.

Both owners and peasants seem to derive a strange malicious pleasure from abandoning the land---perhaps as a kind of ancient revenge on each other, though it ruins them both.

They seem frightened to think, either side. Nothing could be sillier than having a podere which is hardly more than a large field devoted to a dozen different crops, fruits and vegetables, yet dependent on one man alone, without machinery; and, to cap this, two or three oxen which need a mountain of forage twice a day and leave the stall for perhaps half a dozen times in a month for a few minutes. If the whole podere were turned over to wine, say, it would be worked by one man, and would yield far more, even at the present low prices that genuine wine (as opposed to chemical wine) is fetching.

Of course, the multi-crop podere is designed to supply a family, since ancient times; and perhaps it will return to this after all, as the peasants become owners or leaseholders. Machines and one-crop farming go hand in hand, the one making the other economical; but machines are useless on the small, hilly, crowded podere, besides being a disproportionate expense. So perhaps the two systems will go on side by side, the one for local supplies, the other for national.

All this is farmer's thinking: but the fattori here are living in town on their percentages and fees, and not thinking at all.

We asked Sergio why Paolo the shepherd didn't buy a decent

piece of land at the present throw-away prices and work it all himself, instead of getting a shop in competition with a dozen other better-experienced men, and he said, 'Because the land is dirty work.'

Apparently, Luciano and his brother did go to their padrone with a proposition. This proposition, naturally, was that he should give them a higher percentage. But he threw up his hands and said that even at present he could barely pay his taxes or buy the fertilisers, the sprays, the copper-sulphate, keep the machinery in repair, mend their roofs; at a higher percentage he would have to sell everything up at once! But he agreed to buy them a tractor, which will halve their work in the summer and spare the overworked oxen: apparently, if you lay down thirty percent of the price of any improvement on the land, the government will loan you the rest.

A speaker in town said that our civilisation now depends on having a cohesive agriculture, that is, a real country-life again. The Anglo-Saxons turned the countryside into a factory: the result is disease, degeneration of animal vigour and stock, the poisoning of the earth and, above all, the breeding of vast city-populations

detached from the realities of life. The answers have to be different from the Anglo-Saxon ones: based on what men need, not on Puritan calculations of 'economy'.

The fattore came yesterday on behalf of the owner and peeped into the downstairs rooms. The owner, he said, is negotiating with a peasant-family to take occupation in January, and to rent both the land and half the house. Gigi will rent part of the land after all, and work in with them.

We're doubtful if it will work out, and the fattore seems doubtful, too. It may be a sort of political move to get us to take the whole house over, but I don't think so.

The wheat is all being brought in from the fields in sheafs and laid down where there is a flat, sandy space outside, to form a massa, a great round stack with the wheat-ears pointed inwards. Then, in a week or ten days, the threshing machine will come round to the farms one by one and the grain will be beaten from the straw, which will be pounded into blocks and stacked under the cypress tree.

The fields are cleared in rotation, everyone helping the other in neighbourly groups. They start soon after dawn and go on until past the light. The equivalent of our Harvest Home comes when the machine is actually here: a long table is put in the barn (here it will go into Gigi's kitchen) and twelve or fifteen exhausted people will sit down to eat, with plenty of wine. I don't think it will be a real celebration, though.

What a difference from the German farms. The marvel of Germany is her immensity, as if the gods still walk in her mountains---as if they might suddenly step down. It lies in the farms with their ancient spreading trees and long-roofed wooden houses and towering stacks and horses with massive, polished flanks: a stupendous robust vigour that takes your breath away.

The Germans are supernatural, too---wood-gnomes, elves, devils, nymphs, sirens, magicians. Politically we always let them build up their stupendous power again because we're intoxicated.

Do I dream the Etruscans? But if they never existed they would be the same: in their name we're haunted by something; they're inside us. But we can't hope to clarify it, which means in some way to fix it.

Time develops---that must be its illusion for us: that we're moving all the time towards death. But life doesn't develop. Epochs don't develop from one to the other. All illusion. They simply have different lives. We yearn for what we have lost from a previous epoch, and call progress what we think we've gained. But there is only a turning and arguing of life, towards no end in time. We have an end, but it serves us now---in depth, so to speak; we keep it before us but only

time gives us the illusion that we shall attain it; the moment we have it we have moved somewhere else.

We live at the edge of timelessness and seem to fall it into it now and then, perhaps to prepare ^a ~~our~~ change in ourselves, before our reappearance in time. But these changes don't accumulate towards one definite end: that definite end, if it exists at all, is ourselves; we change in order to attain the dream of self which we hold before ourselves all the time; but the moment of attainment can never come, otherwise change would cease and we would be fixed and limited; the end we go towards isn't in time; it doesn't await us at the end of the illusory corridor of time.

We need time to measure our ⁵ little universe by. But in the outer space lies timelessness, still and ^{placid,} ~~placid,~~ like Buddha with his flower.

This is why people---not only Christians---pointed to the sky for God. They were right.

For us to believe in God (the presence in those placid spaces) he has to be a possibility in ourselves. There must be a trace of timelessness in ourselves. We used to measure our lives by the light, the falling of one day into the next, one season into the next: that was ^{real} time. But now we have the ticking clock, measuring the tension into which we have fallen, in a series of moments that pass into the next as soon as they occur, in an endless dying motion; we brought the clock into being, for our particular psychology. At best we fall into timelessness when we sleep, for an hour or two: the luxury of knowing it alert and awake is denied, I believe, to millions of us. I know it has been denied me; glimpses of it were

n.p.)

vouchsafed to me.

God can't be planted in us. He can't be pointed out. The weakness of St. Thomas Aquinas's argument is that he puts the causes within our grasp: he describes first causes. But causes are always second. That is, they're always in time. To be causes at all they must be: they produce an effect, something we understand. Our little hands and eyes are geared to a tiny portion of the universe, enough to get along with only.

All we can do is lay ourselves open to the timeless, which we know is there. First we have to destroy evidence of time as we know it. The ticking clock isn't real.

Do the woods show evidence of time? They show time of day, time of season.

I feel like a man picking his way through ruins.

I remember prayers in childhood, pressed against my mother's stomach, my eyes closed: a prayer for the safety of our relatives and for 'soldiers and sailors, tinkers and tailors, gran'mas and gran'dads...' What an ancient prayer that must be. It seemed to me that my mother found God by describing him to me in those moments: in closing her eyes too she glimpsed the timeless. But it wasn't a real possibility for her: it wasn't the truth of the bustling streets outside, the clang of the tram, the exciting glow of shoplights on Saturday nights; the two had nothing to do with each other.

We're lost without the mediation of Christ. I mean, a glimpse of the timeless isn't enough; outside, in the bustling streets, you have no evidence of it. There is nothing to cling to. We can only cling to what we can understand. We can't

understand the timeless: we need a story in time. And Christ is the only one to have given it to us.

n. p. He said we achieved God through intimacy. It had never been heard of before. For ~~most of~~ the Jews of his time God was attained socially---~~that is,~~ through knowledge, ~~behaviour,~~ intelligence or position. The Law dominated everything, comprising in itself both God and society. Even the disciples didn't know what he meant when he said that whores, fools and criminals were creatures of God. Moses had said long before, 'Pray in secret': but he had addressed a holy people, whereas Christ addressed all of us---fools, criminals, slaves. He inherited the Jewish intimacy from Moses, and gave it to the rest of us. His story is like a mirror of the timeless, if we could but look at it behind the clatter of time which the Church has set up.

J If we can forget the Church we have a last chance perhaps of religion... But they have stained all these names for us---'Christ', 'eternity', 'God'---with ~~their~~ time.

Knowledge never develops. Each epoch only synthesises what it needs to use. All progress is a rake's progress: you only hear of it where money is being made.

There is no hope. Better not wait for it any more. God, like civilisation, isn't in the future. It is now, if at any time. Looking for him in the past, ^{hoping} ~~helping~~ to achieve him in the future, is only our way of denying him. We are like people who look all over the house for what we can only know if we close our eyes. He is here and now, only.

To recapitulate: if you put him in the past or future you make your present barren, and drive him away as fast as you look for him. He is the present, or the presence.

Looking for him is therefore a state of the most chronic doubt, which can never cure itself.

I mean by God 'the silent guide'. We would rarely be aware of this silent guide without Christ.

The sudden idea that there is no silent guide gives me a sickening sensation: that we are dogs lost in a storm, thrown on a rubbish heap when we die.

Now, a few seconds later, nothing could seem to me sillier than the last sentence. It shows the danger of 'thinking', as that goes in the post-Aquinas world.

We are in the hands of a guide so strong that we give up everything to him---we dispose our food to his engineering, we have no part in the beating of our hearts, our livers eliminate our poisons without our permission, we yield ourselves to his mercy in childbirth and he guides the blind child to the mother's breast; and if we're not fools we never take a step in life without being given a sign.

And I say there is no guide!

The fierce, growled G-a-h-h-h-h! from a shepherd outside as he passes with his flock. A cry that goes right through your stomach: no 'thinking' there.

It turns out that the 'peasant and family' negotiating to come to this house is Luciano. He was helping with the wheat-stack outside this morning and told us.

The priest stopped me in the village this morning and gave me more literature, with a bag of fruit from his own trees, plums and pears. His goodness makes him press everything on me, but

at the same time he gives the magazine a wistful look, like a child at a sweetshop, not having read them himself yet; and I accordingly tell him to keep some. He had his book of meditations with him and said he'd found a passage dealing with the 'schism' in England, when Henry VIII sacked the monasteries. He stood fingering through the book, looking for it. But he couldn't find it and said he would show it to me when we came to watch his television one evening. Tomorrow is the feast-day of the village saint, with a sung mass and lots of flowers everywhere, and he recommends us to go. There will be an orchestra in the cathedral. I'm sure he feels we're ripe for Rome: that is, we're civic people in his eyes. He thinks us good. But he wouldn't think us good if we weren't civic.

Gianni sat on our terrace last night in the darkness while we cooked a chicken for him. He and Lorenzo, with Renato and three others, are going to the sea tomorrow (the saint's feast-day) and have hired a car and driver. He and Lorenzo fuss like old women: should they take a small suitcase, how are they going to get all the 'luggage' into the car, what about plates and knives and forks, will they need salt, should they take wine? It makes it exciting, like a trip in childhood; their talk makes the kitchen glow fabulously. They are to leave at half-past six in the morning. The chicken is roasted in silver paper---we tell them this is a good succulent way. Ours is the only gas-oven this side of the valley. Otherwise it would have meant building a wood-fire over at Altopasquale, where they are all still busy stacking the wheat.

Gianni gave us a speech about women: Tuscan women were much 'easier' than those in the south. You could get friendly with

a Tuscan woman: if she liked you she made it easy for you; you might be together for three months or so, and part without once 'going to her house', that is, getting engaged to her. In that time she might let you be intimate with her. But if she did you warned all your friends not to think of her as a possible wife: you said, 'I've been with her. And for her to go with me she must have been with plenty of other men, too.' You will tell your friends about her in any case, because whenever you have sex you boast about it afterwards, you expose the woman involved. More, if the woman has permitted intimacy this rules out even marriage between you and her: intimacy before betrothal is the death of a woman's reputation.

I listen with mild and even cheerful disgust. Pagan talk--- no real sex in it. Even our sex is a Christian act, it seems, even our ~~illicit~~ sex. It is freedom, seeing the ^{spark} ~~spark~~ in someone else. The Italian has been robbed of the secret of sex, though not of passion. Even the Church was powerless to rob him of that,

At half-past six this morning they still hadn't gone. I strolled up the rocky path and there were festive sounds from below: Gianni calling, Renato asking something urgent. At last the car-doors slammed and there was a great collective shout--- the day seemed all space and sunlight, with that special gleaming magic of a voyage---and they drove off. Ciao!

The first touch of autumn, in the midst of the heat:
thoughts of music, chilly courtyards with the sound of traffic
outside, snow in Salzburg, glowing lights in the windows of the
Mirabel ~~le~~ palace. Why do I think of Salzburg so much? Perhaps
as a town that escaped the reformation and the counter-reformation,
and evolved naturally.

A letter from New England---we must come, settle down for
a time. I would know where everything was, from all the loving
descriptions: the piano in the parlour, the television in an
upstairs room so that you can watch it lying in bed. I know
the garden, the black tulips, the house as rickety as a shell
in the wind. Sometimes I sit and think about America, wonder
what it would be like, as if going there would be redundant and
unnecessary. 'New' England. How do you make a new England?
a new dream? How do you make new what was never tangible and
never fixed, what was a light in men's eyes? The Puritans had
such a simple belief---that they could make new lives by moving
~~two~~^{three} thousand miles! They hoped to leave original sin behind!

The Atlantic seems barren to me: a silent stretch of water
between two factories, the no-man's-land of a Utopia. Compare
the Pacific---a sea of islands, tropical mists, sunsets, becalmed
waters. Yet there are islands in the Atlantic, no less.

The Atlantic held that civilisation could be pounded out

of iron. The English gave up everything to America after the last war, including their own dreams, because they had swallowed (perhaps invented) the nineteenth-century idea that civilisation is power.

J
Civilisation is the outer form of our intimacy, which we never really attain: the moment we do, it becomes formula (that is, form turned into power). In what we call ~~(afterwards)~~ a civilisation there was always a struggle for form, which we take afterwards for form itself, though it was never achieved; people always fell short of it, made poor shots at it, excelled at it. The mark of civilisation is that people are creating it all the time, from their intimate selves. n.p.) □ But in the moral society they cease to do this: there is really no discussion, only the victory or defeat of moral imperatives, and vehement and brave denunciations of power or the retaliations of power. The formulae are so clear and predominant, in the moral society, that they make any effort at intimate form impossible or at best pathetic. I believe this is where we are today.

Thomas More's Utopia described not an ideal society but the furniture no society could do without. But the attempt to lay out the requirements of civilisation only achieves the moral society, not civilisation at all. It creates a formula but not a form, since form springs from the intimate collaborations of the moment, not from thought. Our aristocracies were recognised and loved because they showed this form in the way they walked and what they wore and how they smiled and lifted their heads, that is, in their intimacy. Their actual power could have been blown away in a moment at any time in the last five hundred years by a decision of the people. Sometimes that happened. They no longer beguiled and fascinated people. But the effect

of an aristocracy in its prime is to create worship. Power follows on.

We take ancient Greece as meaning a complete civilisation, the basis of our logic and art, but it was a handful of great men addressing barbarians.

A quintet came from Siena and gave us a concert in the courtyard of the museum, by the stone stairs that Dante often climbed. Behind the quintet, under bright lights, there was a mural that reminded me of the Bartolo di Fredi we'd seen: a Madonna with the same half-closed, gentle eyes. They played Shostakovitch, which we thought would be a bit of Russian factory-music but wasn't at all: it made a kind of dumb appeal; it had a certain hurt misery. Like the bear I saw being teased by Kurdish tribesmen once: whimpering, with the same hunted appeal.

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More thunderstorms, with heavy rain: but at dawn now. The other night we watched a cloud hanging over the Sienese hills, under the full moon, with lightning flashing inside it like a storm-scene in a play. The valley with its endless groves, the olive trees and single vines like shadows, look haunted and in a peculiar way ravished. We could even see the village in the lightning, perched on its hill like a piece of carved rock, gaunt and unbending.

In the dead of the night the valley is so still that it seems the most unbelievable madness to suppose we could master it for a moment.

Yesterday our priest took us to the tiny hill-village of Colciano, where there are only two families left, and a shepherd. It was stormy and the wind swept across the muddy path under the church. The road to the village rises steeply between wheatfields and cypresses. The biggest house there lies abandoned, its windows shuttered and barred; not long ago there were fifteen people in it. We could see right across the valley south of Siena, with small hill-towns here and there; Don Amigo pointed out the towering jagged ruin that sticks out of the earth near the road to Volterra, and told us that in the middle ages it had been a look-out post commanding the whole valley, when

there were endless wars between Volterra and San Gimignano.

We were to meet the priest of Colciano and he came out, calm and smiling, as soon as he heard the car. He looked like a peasant, but one advanced in ownership: shrewd, thoughtful, erect, determined, with no spare flesh on his cheeks, and nothing worn away by care, either. Don Amigo looks frail and unhealthy beside him, a bag of bone and sinew. The church-house was the only one in good repair, and we peeped into a pleasant-looking study---actually his 'office'---as we passed. First we had to see the church, bare apart from a copy of an altar from Siena, with a Madonna and child between St. Michael killing the dragon on one side and St. Peter on the other. The walls were painted (cement underneath) in imitation of the black and white stones of the Florentine and Sienese cathedrals. The priest complained in a voice hardly more than a whisper that the rain came in from the bell-tower, and showed us the streams of damp down the wall. The wind was so strong, he said, that there was no way of stopping the rain penetrating: there had never been such weather before, and he believed that the tower had never been put to such a test.

But he didn't seem much interested in the church, and waited outside for us while we looked round. He was aching to talk politics, and the moment we were all in the open air again he pointed to the abandoned house near by and said, still in his whisper, 'There were four families there not above two years ago!' He added more loudly, 'They're all going away, all the peasants. This will be a dead village soon. And why? Economic? No!' His face became sharp and fierce. 'Psychological! It's all psychological! They want the town, they want the industries--- they think they do, at least!' Our priest nodded palely, seeming to only half-listen. 'Soon there'll be a crisis!' the other man

said. 'And God only knows if we'll pass it safely! Not in our country only, I believe---but everywhere!' Take meat, he went on: the production is going down swiftly, the stalls are lying empty; with the land not being worked to full capacity there isn't the forage to feed the animals, even if there is the labour to look after them. So the butcher's shops are open only four days a week now in some places: soon it might be only two days, then one, then---! But there could be such plenty as to make one go green in the face just thinking about it! If, for instance, the valley below produced a hundred thousand quintal of wine instead of a thousand or ten thousand, the wine could be sold more cheaply, in bulk, perhaps even for half the price it was sold at now; the work would be incomparably less, and so would the overheads; the dozen separate poderi that this land at present comprised were a dozen luxuries we could ill afford. And with low prices we could make the countryside habitable again. He was about to demonstrate how this would be when Don Amigo replied in a soft voice that, yes, people were drifting into the towns now, because they found life more 'amusing' there, and---. But the other priest pounced on him with his sharp look, touched with the slightest of grām smiles, 'No, no! You haven't understood! Let me explain. There is no cinema up here. Agreed?' Yes, our priest agreed obediently. 'Well, then, we put a cinema here! But at fifty lire a seat instead of one or two hundred. The result is that not only do people in this village come to the cinema but those from the town are attracted as well, because it's half price, for the same film, and perhaps in a better auditorium!' Our priest nodded: yes, he understood the analogy. 'Now, then,' the other man went on, 'put your fields

under a programme and you cut your prices automatically! The demand is there---the supply's only a matter of intelligence!' To which Don Amigo nodded palely and said, shivering in the bitter July wind, 'Let's go inside, shall we?' And the other man led the way, swift and erect, his head forward, still buried in his theme. The room he led us to was cool and silent, with lace curtains over the windows and a heavy velveteen cloth on the table; there was a large straight-backed armchair covered with bright cushions at the head of the table, 'for the bishop if he ever came'. And he offered this to my wife with a gracious gesture.

As soon as we were seated he began again, 'Everything comes from the earth---there's nothing you can mention that doesn't involve the earth at some stage in its production---so if you abandon the earth you abandon your life!' His eyes glanced about the room, sometimes blindly and sometimes piercingly. Outside, the wind howled as ^{it} might on a winter's night. And our priest sat meekly by the table, rather rigid, gazing across at his friend---whose soul he fears for, perhaps. And then the other man launched into the famous affair of the 'lost' agricultural funds: five hundred milliard lire (about three hundred million pounds) collected in taxes from the countryside cannot be traced! 'Perhaps a fifth part might be recovered, but the rest has disappeared---some say into the secretary-general's pocket, some say into various government departments which happened to be in debt, some say into new industrial schemes from which certain ministers stand to profit!' Don Amigo deprecated this, raising his fragile, bony hand for a moment: 'Is that quite certain?' he said. 'Yes!' the other priest shouted fiercely, at once, his voice ringing across the room in a strange passionate scream,

quite different from his whisper at the beginning. 'It is! Quite certain! The department can't account for five hundred miliard lire! And they call it a government! Robbers! Ladri! Ladri!' And he pounded the table. 'They should be brought to law!' he went on. 'There should be the severest penalty for stealing from government funds---which means stealing from the people!' Our priest's lips quivered a little at this: 'Oh, dear,' he murmured, 'mistakes are bound to happen. Of course, there are scandals. They happen in every country.' 'But five hundred miliard? A mistake? A mighty mistake that was! You'll be telling me it was lost next. The man had the cheque on his desk and it was lost under the blotting paper. It was no mistake! It was a design! It was a deliberate criminal's design---to steal from the people. You're simple, Don Amigo! Tu sei troppo semplice!' Our priest put his hand up again, shrugging slightly, but ~~he~~ made no reply. 'Mistakes aren't bound to happen!' the other man went on. 'But they will happen if they're not punished! The maximum penalty, that's what it needs!' 'I suppose,' our priest answered to this, his lips still quivering slightly, 'people should be killed, like they are in Russia. We don't want that!' 'But it isn't only in Russia that people are punished for that sort of crime! It's England, France, everywhere in the civilised world---the maximum penalty for stealing from the people!' Don Amigo turned to us with a little smile---'My friend has rather strong opinions.' And he added, 'He works on the land himself.' Apparently, the other priest has a large podere, of sixty or seventy hectares, and he has followed his own doctrine thoroughly by putting the land under a programme. The result is, according to ^llocal peasants, that he's making a lot of money.

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I told him about our own podere, that it would soon be abandoned like all the others; or with luck it might be rented for a paltry sum every year. Wouldn't it be best to turn it over to one crop, I asked---say, wine? And his reply was, with a mysterious and rather excited smile, that it was all a question of money, and the people who owned land invariably had no money or else were unwilling to put it back into the land. You needed money to change the crop in that way, he said, because you needed time. If you wanted to turn it over to oil, for instance, you had to wait twenty years for a good yield of olives. And wine would take at least five years. The reason why all these poderi have a bit of everything, he said, is because they were designed to provide all the basic needs of both the peasant and the owner: in fact, he added, although the mezzadria system is psychologically unpopular at the moment (because the peasant has the impression that he gives half his produce to an idler), it is the best agricultural system ever devised, for ^{fair} fairness and efficiency. The actual dividend reaped from this system by a good landowner is about six or seven percent of the produce, after taxes, equipment, new plants, repairs have been paid for: about the same percentage as business men get on their capital. He himself, he went on, paid out eighteen thousand lire a day in wages, to eight or nine workers: he had no mezzadri. With large poderi, producing massive supplies, the mezzadria system wasn't possible, he said. But the country might return to it. After all, people had left the land in great numbers twice before in Italian history---once in Roman times and once in the middle ages, and both times they had come back. What he couldn't understand was that young people should actually want to give up the marvel of a healthy body! 'How marvellous,' he said, his rather narrow eyes shining, 'to

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be out there under the sun, with things growing all round you! What could be better than that?' He quoted two brothers he knew---one worked in the valley below, and the other in a factory in the nearby town: and when you compared their faces, he said, it was like comparing a piece of dried chalk with a plump, ripe fruit! And in the end that would all be paid for, in disease, and poor human stock. Food supplies would deteriorate, in quantity and quality, as the unhealthy factory-product replaced the natural one. The countryside had to be made exciting, he said, and unfortunately a government of robbers and liars was incompetent to do anything except line its own pockets. Don Amigo then turned to us and, quoting the name of a high government official, said, 'Now there's a good man. A real Christian, with some excellent ideas,' at which the other priest nodded ironically, with a little twinkle in his eye, and said with a laugh, 'The biggest liar of all!'

As we got into Don Amigo's tiny car again he watched us calmly, his arms folded, a slight satisfied smile on his lips. He was so different from our Don Amigo. When he talked about how marvellous it was to stand under God's sun he gave me a sense of religion. Whereas our priest makes it a dim spiritual affair. Yet the peasants only respect the Colciano priest in a gingerly and distant way; they laugh with him, they certainly admire him, but Don Amigo is more their idea of what a priest should be---they say of him, 'There aren't a hundred like him in all Italy.' Sergio tells us of the Colciano priest, with a laugh, that he likes his women: 'Watch your wife when he's about---no woman is safe with that prelate!'

On the way back Don Amigo murmured, 'Yes, it's true what he says. The government have a plan for the country now, but it's too late. We needed it long ago. Now everybody has left. We

have a proverb about the government, we say they closed the stable door after the horse had bolted. You see, there are no amusements in the country. No television, no cinema or bars--- often no electricity.' And he added sadly, 'Even for country priests it's boring. There isn't really enough for us to do, you see.'

The same evening, a long argument with Gianni. The night was stormy and rather cold. It began by his asking a question. He'd been talking to one of the peasants employed by Gigi, who claimed that the white smoke from the chimney at St. Peter's, when a new pope has been elected, means that God has made his choice. At first we didn't understand him, and he repeated the stages of the argument carefully: 'First, when a pope dies a new pope is elected. Right?' 'Yes.' 'Well, then, cardinals come to Rome to elect him.' 'Yes.' 'And when they vote their papers are put in a stove and burned: if the smoke outside, which can be seen from St. Peter's square, is black, this means the election has been ^{un}successful, in other words, that the cardinals haven't agreed on who should be pope. Correct?' 'Yes.' 'Very well, then, did Christ do the selecting or the cardinals?' And he stopped. We were still no nearer to understanding.

He tried it again. 'Who exactly elects the pope?' he asked. 'The cardinals', we said. 'Yes, but suppose three cardinals nominate one man, five another, ten another---what happens then?' 'Well,' we said, 'no pope is elected: they couldn't agree among themselves. And they have to agree before the new pope can be made.' 'So the pope is made by the cardinals?' Gianni asked. 'Yes, of course!' 'And not by God?'

'But how by God?' we asked. 'Put it this way,' he said.

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'How does the black smoke come?' 'By the paper', we answered.
'The election papers.' 'And the white smoke?' 'By straw, to show that the ^election was successful.' 'So what makes the difference between the black and the white smoke is different material--- something different in the stove, not the same papers all the time?'
'Yes.' 'There,' Gianni said, 'you see, I was right. I argued with that man for an hour this morning. I didn't say I knew he was wrong, I just said I thought he was, that I couldn't believe him. And it seems I was right. You see, he said that when God came across the name he wanted for the pope he turned the black smoke into white miraculously, and then everybody understood what pope ~~man~~ he wanted.'

The peasant had got very heated about it, he said, and had told him that there was absolutely no doubt in the matter---his father, his grandfather and his great-grandfather before him had all said the same: and no question of the fact had ever entered his head before, until Gianni uttered his doubt.

We then, somehow, got on to politics. He said that the agreement just made by America and Russia and England not to have any more atomic tests was a great step forward. I said that it wasn't anything of the kind: it was a hurried agreement to try to stop other powers (essentially, Germany) making a stock of bombs and thus threatening the division of world-power between America and Russia: that is, it was a desperate attempt to freeze the present balance and prolong the political power inherent in possessing bombs. Also, it only put on paper what facts had already accomplished: namely, that both America and Russia had more bombs than they needed, and that further production of them was wasteful and meaningless; and, secondly, that further atomic tests were equally useless, since no quicker or more effective system of blowing up vast areas

of the earth could be devised. Therefore, nothing was lost militarily or politically by either side in the agreement; and they both gained by being called saviours, in as spurious a publicity as ever existed under nazism. Both the men who had reached their agreement had been responsible only a year before for atomic explosions---though they now said that explosions caused unknown damage to crops, soil, air and living creatures. It hadn't suited their political advantage then to stop the tests, and their humanity, which was now much publicised, had then been absent. Also, I said, there was one test they still needed to carry out, and this was the underground test, and this hadn't been covered by the agreement: presumably, when the underground tests were no longer needed we should be told what unknown damage they had done, too.

Gianni said to this that any disarmament was good, to which I said that this wasn't disarmament at all; if anything, it simply confirmed the possession of armaments in the hands of two powers exclusively; I added that in fact not one form of armament would be given up, and ^{that} this was quite understood between the two powers. But Gianni insisted on using the word ~~disarmament~~, and we got to a kind of deadlock. I called him a dupe of publicity, ~~(he gets the Marxist publicity, rather than the American)~~, and reminded him that one of these saviours of mankind had only a year or two ago exploded twenty-one bombs of the most dangerous air-polluting kind on twenty-one successive days, as an act of propaganda. I said that ~~disarmament~~ of atomic weapons would begin as soon as missiles were ready for war-use: at this Gianni let out a yell and a laugh, and cried, 'Surely you don't believe that missiles are for military use?' I asked him what he thought they were for and he said, 'To discover another planet.'

When he was going he said, 'At least, with these atomic

tests over, our weather will improve,' and I said, 'Don't be so sure the bad weather isn't caused by missiles, and won't get worse.'

The storms have gone and the weather is clear and sparkling as it usually is much later in the year. There are supposed to have been earth-tremors in Tuscany, the Romagna and Emilia, but we felt nothing. Somebody told me that at the sea he watched three separate storms from a hill, close to each other, like clouds with dozens of fireworks inside them.

The last few days have been full of the sound of threshing, like a strange beast coughing regularly. The towering red machine with its chutes and turning cables visits each of the farms in turn. It came here and filled the air with a fine, pleasantly smelling dust, and in the evening two tables were set up in Gigi's kitchen. We ate pasta with meat sauce, then chicken and fried veal, with some of last year's wine. The talk was mostly soft and desultory, everyone being exhausted. Gianni's job had been to stand at the taps where the grain pours out, and to measure it off in sacks so that it could be sent straight to the miller without further weighing. The worst job is standing on the stack and forking the sheaves on to the moving chute, because you get the dust in your nose. Five workers go round with the machine, and stand watching while the work is going on, sometimes adjusting the cables: one of them fixes the wire-staves ^{into} ~~into~~ the straw-chute, so that the straw comes out in pounded blocks. There is great awe of the machine: it excites and captivates everyone. They serve it hurriedly and willingly. The men who bring it try to look like magicians, because this is how they're regarded. They peer into the thing mysteriously and professionally, saying nothing, while the ~~others~~ ^{peasants} hurry round in a flattered way. The noise enslaves

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people, too. It means hope, movement. Like roads, it seems to promise freedom.

The cooking was done by Gigi's wife, and the meal passed quickly, without the slightest merriment, only munching and quiet talk, and chuckling. When it was all over we took Gigi's family back to town and sat in their tiny flat for a few minutes. Both their sons had come: polite, reticent youths, with hardly a trace of the peasant any more. Gigi has brought them up well. They all have a town-delicacy, the girls as well, though they haven't been in town more than ten years. The town is more colto, everyone says---more 'cultivated'. Their kitchen is spotless and looks out on to a roof two metres away. His sons work in a wood-factory, and helping on the land is a penance for them, a descent into the past.

The night was clear, but with storm-clouds gathering inland. Most of the threshing has been done in the worst weather, with rain and bitter winds.

Gianni complains about the 'heavy' meals at threshing time: a special meal at a different house twice a day---chicken and pasta, with steak or veal. 'I can't stand so much meat!' he says temperamentally. Then, 'Stanco, stanco!'---he's tired. And he throws himself down on our divan and promptly falls asleep like a child.

He barges in from the courtyard every hour or so in the morning, whistles outside, clowns, sings, walks up and down our stairs with a humourous, half-anguished restlessness. When he fidgets his mother always shouts, 'Vagabondo! Haven't you work to do?', and whenever he asked^s her a question she screams angrily, 'Madonna cane! Che vuoi, li giù?'---what the devil do you want down there?

Last week he told us mysteriously that he'd found a job driving a truck to Florence and back for several days, and that we wouldn't be seeing him. He had to leave before dawn the next day; but at half-past six the following morning he was in our courtyard again---the truck had 'broken down'. When would it be ready again? I asked him. On Sunday. But on Sunday it turned to Monday. Then it seemed forgotten.

But one day, perhaps when the summer is over, he'll suddenly appear and say, 'I've been truck-driving for a week!'

Sometimes he goes from house to house in the valley, talking, sitting. I walked with him to Altapasquale yesterday and he suddenly lifted up my hand and walked ^{me} along as if we were a royal couple in a Tudor play, his steps long and light, while the peasants chuckled at us. His imagination is quick and subtle. Sometimes our talk is fiercely hilarious, so wild and yet perfectly coordinated, in replies and answers that are rapped out in a strange, mad logic, that we seem to have rehearsed it beforehand. He imitates anger, haughtiness, indignation, while talking complete nonsense.

Nearly every day is dull again, with brief, light falls of rain. There isn't thunder any more, but the land broods under the thick sky. We went to the sea yesterday and along a narrow strip of the coast there was hot sunlight, like a blazing corridor down the sand.

Now there is the annual fever of ferragosto: August 15 is called the Feast of the Assumption, but the time belongs to the people, really to their paganism; it brings out an ancient restlessness. Best to be in the cities at this time, as they are empty and silent.



Some reading about the Reformers: Henry VIII's first act was to seize the hospitals, and having thrown out the poor give them to rich men. That was the end of hospitality. After that you couldn't throw yourself on any man's mercy: the chill, friendless streets we know began---Newcastle, London, Ohio.

Supplication for the Beggars, a book of reform by Simon Fish, advocating the confiscation of church property, got to Henry VIII's notice through the rich men round him. 'The more hospitals the worse,' Fish said. The Reformers were also against vestments, 'dainty singing', candles.

One of the Reformers in Henry VIII's time advocated that the priests be stripped naked, whipped in the market-places and then 'wed'. As the final punishment---intimacy!

This is the first crisp touch of autumn: it makes us think of Rome---the glow of lights ^{on dark} ~~in the early morning~~^S. When it rises the sun shows bright red trees in the woods above us: they have turned quite suddenly in the last few weeks. Yet this should be the hottest time of the year.

Yesterday we sat at the top of a hill near by and watched the threshing below, in a courtyard, the same machine that came to us a week ago. People fed the chute with sheaves in the same unresting way, as if hurried by the sound of the machine. Like most of the hard work here, it is done in a ^k kind of joyless fever.

It suddenly seemed grotesque to us that the young should choose the bad air of factories, the deafening hammer of machines, to this astonishing landscape of plains and hills, under a sparkling sky.

It was like an English sun, being clear and cool, and the

hills had the breathless, exciting look of English downs, with farms hugged round with trees far below.

The machine went on pounding with its strange hoarse cough, while the women hurried to and fro from the house: one could see their excitement, the unusual way they hurried. The work was almost finished: the straw was piled into a neat stack the size of a barn. Then the machine slowly died down, the cables and chutes were dismantled, the tractor with the engine that had worked everything was drawn away. The meal would now be ready in the dark house, and instead of a glowing, memorable supper, that the children would remember with awe, they would all eat in silence, or with grunts, smacking their lips and reaching for bread, and when the last mouthful was down and the cigarettes were lit, that would be the end, and they would get up to go.

But perhaps that is memorable---the darkness, the smell of straw from outside, the thick taste of the wine, without talk or festivity. Perhaps children remember that in the deepest way of all---without their minds. Even in her vacuum Italy has wisdom. The timeless is always there.

I suddenly thought, 'We could easily believe that Christ was illegitimate, that Mary made a mistake before marriage.' Or that he was Joseph's proper offspring. I began considering some of the things we have to accept if we accept the Church. The immaculate conception is difficult to grasp. We have so much to swallow that is difficult for us. Why can't we believe that he came out of intimacy, from a real act of love between a man and a woman? He had so much intimacy in himself. Why must we throw his life away

on the barren altar of original sin?

And there are other things: the rending of the veil of the temple after his death, the earthquake, the opening of the graves, the physical resurrection, his appearing again to the women, to the disciples: they all stand in the way.

The four evangelists all disagree about these things. But about Christ they never disagree. How much have we swallowed from the world before Christ, without questioning it?

Sumer, then Babylon, then Israel had their versions of the creation of the earth, the flood; stories of immaculate birth, paradise, resurrection, original sin.

The Babylonian Adape was a man like Adam, the first creature: he broke the wing of the south wind in anger, and was ordered before the high god, who then offered him immortal life; but Adape refused--- he took his father's advice and remained mortal.

The Sumerians before them believed that the gods had created six types of human creature, out of clay: and a seventh who was weak in mind and body.

It seems that the sense of original sin gathered with time: perhaps it culminated in Judah, in the story of Adam's fall, connecting it with the act of intimacy. Adam didn't break the wing of the south wind, he did nothing in anger---he simply took Eve.

Christ was our first release from original sin. He pointed not to our intimate stain but to the spark in each of us: that the lowest of us was the creature of God.

The Old Testament is the story of the unfolding of God's plan for Israel: God chose the Jews as his people, and their story is one of progress from this choice to their redemption of the world. They are there to save the world.

And the four evangelists, in the New Testament, wrote the story of Christ in that same context. It was the only context they knew. They tried to give his ^{life} ~~Passion~~ full historical authority by showing that it fulfilled Hebrew prophecies, that is, the prophecies in the Old Testament. And this was truthfully Christ's context. He had never tried to depart from it, and he never disagreed that the Jews were the redeemers. Through him, in fact, their laws and unique consciousness spread through the Roman empire, to become our civilisation.

Hence, the suggestion of immaculate birth (in Matthew), Gabriel's appearance to Mary to tell her of the birth of the Messiah (in Luke).

The Old Testament tone surrounds the life of Christ but never touches its details. On the details all four gospels agree. The Old Testament kind of writing is mostly about events before his birth or after his death (the darkness over the land for three hours, rocks being rent by an earthquake etc).

I think Bach's St. Matthew Passion is the most complete recapitulation of the Passion that we have, but I always feel a pause of disbelief at the rending of the veil of the temple, the opening of the graves: and the music becomes properly operatic, scenic, there.

Our idea of moral progress---of one epoch unfolding into a better---comes from Judah: ^{from} the belief that God had called Israel as the redeemer, and that he was unfolding his plan of salvation slowly.

We inherited that through Christ---like so much else that is in contradiction to him.

The description of the crucifixion as prophesied and

ordained and chosen by God, in the terms of the Old Testament, gradually robbed it of achievement for us. We ceased among other things to see what the Orthodox call Christ the Victor. By being repeatedly called 'the son of God' and of immaculate birth, by being withdrawn from men, his achievement has been robbed of its human marvel.

The Jewish story of heaven and hell, and of the first stained creature, all came to us through him. St. Augustine wrote, in answer to the heresy of Pelagius, that unbaptised babies were consigned to the everlasting flames of hell. But how do we know? How do we know about heaven? For the Catholics purgatory is added. How do they know? How did they find out? Who told them?

No one has told us, I think. God still remains the sum of all we cannot know.

What were the Reformers but good Catholics, pressing the doctrine home to its logical and ugly consequences?

Last night, while the sky over us was perfectly clear and the crickets throbbed calmly, there were continual flashes from the direction of the coast, so bright that they lit up the roadway like a full moon. When they ceased for a moment the darkness seemed uncannily dense. There wasn't a sound of thunder,

not the slightest distant rumble. It was like continuous fireworks along the whole length of the coast. Neither of us had known anything like it. We were walking back from Sergio's house, and the path was lighted for us the whole way. At the same time, on the other side of the clear sky overhead, there was a storm over Florence, a single dark cloud perched in the air and flashing intermittently.

It was clear that the sea-storm was drawing inland fast, but it took nearly two hours to reach us. The silent flashes became brighter, so that we could see the wooded slope outside our bedroom-window under a continuous silver light. Then the crickets stopped suddenly, just a moment before the soft rain came. There was the first rumble of thunder, but it seemed muffled, as if high in the air, behind clouds: and this was the nature of the flashes, too---they were 'summer lightning', diffused and glowing. There were no sharp crashes, no crackling or reverberating as in the earlier storms of the year. The rumbles got nearer and nearer, until they were almost overhead, with the flashes going on irrespective of them, and then they passed inland. There was suddenly an avalanche of rain, the windows swung open, the wind whistled through the house, doors banged. As suddenly it was calm again. The rumbling was no longer heard, and at the moment when everything was safe again the crickets began to chirp.

More slight earth-tremors, near Foggia this time.

We took Gianni to Rome for two or three days. We started out soon after dawn, in clear weather. The valley was just waking up and the sunlight stole through the bushes and trees

at a low angle. Only that morning had he decided to come with us. He'd spent all day before trying to decide: his mother said, 'Go! What's the problem?', but he couldn't make up his mind. When he went to sleep he decided, 'If I wake up at the right time tomorrow I'll go---if not, fate doesn't want me to!' He woke at the stroke of five, and jumped out with a cry, 'I'm going!' He put on a white shirt and his best winter suit, which serves for summer as well; and he left the house without a scrap of luggage, not even a razor. I heard his long whistle as he came down the path and ^I jumped up too. We got everything together quickly, a suitcase, two fiaschi of wine, some fruit and cheese for the journey, and drove off a few minutes after Gigi arrived to open the stall.

At the sea the sky was clear and hot, and long files of traffic were going north, after the ferragosto holiday. Gianni sang and joked, and played with the dog until he was bored, then fell asleep quietly, his brow without a line, his lips in the slightest of Etruscan smiles, as if gazing at something pleasant with his eyes closed. The sea was an astonishing colour, a flashing emerald, and the surf was brilliant like white petals that suddenly appear and roll into the sea again. I wondered how Gianni would seem to us in Rome: ^{that} ~~the~~ city puts everything so plainly.

Gradually the fresh northern light gave way to the deep, intimate Roman glow that is like the reflection of an enormous copper gong in the sky. At Santa Marinella, an hour from Rome, I foolishly suggested that we should eat at a restaurant instead of driving on and arriving home hungry. We chose a tiny trattoria on a square just off the road, with an awning that made its wooden tables and chairs seem inviting for a moment. When we

glanced inside we knew what was coming: there was an air of dirt and cunning, enough to stop ~~one~~^{us} eating for a twelvemonth. The traffic roared by on the road, which cut straight through the resort, blackening and cracking the red surface that used to look pretty five or so years ago. We sat down at an outside table, having committed ourselves to eating before we really knew what was happening. On the other side of the main road we could see a pleasant, clean restaurant with white tablecloths and an awning that made everything look intimate; it would have cost more, and the food might have been no better, but they'd at least made an effort to help our need to dream...

The boy came and we put in our ~~order~~st. Gianni had to have his ~~plate~~ of spaghetti and we chose salad, which even a year ago in Italy still meant a bowl of tomatoes and lettuce and chopped basil and mint, rubbed with garlic, and is now half a tomatoe neatly sliced, sitting unsteadily on a faded leaf. We got our half-tomato, and Gianni's spaghetti al sugo---a 'meat' sauce---arrived. His plate looked inviting and he made a satisfied grunt as he dug in with his fork and spoon to mix it: but disillusion was round the corner---the sauce turned to a watery mixture in which there were bits of broiled tomatoes but no meat; there was ~~one~~ tiny pellet of meat which looked as if it had been put there as an ironical gesture. Gianni said, 'I could do better myself! You throw a few tomatoes in a pan!' He tried his wine---we had ordered a quartino to see what hell's brew they'd produce---and made a face. The usual chemical stuff, he said: the colour of piss, with a strong peppery taste and the rather anaesthetic touch of pure alcohol. I took a sip, then went round the back of the place and spat it out on to the road. Even then the taste clung to my mouth.

As it was a sea-resort we chose fish, and saw the fish before it was cooked. It looked fresh enough, but one could never tell what chemicals could do; one heard stories of fish being injected... Anyway, we had it grilled, so that as little as possible would be done to it. The oil for the salad was clear and bright like the fake olive-oil that is said to come from machine-oil waste and animal-fats, going through an elaborate system of refinement. Only the tomato was unadulterated, and there was no more than half of that. The fish when it came tasted all right, but it had been cleaned and scaled perfunctorily, and then---on second thoughts--- it produced a strange mixture of sensations half-way between being not quite fresh and being fresh in an unnatural way---perhaps it was the rank oil they'd poured over it. We asked each other if these tricks and guises that the shops and restaurants go in for nowadays ---the fake-butter and the cheese made of bonemeal---are really cheaper in the end. But for everything there's a ~~cheap~~ little trick you can play--- a powder to make your ice-cream out of, without milk or eggs; a bleach to make your bread look whiter; spaghetti made with everything but flour, fettucine chemically coloured; fake-wine, fake-oil, fake mineral water, an endless repertoire covering nearly every known food.

Gianni drank the wine, ate his pasta and even told the boy that the fish was good, though he added when the boy had gone that he felt bilious. The bread was hard and dry. And at the end we paid more than we would have done for a three-course meal at one of the best restaurants in Siena. The owner came out, looking the part, his skin parched and sallow from over-drinking, his eyes evil and dull, and asked us if the dog under our table ate meat; when we told him yes he brought out a thin uncooked

cutlet, apparently too rotten even for a customer, and threw it on the ground in front of the animal. 'Are you afraid?' Gianni asked him with a smile, seeing he wouldn't go near the dog. 'Yes! Yes!' the man said in his husky wine-voice. 'I've never had faith in dogs---or in cats, for that matter! I never go near them. Yet,' he went on, starting to return to his dark, slovenly kitchen, 'I know they're better than human beings. Cristiani son tutti cattivi!'---all human creatures are bad. Well, a bad man's philosophy!

A family---grandmother, mother and two neatly ^edr[^]essed girls, excited and sitting upright---were at the next table: they drank 'lemonade'^d---saccharine, fizz and chemical colouring. The place began to fill up. Three Germans came: one of them, a young woman, practised her neat Italian on the waiter, enunciating every word with a clarity that denied the spirit of the language; and after she'd put in her professional order she added, 'E vino, per favore'---a rash thing to say in Italy nowadays, without specifying what kind of wine you want. The couple with her looked perplexed. The man, thin and tall, jiggled his knee up and down nervously; he was so clearly in a foreign world---la bella Italia. And la bella Italia would give him a nice headache after lunch and perhaps a stomach-ache too: but he would put it down to 'too much oil' in Italian cooking, perhaps. As the Italian waiters would all tell him, he wasn't 'accustomed' to it, which would be true enough.

The millions of tourists every year have made almost any speculation along the Mediterranean coast profitable: and now the madness and the mess, as always, are left over for the Italians. They have the money and the cars now, they can imitate the foreigners, they can even go to their splendid resorts; but,

as always, it's too late. The last Italian simplicity has collapsed.

You hear stories going round the shops---'Butter has been withdrawn round here---a family died'---'There won't be any more of that tinned meat till next week, it was a bad batch, some people are supposed to have died.' When Paolo brings down his sick sheep to be picked up for slaughtering he always says, 'These are for tinned meat.' Boiling renders them harmless, he adds. And he buys the tins himself, for sauce on his pasta. The publicity makes it seem all right. ^eEverybody else is doing ^{it.} ~~it.~~ They do it abroad. It's quicker. And there is something magical in the factory. It transforms, sterilises. It means progresso, the word on the lips of every peasant. Yet he will tell you himself that il progresso means a fake and even poisonous product, dressed up to glitter: he sees it happen, as the citizen doesn't. But he buys it just the same. That is the power of publicity. The simple people all over the earth are powerless to change their lives, they always have been. They have to take what they're given, what everybody else is doing, even if it kills them, even if it gives ^{that} the children ~~they love terrible~~ ^{frightful} diseases. But at least it isn't as bad in Italy as in the Anglo-Saxon countries: few people eat in restaurants, ^{and} there is still a healthy desire for fresh food.

Our meal seemed fouler afterwards than when we were eating it. We strolled across the square, which was more deserted now in the noon-heat, and took a coffee at one of the ^eglittering bars. A child served us, his face mild and dreamy. And he produced one of the best coffees I've ever had. We smacked our lips afterwards and said simultaneously, 'That was worth all the money we've given to the villain across the road!'

We reached Rome in an hour and found our home cool and silent, behind closed shutters; also it seemed remarkably clean and neat after our farmhouse. Gianni looked round in a mild way, and his first thought was to take off his jacket and hang it carefully in the wardrobe. We now had the luxury of running water and even hot water; a lavatory which flushed, electric light which came on at a flick, and a telephone. It felt like a pleasant game: something infinitely subtle and refined, the fruit of long, intimate dreams over the centuries, like the one I'd had in our village-hotel---the dream of a city.

The straw mats over our terrace, shading it against the strong sun, were intact; we'd massed all our potted plants at one end so that our neighbour could water them from her terrace. But watering was hardly needed this year: it rained avalanches a few days before we came, and the mud from the pots was spattered everywhere. I put Gianni in my room, and we all had an hour's rest; but the roaring of the traffic in the narrow street below kept me awake. The bed seemed marvellously soft; it was wonderful to be home, where everything was ours. I lay on the divan in the big room, picking books out of the shelves and browsing through them; then I made tea, jDoked with Gianni. He was quietly surprised at the number of books I had, especially in my own room, along three walls: he said, 'They must be worth a lot of money. How much, do you think?' And he made me calculate how much they'd been worth at the time of buying. He couldn't believe they were more or less worthless now. They were bright, well-produced commodities for him.

In the evening we had a light meal, with the wine we'd brought from the country. It seemed to clean our stomachs after our midday experience, and we smacked our lips. 'Never again!'

we said. 'Welll never eat out again!' We took Gigi's wine down in long, swift draughts.

The dusk came early, a reminder of autumn. There was none of the usual heat: even with the carpet down in the main room it was cool. But the air was heavier than in Tuscany: the Roman air slows and eases; it exerts a heavy but strangely comforting pressure. And the light was quite different: the immense copper glow was behind everything. This was Rome's best month in the year---for walking and breathing: in August the city is deserted more or less; below, in our own street, there were even parking spaces. At its loveliest time, in September and October, the city will be stricken again: no more walking in the sidestreets; a thick stench of petrol and diesel fumes; ~~two traffic jams a day.~~ J The man at the wood-shop said to me, 'It's finished now--- Rome's finished! Ten years ago we thought we were hard up, but we were much better off, if we'd but known it! ^{now!} Everybody is out for himself _{now!} of course, in a city crammed with cars, over six hundred thousand of them, this weakness of the Italian psychology produces deadlock. There is the same cry everywhere---'The Italians have no discipline!'

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When it was dark we went to our trattoria and found the old faces. Gianni was introduced, and I was surprised to see how well he fitted in. And it had been the same in the afternoon, in our street: he'd met everyone with the same easy and curious equality---the portiera, the woman at the latteria who always gives ~~the~~ ^{out} dog cheese and biscuits, Sergio at the wineshop, slim and shy, peeping out of his doorway. Italian usually meets Italian with a subdued scowl, but I noticed they respected him at once. Perhaps it was due to a certain northern cleanliness in him; and he speaks loudly and clearly, with the touch of rhetoric

which they admire. He and the owner of the trattoria, Giorgio, began talking about Rome. One thing I notice is that Gianni has less gravity than the Romans: everything is a bit of a joke for him (outside the hard labour of the fields) and he makes a slight smile whenever he advances an argument, as if it were a jest: but partly this is his clear and swift imagination, which skirts and flies over what other people find ^d difficult.

Even so, I could see how he was silently adapting himself to Rome, as we sat over the wooden table drinking Giorgio's red wine, in the dark courtyard, among the narrow mediaeval streets.

'The more I know about Rome,' Giorgio said, his sleepy, half-closed eyes flickering doubtfully, 'the greater she seems! In ancient times anybody who wanted to come to Rome could---all they had to do was to pay the tribute, then they were citizens, free like everybody else! Rome has always embraced people---taken them in---even enemies---even the people who've sacked and ruined the city---she has converted them---changed them!' He talked about the first Etruscan kings, about Romulus and Remus, the emperors. Gianni said something about the wolf that mothered Romulus and Remus, and Giorgio shook his head and said, 'You got that from the films---no, no, you don't want to believe the films!' He waved his hand in a deprecating way: 'It is possible that Romulus and Remus were brought up by a shepherd, to whom they'd been abandoned by their parents, a noble family perhaps.' Giorgio gets all his information from the comic-strip magazines; this makes him feel superior to the films. He sits hunched over a table by the door of the trattoria reading these nearly all day, except Tuesdays, when he goes to his father's house in the country and lies down to read them, holding them above him, in the same position for hours, wrapt in biblical stories and ancient Rome

and Babylon and Athenian politics, while his wife gets the dinner ready.

I could see Gianni using his eyes everywhere, learning fast. I couldn't put my finger on it---he was in the midst of a vast, glowing civilisation for the first time, spellbound; it seemed to captivate him so much that it exhausted his nerves; he slept for hours, in the afternoon as well, slumped on the bed like a soldier after a battle. And he was quietly helpful---with the washing-up, the shopping. I was aware of Rome's stupendous presence, her power over people, through him. She seemed to me the one Etruscan creation to have survived; and the Etruscan in Gianni was responding to her perhaps.

Our portiera told us that there'd just been another 'scandal' about the city's milk-supply. They're always finding dirt or foreign substances in it. She said she'd had a bottle that week which even her stray cats wouldn't touch. After a day it had gone ~~bad~~^{green,} with a fatty layer at the top like grey wax. I've noticed this waxy deposit in the Roman milk myself: sometimes it pours out in a long stream with the milk, like mucous, thoroughly disgusting.

While we were in Rome we went to a vineyard near the sea, behind Anzio. A strange day---with the sparkling, bright-yellow, wet sunlight you find in England and the north of France but almost never in Italy. Nearly half the grapes had been lost, at the beginning of their maturity: a hailstorm had stripped them off the branches, or frozen them black; the water had cascaded down from the sky and torn great ruts in the earth, dividing the hills with new streams that cut right through the plants; no one, even old men of ninety and ninety-five, could remember such a thing, or remember having heard of such a thing. We went to a tiny one-roomed house near by which we'd thought of renting: the earth from the vineyard all round it had swept across its court-

yard so that the cobbles were now invisible, and had flooded the rooms, which now had floors of mud. The wind had been terrific. The olive trees had suffered nearly as much. None of the fruit had ripened this year: the peaches were still hard, and they were falling off the trees before their time. The sight was amazing: having seen these same vineyards in the spring, we couldn't believe it was now summer; the air, and the damp, troubled earth, furrowed in places like the sea, belonged to a hard winter's day in a land far from the Mediterranean.

This must have happened at the same time as our strange storms in Tuscany.

It was pleasant being among my own books again. I read that the emperor Constantine was suddenly converted on his way from France to Italy in 312; at least, this is one of the stories. The Christian empire began in him. Twelve years later he moved the capital of the empire from Rome to Constantinople, named after him; Rome, he said, was too much stained by paganism.

Byzantium, or Constantinople, was an attempt to create the new Christian society against a background of conversion and not of paganism. But the emperor took his paganism with him. He became at Byzantium the 'vice-regent' of God, really the first pope. Byzantium was an attempt at Christian civilisation: it faced the usual pattern of rise, decline and fall. Was Rome's strength, after this, that she attempted no such thing?

The Church was divided from the very beginning, always by the same thing---the tendency to make a civilisation on the one hand and the tendency to make a moral society----a clean sweep---

(caps) on the other. The first schism of the church, in which the Catholics divided from the Orthodox, was due to it. In fact, the Church was never a unity. The Crusaders appalled the Byzantines with their ferocity when they attacked Constantinople in the thirteenth century: making a clean moral sweep of the luxurious and degenerate capital, they behaved like vandals, they tore the altars to pieces and smashed the ikons, always under their own symbol of the Cross; they behaved with the same cruel vigour---and the same sense of redeeming the world, in Christ---as the Reformers under Henry VIII sacked the abbeys, and the Roundheads under Cromwell a century later tore up the copper graveplates in the churches. There was always the same crusade, reforming life and reforming it again, in endless revolutions that look like a permanent sore in Christianity, which can never stop running.

Civilisation (like Byzantium) is a kind of gala, to celebrate: it preserves intimacy. It even tries to enthrone intimacy in permanent forms---in his old age Constantine had his hair curled by special artists. The Reformed society, on the other hand, tries to embody an idea, and in this dethrones intimacy.

The power of Judah was the moral end that lay in each of her children; but Judah was also the Reformed society (never an attempt at civilisation) by virtue of the fact that her children were naturally joined together, like a family. But we can never imitate that compactness. The natural moral conviction of Judah can never exist for us: we are conglomerate, a hundred different races, peoples, languages, joined under one presence. And we haven't got to the bottom of what that presence is. We think it is offering us something in time, in the future---in the world. But it is outside time. It is pulling us outside time as fast as we plunge desparately further and further into time.

The first complete moral or Reformed society was Victorian England. Hardly a trace of intimacy was left in England after three hundred years of Protestantism. The buildings, roads, even the churches had the same bustling but hollow public look. The feeling people have nowadays that there is something similar between the modern American and the modern Russian comes from the fact that both belong to the extreme moral society, the one with the same Puritan root as Victorian England, the other with a German or Lutheran root (Hegel, Marx). Both are gripped in a moral system that saps the intimate energies as fast as it tries to use them.

I was interested to see that the first Christians in Rome used not the pagan temples for worship (as those in Greece did) but the basilicas, that is, the ancient lawcourts. S. Maria Maggiore is the oldest of these. The basilicas were rectangular buildings with two columns of pillars and a semicircular apse: that is, the form of our churches. Christ thus became at once the new Law: the moral quest was fixed from the beginning. Only the influence of Byzantium, in the fifth and sixth centuries, brought the pagan temples into use as well (SS. Cosma and Damiano, S. Maria in Cosmedin).

Monasteries came into being after the persecution of the Christians ceased, about A.D. 312. That is, organised and voluntary austerities replaced martyrdom. Here were the first attempts at the most intimate reform possible---self-reform.

Reformed society is an attempt to baptise society (an idea) once and for all. But Rome only baptised men. Was that her strength and staying power, that she attempted nothing permanent?

from
When we got back ~~to~~ Rome I walked Gianni up the hill to his

house, where we found his mother and Alberto cutting forage in one of the barns. His mother was wrapped in a man's winter-jacket, though it was hot. She'd suffered, she told us, with hardly a glance at Gianni. All the way up he said, 'I wonder what she'll have to say? You'll have to tell her everything. I won't say a word!' Only when we were there did it transpire that, from their point of view, he'd come to Rome to look for a job: but in Rome he'd only let his imagination bask---he hadn't mentioned a job once, except to say that you couldn't have a job in a place where you had no parenti, no home to go to.

Only upstairs, in their kitchen, where we drank a glass of wine together, did his mother give him a long, silent, fierce and yet humorous gaze of welcome. 'You've got thinner!' she cried. 'Yes,' he told her, seizing on the possibility of sympathy, 'they eat so differently in Rome---they don't start the meal with mine-strone as we do, therefore I got thin!' I told them how he had turned the telescope on the Pincio towards the dome of St. Peter's and had picked up a blonde girl with it instead, and they laughed politely. Gianni sat dandling Paolo's niece on his knee, cooing at her and pointing out the various dogs and cats that came in and out. Then he took me across their fields and cut small marrows, beans, beet, tomatoes, for me to take home. And his mother put two eggs into my hand. 'He's a birbante!' she shouted, flinging a glance at him. 'A wretch! He does nothing! I've suffered today---going to town, on foot, to get my pension!' He's bad---everybody says it, even the cat!' Alberto stood gazing across at her with his head lowered, smiling. 'The doctor gave her some pills today,' he said; 'it's the stomach.' I told her, 'No, Gianni's good---he's been good in Rome---you've a good, clever son!' At which she burst out, 'That only means he's turned you

into a birbante as well!' At which everybody laughed. 'Why don't you take him?' she asked. 'If you like him so much--- employ him, take him into your home as a son!' She added quickly, 'Are you afraid he'll seduce your wife?' 'No!' I said. 'Well, then, take him in!' 'He's too old!' I said, laughing. 'He's twenty-three!' 'What difference does it make? He's got good arms! You can get plenty of work out of him, if you like him so much! I don't want him!' and she and Alberto went quickly back to their work in the barn, he turning the wheel while she fed the chute with bundles of grass. When I left, Gianni was sitting on a curbing looking in front of him, very still, and he said quietly, 'Ciao!'

Next day he asked, could he write a book without a university degree? how much money would it get him? who would correct the book for him? Or could he paint pictures? Suppose he became a sculptor---what were the possibilities? Would he have to go to art-school?

While he was asking these questions he made me feel that the Italian imagination wastes and fritters away in a second enough powers to alter a whole continent. This is the country's splendour and pain.

Suddenly five goats appear outside under the shade of the old cypress, brought down by one of the shepherds. Two of them are pure white. Then more appear, from Altopasquale. They stamp their pretty, obstinate feet. They frown through their hair and make their mildly petulant bleat. They are so pleased to meet each other---it seems they're strangers. They sniff each other pleasantly and the latest comer makes his 'how do you do' to the others one by one; afterwards he does a charming mock-battle with them in turn; they spring up on their hind legs, half-turning in the air, and come down with a deep thud on their front paws and clap their horns together. Then they look at each other intimately as if to say, 'It's good to be here, isn't it?'

A young pig arrives in the courtyard, his new home. He buries his head in the straw and won't look at anyone: he breathes hard. The journey in the truck, and his having just been castrated, terrified him. He lies there, stricken. He buries his head in a delicate and sorrowing way.

I notice that all young things---dogs, children---gravitate towards Gianni. He tricks them, jokes, laughs, tickles them. Paolo's little niece weeps bitterly if anyone says, 'Gianni's

naughty!'

In the podere below the road you can feel the past, how the vines and the bamboo-stalks in the gully and the mossy boulders standing in clover and grass, and the rough yellow paths that wind down from the house, used to lie there in exactly the same way, only included in people's lives, for centuries and centuries, with the heat drenching everything, the sunlight golden and terracotta on the palazzo of Altapasquale. It only lies there like a reminder now, in its special soothing dip, unowned, though still ~~in~~ desultory way cultivated: like a garden belonging to ruins. It captivates you all the time, with every step you take, and has a different story to tell at each different time of the day---golden and sparkling and bright in the morning, mellow and still in the afternoon, cool and secretive in the evening, with special silent messages from ages ago when the same one-bladed plough was used.

I can remember the same sensation ten years ago in the country near Rome, when the heat gripped the earth and vines in a silent and timeless power that seemed impossible to end. Little traffic came along the road then. The wine was real: I remember drinking real Frascati, shaded by trees at a wooden table by the Rome-Frascati road. And on Sundays the countryside ~~all round~~ lay in one unity: there was the sound of bells and one heard people's voices; everything was joined mysteriously across miles of vineyard and olive grove, in one stillness. But now there are bits and pieces of experience, and the earth lies there wondering what the next stage will be.

I noticed for the first time to day that there are schrapnel-marks on our indoor staircase, ~~from the war~~. On each stone step

there are little chipped dents, more or less uniform. I examined them and thought it must have been a machine-gun fired from the top, frantically, sweeping the floor as well, perhaps in the dark. I remember one of my own signallers coming back from this same village and telling me, pale and trembling, that there'd been hand-to-hand fighting, Germans in one room, English in another.

I can remember these farmhouses so clearly: the drawers pulled out---photographs, trinkets, spread all over the floor. I used to look through the photographs with fascination. There would be broken glass, upturned chairs, perhaps a broken cot. Somewhere near here, in a farmhouse, I remember dozing in a baby's cot, my booted legs dangling over the side, a few minutes before we moved into a forward position. There was a great gash in the roof and a chill wind blew through. I had a sickening sensation of fear in my stomach, but it was so usual that I was hardly aware of it. ~~now~~ Death painted the country wild colours. Sometimes I think they were her true colours.

The 'hunting' season has nearly started: the first Sunday in September. We were woken at dawn by 'hunters' stumping about in rubber boots outside, with yapping half-breed dogs round them. They're supposed to be training the dogs to point. But God knows how this can be done with mongrels, and in woods so thick that you can hardly walk through them, let alone sight a quarry. They keep to the edge of the woods, close to our house, as if they were afraid of the hobgoblins. And they seem to want an audience more than a prey. They're all townspeople, or from one of the villages. A peasant has no time to play. They love to stride along a tarred road with a gun slung over their shoulders, their boots---turned down at the ankle---making a solemn thudding noise. They pay

twelve thousand lire a year for the licence and are lucky to bag a couple of hares. For weeks now they've been preparing capanne, cabins in the woods. But even these are safely near the road, though the woods are twenty and thirty kilometres deep. I think they like to keep our house in sight, to feel cosy. They make extraordinary noises to their dogs, who join in the game and squeal and yap professionally as if they were really doing something. Like their masters they're enjoying a run, after a week cooped up.

This 'hunting' has an undertone of fascism, though it existed, in exactly the same form, before fascism. And an inclination to both often occurs in the same man. I've never met an Italian who could resist a firearm. It makes a bang (the greatest recommendation), it can kill without risk or effort, and it endows a war-like and masculine appearance; the little women cower in the background, supposedly, and the atmosphere is ~~pregnant with~~ ^{full of} danger and menace. When an Italian shoots he takes revenge on a lifelong sense of being ^finferfectual. Fascism was that on a bigger scale.

The first Sunday will be a pandemonium from dawn onwards, Gianni says. They will park outside our courtyard, perhaps inside, too--- motorcycles, cars, scooters, pop-popping ~~four~~ ^{three}-wheelers. Nothing is private unless you put up a notice to say it is, and for this you have to pay the government money.

I read about the Carthusians of the London Charterhouse who stood firm against Henry VIII: they were hung, quickly cut down and then disembowelled alive. While they were waiting for their turn to come they gave sermons to the crowd, advising loyalty to the king in all that was not against the honour of the Church.

Bishop Fischer was beheaded and his body flung 'contemptuously', according to the king's orders, into a pit.

Henry VIII was a god for his people---even for the people he executed. We ^{can't} ~~cannot~~ imagine the degree of faith that made these brutalities possible---either their infliction or their acceptance. Really, our constitution, our whole form of life, is stained by them.

Industries---that is, the violent disinheritance of the people from the land, and their savage use, with their children too, in pits and mills---came naturally out of those events, just as German behaviour this century came naturally out of Luther's violence.

Gianni has disappeared for a few days. He got the truck-job, apparently, and is driving a load of furniture to Sicily, with a spare driver. 'If he likes it he'll stay,' Alberto says. But I doubt if he will. There are hard, gruelling hours leaning over a wheel, in the southern heat. He slipped away without saying anything. He says nothing about what he isn't proud of: a most Italian trait.

It occurred to me that for two thousand years Christianity has been trying to escape time. In the middle ages time only existed in the towns: it was necessary for the calculation of rents, rates, taxes etc; life had to be planned and foreseen. The timeless seasons no longer governed life there.

The background of the Reformation lay far back in the middle ages: it was rooted in the eleventh century perhaps, when a commercial class came into being, a sort of embryo of our middle class, in the towns. These towns were separate mentally and physically from the domains all round them. The towns (the rich) broke the domains (the Church); they did it by trade, by cutting across the domains ^{with} ~~by~~ roads, sea-routes; the Italian

(cap) renascence came out of the new liveliness created by trade. Hitherto, each domain had been a law and country to itself: its excess grain, for instance, had been thrown away while there might be a dearth of it in a domain close by.

The towns (law, civilisation, art) were in time; the domains (peasants, knights, priests) were in God, the timeless.

That was a sort of repetition of pagan form: power on the one hand and timeless slavery on the other. Where did time as a restless itch come from? Is it pagan? If we look back to what we call happiness---it might be to adolescence---we find there is no time: that was a timeless period. If we are sure of being created, the itch is removed. When we're happy we rest in the feeling of having been created.

The pagan is a marvellous animal awoken to consciousness: but he has not yet put two and two together. One might say that the first clear gestures towards Christ were by Socrates, Plato: they were putting two and two together; they were searching for the form that they knew was there, beyond time.

The weather is cold and dark again, and we're still in August. We heard that on the night of the strange continual storm, with flashing everywhere, a tornado occurred on the coast and rooted up numberless trees at Viareggio, tore motor-boats out of the sea and flung them on to roofs. It could be seen approaching inland like a vast cloud stretching down to sea-level. I remember that the moment the storm reached us there was a sudden fierce wind, then, after it had passed, perfect quiet again.

A postcard came from Gianni saying he was sorry to have missed us: from Messina. His absence makes the rocky path up the hill seem fixed and barren. Imagination touches things like a wand.

The sound of Caterina singing: a snatch of an old song. Seven o'clock in the morning. It makes everything still and spacious. Then she calls to her chicks. The valley lies under a shallow mist, with piercing, warm sunshine, after the tramontana last night. For a moment there isn't the sound of a car or cycle, no engines of any kind: the valley lies in its own original quiet---a few birds sing briefly, there is the metallic sound of a spade from Altapasquale, someone turning the earth over.

The exciting sound of cantering hoofs. The dentist from P--- rides past on his white horse; he takes a ride every morning before breakfast. The hoofs sound busy, passionate, absorbed in their own pace.

Before the war everything here was on horseback or was horse-drawn. Every podere had a horse or two, and Sergio told me that the road outside was always clattering with hoofs and wooden wheels.

Luciano's farm looks fine and idyllic on the other side of the valley, in the early-morning sunshine, with the mist drifting by, through its great holm oaks. The farm stands on an island, with a shere drop to the fields. ^{As I say,} ~~in fact,~~ there is no idyll there: it isn't Austria or France; no gentleman has blessed the countryside, given it a touch of folly and leisure.

We met the padrone of one of the houses up the hill; he lives and works in Florence. He made a brilliant attack on the present state of things in a loud, ringing voice, his eyes popping out of his head. He said he'd seen a TV programme the previous evening about the problem of how to feed the increasing populations of the world: it seemed there were great possibilities---millions of acres of land remain uncultivated on the earth---marshland, tropical bush, desert, the sea-bed---and at vast expense they could

be claimed for human use. Then he struck his hand on the table smartly---'We sit and watch this nonsense and outside---' he turned towards the window, with Altopasquale below---'there are thousands upon thousands of acres of our own land lying idle---perhaps the richest land in the world, basking under the richest climate---we have to go to tropical lands three thousand miles away to find our food! What idiocy! There's more than enough food for all of us outside in those fields! We sit watching these programmes while we squander the inheritance of centuries---the vines we inherited are going rotten, the olive trees are unpruned! And we call ourselves intelligent, we say we've advanced, we send our children to school to listen to this nonsense while the facts under their noses are withheld from them!'

He added that only Mussolini had dared to tackle the problem, thirty years before, and had foreseen what would happen. You hear this echoed by the peasants as well, whether they're communist or not. He knew 'how to treat the Italians', they are 'an un-disciplined people.'

The collapse of fascism struck down an energetic, intelligent, unpleasant class of men. You can see them sitting about the squares today---men with nearly distinguished faces, idle, malevolent, embittered, in the gracious Italian way: semi-intellectuals, semi-gentlemen; their world collapsed so suddenly. They would like to do violence to life perhaps---but they can't break free from their own timeless natures.

Reform is against the Italian genius. All attempts at it---like fascism---end in evil.

Fascism was the Italian taste for rhetoric translated into politics. All Italian life outside Rome is rhetorical: there

are no pleasures or enjoyments but those of rhetoric. This gives foreigners the mistaken impression that Italy is sentimental, because of her rhetorical pleasure in sentiment: she is the least sentimental country of Christendom.

Foreigners are the signori who bless places by their presence. They bless the hated countryside, the hated antique houses. Our presence in this valley has produced a rash of enquiries for land 'to build a villa on'. The enquiries are rhetorical. So would the villas be, if they were built. Their rooms would be showpieces.

Only Rome is unrhetorical. Rhetoric is provincial: the fear of vulgarity. This is why Gianni makes set speeches: he is flying above the basic vulgar chaos.

Rhetoric is so powerful that it may lead a man to eat what he dislikes and enjoy it more than what he likes. The peasants who live near the dentist of P--- talk about his riding before breakfast with a certain puzzlement; they say, 'Yes, he rides for amusement! It diverts him!' They can't really understand why he doesn't go by car. But if he put on a uniform, with shining black boots, and had a retinue of attendants, they would understand: it would be rhetorical, he would be making a fine figura.

4
IV.

Today I suddenly thought, 'Life is cascading down so fast that we can feel it worse every day. Will it come to a head soon? how will it burst?'

Each country will have its benevolent absolute ruler, perhaps, to get the mess cleared up before too late. Only single minds will be able to deal with the problems. Only they will be free of the collective publicity, by having to stand alone.

In England perhaps it will be through a prime minister rather

like the first there ever was, Walpole. Instead of a king to cajole and placate, he will have the press and the Commons. And instead of laissez-faire it will be faire ou mourir.

Today began bright and cold, with a thin mist veiling the land. Then there were the usual clouds, with the sun appearing now and then. Some of the clouds were black and fierce-looking. There was no growing heat as usual on an August day. The invigorating chill remained. Sometimes one feels it is a summer scirocco, because of the warm stillness; then it seems November. Now thunder is rumbling in the distance, and a storm seems to be drawing near.

There are roads to be built, the cities have to be cleared of traffic, the air has to be purified, agriculture has to be put on its feet, the insect- and animal-world has to be restored, doctors must be healers again and not functionaries dispensing drugs. Only this can forestall the great new plagues, the worst of which is cancer; its rate among children increases the further west you go.

A doctor needs as grave a vocation as a priest. The present-day doctor needs to be stripped of his title and called 'male nurse'; or else the real consultants should be professors, nevertheless. An approach to our enormous difficulties and pains can never be taught in a university course.

These things will promote nothing in themselves: they are only to ^{get} ~~free~~ us ^{out of} ~~from~~ a mess that ^{made} ~~brought~~ us ^{what we are} ~~into being~~---and that doesn't allow us to be any of the things it promised, including free. They can't be reforms, that is, to make a better world: but de-reforms, to open the door to intimacy again.

There are so few comedians today, they say: laughter and freedom go together!

A child should be educated up to the age of eleven or so, and should then be offered the chance of other work for a few years--- farming, sailing etc. A whole list of fascinating apprenticeships would await him. His health would benefit. Very few people are fit to be educated, in the general sense. Working and thinking ^{in solitude} ~~are~~ given to very few. In the years between eleven and eighteen the child learns all the worst habits, of posture---leaning over his desk in a stale atmosphere; and chronic masturbation. The only education a man needs, for general thought and general development, is reading and writing: and that can be done by the age of eleven. After that his requirements are health and leisure. The alternative to this is a vast army of semi-intellectuals all over the world, who have been taught that their thoughts are valuable, whereas this is not the case. This will pull all learning and thought and certainly all art down, finally: education will be the means of putting an end to our civilisation.

After the age of eleven a child is beginning to learn about the world, his senses are eager, he is seeing something objective outside him. And stuffed into a room every day this is thwarted and starved. This is why 'educated' people invariably seem more remote from life than others, and why they have to find the key to health slowly and painfully, because of those lost years, when their passions were turned inwards.

But a child should be free to choose the stuffy room if he wants it. It would be one of the apprenticeships.

J The padrone of the house up the hill told me that ^{to his mind} ~~he thought~~ the peasants were much freer than ~~the~~ workers; ~~in fact~~ they could take a rest when they felt like it, choose the particular work they wanted to do each day, within the limits of the season; they could take a day or so off if they felt ill, and make up for it with extra work; they ^cwould go to the fields a little earlier or a little later than usual; there was no one to stand over them---you simply couldn't supervise work in the fields as you could factory-work. There could never be a set schedule in the countryside. He said that the common people never really struggled for freedom but ^{only} for the dreams ^{that} people higher-up concocted for them. The peasants were in an excellent position at the moment to drive hard bargains: they could win whatever freedom they wanted on the land, but they chose the ready-made life of the towns. In fact, they were incapable of changing themselves.

Luciano brought the yeast over for our bread last night and told us that the agreement for him to move into this house in January was already fixed. All the produce of the land he's renting will be his. Our padrona will get the tiny sum of fifty thousand lire a year from him, about thirty pounds---for a podere of three or four hectares. He also told us that his brother will be leaving the land for good---he'll be a builder's mate, earning three thousand lire a day instead of ^etwo thousand he would get as a labourer on daily hire. He himself would do that, Luciano said, but he was too old to change. (They don't seem to realise what enormous knowledge they have, about the crops; they consider it nothing---they think that I undoubtedly know as much as they do, that it's common knowledge, how to till the rows for vines, prune the olives, beat the bean-pods when they're dry with flays,

^o sew the maize; tend the cattle at night when they give birth, feed the hundreds of geese and ducks and chickens, transfer the first wine to vats and squeeze the juice of dry, sweet grapes into it).

We then had a chat about food, in the darkness of the courtyard. He said he himself would put three or four of the people who adulterated food 'up against the wall' (a favourite image of Luciano's, but he's the mildest man on earth)---then we'd see if food-adulteration continued! Most of the manufacturers laughed at the fines imposed, he said. Their profits were such that they could afford a periodical loss of a few hundred thousand. At one time, he said, he used to buy his wine in town, but then he'd begun to wonder why he always felt bad: he had cramps in his stomach, and these stopped soon after he began to drink his own produce. He still wondered if that wine was what had given him his kidney-trouble.

That same evening we saw the art-restorer and his wife, and again the talk was about food. They told us they were obliged to eat in restaurants most of the time, because church-restoration took them all over Tuscany. They described some of the meals they'd had with horror: they'd tried to cook a cheese-dish one day and the cheese had formed a sort of liquid rubber when heated, and had been impossible to eat. Before the war, they said, grated cheese had been a pleasant addition to minestrone, but now the stuff stuck to your spoon like plastic and congealed horribly. What this was doing to children, whose organs had to form, God alone knew!

They called this process of food-manufacture and adulteration part of 'Americanisation'. Like many people brought up under fascism or nazism, which created a wall of ignorance round the ^{two} countries, they believe that America brought modernity to Europe after the last war. They don't know that the process had already

started in England in the Thirties, as an inevitable climax of industrialism.

The first Sunday of September: the 'hunting' season is on us. All day there have been motor-cycles and cars outside the house. At dawn the woods began to reverberate with thuds and thumps, from various sizes of cartridge. And at about noon they began to retire, with hares, pheasants and rabbits hanging from their belts. Sergio's brother caught a hare soon after dawn: the first day of the season is the best---the animals aren't expecting you. He described how a dog follows the pheasant's scent: the pheasant believes she is being followed by the eye, and thinks it enough to wriggle under leaves and bracken, and lie there quietly. But the dog stands stock-still, close to where she lies, waiting for the hunter's signal to leap forward; the pheasant flies up in panic and you shoot.

The season really began last night at ^{eleven}~~even~~ o'clock. Just after we got to bed a motor-cycle stopped outside the courtyard and we heard a hunter plod slowly past our bedroom window in his rubber boots. And a few minutes later we heard a shot ring out at the edge of the woods, followed by another. There was bright moonlight. This is forbidden---any shooting at night: you may shoot ^{after} sunrise and before sunfall. The penalty is the loss of your licence or even imprisonment. The road was being patrolled by keepers at the time. We wondered about this wild, lonely hunter, bent on his quarry in the moonlight. Drunk, perhaps. All evening there had been the atmosphere of zero-hour: in the village there were groups of rubber-booted warriors, and youths were polishing their guns. There was a lot of talk about the carnage to take place the next day---hands being rubbed, conniving

smiles. All false; and mean, underneath. Another little bit of rhetoric. Gianni, if we catch a hare in our headlights, shouts at once, 'Drive fast! Fast! Kill it!' An animal means by definition that which is to be killed. Except dogs, which are necessary for the killing.

Don Amigo, our priest, brought along two ordinands from the English College in Rome. We sat on the terrace drinking tea and talking half in English and half in Italian. Don Amigo cautiously left his tea---he wasn't used to it, he said; Protestantism, tea and wholemeal bread are a strange and violent world for him. We all laughed at the gingerly way he pushed the cup aside. At noon he stood us up and said the angelus, reading from his prayer-book. I noticed how much freer the English were. They really seem the children of Protestantism, compared with him. They joke about some of the saints, with mild impatience, and actually seem to be thinking about their religion. Don Amigo seems never to have thought in his life, only to have accepted and followed. You can see that their consciences are alive.


There was Protestantism in St. Paul already, transmitted from Christ: 'Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage' (St. Paul to the Galatians). But it didn't make us free. Something went wrong.

Before the fifteenth-century Humanists only a very few

people---these nearly all priests---had ideas and talked about them. We have so little sense of our history that we lose sight of the slow materialisation of Christian doctrine that has come about since the end of the Roman empire. Everyone of us is a talker now.

The Humanists looked back to ancient Greece and Rome because these civilisations had concentrated everything on what men did: they were two marvellous exercises in prowess, as if men had been alone in the universe then, not overshadowed by God. The Humanists were believers in 'poetry', which meant at that time what we would call letters or scholarship. And Greece and Rome were the models for this: every scholar produced his imitations, a custom that went on far into the eighteenth century, all over Europe. But it was always in the context of achieving a better Christianity. It was never an interest in the ancient civilisation as an end in itself.

Inevitably, this humanism led to reform. Christ seemed to have offered exactly that freedom---to choose and make your own life. Humanism and trade and flourishing towns and travel came about together. It was a terrific Christian upheaval, mostly in Italy, and not pagan at all. It was this that produced the slow revolt in the Church culminating in the Reformation, after two centuries of discussion.

But behind it all---hidden but never defeated by the example of Greece and Rome---was the story of Adam's fall. 

And it connected, fatally, with the new prowess men were trying to learn. For Adam had fallen because of something he did. And it was only one short step to saying that men had again to do something, or undo what they'd done, to get back into God's grace.

The climax of moral self-torture (the anguish of past crimes and good resolutions for the future) was reached in the eighteenth century, when it had infected the thinkers and even the leisured classes. Dr. Johnson argued that the present was never a happy state for any human being; asked if a man wasn't sometimes happy in the present moment he said, 'Never, but when he is drunk.' They were talking about Pope's 'melancholy' line, 'Man never is, but always to be blest.' Johnson tortured himself with resolutions, and his failure to achieve them. 'Hell is paved with good intentions' was his phrase.

I thought of Rome again. Time doesn't haunt Rome. This is why she is called eternal, not because of her span of years. It's a feeling. There isn't the itch of men's time. This is the Rome that survives every invasion, from that of the mercenary troops under Charles V to that of six hundred thousand cars. Rome is a feeling that has always evaded reform. It has never put any hope in men's time: that is, in the possibility that by doing something, by behaviour, you change the world.

I itals)
Is this how she survived? She didn't invade, menace, plunder, out of moral justification: she did it because she wanted the land or the money or the strategic position. She plundered little; she quietly took the fruits. She has always, since the conversion, been intimate. She has always been a consumer, never a producer. A producer's exploits would have

been more dangerous and less effective.

I remember a phrase I read once, that there is nobody crueller and less relenting than the man who believes he's morally justified.

They always do think it morally justified---the nazis in their camps, the mass-bombers, the planners of Hiroshima...

But no power can be. It always comes from a hot desire for domination, from interest: that is, it can't be brought up to the level of religion, and only Christianity has attempted it. Power is an agreement between men, and it impresses only men. The timeless isn't involved. Power is never spiritual.

Thomas More's ambiguity---causing a puzzlement that has followed him down the centuries---was that he tried to administer power morally, as a judge. There was something stained in his whole position. He tried to administer Christ, so to speak, not just the law: he didn't leave it to the timeless, except at the end of his life, when he no longer argued or tried to persuade.

This moral use of power---administering life as if you were God---is what we call ~~the~~ Reform. It bears its own cancer. No reform produces happiness.

This is why the great men of Reform---More, Erasmus, Luther--- had to withdraw from what they had^d provoked. It is why Henry VIII looked hopefully to More as a Reformer and ended by beheading him. Henry VIII was the first to use moral power on a grand scale. The result was a bitter and murderous carnage. He destroyed everything beautiful in England, helped by his chancellor Cromwell. Another Cromwell took it a stage further a century later and desecrated

what little had been left in the churches.

Yet each violent step brought the doctrine 'be not entangled in the yoke of bondage' nearer to fulfilment. But it involved a sort of mass-suicide: a man who uses power morally (that is, coolly---to teach a lesson, to change other people) does this--- he commits a sort of suicide. His intimacy suffers every time. Our cities are like vast factories geared to ideas we no longer understand: we yearn for a little intimacy again; there are so many monuments!

After two bright, sparkling days---the first two of September--- the weather collapsed again and there was heavy rain, with black clouds and alternate stuffy heat and freshness. During those bright days I could feel the other weather coming, in a peculiar nervous expectation, like an electrical throbbing in my body; when the first massive clouds came the air seemed to go stock-still, the pressure was enormous, with sudden shafts of burning and blinding sunlight. There was a brief storm, ^{and} then the light rain you get in the mountains, during the autumn of early spring, making a light, mournful dripping from the leaves, and a mist that drifts through the branches.

Yet the heat hasn't gone, for all the rain. We decided to go to the sea this morning but turned back before Volterra. There were low, misty clouds across the whole barren range of salt-hills east of the town. We found a tiny lake far below the road, with a vast hill sticking up at its side like an ant-heap. We sheltered from the rain in a peasant-house and the owner pointed out all the abandoned houses round about: there was a palazzo surrounded by cypresses on the other side of the valley--- all abandoned, together with its tenant-houses. He said that of about three hundred peasants who used to live in the area,

fewer than thirty remained. At one time the podere up the road had forty or fifty head of cattle, but now there was hardly more than ~~three~~: yet the demand for meat was going up all the time etc. etc. He himself worked his own land---conto diretto: but there was little to be made out of it; provided with tractors, mechanical copper-sulphate sprays and pumps he would make a fine living, and work less.

Suddenly, in the middle of the night, a fierce wind started up---again the doors and windows slammed, and there was a booming noise down the chimney. It was quite dark---three or four o'clock, perhaps. After twenty minutes or so it stopped as suddenly as it started, and the night was still and warm again, with heavy clouds. We are wondering if there was a kind of tornado on the coast again.

Somebody has said it! 'This weather is due to a twenty-year cycle.' Last year it was an eleven-year cycle, the year before that a fifteen-year cycle: torrential rains in the summer, floods, tornadoes, abnormal cold, something strange nearly every year since the war... People will do anything not to pierce the publicity and find out what's going on. Of course, they might find out that nothing is going on, but ~~how~~ do they know? Have they had a guarantee? Have we a guarantee that our bodies aren't being influenced invisibly, that not only the immediate weather but the earth is being wrecked, perhaps for generations, and our children maimed in a way we don't yet understand? Who can give us a definite no to these things? They tell us now that the atomic experiments were harmful to the earth, the air, our bodies, because their interests no longer required ~~the~~ experiments. Yet for years they denied it. The scientists---the highly-paid accomplices---
~~were~~ ^{are} silent about it. We can keep our fingers crossed. Millions

of people all over the world must---hope for the best! And we choose our own lives? We no more choose our own lives than the darkest slaves of Roman times!

But we're choosing something: we're choosing for people in the future.

Again, it's all morally justified! The men who authorise the experiments and the men who arrange them are all very moral people! There are two arguments: first, you see, if we weren't doing these things there might be a war, it creates---it creates--- a balance of power, you see! and, secondly, all these researches are simultaneously going into peaceful and civic uses ~~as well~~.

So if you are poisoning all future life on this earth, and your own child's body, well, there's a reason for it...

We got a load of gunshot in the window today but luckily the shutters were closed. I rushed to the window and shouted down various curses---'Vagabondi! che fanno? vuoi ammazzarci?' etc. etc. Then I realised they couldn't hear a thing I was saying because they were sitting on motor-cycles and their engines were running. There were three of them. I dashed down to the road and pinned on to one, a pale, surly-looking chap. 'Did you fire just then?' I asked him. 'Fire? Fire?' He looked as if he didn't know what a gun was. The other two looked more homely and I turned to them: 'Did you fire?' Yes, they had fired, and---madonna la troia!---the bird had got away; they were looking for it; they knew it was wounded, but it had limped away. And they kicked through the bushes, even to ^{within} a foot of our bedroom window. I realised he---the youngest of them, with his firepiece still smoking---needed actually ^{to be told,} in so many words: 'Do you realise,' I asked him, 'that you just now fired into our bedroom window?' 'What?' He gaped, his eyes still blazing from the

chase. Since I hadn't talked about birds he couldn't understand me at once. Then he came to. 'Impossible!' he cried. 'I fired--- I fired there!'---and he pointed straight into our bedroom window. 'Exactly,' I said. 'You fired at a bird but the bird wasn't there, and you overlooked the fact that shot doesn't stop because it finds nothing, it travels on until it does. And in this case it found our window. It made a hole this big,' I added, lying unto my back teeth, and making a hole the size of a potato with my fingers. 'Impossible!' the older homely man cried. 'It must have been something else. A simultaneous explosion!' 'The law of probability is against you there,' I said, settling down and losing interest. The grubbing among the bushes had started again. ~~and they didn't seem to know about the law of probability.~~ 'So you've taken this house, have you?' the older homely man went on. 'I've seen you in town.' 'Yes, we've taken it for the summer.' 'And are you comfortable?' 'Oh, yes,' I said with a smile, 'Until a load of shot comes through the window, then it gets a bit hot.' 'But look---' he said, taking a cartridge out of his belt, 'how could all those tiny little ball-bearings hurt anybody?' 'Well, they come at quite a speed.' 'I know, but they could never make a hole in a window!' 'No,' the young man went on, 'I can't find it. How the devil it got away I can't think! I know I wounded it! Madonna cane!' You could see from his eyes that he ^{would} fire at anything, ^{including his own feet.} But he calmed down. They turned their cycles round and then with a cheerful good-evening ~~to me~~ drove off.

The hunting makes the woods seem gloomy and barbaric, especially in this weather. There is a particular clowning trio who come at dawn and call out to each other dramatically through the trees as if they were drowning, while their dogs yap and squeal. When they bag something one of ^{these} ~~the~~ clowns makes a sort of high-pitched croon-

ing noise as if Harle^qquin had hit him over the head with a rubber truncheon. You expect mechanical tears to pour out of his eyes. 'Woo-hoo-ooo-oo-hoo-hoo!' he goes.

Gianni came back on Sunday looking exhausted and pale after a week on the road. I asked him to return in the evening---'Come and tell us some little stories---about what you saw, especially in Sicily, the people you met.' He looked puzzled by this, but he came dutifully. And at once he plunged into a set recital that lasted an hour. Did he get enough exercise? Wasn't it awful leaning over a wheel so many hours together? No, no! He got enough exercise, unloading and then reloading the truck every few hundred kilometres. And then there were the stops. Three or four minutes ~~after that~~ ^{later} he said that one of the troubles was, you didn't get enough exercise; you were leaning over the wheel all the time... 'I want to eat like you do---healthily! All that filth they serve in these restaurants, especially the meat---more disgusting the further south you go! You wonder if it's not a dog or cat sometimes! The body gets nothing natural nowadays. One of our drivers can't work any more---he's gone down with stomach trouble, his nerves are wrecked!' You could see the difference between a truck-driver and a peasant, he went on---just by looking at their faces. He then made a speech about youth. 'Youth today isn't satisfied with a piece of bread and a bar of chocolate on it as a treat, like it was at one time! We aren't so easily satisfied, not like our mothers and fathers!'

J ✓
I asked him, supposing the government made a good deal for the land and increased daily-hire earnings to, say, three thousand lire, would he come back to the land? Yes, yes! He'd return gladly if he could make a decent living---be as good as the factory-

worker. The land would then represent a future for him, not something ^{to fall} ~~he fell~~ back on when his luck was down.

J I described the wonderful farms in Germany ~~to him~~, with their huge elm trees, the horses and tall wooden houses, the sense you got there, not only in the south, in Bavaria, but close to Hamburg as well, of a great thriving land-tradition; there were families, I said, of ten or eleven children, and the young were still working on the land, because it was a solid and even rich life. 'Ah, yes!' he said. 'In Russia, too! The peasants get a good deal there, too!' Russia means the happy land of peasant-owners, in Italy: Sergio's father has Stalin's picture on the wall of his bedroom; it balances the madonnina over the bed---the male dream that the Church has failed to provide...

The work seems to have coarsened Gianni. I wonder what he'll be like in ten years' time. I see him looking back on these times with the Italian wistfulness---'Ah, do you remember when we went to Rome? The blonde in front of that telescope! Che tempi, eh? Ragazzi!'

Some minutes after he'd left us we walked up the hill with the dog, for a breath of air before bed. The dog barked suddenly at a turn in the path and I saw a figure standing in the field just above our house, only a few feet from where we were walking. I noticed that the figure was ~~wearing~~ wearing bright fawn trousers. And the dog walked on, apparently not alarmed at all. Then I saw the figure walking thirty or so yards behind us, now that we'd passed on. We turned back at the brow of the hill as usual and ^{began} ~~began~~ to walk down again: and in the moonlight I saw him leap off the path to avoid us, into the darkness of the woods, clearly waiting for us to pass him. The dog sniffed in his direction as we passed but didn't bark. Then when we were gone

the figure jumped back on to the path and hurried up the hill. I was sure it was Gianni. That would account for the dog not barking. And it was his same walk; and he'd been wearing fawn trousers.

Perhaps he'd been squatting in the field, and pudore made him avoid us. But there is always this mystery, in Italy: I mean a mystery between people. Everyone is a stranger and alone in himself: even with his mother, his wife, this is true. But he isn't separate by introversion. It simply is the truth about life. There, as in so much else, he is sound and natural.

The weather is ^suddenly cold, and the rain pours down steadily, with low, grey skies and drifting mists. We need winter clothes, though this is only the first week in September. Tuscany looks gloomy and barren as I've never seen her before. But in an hour's time it could be hot: you can't tell from the state of the sky any more. A still, clear night can cloud over within a few minutes and a storm suddenly rise.

There are supposed to have been floods in Trieste, and snow in the Alto-Adige.

Italy gives way completely to the weather: interiors are bare, waiting for the sun to fill them. Sunlight is part of the Italian character, necessary like water. In the rain, everything waits--- the trees, the houses and people. It is dark and still all day, with the ^slow rain. But people are mildly excited, too, by the abnormality. At the market yesterday evening there was an atmosphere of ^{rity.}hilarity. The rain brings intimacy, and no work. The hired workers like Sergio stay at home, and aren't paid. That brings a holiday feeling. He told me yesterday that last winter, because of the endless rain and cold, everybody ran up bills at the shops:

they 'planted nails', as the Italian says---piantavano chiodi!
Some, he added with his honest, rather wistful smile, were good
enough to honour their bills when they were earning again, others---
took their custom to other shops...

Alberto came down yesterday wrapped in a brown overcoat, with
water dripping from his nose, and asked if we could take his mother
into town. We said yes, we'd wait for her. But the rain began
pouring down in a fantastic avalanche, and she didn't come. He
told us that Gianni was in Sardinia, with another load of furniture.
He probably meant Sicily. It was better this way, he said---with
Gianni earning enough to pay for his cigarettes and a suit of clothes
now and then. Who else could buy these things for him? He,
Alberto, worked the land, but this could never provide money to
'put aside'. (This is what money is for the peasant---something
to be put aside, not a basic, much less ^a terrible, necessity; this
is why he can blue ^{it} with more ease than others).

A concert in Florence---mediaeval and Renaissance music, on
the original instruments: flutes, cymbals, viola da gamba, lutes,
cast^aanets, hand-drums. Quiet, subtle music---fingers lightly
and delicately tapped. It was like returning to real music---
its first quality, at the edge of silence. Music should open
the outer silence to us, which we never hear in the day. It
should take us beyond men's time.

✓ The music we're used to, ~~which is~~ largely German music,
doesn't ~~seem to~~ do that---quite. It opens up a construction
for us: ~~it might be~~, a man's stupendous construction, set in
the middle of the vast ^{ness} ~~silence~~ outside; an orderly and basically
certain world which the Germans create wherever they go---which
they ~~seem to~~ need and must at all costs make, ~~even~~ ^{their} out of chaos.

You find it in their thinkers: great systems, constructions---
Kant's was perfectly rounded off, as unlike ^{Locke} ~~Hume~~ or any other
English philosopher as he could be; it is why the German universities
have despised English philosophers, for their apparent untidiness,
and have argued that only one of them was worth reading, and that
because Kant exploded him (Hume).

In music Brahms made a struggle away from this, and achieved
his freedom better than anybody else after Beethoven. Therefore
when he is played like Beethoven (that is, as the dramatic unfold-
ing of a theme) he is meaningless, and we cannot see how his instr-
umental work connects with his symphonic. Haydn, Mozart, Schubert---
the Austrians---always left something open: in all of them the
marvellous outer silence is suddenly heard, without it making us
feel, as we do in most of the renderings of Beethoven (perhaps in
Beethoven himself) that it has been prepared for with tremendous
lonely gravity, like a legend told at night, leading to something
far beyond us. Furtwängler's great touch with Beethoven was
perhaps due to his unfolding him like an awful legend, in breathless
dramatic steps. But Schubert defies the same treatment (which
Furtwängler was careful not to give him): man's time has to be
forgotten in Schubert, development and progress have to be put
aside. When Schubert's Great Symphony is played for development
it is a hopeless, rushed mess: not only that, but vulgar and
repetitive. This is why Schubert was despised in his day (by
the German taste), and still is secretly. The same is true of
Mozart: but the Germans have hoisted him up as a monument and
spiritualised him, as they must everything they respect. He is
much closer to the Italians ~~than that~~---to the early music that
was written for great yet intimate (that is to say, aristocratic)
occasions. But the great occasion in Germany can never be intimate:

it is always formal, and basically rhetorical, a show of power.

Perhaps the most important thing to know about Germany is that Humanism with its bright and free and intimate discussion, in which men laid their minds bare to each other, had no place there. The great formative origin of society in Italy, France and England was lacking.

In the German tradition Mozart is stripped of intimacy, and becomes as cool and ordered as mountain-tops. Even Beethoven---supposed to be the protagonist of this tradition (the bombshell that ended music)---is damaged by it, and turned into a rigid system. In fact, you hear the same struggle in his work as you do in Brahms's---to break free of system: the imprisoning system for him was Haydn, while he himself was the imprisoning system for Brahms; a system wasn't there in either case. In Beethoven, you hear the signs of this struggle in sudden changes and alarms, a harsh note, silence. The end of the Ninth symphony is nearly chaos: because a flight from system.

Beethoven's struggle was harder than Schubert's because his natural form was less than Schubert's. Musical form---the quartet, sonata, symphony---was always a harrassment for Schubert: a means leading to his perfectly natural and easy form, that seemed to capture silence itself (quintet in C Major, the ^{second trio} ~~third and fourth~~ _{in E flat major} ~~movements of the Trout~~), and to defy written form but never to break it as the end of the Ninth does. For the German taste Schubert was always lacking 'technically', for this reason. Real form is always apparently lacking in 'technique'.

In none of the Austrians do you have a struggle for form. They are all close to the Italians, and derived from them consciously. Between the operatic style of Mozart and that of Cimerosa there are obvious similarities. We overlook this because of

the massive German tradition that hides the scene. Haydn's real nature---soft and cheerful and daring---seems squashed under a supposedly Exquisite and Lofty Mozart, a Gothic Bach, and a Great (heroic) Beethoven. The result is the falsification of the Austrian tradition entirely, and the subordination of Schubert and Mozart to a system that neither of them could possibly have worried about.

In fact, the German tradition fades into air if you touch it: Beethoven, taken as the authentic German master, kept his hard-won sanity (form) by living and learning and suffering in Vienna. Bach, an alternative basis to the German taste, was first and foremost a Christian, and a clear exponent of Italian style. There were then Schumann and Brahms, but Schumann went mad and Brahms won through in the same way as Beethoven: he too knew Vienna, but above all his first tender model in music was Schubert (some of his early works could be Schubert's, at first hearing).

And the natural climax of the German taste is what we have in music today---abstraction. Its herald was what might be called the baroque abstraction of Wagner: then you have the mathematical or atonal music (Schoenberg based his studies on Wagner).

Those quite mediaeval phrases---almost silence: almost a kiss, a glance... We have so little intimacy---how can we have a music?

It looks as if we won't be returning to Castel Vecchio after

all, to see those ruins. First, our priest told us that there were vipers. That was during the warm weather. And now the hunting season has started---danger of getting your head shot off. Also we heard that there aren't Etruscan tombs there, only the ruins of a mediaeval castle which one can see just as well from the surrounding hills. Next year perhaps---when the sun is bl[^]izing again---if it ever blazes in Italy again---we shall go there and see for ourselves: a confirmation of something, a dream.

Both Sergio and Gianni have the slightest of smiles when their faces are in repose: it is fixed in their mouths. Here is the Etruscan smile---as Sergio's bright optimism, a sort of lithely contained joy, and Gianni's gaiety and quickness of imagination, are Etruscan, too. You could find nothing like either of them among the Romans, whose Etruscan root went into empire.

We call our pig Giacomo. He lives most of the day in darkness, just able to turn round. Gigi lets him out to roam

~~We call our pig Giacomo. He lives most of the day in darkness, just able to turn round. Gigi lets him out to roam in the field below the road for perhaps an hour. At the end of this eventful life, in four or five months' time, he will have his throat cut and be bled to death.~~

Some snatches of quite strong sunlight today: but there is none of the usual calm of September. The air is weak and damp. Mist drifts across the hills north of Siena. I walked down into the vineyard this morning and the grapes are still far behind. They should be a deep, dark colour now, and the white ones should be yellow and plump, but they are all still pale; if there is really strong sunlight for the rest of September some wine might come out of it, of about ten degrees alcohol, but otherwise it will be hopeless. Sergio has found us some wine of thirteen and a half degrees which we can store for two or three years. On the whole the peasants don't like matured wine. They say it's too 'sweet', too heavy. They like the young wine which is still vivacious and sparkling.

Gianni appeared briefly again, with a brand-new wristwatch. He has been to Calabria. He already talks about the 'old' days when we joked together, as if they were deep in the past. He looked matter-of-fact; made no speeches. To keep himself awake for night-driving he'd drunk seventeen coffees the previous day, he said. But as much of the coffee is barley, orzo, its stimulating effect is small. Their grain at home was already threshed, he told us, and we'd missed their harvest supper. 'But it wouldn't have been any good without me!' he added gayly.

The weather seems to be settling into winter, although it is only the second week in September; we're already in winter clothes. A certain grim nullity begins to settle into people,

as if what charm they have, which is really very little, is going into hibernation. Only Sergio keeps his bright smile. His whole face is a smile, always, not just his mouth. He is one of those few creatures who were made for their work, and for whom work was made.

Today Giacomo was so happy to be let out of his dungeon that he ran full tilt along the road outside and Gigi had to chase after him. He then did the same across the field. He has a witty turn of mind. The other day he ran into the cattle-house to inspect it, and when Gigi chased him out he climbed up the steps to our entrance, sniffing everything gladly; he got a kick ~~in~~ the side of the face for that, which made him squeal. Gigi says he won't let him out again. He makes too much 'fuss'; so he must spend the rest of his life in darkness, with just room to move round in. He can hardly support himself on his back legs as it is, through over-feeding and over-confinement.

Went to Certaldo for an exhibition of altar-pictures and crucifixes from all over Tuscany. I was surprised by Filippo Lippi's blonde Madonna and child, so remote-looking, quite German. A world of difference from the rapt dark face of the Byzantine and mediaeval panels. She has slightly wispy hair and an open, clear gaze. Like the clear light of Greece pouring on to Christianity: the Renaissance.

But the look only lasted a moment. Then, ~~the affair was closed~~ ^{after that} the Counter-Reformation: ~~everything~~ ^{becomes dark,} ~~in a terrible way,~~ ^{This} suffocating and mediocre. ~~That~~ was in the exhibition, too: heroic themes, with ridiculous heavy bodies, posturing and going through the motions of divinity; very Spanish in flavour. Spain was the scourge that went through

Italy: her Inquisition, with a mediaeval vengeance (for Humanism never got to Spain), put the brilliant Italian imagination under a terror the effects of which aren't ended yet.

Like Filippo Lippi's glimpse of the light, Erasmus's expectation of a new age only lasted a moment: for Luther broke on the world.

The first Erasmus heard from Luther was a reminder (Luther was then an unknown friar) that he paid too little attention to original sin; and should read St. Augustine. People usually say that Luther's propositions against indulgences, posted up in 1517, were the first act of the Reformation, but in fact they brought it down in ruins.

Humanism was the real Reformation, and it had existed for two centuries or more. Reform of the Church had been its endless theme, and its hope. It brought the printing press into being, so that scholars could read several copies of a letter, instead of circulating it slowly from hand to hand: these gradually became what we call books.

And Luther's influence spread chiefly through this press. The Germans only had to embrace Erasmus, and admire him as the first reformer of Europe, to bring not only him but all humanism down in ruins. The condemnation of Luther at Louvain university in 1519 meant that Erasmus, who was teaching there, had to go; he, too, was by inference a 'reformer'. He sooner or later had to declare for or against Luther, and he recoiled from Luther's violence. It forced him eventually to declare against.

Answering Erasmus's treatise on free will, Luther wrote in a pamphlet that God had always hated men, even before He created them. He was thus much closer to strict Church doctrine

than Erasmus, who (like Christ) had little to say about original sin. And Erasmus's reformation was deeper and more drastic and more revolutionary than Luther's by its arguing that men were free and good.

Luther wasn't a lonely martyr. He always had the support of power---that of the princes who expected big gains from the confiscation of Church property, and that of the people who hoped for a respite from the unthinkable brutality of their owners. When he was called before the Diet of Worms in 1521 he was cheered to the doors by great crowds, and he came out as free as he went in. The emperor Charles V was unwilling to provoke religious trouble in the German provinces by opposing him. The pope and his council at Rome were listless and passive, and seemed not to know what to do; after all, reform had been talked of before, for two centuries; no one expected a division of the Church to come out of it. And Luther felt strong enough when he got the papal bull condemning his works to burn it in the market place at Wittenberg.

Luther's ardour was thoroughly German---it grew violent in its first stages by the blank refusal of interest all round it, and violent in its later stages by the brute power it had provoked.

He had none of the Italian Renaissance in him, no humanism, though the Humanists were the first to acclaim him. He belonged to the middle ages, though to the 'heresies' of the middle ages. He was indignant towards the weak and ineffectual papacy, and docile towards the princes when the time came for them to crush the peasants mercilessly after their revolt: though the revolt was a direct result of Lutheran doctrine. It was a thoroughly German story, as we have come to know it since---a 'revolt' that

began with the grievances of the people and ended with the consolidation of a power more terrible than any before: with the leader condoning the bloodshed of his own followers, whose bravery he had provoked.

Humanism and Italy were brought down in a sudden and ghastly end. There was panic in the Church. The Humanists were blamed. The study of Greece and Rome was blamed. Intelligence was blamed. And by putting himself under the protection of the princes Luther consolidated serfdom in Germany at a time when it was dead everywhere else in Europe. When serfdom came to a complete end in Germany, Englishmen and Frenchmen had already been free six hundred years.

Above all, he produced the Germany we know today, where the status quo consists of a more or less unchallenged power on the one hand and a docile people on the other, mitigated by sudden terrifying revolutions. It remains the country where a man with power can do what the devil he likes---if he keeps out of sight of that child of Humanism, the press.

The Reformation was carried out in England and Germany by authority, and in both cases on behalf of a small group of powerful men. If the butt of your attack is power and not falsehood, you have to replace it with different power, not truth. Thus, the Reformation started by attacking Church-magnates and ended by establishing lay ones.

The people in both countries has^d as little to do with it as the people ever do with revolutions, especially the ones in their name. But in this case it involved their most intimate affiliations. Few knew the questions involved. Almost no one had ever thought of leaving the Church, that is, disrupting life

at the base. Even Henry VIII never meant to leave the Church: it happened step by step, almost by accident.

Erasmus had warned Luther that his violence would disrupt the globe.

caps) Does the curious sicherheit you sometimes find in the German---his downright and undoubting mode of speech, which is quite unadapted for discussion---come from that first Reformer who argued that he was an instrument of God's will? And Erasmus's answer to this was something like, 'I'm a man. How can I know about God's will?'

As another terrible dream---mystically inspired---nazism---turned us into destroyers (the destroyers of all forms of life on the planet), so the Reformation turned the Church into a destroyer.

In a way, Rome became Luther. It shook with self-disgust, under his moral lances. The bright and simple impulses of the Renaissance were suddenly dark. The baroque that came later on was like men celebrating marvellous memories, which were doomed because they were only memories: you got the florid and sentimental.

Erasmus saw men leaving their Reformed mass with faces full of moral anger and violence. Strange to see---coming out of a church! He noticed that there were no fewer drunkards, rich men or fornicators among the Reformed. Then what had been reformed?

Again, there is no one crueller than the man who acts out of virtue. Remember the classical beginning of the virtuous letter you receive at least once in life: 'It hurts me to write this but...'

Luther forced the Church to rest its power squarely on guilt. Guilt isn't simply remorse, which had always existed in the Church, and is a natural human emotion. Guilt is the claiming of a moral destiny. 'I am guilty' implies the same claim as 'I am free from all stain'. Guilt in its proper and original sense meant simply 'having committed a crime' but it has come, through the Reformed doctrine of original sin, to mean 'the destiny to commit crimes', a darkness that lies over the soul permanently, bowing it in a kind of paralysis.

Guilt and freedom were of course incompatible: this is how Luther was the cause of the persecution of the Humanists and bonae literae without intending it at all. Like many other Germans since, after some frightful private or social calamity, he woke up and asked, 'What have I done?' That question has been silently asked by so many German lips, with endearing simplicity, from childhood on, as if this people were sealed off in some strange way from mankind: 'Why did I do it? What have I done?'; as if no power lay in them, but at best a destiny beyond their control...

And destiny began to dominate their thoughts increasingly. Music became their destiny; when they had a few philosophers, these became their destiny to Deep Thought. And of course there were the frequent political destinies, and even, finally, a racial destiny.

Really, Germany came into being through Luther: before, she had simply been 'the German lands'; through him she discovered an identity separate from both the empire and the Church. It was the beginning of their national destiny.

The Germans were the authors of that fatal view of civilisation as a destiny slowly unfolding, a 'process' and therefore by inference a 'progress'. America since the last war has been

dominated by this to an extraordinary extent, just as the previous moral society in Victorian England was; the idea of a moral destiny rewarded by world-power was accepted by millions of Americans so deeply that they couldn't visualise others not sharing it; a sense of 'youth' and a quiet ethical superiority to other peoples went with this. Nazi Germany has^d been 'youthful' too, and its sense of ethical superiority had been uncurbed by human sympathies.

It is rare to find a German who can stand before the humble works of the middle ages or the early Renaissance and exchange his intimacy for that of the work: he is invariably in the presence of Art, or a Movement of art, or a School, or Beauty, or a destiny of some kind or another which makes the painter, in this single effort, slightly pathetic and irrelevant. To tell the truth, there are few Germans who can see anything in the literature of France or England except what can be falsified into a monument, like Shakespeare (who ~~was then~~^{has been} claimed as German). There is a rough and personal and intimate quality in our work, the fruit of the long discussions of humanism, which offends the usual canons of German taste, even now. It is why German editions of books, even first editions, are some of the finest in the world: they have none of the rough touch of those first letters of the Humanists, and they are in direct contrast to French books with their paper covers and uncut leaves, meant to be browsed over and marked and put in the pocket. Everything in the German canon must be turned into power, that is, a destiny 'higher' than the human creature.

German society was always a chaos, from the middle ages on. Whereas the English and French were born into a certain form---

into a society that had been moulded slowly by an aristocracy and united under a monarchy---the German was either a victim of or a possessor of power, with little to guide him except hard necessity and written law (though the written laws were in a chaos of contradiction, too).

Therefore the German's struggles were always towards achieving form; his successes were invariably on the lonely heroic level (Goethe, Beethoven), like his legends and dreams. And his blunders of judgement usually came from believing that the rest of the world was formless, too...

History became wrapped in destiny, through German clamour. They were the authors of an Italy that was no longer a brilliant people but Archaeology or a Movement of Art or a Museum. They were the authors of the ridiculous view of the Italian Renaissance as 'achieving harmony at last', the climax of a struggle that had been going on since the beginning of Christendom, though there is no evidence of this struggle. A century and a half ago they---including Goethe---came to Italy and didn't trouble to look at the Giotto's and Massaccio's and Piero della Francesca's; now these artists have been catalogued into the area of accepted German taste, but with the same exclusiveness as before. Whatever showed a sort of monumental power yielded itself readily to the German taste: the late Greek, the late Renaissance. And the poor Etruscans, the 'primitives' of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, were a little despised; they were 'naïf', they hadn't the full sophisticated stamp of power required. The Etruscan smile was momentary, fleeting, the image of an intimacy that lasts as long as a flower...

There is always this sense of a moving belt of time in the German taste, a destiny that governs every creature and every

event, so that our individual efforts are no more than tiny marks along the way, to be collected into one ideal. In no case is the creature himself a seat and authority of life. Basically, in his intimacy, he is gauche and ridiculous and pathetic like the peasant as he used to be considered in Germany, who if he was fool enough to show his intimacy showed his backside. The man who lays his heart bare to the German is invariably despised. He must go to him armed with power. This gives him the right to a voice. The human creature is basically vicious in the German psychology.

Religion in great parts of Germany became just a code of respectability as a result of Luther. It meant obedience to the princes. Christ became a word for tameness and mediocrity, and insipidly ethical living. Having been stripped of his religious impulse, the German tried again, in the barbarous chaos that was left him, to establish systems out of his head, as naturally as the Puritans, suffering from a similar sterilisation of powers but in a more ancient and formed society, created factories and mills to give a stamp of power and destiny to an earth that had been struck barren. England and France were practical, Germany visionary.

Flicked through the sayings of Christ in the four gospels and found no reference to the Fall, to original sin. Emphasis is all the time on forgiveness, 'ye are gods'.

We went to Lucca for the fiesta of the Santo Volto when

crucifixes and banners and even tall altar-pieces are brought from churches all over the town's province---from Pisa and Massa ^{Carrara} ~~Marritima~~ and Viareggio---to be drawn in procession. We arrived when the candles were already alight---hundreds upon hundreds of tiny tapers ^{framing} ~~framing~~ the windows and the porches and the arches and even the roof-tops, in a twinkling mass that made the town look like the most exquisite wedding-cake ever made. The traffic was barred, and waiting crowds with that special intimate ^h Luccese humour surged through the narrow streets. We parked the car on top of the massive wall that has preserved the town's intimacy for centuries, and will renew it when traffic is barred once and for all. The wonderful overladen shops and busy cafes glowed on either side; the town-theatre, a quiet, sedate, baroque building, looked like a miniature palace under its candlelight, standing alone behind a square that seemed made for cockaded soldiers to parade in. S. Michele had great flaming tapers behind its tiers of pillars and arches, so that it seemed to float and roll in flames with a strange and wild movement. We passed the little church of S. Frediano, so humped and modest, lying under one arc-lamp, neglected by the festa, and watching humbly and a little

gloweringly. The cafés were full. People were crowded at the windows and balconies. The baker-shops were selling ring-shaped sweet loaves with currants in them. On the square before the cathedral there were stalls for doughnuts and toys and sweets. The procession was forming up in different parts of the town. The night was clear and warm, and luckily we were in our summer clothes again. People were sweeping into the town from all the gates, hurrying. Then the ordinary lights went out. We stood in front of one of the doughnut stalls on a raised^{step}, with the hot smoke from ~~his~~^{the} fat in our faces, and the owner unscrewed the electric bulb over our heads. The procession began. There was the sound of a band. The hum of voices grew louder. The crowds surged. There were children in arms, old men, staring young women, boys close together, priests. And the first massive cross came slowly along, above people's heads, borne like a treasure, swaying slightly, high in the air, clasped in the arms of a single man, making him bend his knees with the effort, while two others stood close^{by} to relieve him every few yards. And this man made a strange slow dance with the cross in his arms, so that it turned in the air, seeming to bow and to leap slightly. Here you have the joy of religion. The Christ was black, jet-black, and shining, and they had draped a golden robe round his middle, with a tassel dangling down, so that he seemed to sway and dance in the air, with a strange ecstatic grief, clothed delicately and thoughtfully like a marvellous child. Then came banners and smaller crosses, and men in black cloaks with pointed hoods, and thick candles held high above, on sticks, followed by the first band. And again there was a massive crucifix, this time with sprays of gold leaf pouring out from its arms in great tinkling globes as it swayed along, like a shower of light in the darkness, swathing the patient

and broken Christ in colour. I've never seen anything where the sheer joy and victory of the crucifixion was showed so much, in such a fervent celebration. There you have the mediaeval--- that frenzy of worship that has nothing heady or false about it, but is simply wild joy, also delicate and compassionate and intimate, as the procession sweeps along and one raucous band follows the other, clashing and echoing in the night, and there are monks, priests, servers, men dressed as mediaeval soldiers with long hair that makes their faces look real and dark and virile as ours can never be under our ridiculous half-shaved scalps; and suddenly, as one of the last great crosses pass, swaying above its bearer like a tower, there is a burst of light and smoke and shattering noise from one of the roofs as the fireworks go up, making a silver blaze over the town like the eye of a great animal watching and flashing. And as each new cross passes people clap and cheer. The crowd is thick and hot. Bells ring out. There is the wildness of faith, with nothing pagan, nothing destructive or egotistic, but delicate and loud and joyful, with masses of sound and colour and light, the kind of worship that to its shame the Church put out, in safety-first.

Now that the rain has let up the hunters are out again at dawn, prowling round the house and calling to their dogs. There is little game left, after the first day's carnage: hardly a shot rings out. We recognised one of the noisiest of the dawn-marauders: the village-carpenter, a thin, pale, hungry fellow with a brusque manner; I got my desk ~~from~~ ^{from} him, for very little, but his sly glances made me feel I was paying a lot. At the top of the hill we saw a little gathering of hunters in their

usual gear, standing about like military commanders. They remind me of photographs of fascist officers from the last war, standing at the edge of woods before an attack. The wet weather produces a certain surliness in people: the other day we were standing in Altapasquale talking to one of the families, about eight of us in the road, and a hunter passed on a motorcycle, stopped by us and murmured with an unpleasantly abashed smile, 'The road is public, you know.' We smiled at him and said, 'There's room enough for you,' and he drove unsteadily on.

The other day, in the gloomy weather, I drove over one of our pigeons, coming into the courtyard. The tyre pinioned one of her wings down as she was trying to fly off, and drew her under it; presumably the mud had stopped her. Her mate flew quickly up, with an unusual rushing movement which I noticed inside the car without realising what I'd done. We got out and went upstairs, and only there, after a few minutes, when I happened to look out of the window casually, did I see the pigeon sunk into the mud, almost flat. The male was in ^{the} ~~his~~ nest and I could see his rear feathers moving as he sat nervously over the young. I went down and scooped the creature up in a newspaper, for Gigi to see. There wasn't a scratch on her body---I realised by her darker markings that she was the female. I climbed up to the nest and found the two tiny, featherless squabs, sitting huddled together. I wasn't sure that the male would continue to look after them. I would get him another female, but only after these young were reared; he would desert them ^{if mated again too soon.} ~~for a female, find another home.~~

All the following morning he didn't appear. Gigi said that almost certainly he was out finding food. And later I found him sitting placidly in the nest with the squabs under him. He didn't stir when I looked in.

It made me feel gloomy and restless for two days. Sometimes he approaches the female of the other couple and the male walks firmly across his path, puffing his breast.

Sergio took me to the local wine-factory. In the entrance there were hundreds of fiaschi of red and white wine, lined up like painted soldiers. Further inside there were girls standing at a moving belt, looking tired and bored, with pale faces. It was towards the end of the day. A printed schedule on the wall gave closing-time as six o'clock, but it was nearly seven: the employer can exact longer hours---'Let's just finish these bottles so that we can get them off'---because he can get more labour where these came from. The girls were pasting red and golden labels on to the fiaschi as they jerked past. Among them was one young man, the 'chemist', as I found out later. And it occurs to me now that he looked a bit conscience-stricken, as well he might.

The fiaschi were emerging from a circulating platform, where they were filled mechanically from taps: and here an old man was sitting, thin and tight-faced, with sharp but strangely naked and lifeless eyes; like the girls, he was very pale. He leaned on a stick, as he took cleaned bottles off the belt and fixed them under the taps. I took him for a peasant, but Sergio said, 'The owner.'

And the owner began showing us round, while the girls looked on in a listless way, like condemned prisoners. There were massive hosepipes coming from cement vats, and these supplied the taps. 'So clean!' the owner cried proudly, and Sergio echoed him: 'Clean, clean!' The chemist's little office was pointed out: here, Sergio whispered to me, is where the chemical element is

determined. I looked in and saw small bottles marked 'Pure Alcohol', 'Red Carbohic Acid', 'Sulphuric Acid'. In the corridors between the tall cement vats there were sacks of pulverised citric acid, used to correct any tendency in the wine (the inferior or stale wine that is used as a basis) to go bad. I noticed that the hosepipe feeding the circular platform with wine didn't in fact come from the cement vats at all but passed through the wall to a half-hidden tank outside, on the roof; I saw that access to this could only be reached through the owner's private quarters above. I asked, was this half-hidden tank to 'cool' the wine before it went into the bottles, but the owner brushed the question aside vaguely---no, no, it was only another tank; a sort of subsidiary tank---they were going to remove it soon (but it was new).

When Sergio cried to the owner, out of earshot from the workers, 'Now show us how you make wine from water!', the old man smiled with a quick, gleeful, roguish expression and nodded, 'Si fa, si fa!'---yes, yes, it's done, wine is made from water! But today he couldn't show us how. On a Sunday. We must come on a Sunday. And he gave us a confidential glance. He seems to drink the stuff himself: he took down some of his own vernaccia while we were there, gulping it greedily; I took a cautious sip, and it was delicious. The old ^{man} lipmed, and his joints seemed to give him trouble. He told us that he produced over a thousand litres a day, and two trucklads a week went south, to Rome and Caserta. And he sends big consignments abroad, as far as America. He showed us two gleaming machines for filtering the wine and said proudly, 'They cost six millions each.' The work of constructing the factory on 'modern' lines, out of barns, cost him sixty million lire. The firm was now worth twice that sum. 'And you started as a peasant!' Sergio said with his beaming

smile, 'Just think of that!' 'Yes', the old rogue said, limping up the stairs like a character in Dickens, 'I'm worth a lot of money!'

As we were walking up the narrow mediaeval street at the side of the factory afterwards I asked Sergio, 'Why do those girls stand for it---isn't there a trade union---why do they allow a man to poison people like themselves, all over the world? And aren't there inspectors?' Sergio smiled and took my arm in his erect way, 'There are inspectors, caro mio! There are laws---strict laws and strict inspectors! But the inspectors are payed, well, not so much. A little addition to their income every month is welcome, it helps their children, brightens their homes! And our old friend there knows how to keep people quiet, he knows the human weakness for money! So what use are the strictest laws in the world?' And as for the girls, he said, if they liked to talk about poisons and leave their job, there were others to take their places at once; not that they would leave, probably, a little rise in salary would see to their consciences as well...

The daily habits of the weather have changed but they are still uncanny. The air is balmy and warm at present, the best temperature for the grapes. But the clouds gather in the afternoon and a rainstorm breaks in the evening, suddenly. Then, after the heavy masses of rain, there is a serene, starry sky, with hardly a breeze, and the grilli echo across the fields again.

The clouds don't seem ~~---~~ quite right when they come. I've never seen this light in Italy before. I've seen it in England, Germany: but here rain has always been accompanied by a heavily-misted sky that shines blindingly because of the strong sun behind it; Italian rain is soft and drifting. I don't remember these

separate, dark, heaving clouds, day after day, producing a sunlight---when it breaks through---that belongs to the north, thin and sparkling and enormously spacious; the Italian sun, from north to south, has a deeper quality---a massive glow close to the earth. Even in Rome I noticed that the sun was watery; not at all the relentless Roman sun of August, that drenches the streets.

What is happening to us? Is it possible that our bodies are ^ebeing influenced, too? Things are rarely influenced separately in nature; our bodies are a functioning part of nature. When the papers say that we ^{are} being exposed increasingly to radiation, what does it mean? Sometimes the storms here are so overwhelming---the avalanches of water are so shattering---that you think the end of the world is coming each time. And then the air itself feels unnatural---it grips and haunts the nerves. I feel it ^{separately} ~~separately~~ from myself---from my own mood; it seems totally physical.

The oceans regulate the temperatures of the world: they absorb or radiate heat according to the needs of each area, equalising one area with the other. If the oceans didn't do this there would be sudden terrific winds, tornadoes everywhere, as the cold rushed into the heat; there would be sudden changes of weather, chaotic and unpredictable...

Are the oceans being interfered with? (We are like children with our questions!)

Are we contaminated? Will there be more, say, malformed babies? Are terrible plagues in wait for us, working invisibly at present---will thousands suddenly be affected, their skin falling off? We hear of an explosion at a 'most secret atom-plant'---the column of smoke that rose from it was seen for miles around:

did it injure, kill, contaminate no one? What happened to the contaminated? All secret! The future of our lives---wrapped in secrecy! We elect these men to top positions---and at once they're in the grip of security police, or seem to be. The higher you go, the more enslaved you find them. When you reach the president of the United States you find a man ~~agg~~aggged and [&]bound and restricted as ever a man was outside a concentration camp: only he himself would be able to tell the full truth of what I'm ~~writing~~ writing. For under his titular control is the biggest stock of atomic material in the west. Or am I wrong? How do I know? Are my little feelings enough to show me the facts? But my little feelings are all I have to go on...

Yet the secrecy can't be maintained. By making an agreement about atomic experiments the two sides showed that it was necessary: they needn't have done, they could have shown it as simply politically expedient, which was the case; but they preferred to make moral capital out of it. And this is what blasted a hole in their secrecy. For why should the end of experiments have been a moral necessity? even, apparently, an urgent necessity? how is it they are ~~going on~~ ^{continuing} now, under the ground, when no expediency on earth could justify them? We hear about atomic material being dumped by the English and Americans in the Atlantic---the fish being contaminated---the fish entering us as food... Can the stories be multiplied? The men who work in these plants---from the top to the bottom---they're silent men. What Faustian contract have they signed? When will the break come---or will Einstein's prediction come true, that the price for not having destroyed all atomic weapons at the beginning would be the destruction of all life? Will it be allowed to drift to that?

Has it already drifted to that? Or will something drastic

happen to save us---to save a few? Will there be cases of contamination---men like lepers---panic in and around the camps--- attempted suicides? Will government-denials then engage the anger of the people? Or is it too late? How could the atomic material be destroyed if we wanted to do it? Is burying it enough? One way or another we shall wake up! And perhaps we shall find that all these years we've been living in the grip of two terrible war-systems which have engulfed the whole world by the simple device of keeping tension with each other, under the pretence of keeping peace when in fact the most deadly and complete war ever conducted on living things has been going on. A war so long that it may be twenty years before we know the outcome!

At the very first light the hunters begin climbing into the woods with their dogs. In the immense stillness of dawn their voices sound dry and unenchanted. When I hear them I think, 'Haven't they anything charming to keep them at home?' Sometimes the men here gaze before them like their own oxen.

I'm beginning to like Paolo the shpeherd. He has fought hard for his life. And he no longer seems to take us for puppets. He beamed at us today and cried out, 'It's been cold, hasn't it? Nearly winter last week!' Then he gazed at us wistfully with his shining red face and sharp nose, his long, penetrating Etruscan eyes. Now he's made money, he feels he can afford to soften his heart, like signori, like foreigners.

An afternoon in Siena. I think I could look endlessly only at the Sienese school of the fourteenth century---Lorenzetti, Paolo dⁱ Giovanni, Duccio, Bartolo di Fredi, Martini. Their intimacy is complete---unbroken.

The moment the classical enters, in the next century, you get the first touches of falsity, the conditions of upheaval. There are poses, dramatic strokes, spectacle. The creature begins to writhe against the accusation of original sin, to insist on his godliness. Botticelli was the climax of this deliberate assertion of the godly human body. It went too far---like a throw-back to paganism. But perhaps it had to.

✓ ~~But~~ In those early pictures there is a rapt stillness. The people in them aren't moving towards, or ~~moving~~ away from: they are, in themselves.

Christ's rhythm---his personal rhythm---is what we've forgotten and what, through the fatal story of the Fall, we've twisted into moral tension. But he wasn't a teacher: much less a reforming man. What he advised was for himself. He gave up his own life, not others.

This rhythm of his is always there, in the gospels. It is the rhythm of the present. He's always in the present. He points only to the present. He moves in his own timeless present. His predictions of the future are predictions about himself, based on his own designs---the crucifixion and the aftermath. This rhythm can't be pointed out or proved: it lies in the gospel like a special silence, a presence. It is the only proof of his existence we have.

Power in us lies in what we are at present. Anything that draws us out of the present---hope for future fulfilment or regret for the past (the same thing)---draws power out of us. The present is beyond time: when I think of the past without any wish to alter one of its details, it is in the present; that is, 'the past' is not then time, but experience---timeless.

Our nervous and unnatural concept of the present as a fraction

that moves along a belt of time, with the past increasing behind it and the future decreasing in front, is due to the concept of original sin that has been forced on us: the past becomes the area of sin, born with us, and the future is potential grace, a hope for relief.

So there is a quest in us all the time. The quest has broken us further and further into time, until now we are obsessed with it, with clocks that tick away the minutes and seconds; whereas, before, at the time of these paintings, the divisions of time were large, they were the seasons, and from dawn to dusk, there was no pressing moment, gone before it was caught.

Our livers, kidneys, hearts, glands, cells do their work in the stillness of present time: only when we chase time do we disorder them; our breathing becomes tense, our circulation changes, one by one our organs are flung into alarm and disharmony. We are free only when we cease fixing our minds on things, and things on our minds: then wonder can begin. This is Eastern teaching: but perhaps Christ pointedⁿ East, to stillness. Perhaps one day we shall draw a strange new power from Buddha.

We have been given no recommendations for living in a bare universe. The Jews were in a family, and partly we inherited their life, through Christ and St. Paul. But the fact remains that Abraham, Moses, Aaron, had no recommendations for the man who ceased to be a Jew---who fell into the void. We are all, now, in the void. We were given promise of that great family, but it wasn't fulfilled---we are a conglomeration of races,

languages. Our harmony has to be chosen, won.

But a bare and cold universe is a good start: the best certainty is no foothold at all (again the East). We only have to let ourselves fall into the present. But we no longer know how. We have to learn in our bodies, nerves, not in our attitudes (these follow on, in any case). We are broken people.

The moral revolution broke us. The rhythm round Luther was one of power, that is, tension: not intimacy. It wasn't enough for him to be, to believe. The moral revolution always destroys, overtly like the French revolution or nazism, or in the processes of time like the English industrial revolution or America's War of Independence.

In this sense, America is the climax of the false reformation--- in the belief that life can be made all over again, on a new footing. The War of Independence made further wars necessary: wherever an intimate local life was found it was uprooted and massacred---the Indians, the Mexicans, the southern aristocrats and finally the negroes.

The moral revolution tries to supersede original sin. The sense of being superior to others (the hub of moral revolution) is the sense of being dirty in oneself. In flying from intimacy we are flying from the present. We are always questing, trying. Our 'daily exercises', 'sport', all build up tension because they come out of tension---that is, trying, forcing.

9) We force ourselves everywhere---it might be in the lavatory, or in our thoughts. The Germans are the masters of tension, therefore the authors of all the tense theories of history, thought. Someone says of the hero in Death in Venice that he has always lived 'like this', clenching his hand into a fist, never 'like this', letting it fall relaxed. The hero tries it (living relaxed) and the result is sickness, madness and death.

German ideas engulfed two continents---America and the Russian lands: the idea of moral progress and the idea of

historical materialism are the same ^{Hegelian} doctrine in the end. ~~(Hegel)~~
This doctrine makes all the past a sort of shortcoming, and the
future ^a ~~the~~ zone of promised glory and fulfilment: ~~thus,~~ the
powers of the present are always wasted.

The present isn't here and now, that is, a particle of time:
it is our being. 'Future' and 'past' are simply arguments about
our being: therefore ~~largely~~ moral.

I try to give up seeing life as a development (from place
to place, age to age), and to know it as motionless. But I
naturally think of our coming here from Rome as a movement towards
something, that is, as a development in my life: and now I find
I've begun to think of our move back to Rome next month in the
same way. But the reality is a landscape where Rome is one
place and this village another, they remain there in stillness,
like distant lighted cities in a plain, seen from a hill.

If I no longer move forward, I am more fully.

The present is a glowing stillness; it never disappears; we
are in it all the time. Like a room, it is still and safe all
round us. We only have to think like this to feel remarkably
safe. And this isn't the stillness of things: it is the stillness
of that from which all things come. The present, in the real
sense, leads us beyond men's time.

At once we shed the haunting questions, 'What will the future
bring?', 'What has the past stolen from me?' The past and future
are our minds working. As the philosophers say, we can't perceive
space and time.

If I want to keep an Italian friend, I'm always careful to
let him down now and then. It makes him feel in equal company.
He hates the sense of a blueprint of obligations hanging over a

friendship. Like the Jew---perhaps like all ancient religious peoples---he wants an escape-hatch from time.

Gradually, in the last ten years, I've looked into every part of my life---tried to disrobe myself of education. My early childhood supported me in this: being brought up by poor people I ~~had been~~^{was} allowed my natural harmony. But later the world made me cover my face with fixed expressions to hide its real ones, to walk in a rigid, ashamed way, to stand, sit, breathe as if under a censorious eye.

There are books now on how to be natural---how to breathe, stand, even on how to go to the lavatory. Don't try, they say---don't force: you damage the organs. If you breathe properly---not quickly or tensely---your body gets the oxygen it wants, and the diaphragm massages the bowels as it is designed to, etc. etc.

We took Caterina to a 'fair'. It was above Castel Vecchio, looking straight across a wooded valley with a rim of clean, rolling fields. We could see where we had walked in the first heat of the summer, trying to find the ruins; now the ruins were invisible, hugged in one of the deep valleys. We strolled up to where the fair should have been, at the top of a hill, like a high plateau. There was the usual chiasso of an Italian gathering, in the distance---voices raised, bells, cries, hooting horns, whistles, laughter. Luciano had told us about this fair: at one time, even ten years ago, it had been famous in the whole countryside, the big annual event to which people walked ten and twenty miles; hundreds of horses were for sale, filling an immense field; there were calves, pigs, merry-go-rounds, roasting booths, plenty to drink; there were music and dancing, and the peasants wore their costumes. Men had got drunk and ^usang at the top of their voices.

And when we got to the top of the hill we found four or five solitary booths selling sweets, toys, oddments like bootlaces and pocket-knives. There was an air of self-conscious desolation over everything. We looked for cattle, horses, sheep: nothing. Caterina shrugged and laughed---'How things have changed!' There was a table and bench where a few men sat drinking white wine in a perplexed and vacant way. There was rubbish on the ground, people were ill-dressed; there was one shy-looking woman^a in peasant costume, standing alone, not knowing what to do while her husband sat at the table. Youths looked round them, gawping and heavy---they'd come for fun. We looked into the woods---nothing. Why had people come, then? To buy a bag of sweets they could get in the shops? Perhaps they'd all expected something more, like us. The white cloak of the woman in costume gleamed proudly. A shepherd had scrubbed himself and his two children so clean that the three of them looked polished, and they were walking back home, the children clutching flimsy plastic pistols. But nobody minded. We laughed. Nothing is destroyed so fast and with so little regret as in Italy. They're used to it. 'Better to stay at home ironing!' Caterina said.

Don Amigo gave me an Italian New Testament and I was struck by the rhythm and simplicity of the language. It was the same as the King James version, the same rhythm and tone; you would think one word had been exchanged for its perfect equivalent. It was clearer to me than ever before that we belong to the same civilisation, like a close family:

Ora i Giudei lo cercavano alla festa e dicevano: Lui dov'è?
E tra la gente era un gran mororare di lui. Gli uni dicevano:
'E buono' altri: 'No; anzi travia il popolo'.

Nessuno però ne parlava in palese per paura de' Giudei.
Ma già nel mezzo della festa Gesù salì nel tempio a insegnare.

E i Giudei ne stupivano, dicendo: Come mai costui sa di
lettere senza aver mai studiato?

Gesù prese a dir loro: La mia dottrina non e mia, ma di
chi mi ha mandato.

Then the Jews sought him at the feast and said: Where is he?
And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him. For
some said: 'He is a good man' others said: 'Nay; but he deceiveth
the people'.

Howbeit no man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews.
Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple,
and taught.

And the Jews marvelled, saying: How knoweth this man letters,
having never learned?

Jesus answered them and said: My doctrine is not mine, but
his that sent me.

Yet, since that time, our languages have become 'foreign' to each other. When I read the two languages side by side it makes me feel that we weren't foreigners to each other in those times as we are now. Europe was an actuality as it has never been since. h.p. Italian has changed: really it has been abolished as language--- what Dante started wasn't fulfilled; it defies being learned because it has an infinite number of rhythms suitable for different situations and areas and attitudes---rather like a distracted person who can settle to nothing, through having been forbidden to concentrate on anything; the language shows the mark of the Counter-Reformation as the people do~~s~~. There are words no dictionary will tell you about---even if adequate dictionaries existed: Italian has been locked in a sort of desert for so long,

separated from the rest of its family in Europe, that it has become a formless pool of words and dialects through which the writer has to flounder to find a rhythm of his own. The constructions have no decided and universal rhythm as French and English ones do.

The other day Luciano's family asked us to write a letter of thanks for them---to someone in Switzerland who had sent them photographs. They naturally assumed that I was less foreign to the language than they were. The language wasn't their possession. By being educated, we knew more of its secrets, had more of a right to it. And they looked over my shoulders like foreigners as I wrote. A foreign or strange use of language isn't as foreign and strange to them as it would be, in a similar case, to French or English people. The Italians who correct your language punctiliously ~~invariably~~ ^{always} have an attitude of some kind---a mild nationalism; they would like you to believe that a fixed and authentic national language existed, but it doesn't.

An idiotic note at the beginning of the little New Testament Don Amigo has given me: 'The faithful, who for at least a quarter of an hour read the books of the Holy Scripture with veneration and as sacred writing may gain with contrite heart a partial indulgence of three years.' ^{Time again! The rewards of time!} ~~But for the Counter-Reformation, which fixed the Church in a static frame, just as it saved many Church lands from secularisation, this kind of rubbish would have died naturally.~~

This morning, Sunday---a convoy of cars, small trucks, motor-scooters come and park themselves round us; before first light. Like an invasion---voices raised, dogs barking, rifles being cocked. They walk under our bedroom window talking as if

it was full noon. This isn't boorishness. To 'disturb' in Italy---disturbare---doesn't mean to violate someone's peace so much as to 'put someone out'. Violating someone's peace is impossible because no one is thought to have any: inner peace doesn't exist, so it can't be held sacred. Therefore cars, guns, televisions, radios quickly become nuisances in Italian hands. The whole inner theme of conscience in our sense is missing. Compassion, fellow-feeling (perhaps stronger than ours), timidity, fear of the law, prudence, takes its place. The Church broke the interior monologue, as you find it broken in, say, political prisoners. The Italian no longer had any right to choose for himself---even between right and wrong: it must be referred to the priest. This is the sense of life I get from Don Amigo, now that I know him. Given the power, he would close my mind, and all my books, without a moment's thought. He is rigid and stern, and even perhaps relentless in a Lutheran way, under his mildness.

Italy had peace once: I mean, in people---something more than the sound nerves that they have at present, an inheritance from that peace. You can hear it in their music of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries---an extraordinary silence like another rhythm we have never been allowed to hear, in our broken and shattered lives. Only Schubert perhaps, in the north, really captures that stillness.

Their voices in the early morning are dry, barren, dusty, unenchanted by a moment's enlightenment, that is, real choice. The enlightenment missed Italy.

The worst flood in Italy since the war: a broken dyke. A vast wave, said to be a hundred metres high, swept down the Piave from lake Vaiont through villages, sweeping them away, uprooting trees; the whole area is silent and devastated, without

a sign of life. Thousands of people buried and drowned.

The papers say that in the seventy years after 1889 there were four great dam-bursts in the world. ~~But~~ In the last four years alone there have been seven.

I saw Sergio this morning on his way into the village, erect and stern-looking on his motor-scooter. He was wearing a jacket and the effect of this was to make ^{him} look like an English country gentleman, if there are any left---lined, ruddy, with fine eyes. I was astonished to see the resemblance---for a fleeting moment. The optimism in his ^f face makes ^{him} quite different from the others. His mouth bears the ancient ^{Etruscan} optimism ^{in fact, as you see it in the tomb-figures.} ~~of the Etruscans.~~ There is something uncrushed in him. A great dreamer---he can't wait to get to town every day, just to stand in the piazza and dream. 'He's mad for the town!' Caterina says. He's moving there to complete the dream. Soon they'll be installed: the water and light are there.

Gianni is off again, this time to Rome. We were away in Lucca when he called last. We talk about him together, wondering if he will get 'blunted'.

With the return of the warm weather there are thunderstorms again and sudden flashes of lightning. At Lucca, after a clear evening, a wind started up in the middle of the night---our familiar little tornado---and died as suddenly as it had started.

The swifts were forming up on the wires this morning, for their migration. They were side by side along the two ~~parallel~~ wires as far as we could see, stretching far down into the valley, like hundreds of tiny soldiers. Then they flew off south in a great mass, as if by a silent signal.

I went down into the podere and tasted the grapes. I tried

Gianni's suggestion---biting them straight off the vine without touching them with my hands. They taste so fresh that they burn the throat. Every vine tastes different, and every part of each vine tastes different. Comparing the tastes, I found the highest were the best; an old man in northern Tuscany once told me that the best wine in his experience came from grapes grown in the form of a roof, along wires. His wine, he said, would keep for five or ten years without spoiling.

One of our vines, with white grapes, stands alone and has grown as tall as a fruit tree, supporting itself on a pear-tree at its side. The grapes are for eating, swollen and juicy.

Many of the grapes aren't ripe even now: some of the vines are blighted, and their grapes hang in shrivelled clusters, like dried raisins. This is partly the excessive rain and partly care-⁽¹⁾less copper-sulphate spraying.

The weather suddenly became normal for early autumn, with radiant and warm sunshine and a cool breeze. Evrybody rubbed their hands: it would push the wine up to ten or eleven degrees, perhaps. The podere below lay in its hot, still basin, glorying in it. The flies came back, as in July. I killed our second scorpion.

Gianni returned, looking thin and in some way liberated; also very serious. He drank a glass of wine with us and described the long journeys to Caserta and north to Bergamo, where it was cold. 'Tiring?' I asked. 'No, not tiring at all! But---it's too much.' He would come to Rome with us, perhaps---look for a job. Far from being blunted, he seems frailer.

The golden weather ceased suddenly, the sky darkened and than^e unloaded such an enormous quantity of water that our well was full

in a few minutes and a cascading river had formed ^down our rocky path, making the hill look like Austria. It poured down relentlessly and everyone said, 'Now---now the wine's finished!'

But then the glowing autumn weather came back again, and remained even longer. And at this moment, after five or six splendid days that were like an autumn belonging to a different year, and therefore a sort of uncanny dream, it has begun to rain again. An extraordinary darkness comes over the valley, like night in the middle of the afternoon. The gullies outside quickly form rivers. The wind howls. The road is a pool of mud. The rain comes gently at first, then more and more powerfully. And now the whole roof is thundering with its force, so violent that the house with its massive walls, which have stood the weather of five centruies, seems about to collapse at last.
