

Diary M.S.



Dott. Eugenio Colsoni  
Congrès Descartes  
rue des écoles  
Sorbonne

Franceia

Paris 6 e

L'idée que us avez  
à l'office que ce sont  
les idées qui mènent  
le monde



Today is the 28<sup>th</sup> of October, anniversary of the March on Rome and beginning of Year XII of the Fascist era. I take to the road before ~~dawn~~<sup>dawn</sup>, in flight before the celebration that will deafen ~~Rome~~<sup>the Capital</sup> all day. My place in the country seems infinitely desirable. I am grateful to the familiar hay-lines and the unchanging fields as they go past, ~~the unmineral~~<sup>and delay</sup> serenely unaware of time, as set ~~up~~ by men. The epoch will dissolve upon them like those clouds ~~to~~<sup>reshiny</sup> on the mountains, and they will remain the same. One can understand that the beauty of this land is a snare, and yet succumb to it. A too-intelligent friend of mine, a marked man, said it with a sad grin, after he was compelled to hole up ~~in~~<sup>in</sup> his ~~private~~ profession: "There are enough lovely women and lovely panoramas in this country to ~~make~~<sup>help</sup> us forget-~~maybe~~."

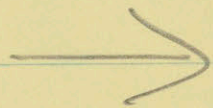
who had been a defense attorney before the Special Tribunal for the Defense of the State, and who had been driven to hole up in legal drudgery, said ~~with~~ <sup>once</sup> with a sad grin: "There are enough lovely women and lovely parables in this country to help us forget - maybe."

It is the <sup>transparent</sup> light that does it, and the imminence of the sky. Ranges behind ranges of hills, in crystal-sharp outline, transmuted into ethereal mistance. Northern horrors are close, weighted down by haze, but here all is amplitude and silence, and the ordering force of infinite clarity, which assigns inexorably a place in the scheme to the houses and works of men, setting them like minute jewels in an ornament. What an ass. of course. ~~Q~~ Cosmos, Greek for ornament. Clearly, this country concerns only the gods,

and such men as respect the gods.

Those gaunt hillsides covered with ~~short~~ meagre shrub are secret places. They are unperceived by the outsider--protected. None but the charcoal-burner and the shepherd will ever walk there, and for them nothing changes.-- A desperate illusion. The publican has been ~~there~~<sup>around</sup>, and the surveyor. Those woodsmen are being drafted. But their soul clings and hides there. Everywhere in the sacred grove, hidden in poverty.

At a crossroads past Bolsene, a few miles before Orvieto, I stop at a ~~wayside~~ <sup>roadhouse</sup> inn. The man talks about crops and cattle as he pours the ~~very~~ coffee. He comes from my part and apparently knows me. As we sit under the pergola the valley spreads out beneath us, and across it the dark town of Orvieto <sup>with</sup> on its abrupt pedestal of rock, unchanged from the Etruscan fortress it once was. The huge cathedral, crouching like a friendly elephant among the pygmy houses, tries to resume its flock that died past.



It looks absurdly big for the small town. But when it was <sup>conceived that way</sup> decided in the Foundation Charter: "We, the citizens of Orvieto, want to show indeed that the cathedral shall give by its size a measure of our feelings towards our Creator"... The thin blast of the brass band wafted on the wind recalls us to the present

"Not going <sup>in</sup> to town today?" I inquire casually. "I might give you a lift"

"No thanks. We ~~are~~ <sup>aren't</sup> going. Too much noise and going-on."

His wife, bustling among the tables, lifts her voice sharply: "yt's none of our business. They're always having a good time for this or that. <sup>Gadabonty</sup> But we mind our business. Toller is quiet <sup>(around here)</sup> ~~upstairs~~. They've got enough to do. Don't you think so, eh. "Sor Evandro?"

"Nayh, eh, mind their <sup>business,</sup> ~~business,~~ <sup>sure enough</sup>" grunts an old vintner who is sunning himself on a bench by the wall. And after a



pause, quoting an old proverb:  
 "Acqua cheta vermine mene. Still  
 waters breed vermin". Then he lapses  
 again into his silent contemplation.  
 The innkeeper and his wife have also  
 retired into a self-conscious silence.  
 Everyone has said enough.

Strange people, <sup>these peasants</sup> maybe, if they knew  
 me, they <sup>also</sup> knew I ~~enjoyed~~ <sup>enjoyed</sup> an enjoying  
 less than favour from the ~~domestic~~ <sup>bosses</sup> -  
~~tion and power~~ in Peru. But  
 then what about the old man?

One doesn't expect country folk to  
 talk or indeed to have a political  
<sup>the fact, one may live for months at a time with them and never bring up a political issue;</sup>  
 opinion. <sup>it would sound almost an</sup> City workers will  
 talk, <sup>in propriety</sup> if guardedly. The middle  
 class will talk with more ease,  
 knowing all the ways ~~to~~ and loopholes  
 whereby you ~~can~~ may criticize  
 and still be safe. But the pea-  
 santry have always been apprehen-  
 sive, cagy, and at bottom alien  
~~for~~ all these events. A peasant is  
 full of atavistic fear. Dominations <sup>on nobody</sup>  
 and powers are <sup>to begin</sup> like lightning or hail,

One speaks of them in deprecations or allusions } 5  
if you have to; it is wise not to draw their attention.

not to be mentioned if possible. <sup>The peasant</sup> #  
will wear his black shirt when he is  
told to, go to rallies when he is  
convoled, and then slink back  
to his farm and try to keep ~~the~~  
~~the good out of the way~~ <sup>away</sup> of the big racket.  
He knows he has nothing to gain and  
all to lose. Maybe, he dimly hopes,  
his name will fade out <sup>somehow</sup> of those beastly  
registers too, and the carabinieri  
will ~~not~~ <sup>forget</sup> to <sup>come and</sup> draft him for  
another of those wars.

One is so used to their silence,  
that a word from ~~the~~ and to having  
to respect it, that a word from them  
is <sup>always</sup> a surprise. The still waters —  
they have the right image there,  
a very old image, to which they  
have always clung. It is the  
still rivers that support bridges,  
as they say in my parts. Who  
knows, when the time comes for a  
post-war market, ~~that~~. But that  
we shall find the regime words  
to an empty husk by the patient

obstinate passiveness of the people. It is risky to think so, for were not the Papal States such a lump, and yet they endured for centuries. But this resistance seems more real. I cannot forget the light that came into my gardener's eyes, the day when the news came of de Bonis' flight over Rome. "So he is on our side, is he?" the taciturn young man had said abruptly. Who would have ~~been~~ guessed that could guess what he meant? Had he any affiliations? ~~He had~~ simply ~~only~~ ~~the~~ ~~his~~ maybe he had in mind only the instructive ~~togetherness~~ of the oppressed. There was a flash of truth then. But he also knew that I was de Bonis' friend. Ingratulating ~~at~~ as always. But no. Some of them are in jail. It's all so impenetrable. And what about the <sup>resistance</sup> ~~fiercest~~ battles in the Val di Chiana in 1929, the house-to-house fights, the embattled farm laborers? And again, what about

The wine-tax riots in Maritime France,  
where ~~they~~ the cavaliers were thrown  
out of town? ~~Do they~~ Can they be  
aroused only on small local issues,  
or for purely economic ~~group~~ rights?  
Or do they still nurse the messianic  
dream as it broke out forty years  
ago in David Lazzaretti, and still  
creeps around in so many ~~secret~~  
half-religious, half-political secret  
brotherhoods? Improbable.

I heard an emotional hierarch saying, three months ago: "Mussolini saved Italy in 1922, but the Italian people have saved Mussolini in 1936. If he doesn't remember it, ~~he is a scoundrel~~ after this crisis, he is a scoundrel." Every-  
body <sup>- or nearly all of those average persons known as everybody -</sup> was expecting then that the whole population would be promoted to Party membership, and that a new era would begin, of a <sup>new</sup> national political life countenanced as being inside the party.

What has come instead have been restrictions in Party membership, a new grading based on precedence and virtue. The "old Party" has enforced its rights as an aristocracy. It seems to be a rule with all dictatorial regimes. The more they are in a condition to relent, the less they do. Their own necessity urges them on.

Trotta piccolo di casa  
Tufus quello rivere

Popes' election

Convegno prof. all'estero

Gayden Tubulandi

Rome universali

Spirite: posto che non vi è  
alcuna dottrina, per indici  
e stato —

Met Missiroli on the street, and noticed he was a bit shy of me. Quite understandable. There is a tacit agreement to forget people's pasts. <sup>and by now it works with abandon</sup> But how can this outstanding political essayist not feel self-conscious, who staked his <sup>position</sup> ~~as a thinker~~ for twenty years on the moral necessity of <sup>a</sup> social democracy ~~is~~ in this country and ~~is~~ now <sup>has</sup> <sup>become</sup> one of the authoritative apologists for fascism? That is the worst about us of the so-called Old Guard, we make people uncomfortable just by existing, and there is a damp mist of aversion following us wherever we go. "Why do they insist on being Different?" We are a reminder, albeit archeological; a respectable residue, oh quite respectable, but confused; inhuman, rigid, abstract, "ideological" (the worst kind of dismissal); we are out of step with History.

So he embarked on a dazzling demonstration why Fascism was the answer to all the contradictions of our time, <sup>and the fruit of our suffering,</sup> and the Ruse of Reason itself, and the essence of History. As if I didn't know.

One feels nothing in these cases but a great desire to put the other at ease.

"Come", I said, "I don't know why you feel that this ordeal was mysteriously assigned only to our own time. Think of a man like Dryden. Is he any less interesting to-day because he started out with an ode to Cromwell and then went Restoration? Is the Restoration any less basic for English society?"

I was going to add: "This is a time for sophists, and only  
~~an~~ out-and-out sophists like you and the rest of the boys  
can be happy in it", but I refrained; and already he was  
bouncing <sup>up & down</sup> on the idea, "Yes, think of it. Was not the Res-  
toration the necessary prelude to the moral rebirth of the

Nineteenth Century? Think of what - yes, my  
dear man, what rugged intellectual <sup>cyni-</sup>  
cism Hobbes had to hammer out of his  
times, before a nation ~~could~~ <sup>could</sup> set the founda-  
tion of an empire, and of a politically  
wise society. We have thought of history  
as an ample rising plateau, and it  
is nothing but a few sunlit peaks.  
~~We have spent most of our lives~~ ~~Very few~~  
and far between are the epochs in which  
nations really live. The rest is confusion  
and submission and sorrow. Most of my  
life has been spent groping in the tangle  
of the valleys, and now it is almost  
over. But you know, sometimes I feel  
we are like the obscure workmen who  
labored at the cathedrals ... "

He is beaming now to the top of  
his bald head, but his eyes <sup>have lost the art</sup> ~~cannot~~ <sup>do not know how to</sup>  
of smiling in his weary face. He departs,  
feeling good, and leaves me, <sup>upset</sup> uneasy.



Home again, I gaze at Missiroli's books on my shelves. A Lifetime of learning and sharp analysis, (and now this). Mattcott owed much of his youthful formation to him. <sup>Even in his contradictions and subtleties, he was a good stimulant.</sup> But Mattcott is dead; and there he goes.

They say that when the Prefect called him, in 1926, to warn him that from now on he would not be allowed to write as he pleased, he stammered: "But-but give me at least three days to change my opinions..."

In looking through my papers, I find some notes from a conversation with Missiroli, in 1923. ~~The Matteotti murder was coming, and he~~ ~~which~~ Fascism was in power, a crisis was coming of which he predicted the destructiveness; <sup>but he did not know</sup> ~~the fact~~, <sup>going to be</sup> it was the Matteotti murder. This is what I wrote:

one space

" Agreed with Missiroli that Fascism had set itself three objectives: 1) to break the attempt at a new democracy founded on the lower middleclass and the proletariat, which ~~was~~ needed a change-over from the ~~newly~~ constitutional to <sup>a</sup> ~~the~~ parliamentary regime, ~~and~~ by

restricting the power of the Monarchy;  
2) build up again the capital used up by  
the war, ~~by the~~ not so much through econom-  
ies as they say, as through political oppres-  
sion and economic compression of the working  
classes, who will be called to ~~pay~~ <sup>foot</sup> for the war  
bill; 3) eliminate the new inequality,  
both political and moral, between the  
middle classes and the workers, which  
had ~~emerged~~ risen during the first postwar  
years to impossible and exasperating pro-  
portions. The workers "had to be put in  
their place". The white-collar man was  
left simply nowhere

This last point has not been solved.

*our space*  
A great thirst for justice ~~has~~ had thrown the  
*middle classes* into the arms of Fascism; those ~~middle~~  
~~classes~~ ~~but for the moment~~ or rather, those  
only too normal elements of the middle  
classes for whom ideals are something  
<sup>to be</sup> you can talk about <sup>when one wants to feel good</sup> <sup>whereas</sup>  
~~with fine effect~~, ~~at least~~  
the newly acquired affluence of the working  
class and the high salaries are a daily  
insult. What broke <sup>to pieces</sup> ~~it~~ was the good old  
traditional world, which ~~rested~~ <sup>carried</sup> on <sup>with</sup> equable

and middling interests, and ~~of~~ barometer  
ideals. Politics had been assumed to be  
the simple luxury accessible to all classes.

But once the old parties ~~went~~ <sup>had gone</sup> down the  
drain, society ~~rearranged~~ <sup>rearranged</sup> itself with lightning  
rapidity ~~and~~ according to actual con-  
crete interests, viz. class and group.

~~It~~ brought to the surface violence and  
struggle for life came to the surface. ~~What~~  
~~sank~~ down out of sight were citizen-  
ship and solidarity sank ~~down~~ out  
of sight. Solidarity persists only  
in the ~~severely~~ <sup>severely</sup> restricted limits of one's  
"particulars".

~~But~~ <sup>the regime</sup> ~~at this point~~ <sup>failed to deliver</sup>  
the goods. These middle classes were looking in  
fascism for something they did not have in  
themselves, ~~but they are~~ essentially unin-  
formed as they are, and <sup>alternating</sup> ~~sticking~~ <sup>between</sup> all the  
<sup>Extraneous of</sup> ~~time~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~from~~ <sup>quiet</sup> cruelty to pietism and from  
~~see~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~frank~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~enthusiasm~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~to~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~letter~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~dejection~~.

~~But~~ Fascism was not the Santa Claus it was  
expected to be. The inequalities remained;  
instead of between classes, and ~~of~~ the differ-  
ence between classes which was somewhat  
robbed off was replaced by antipathies

rough  
space

rough  
space

between groups of the same class. Strangely enough, after all their talks, the new men brought only an accentuated contrast between plutocracy and middle class, without really checking the plutocracy.

A half-understood analysis for me at the time I wrote it, but I <sup>perhaps</sup> felt it was ~~not~~ ~~right~~ enough in it to impel me to write it down. To-day its <sup>truth</sup> is clear even to most people of the middle class. But like Missions himself, they have already sold out.

"What was the matter with C. that he killed himself?  
Family trouble?" <sup>if</sup> My friend leans back and stares at the  
inane Sunday flow of promeneurs collectifs under the flower-  
ing mimosas in the Spring sun.

"No. Nothing much the matter. Just growing despondency. I  
saw him several times in the last months. He could see noth-  
ing ahead - and I guess he couldn't forget that day in Geneva -"

"I don't know the story."

<sup>Ch-</sup> "Well, you ~~knew~~ <sup>met him, didn't you?</sup> C. The old time respectable journalist.

Good writer. Going on sixty. He didn't like it much around  
here, and for a while he thought he'd found a convenient way  
out. He got his paper to send him as a diplomatic corres-  
pondent to Geneva. He would be able to live abroad, do his  
bit in trying to keep the Italian public not ~~xxx~~ too misin-  
formed about the League of Nations - and -well - just carry on  
in the hope of better times, then comes this Ethiopian  
business, and C. finds himself on the spot. The heat had to  
be turned on the League. Remember the papers in those days?  
It was quite an astonishing job of subtle vituperation.  
They sent up all the best names in literature for color  
pieces. C. was given exactly the slant. ~~Almost no~~ facts  
allowed. You know the way it goes. How you try to tack into  
the wind, and then they edit your stuff at the copy desk.  
Then came the day when Haile Selassie was going to ~~speak, and~~ ?  
appeal to the Council. Only time I can remember that a King

spoke like a King, and it had to be an Abyssinian."

He paused. "Well, you remember what <sup>~ (see)</sup> happened. All the journalists got orders ~~from~~ from the Consulate or somebody-- no, I'm wrong, it was Alfieri in person -- that they were to start whistling and booing from the gallery. <sup>as soon as he rose to speak.</sup> just to show

*what we thought of them all; the whole Roman stuff.*

C. was trying to think up some way out, but before he did they called him up and said, "Be very sure to sit in the front row and to lead the booing. This is for your good."

~~That night must not have been pleasant for him. But He had~~  
a wife and three children. So he went - and boomed. "

The Party, and the Chamber of Commerce,  
and the world of ~~Influential~~ <sup>the copycats, for</sup> People. You  
can get along with people, but how can  
you get along with Influential People?  
~~Of course~~ you tell me that. My parents  
should have known that since the  
world belongs to the Influential People,  
one had better get used to them ~~when~~  
one is quite small. But I didn't.

Civile modestia

They select some of us - I guess they  
breed 'em - those watery-eyed corrupt  
brands who marry American money  
and take care of the foreign press  
- ~~on duty~~ <sup>there others that they</sup> ~~live~~ <sup>live</sup> in the country  
estates to ~~remember~~ <sup>remember</sup>  
Take my aunt Catherine,

Yes, I know Aunt Catherine, ~~and~~  
the many Aunt Catherine

They that dally nicely with words  
may quickly make them wanton  
Twelfth Night, III I



We used to think that ideas had power. Now it depends from the emotional context. The dictators have dissociated the emotions & organized them around more suitable frames, & the ideas look silly. Meaning the abstract system of thought, derived from simple notions like justice which are not to be decomposed.

Francois - Pouch  
Hiker = fort populaire

Paris

Is it a nightmare?

Troy, great Troy is falling - Europe  
is falling. I understand ~~now that~~  
how, through the smoke and  
the haze of the city crumbling  
in flames, the fugitive saw  
the great figures of the gods,  
running maybe dead, wal-  
king ~~through~~ the across the  
~~ruins~~ devastation.

British constitution:

Placet esse quiddam in re publica  
praestans et regale; esse aliud aucto-  
ritate principum partem ac tributum;  
esse quaedam res servatas iudicio  
voluntatis multitudinis (Livy)

"A limited monarchy is a device  
for combining the inertia of a  
wooden idol with the credibility  
of a flesh + blood one." (Shaw)

Il ne voit pas la synthèse  
Corruptissima re publica plurimae  
leges (Tacitus)

British policy:

"Madam - said Walpole to his Queen in 1734 -  
there are 50000 men slain this year in  
Europe, & not one Englishman."

If I take all the running you  
can do to keep us in the  
same place

out

Today I have seen one of the important men of our age.

I walked into a literary gathering and there, in a corner, was Guido Manacorda expatiating on spiritual joys to a circle of ladies, some of them getting flushed and restless. He looks irresistibly like a chicken's embryo; you fancy that egg-bald cranium palpitating visibly. In a high squeal of a voice, he was explaining the subtle connexions of St. Catherine of Siena with the German mystics. Not any actual connexion in time, but the analogies visible to the philosopher of mysticism. (Well, he holds a chair of mystical philosophy and is supposed to be a good scholar.)

After a while he was standing beside me, teacup in hand and ~~me~~ operating on a large eclair.

"If you don't mind, I shall send you a little thing I have written. Nothing much, oh no, a little thing, you know, but you might perhaps like to review it. Papini says he likes it very much, eh yes, Papini likes what I write, he is very good to me, but you know, he isn't getting any younger-- he is willing to praise my friend Allodoli just as well, who, although he is my dear friend, well, you know <sup>he's</sup> ~~he's~~ <sup>not</sup> worth ~~much~~ <sup>anything</sup> -- si sa, we Catholic writers always tend to praise each other, but what ~~dux~~ does it mean in the end? It is you scientists who should be touched by the new spirituality. Now that science has outgrown materialism, we count on you to give us a scientific philosophy leading the mind back to the unchanging deeper truths ---"

I see old Tilgher's eye fixed on me with fiendish glee. As he comes to free me, he says in his rasping voice, "Well, and was that whatsisname trying to rope you in? Never mind, I know him, the opprobrious buffoon, and he knows it. Do you realize what has been his highly spiritual job? Bringing twenty million to the Nazis for their election campaign-- Why yes, that foetus there has been the chief go-between of the Nazi-Fascist understanding, he has sold Hitler to Mussolini when nobody believed in him over here, and we were still playing ball with Braun and Bruning. He took a risk, but now he is cashing in".

What if Hitler had not received that help, if he had not turned that difficult and desperate corner in his career -- Es schwindelt.

Now the die is cast. There is the man who set it rolling.

---

*continued to be*  
(X) Manacorda went on being the chief personal intermediary between the dictators, and he was the only outsider to take part in the Brenner conferences in 1940 and 1941. Some U.S. commentators alluded to him as a "deeply religious personality".

Somewhere, we thought, lost in the complexity of that dim and mighty thing called civilization, there must live that thing called reason. We were calling to the men we do not know, trusting them as one would a divine agency; to our distant kind, to impassible posterity; to the community of the dead, the living and the yet unborn.

But now we are compelled to see, and the equation will come to rest in our hearts: there is nothing outside of here, as we know there is nothing inside. It takes time to learn, but once you have it, it sets the mind free. Whatever we do, we are going to invent something out of nothing.

"For as the nature of foul weather lieth not in a shower  
or two of rain, but in an inclination thereto of many days  
together; so the nature of war consisteth not in actual  
fighting, but in the known disposition thereto during all  
the time there is no assurance to the contrary."

Leviathan



Sensible, balanced and well-informed men are always the same. Old Ferdinando Martini, dean of the liberal-conservatives, said in the days of the March on Rome, "When the doctor has let the wound fester, one should bless the surgeon." He changed his mind before dying, some say. Maybe.

Makes me think of Sainte-Beuve, another and greater appraiser, and not without leftist sympathies, saying apropos of the Coup d'Etat that brought Napoleon III to power, "I was for the "Deux Décembre" with all the men of sense ~~who~~ who felt the need for something solid and stable to lean on, but I did not stand for the Third."

They always hope for a Two without a Three. It is what they call mellow experience and mature statesmanship.

Fascist society is nothing but the uncontrolled growth  
of what John Earle describes as "a vulgar-spirited  
man." If you but look it up in his Microcosmography as it  
was written three centuries ago, you will find him all there.  
I bet you would find him in Theophrastus. He is a permanent  
fixture of society.

How can one then pin him down to Italy or Germany, since  
Balzac has already described his seizure of power, and  
America has multiplied him as the grains of sand on the  
beach? All he needed was an opportunity.

"Unqualifiable behavior of Ethiopia"  
the howl of the small newsboys was  
like an evening tide. Large headlines:  
"Ethiopia ~~is~~ evades frank explanations"  
So that, that. The last  
attempt at a progressive inner  
policy is dropped, it would seem.  
Too hard to deal with the people.  
Try a colonial adventure for a change.

# The blameless Ethiopians, says  
Homer, beloved of the gods...

I run into S. just stepping out  
of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <sup>where is chief of the N section,</sup> and induce  
him to drinks. His face is tense  
and lined. "I say, is this war?"

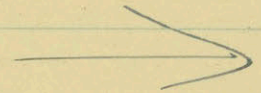
"Looks like it" he replies glumly  
He never ~~has been~~ <sup>was</sup> in favor of adventures.

"Just ~~that~~ <sup>one of those things,</sup> ~~that~~ <sup>they</sup> ~~offer~~.  
A <sup>call it</sup> ~~like~~ jinx on those poor Brits. Did  
ever nation try more meticulously to  
offer satisfaction for a wretched ~~incident~~  
incident like Wal Wal. Couldn't we  
at least look up something more  
plausible?"

He waves me off wearily. "Niggers.  
~~is niggers~~ Besides, international  
incidents from now have to be run  
in shorthand. See how the Japs did  
it in Manchuria."

"Yes, just look at it!"

"You're always encumbered with  
abstractions. Suppose I want to kick  
you in the pants, will it be nicer if I say:



Paul, will you find it nicer if I say  
'wait a minute, I'll run up first  
and ~~put on my~~ <sup>change into pumps</sup> ~~water-tight shoes?~~'

You know as well as I do that time's  
getting short. ~~So~~ Maybe we'd  
better make hay while the sun shines"

"Call it a distraction. What I mean  
is that ~~we~~ we're well on the way to  
counting shamelessness among the  
positive virtues. Remember a few months  
ago, when we were caught red-handed  
in that arms-smuggling affair of  
Hirstenberg, we started calling Bauer  
an international provocateur because he  
had ~~protested~~ brought it to attention"

— " ~~So~~ I suppose we should  
have said that we were waiting  
for the ~~bus~~ bus? "

— "Listen, <sup>I said</sup> I'm asking simply, is  
~~whether we are looking for a crisis?~~  
<sup>have made up our minds to stand up</sup>  
<sup>the sky the limit? Have we set our minds on a crisis?"</sup>

— Crises are bound to come in  
their time. It's not a matter of ~~when~~  
Point is: does it suit Britain to ~~be~~  
~~as friendly~~ <sup>with us</sup> or not? I mean — for the  
present. Well, if we show that we know

our way around, it helps."

"And the more unexpected our ways the better, eh?"

"You got it" he said, ~~and~~ suddenly appearing tired. "Look at what you make me say. God knows I don't like all this stuff that's going on. But everything is relative, as you scientists say. You boys discover relativity, and then you seem to forget about it."

Here again I am confronted with the principle of the Whopping Lie. Is it a necessary consequence of our so-called civilized life? Of the scientific study of propaganda? Of a sound positivistic spirit? All true but too general. What we have here now is the deep desire of the hearers to believe the lie even before the lie is told. Someone is taking care of reality. Always that extreme desire of moderns to be original, <sup>by delegation</sup> to find the trick, the <sup>thing</sup> "sensationally new, and docile, and unfeeling, to match the novelty of the technical instruments of progress. A striking lie is a slap in the face of all those who <sup>R</sup> think they know, <sup>knugs, who</sup> who know. It is a way of saying: what do we care →

for the pointless knowledge you tried to gather for yourself, aimlessly and vainly, or maybe as a means of looking important. It is easy to know the truth for such as us. It lies about, and ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~best~~ experts ~~at our disposal~~ are ours too. But ~~we need not~~ <sup>so what?</sup> tell it. We spurn the truth unwilling and unwatched. ~~Beig body's truth~~. Truth is unyielding, ~~our~~ <sup>our</sup> truth is streamlined. Truth is anybody's, ~~our~~ <sup>our</sup> truth is all ~~ours~~. <sup>our truth is our world, not theirs.</sup> ~~you~~ <sup>They</sup> don't know what ~~you~~ <sup>they</sup> want ~~of~~ out of truth, that vague word, but we know what we want out of ~~ours~~ <sup>it</sup>. We can both use it and kick it, it becomes in our hands a precise and flexible instrument of our will, and people will admire us for going the short way at it for our strength, our daring, our challenge to the part.

One might predict that in the coming war flat lies will be de rigueur. I mean the unnecessary

lie that comes before the fact of success. simply because people will be asking for them because they shall relish the idea of jumping the gun on events.



A cross-eyed world. Can it at least  
go where it cooks?

Suddenly there comes to me a forgotten  
image from last summer. "Arribal  
~~at~~ à la Perception de Tormere" - Going  
through Burgundy, I had stopped at a  
café in the little town that bears that  
weird name. As I was sitting there,  
a sleek <sup>Cooking</sup> ~~black~~ <sup>roadster</sup> car slid up to the  
curb, and I noticed with <sup>It cooked</sup> ~~surprise~~ <sup>faculties, why yes, it</sup>  
~~that it bore~~ an Italian number plate.  
The athletic-looking ~~young man~~ <sup>too</sup> ~~owner~~ <sup>vaguely</sup> had a "familiar face" - I recogni-  
sed him as a Milan business  
lawyer, but I could only <sup>recall the</sup> ~~recall~~ <sup>place him by</sup>  
first name, Arribale. He charged  
~~us~~ blindly into the <sup>precisely</sup> ~~first~~ door, bearing  
the official shield of the tax collector,  
~~then~~ dashed out like a ferris and  
doubled back into a dingy stationer's  
shop nearby. He came out limping  
with <sup>despondency</sup> ~~depression~~. As he stood <sup>there</sup> ~~there~~  
in the sun, he suddenly saw me  
and ran towards me as if

Y were a promise of life. "I say" he gasped  
"d'you know where I can find an Italian  
newspaper?"

"An Italian paper?" I said. "Why, man,  
you'll have to go as far as Dijon and  
even there you might not find one.  
How do you expect these people to carry  
Italian papers? Sit down and take  
it easy. ~~Even if there is a bit of a~~  
~~crisis, it's good to go for twenty four~~  
~~hours without a paper.~~ There isn't much  
of a crisis, and anyway you can  
get all the ~~news~~<sup>wires</sup> from the Temps."

He did not even listen to me,  
but ran his hand through his hair  
distractedly. "In times like these,"  
he groaned "not to be able to  
know the truth —"

On coming to power, Mussolini announced that his legions had "trampled on the petrified corpses of the Goddess Liberty". Many times since then I have heard his young men quoting those words blithely, as a simple solution for so many difficulties. There is no trace of perversity in this thought. It looks for them like a brilliant idea. Often, I have caught myself thinking Liberty, through them, as some kind of and maniac foreign spinster who barred the gate of life and is now safely out of the way.

I hear old Benedetto Croce saying in most wise tones: "You cannot get people to unlearn liberty". It sounds rather theoretical to me. The simple and staggering fact is that these young people have not the faintest idea of what the word liberty can mean. They identify it directly with the "liberty of the nation" (i.e. arbitrary license) to exult. They can improvise beautifully and cogently on that line. These you have the working side of the teaching of all these venerable liberals and conservatives with this "sacro equino". The tough farmers of Mollinellen knew what their freedom meant to them. They who had to be knocked down and dragged out of their houses individually and dispersed to the four corners of the country before they submitted. But these young men of the middle classes, who, at least theoretically, were exposed to the great educators and to mature thought, show no evidence of having learned anything but injurious rhetoric. Which leaves one with the doubt that the great liberals and educators, for all their talk of bringing up the country and leading it by the hand, never were able to reach the parents of these young men. There are certain things you learn only at home.

And I am not thinking solely of the middle classes, trained to look for a sinecure through the usual game of influence. Now really: what can a man of Mussolini's temper and background (and there are many like him in this continent) know of freedom? What he knows is his own soil of Romagna the

Rabelasian good cheer and humorless brutality of an obdurately avaristic and pagan population. It reminds me somehow of the story of a man from his own home town, a fat, jovial baker, who, on seeing some ~~acquaintances~~ acquaintances engaged in a noisy argument in front of his store, climbed up to his room and without more ado, blasted the group with his shotgun. "Me l'no fatt per scumparti", (I did it to break them up) he explained, with self-evident simplicity.

Mussolini knows only, deeply, this kind of homeland. As he grows older he reverts to it, he rushed <sup>away</sup> from the splendor and the refinement in Rome to spend hours of death-haunted silence at the grave of his parents in Piedepio. He reverts to his people and to its ancient obsessions. What can he find in his past? His father, the domestic tyrant in his smoke-filled tavern, throwing down answers to the problems of the day in an oratory seasoned with picturesque obscenity; the craggy coarseness and brusque rioting temper of the hometown folks; the political clamor in which the burning nationalism of the French Revolution was set in the more familiar pattern of the feud between Guelphs and Ghibellines. He can remember the unforgiving sullenness of his youth as a schoolteacher at five dollars a month in a town where he knew nobody; his incapacity to make friends; his nights of furious reading in subversive literature; a career of agitation and fight for power within a treacherous group. An ~~airtight~~ airtight life, springing from a social cell of half-medieval anarchisms and virtual abuse. I am willing to think that in another generation or two, political ~~and~~ education would have seeped through that cell, for there was intellectual life in that rough-and-tumble of class strife and sensual fury. But young Benito, named after Juarez, had only one life to live, and one world vision ~~he~~ to make use of. Cynicism is among the many capacities which have served him best, which sculpted his personality. He has evolved the technique. But Italians are now trying patiently to re-learn life from him. Much as they dislike the kind of man he is - for the Romagna has always somehow

been felt as an unwilling foreign body in the national organism - they have to notice that he has a new formula for getting ahead in the world, which means to them, as to all poor nations, the international world, - a new kind of education from below, "Just a reversal to ancient type", I heard someone say scornfully once. "It combines the two ancient institutions of carnival and brigandage."

Too simple. Yet there is no getting around it; this people has ~~had~~ forced freedom, it even invented it centuries ago. But it was not our modern kind. It never made that its own. There you have the easy answer. It was given modern freedom, but freedom won't work unless you make it your own, unless it becomes a physical necessity like breathing. For, certain Italians that is sure. Even now. They did give their lives, they are still giving them. But one has to think of the people, of that confused, all-comprehending being that is a society. And this particular medley of national Italy had little use for the political freedom we French and English nations were giving to the world. Freedom never reached any part of them: and once the alternative came up, they found it more natural to recognize themselves in the unloved but too familiar Italy from Romagna. It is easy to sentence a people to political immaturity; an ancient people is not a structural void, it is still possessed by powerful powers from the past. A Latin and Catholic society conceives of man as a creature of sin. Therefore, it can never attain to that measure of self-righteousness which is needed for a faith in modern freedom. Man is made up of passions; they are inevitable and illegitimate. But they are, and usually recognized by minds made by legal use acumen and aberrations of casuists. The Church is the real pessimist, and the great skeptic. She sees man as the oppressor and oppressed, as the oppressor and destructor of himself, as a revolted, blasphematory, stunted, mistaken being whose only hope is grace; a being forever tormented by his

demons and trying to slink back to his dark lair, as a cat pursued by cruel children. Popular conscience does not deny it, it turns with a shrug to the glass of red wine and the familiar transgressions. There are too many lucid pitiless consciences in the people. The bitter cries of a Machiavelli is that of the hopeless conscience. But it can become revolt. Too often I have seen eyes that made me think of the tormented animal, eyes dulled by pain and yet wild the inescapable moment. They know, they cannot avoid knowing, that they are going to hurt each other just as they are hurt by the people on top. And so they curse each other and God with abandon, with a pride in performance which soothes the deep urge to wound and defile the deity. Only savage precision can satisfy their physical awareness.

Among the more rugged and tempered characters, that awareness becomes an ancient humane philosophy: Shut up, forgive and forget, and make another try at living in peace with each other; there is no justice anyway. Such is the wisdom of the peasant and the worker. But there is none of that in the stunted, ugly middle-class which has no business with forgiving or forgetting, and cloaks its ugliness with rhetoric. The wisdom is all in words, ample, well-organized words, meaning nothing. "The vipers' nest", as Mauriac has recognized them, always the same in so many settings. One stares at them and wonders: Where are the noble old liberals of the Risorgimento, ~~like~~ those candid and fearless liberals who understood realism so humanely? There still are a few around. They look like historical remains, flotsam and jetsam on the tide of time. The real, the low middle classes have come into their own. They have inherited only one idea from their oppressed forbears: that society has never been a legitimate affair and that, since now they are the oppressors, they had better forget nothing of the craft and brutality that brought them on top. "The masses, my dear man", a hierarch was saying sentitiously the other day, "why we know the masses and you don't. The masses are ignoble and anarthic. There's only one way to handle them: whip and sugar".

And who made them , I was going to tell him, except such as you? But then I considered that such as he has been going on for thousands of years, that they were as inevitable as frost and hail in a society based and framed in sheer poverty. They had been the slave-drivers for the feudal lords, men of law who administered exhortions for temporal and ecclesiastical power, fathers and sons of priests, and in the "liberal" era, local bosses, traffickers of influence and manipulators of voters. They will never be the men to give the people half a chance, even if they now talk rational - socialist verbiage.

What can political freedom mean against such a philosophy? For it is a philosophy, and a valid one. From high to low, the social structure recognizes itself as a racket and a multiplicity of rackets. Even on high, among the rich and the well-born, in Italy just as well as in France and in Spain, Society, with a capital S, cannot remember the time when it felt at ease and legitimate. Look at Goya's portrait. All their dark eyes look ~~right~~ always fearful of the sinister work of the "Techs". Their fear has been moulded therein, their way of life has become that of conspirators, spying and checking on each other, meddling and gossiping, apprehensive of privacy and self-sufficiency in any of its members as of a threat at its own being. "Why don't you play the game?" The question is not put to you smugly as in England, but suspiciously and snarlingly from all sides. "If you do not share our vices and our fears and our self-protectiveness, you are not one of us."

The right of doing nothing and being by himself is the Englishman's castle. Any such castle would draw destructive fire over here. It needed only a war to sell these people the idea of ~~them~~ merging their several gangs into a big national one., to the size of the times. Police spying, block spying has replaced social spying. What was needed was a ring of men with no prejudice whatever, and no loyalty to a past. The , as the

Frenchman said.

They will in their towns, and they know it. Since the time of the Golden Bough, they have always known it. But now they are theorizing it. They like to taunt us with their pride in the passing moment. They want this time to be all theirs, and they don't give a damn for what has to follow. "I am only interested" said Mussolini, "in the lyrical moment of action. The bureaucratic period leaves me indifferent." The men who will overthrow them are born already. They are already searching for their way. But not one ray of thought, not one point of overage are available from the West. France used to be the great stand-by, the elder sister. But she is distraught, in the throes of a coming civil war. Britain was once a model; now one discerns nothing there but Brunwagers business, in cahoots with the bosses everywhere. We are alone with Germany. The Pit and the Pendulum. If one asks the serious young men what foreign country attracts them, they will answer invariable: Russia. Like the other young men of the Nazi left, they are fascinated by the bigness and the dream, by the revolutionary myth cradled in steel and concrete. Mussolini himself - one knows well where his secret sympathies lie - that is why they secretly respect him. Strange how Heinrich is absent from their thoughts.

They know it seduces only the vulgar-minded, the get-rich-quickers. One of them said the other day: "America is non-existent". He had found the world.



I am sent on an errand to Piero Parisi,  
Director of the Office of Italians Abroad.  
The usual sleek, ~~and~~ ~~and~~ aggressively  
handsome young hierarch, slightly  
red in the face from a realization  
of his own importance. And importance  
it is, ~~for~~ sure enough, for ~~he~~ he has  
the consuls throughout the world  
working for him on fascist propaganda,  
~~and~~ hordes of lecturers and society  
missionaries, ~~swarms~~ of Catholic priests  
in the American continent who take  
the patient emigrant <sup>through</sup> ~~by~~ <sup>eloquently</sup> ~~of~~ <sup>preaching the</sup>  
of Mussolini with the Madonna. ~~At~~ ~~the~~

A good way to come for a young man  
who in 1921 was a small bank  
clerk. Banks seem to provide inex-  
haustible reservoirs of frustration.

Following in sumptuous furniture,  
he expands complacently on the  
greatness of his task, on the virtues  
opening in the future. All the same,  
these important men. Any casual  
writer is a potential trumpet for  
their fame. His pet project right  
now seem to be the international  
Committee for the Universality

of Rome. One of those phoney initiatives  
by which ready foreign intellectuals  
are enlisted in the hope of a subsidy.  
His particular favorites (and Ciano's)  
are the Fascists, a disreputable little  
shirt racket that has cost ~~them~~ <sup>of Ciano</sup> ~~him~~  
hundreds of thousands, and has  
paraded a couple of ~~times~~ in  
Paris amid jeers. Now at last,  
through more good money, Fascists  
and Francists and a few plumeiffs  
have managed to get together an  
"International Congress" in Lausanne.  
That is real prestige. Parini feels  
that all of the youth of France  
is in his grasp. "They don't know  
yet who we are but they are begin-  
ning to know". Do they? Don't they?  
~~I should~~ I am thinking as he talks,  
not of that many handful, but  
of the real <sup>French</sup> admirers of Fascism,  
the plucky frightened people of the  
moneyed set, who gush that  
France needs a Mussolini. The fascists  
are to them a <sup>goodly</sup> ~~right~~ unknown  
promise, something in the shape  
of smart young service station  
attendants parking apily at  
your door - handle, and keeping

the mob in their places with a bludgeon  
and the stern face of authority. If  
Fascism only knew its basilisk ~~power~~,  
virtue, if it only knew what crazy  
hopes and deadly complicities it  
~~crosses~~ <sup>crosses</sup> everywhere. Well, ~~of course~~ these  
men <sup>here</sup> know, of course, but somehow  
they do not care to realise. It is  
clear they are not particularly  
interested. That ~~kind of~~  
kind of allies may come in handy  
for diplomatic intrigue. But the  
dream is to inspire some real  
popular movement. Something  
flashy, dynamic, agitational,  
a correspondence of souls that  
might make these ~~people~~ <sup>partisans</sup>  
feel that they have started a  
landslide in history. A strange  
wish-world for <sup>such</sup> Machiavellians.  
They poison societies at a distance,  
but no more than a virus can  
they know or control what they  
are doing. The hierarchy is still  
blurbing on, in ~~a talk~~ <sup>multiplying</sup> full of  
words like "realism", "dignity" ~~and~~  
the "hale of civilisation", which  
sound as self-conscious as allu-  
sions to affluence in the newly rich.

I listen in silent wonder. Thou art not a devil my friend, not <sup>even</sup> so much as an evil elemental; a little thing of nature art thou, the spat in the horse's nostril, the tiny crack in the beam. Never was greater ruin ~~carried out~~ <sup>started</sup> by more insignificant instrument. Then, at last, he asks a question.

"You come from London. Tell me, they admire us there, don't they?"

I fail to recollect even a faint sign of interest in Italian politics among the Londoners I have met. Events among the lesser breeds ~~can~~ may occasion a polite statement of principle en passant, after which conversation goes back to normal channels. I try to convey the British view as tactfully as I can, but I see him flushing angrily:

"Very well, they can go to hell. We don't give a damn for what the world thinks about us."

There they go, sulking like little boys. In a minute they

will have forgotten all about it.  
The <sup>huge Resistance</sup> ~~chambers~~ room, the push  
buttons, the rolling phrases hold  
them. The world is their oyster  
still. In those distorted minds,  
so crude and earthily practical,  
in these complacent discoverers  
of modern realism there is still  
a childlike wonder at being taken  
seriously, <sup>there is</sup> a longing for genuineness,  
the little blue flower of ~~a~~ dream  
fulfillment. ~~fulfillment~~. The King of Tarshish shall  
bear gifts.

Out skiing with a couple of friends  
at ~~the~~ Abetone Pass above Florence.  
As we reach the mountain club  
shelter in the evening we find  
it filled with noise & smoke. The  
shouts <sup>rise above</sup> mingle with an accordion;  
then they blend in the songs of  
alpine regiments, and the "canti  
della vigilia". The usual ~~festive~~ <sup>hysterical</sup>  
high jinks that goes with the exalta-  
tion of mountain air. Everybody is  
feeling truculent, magnanimous and  
slaphappy. In ~~the~~ corner I spy a  
grizzled head of hair. Count R., a  
Party official from Bologna, is  
<sup>beaming over</sup> ~~watching~~ us young barbarians  
at play. He greets us effusively  
"Ah yes, blessed boys, wonder-  
ful time they're having - it warms  
one's heart." It certainly corresponds  
very closely to what is intended.  
I remember certain radio presenta-  
tions of the Student Group.

Sorry, I'm just a non-smoker  
"When you saw ~~the~~ the heavy pain  
does not move, but his eyes which  
had been fixed on the desk turned  
on me fiercely

"I remember once, when you  
were ten, you answered back at  
your parents just like that, and  
it was I who intervened, ~~not~~ to  
you would have been deprived of class"

"I do remember so, but that  
time I'm not just being contrary.  
In fact, I feel for you, but I cannot  
square my instinctive feelings with  
my experience

"Your father" - he goes on - served  
the state and advised it, even as I  
am doing, and as our fathers had  
done before us. We are the bearers  
of a historic responsibility, and I would  
not like you to secede from it without  
thoughtful. New men come in all the  
time, but we represent something  
not easily replaceable. I wonder what

with your generation  
H. W. They children, too — what is it?  
Excuse the ~~directness~~ ~~of my question~~ me  
in, but I would rather ask: did you  
take a good look at the men who are  
ruling you and me — at those who are  
giving you orders? Maybe you might get  
part of the answer there.

"Those men" he answered unperturbed,  
"are upstarts, and uncombed at that.  
But such men come and go. I have seen  
very strange people in power. I have  
had to spoon feed cabinet ministers  
who would have been unfit to run a  
grade school. But political ~~figures~~  
agitators are not the state. They ruffle  
the waters, but the state goes on, for  
it is simply the accumulated stonches  
of society. It can stand worse storms  
than these

"I remember, in fact, that you once  
said that you would have had Mazzini  
without fuel

"I certainly would, for Mazzini was  
a foolish visionary. But a man like



him would never have been able to run a  
real state. These men <sup>here</sup> are running it. They  
have demagogical bills that I don't like, but  
that some think necessary. <sup>Maybe</sup> The best is this:  
however wildly they talked, they have behaved  
prudently on the real issues of foreign policy.  
They know what a nation is.

Supposing they don't <sup>ever</sup> ensure its permanence?  
They will. They ~~follow~~ are sensible enough  
to interpret the national will to permanence.  
The rest <sup>means</sup> ~~counts~~ little. We <sup>Europeans</sup> have many many  
centuries of history. The men ~~at the~~  
at the head of affairs were often people  
of most contemptible character. And  
yet the nations persisted. They grew  
in spite of them. What Christian nations  
need is a guarantee of the family, of  
religion, of the right to property. They  
need men like us to be their stewards,  
and there are always men like us  
available. We do not desert our post.  
The rest "be added with a pen  
" is a matter of chance. Up + down

"Time without end?"

As far as we can see - or say so - yes. I am a Catholic. For me, religion and the social order are inseparable. Did you ever read the letters of Erasmus? You see there what the idea of the Christian state is like. It cannot change, for it is anchored in heaven.

The young monarch got up and with his hands on his hips, true Dutch style, delivers a ~~rather~~ <sup>very</sup> uncertain attempt at a snappy oration. ~~Strange~~ His face is red - strange how many people in the higher ranks who look as if they had just eaten themselves red in the face. The first flush of power.

Why are they all so red-faced? I enquire of my neighbor, S who sits beside me.

He is a section chief at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and an expert in labor problems. He smiles absentmindedly.

"First square meal in three thousand years," I guess, considering where they come from."

Someone told me a lot of young Russian commissars look like that.

"Why yes, it's true. Party meeting in Moscow. And yet - me, Cook. You never were in Russia? Too bad. It's terribly different. There is steel in these eyes - you feel steel all around. Wouldn't you like to be there?"

Yes - and no. Arent they a new kind  
of humanity? One wd have to get reborn  
first. If they are Cre- Makers, we  
are Heunderthals or receivers. Nothing  
to do with us. At least that's the way I feel.

I dont know. I often think of  
Russia. If only we had what they've  
got. A big thing. "An eye is better  
than two memories"

Mastro Benedetto has dropped in. He honors me with a visit once in a while. He is an old stone-mason, himself hewn out of the core of this rocklike Roman plebs. He lives in Trastevere, the last truly ancient and plebeian section, right under the Vatican. For centuries, his forebears built the works of magnificence of the Popes, drank Frascati wine and fought each other to the death on slight provocation in the shadow of the Basilicas. "To be a Christian is a good thing," says an old piece of advice, "therefore don't forget to carry a sharp knife and a rosary." But Mastro Benedetto is of a sedate if commanding temper. In the course of time he has become a subcontractor on his own, and he knows the ins and outs of business.

"Well, sir," he said, settling his impressive bulk in a straight-backed chair (for he has no use for those soft things), "I guess we'll be going to war with this Ethiopia some day."

"Looks like it, Sor Benedetto. At least that's what they say among people in the know."

"Bad, bad. They are always up to something. They'll lead us all to ruin. And I tell you the Pope's behind it this time. The priests have been preaching from the pulpit about how we ought to bring those poor infidels and heretics back into the fold. Good Christians all. The Pope, he always comes out all right. He drew his

billions out of those boys along with the Concordat or whatever you call it, and he's got his dough in the Bank of London. Whatever happens, it's all right with him."

"There's more than the Pope to it."

"Sure. What 'they' want first is to keep their machine going. Don't tell me. What I mean is - is there any sense to this? I'm asking you."

He sat straight and still, as he talked with long pauses; his old blue eyes, bloodshot from much exposure to chips and mortar, surveyed me gravely.

"What do we want with those people? Why should we go and kill them? 'They are going to dress it up as if it were the last squeeze of the Piave, watch'em, but it's not. We're going a long way out. And those people may say, 'You've come all this way. I may be black, but I'm at home here. What do you want?' That might mean trouble.

"I'll tell you what. It's just prepotenza (bullying). This crowd are a bunch of prepotenti, and they have to behave that way, inside and out. It's because they don't know any better. What can you say? Nothing. Now I've got some friends - old-timers, regular fellows - charcoal-burners and the like from Albano and those parts, old syndicalists that quote Mazzini and sleep with their pistols beside their beds - fine men for organizing. Maybe you still remember how they pulled off that election

in Genzano against hell and the authorities, a great stunt that was. Well, they too know there's nothing they can do. So do you know what they do by way of protesting? They go to the Protestant Church. Yes sir, I once found them at the Waldensian Chapel in Via Nazionale, all sitting there."

"So you go yourself, eh?"

"I go once in a while, just to get a feel of something. And there are men from San Lorenzo there, and Trionfale - from the brick furnaces and so on. But mostly old men, grey-haired like me. The young 'uns go another way."

He does not insist. Going communist is a risky job, and nobody's business.

"Have a glass of wine, Master."

"Thanks. Good stuff. We had good men in those days, and good organizations too. Mussolini - <sup>now</sup> who's Mussolini? I knew him well. Just a kind of walking delegate, always trying to make trouble. He didn't cut any ice with the boys..He used to hang out at the Five Moons, and he left a string of unpaid checks there that are still waiting. Used to eat there regularly. The innkeeper is my friend, and he showed them to me, all signed for credit. I said, why don't you go up to Palazzo Venezia with the stuff, maybe now he's got the dough. But he doesn't want to end up in jail. He says it'd hardly be diplomatic.

"Mussolini - what does he think he knows about ruling?"

The only way he knows is prepotenza. Now old Giolitti,-

that was a man. We used to fight him, but he was a man."

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But the old worker came back to the present.

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"Now Master, you know very well that you of the Eternal City think that everyone that comes from the provinces must be small beer."

"Maybe. There's some good and some bad, but the Romagnolo is worse. They let down Garibaldi after Mentana. D'you know what Pope Sixtus said about them, he knew them well..."

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"Have another glass, Sor Benedetto."

"Thanks."

He pondered the taste, then resumed placidly: I tell you this Pope's a great bastard. They used to be sort of better when we Romans had a hand in making them. At least if it had been another Papa Pecci (Leo X<sup>II</sup>) - all from Carpineto -"

"You seem to have the Pope on your mind, Master. I never heard you talk of him before. What's the matter?"

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"What are you afraid of?"

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"These are bad times all around. The going is hard. No business except for government, and they hand it out among their own crowd. The young men are in trouble, what between the war, and - . Now take my son-in-law, the one that married my youngest daughter. They caught him for irregular organizing, and it looks like they're going to give him eight months. Just because they can't pin anything on him, otherwise it would have been ten or twenty years, God knows. That's eight months off the

payroll, and then he'll have to look around for a job and it isn't so easy. Meanwhile we've taken in the girl and the little ones, and my wife is getting old, and I'm not so good at getting around as I used to be - . Well, I've bothered you enough for one afternoon. It does good to talk once in a while."

With his hand on the door-knob, he paused and looked around.

"There's one thing I'd have liked to talk about. It's not easy, but I keep thinking about it when I lie awake nights. Is there a God? What's your idea?"

We stood there in thoughtful silence.

"The way I figure it out is this. There's got to have been a God, else who made the world? But maybe he's dead. I guess that's how it is. It's such a long time since. If there were a God around, I don't see how he would let these scoundrels have their way like that. Maybe he doesn't want to look at us any more. But that's not like him. If he sent his own Son to save us - . But then why doesn't he give a sign? He might come to us at least in dreams. That's not much to ask. My idea is that he must have died long ago. Nothing lasts forever. Why, gold - look at my finger, even gold - that's the toughest thing of all, even it has to come to an end. I guess he must be dead. What do you think?"

Mastro Benedetto has dropped in. He honors me with a visit once in a while. He is an old stonemason, himself hewn out of the core of this rocklike Roman plebs. He lives in Trastevere, the last truly ancient and plebeian section, right under the Vatican. For centuries, his forebears built the works of magnificence of the Popes, drank Frascati wine and fought each other to the death on slight provocation in the shadow of the Basilicas. "To be a Christian is a good thing," says an old piece of advice, "therefore don't forget to carry a sharp knife and a rosary." But Mastro Benedetto is of a sedate if commanding temper. In the course of time he has become a subcontractor on his own, and he knows the ins and outs of business.

"Well, sir," he said, settling his impressive bulk in a straight-backed chair (for he has no use for those soft things), "I guess we'll be going to war with this Ethiopia some day."

"Looks like it, Sor Benedetto. At least that's what they say among people in the know."

"Bad, bad. They are always up to something. They'll lead us all to ruin. And I tell you the Pope's behind it this time. The priests have been preaching from the pulpit about how we ought to bring those poor infidels and heretics back into the fold. Good Christians all. The Pope, he always comes out all right.

He drew his billions out of those boys along with the Concordat or whatever you call it, and he's got his dough in the Bank of London. Whatever happens, it's all right with him."

"There's more than the Pope to it."

"Sure. What 'they' want first is to keep their machine going. Don't tell me. What I mean is - is there any sense to this? I'm asking you."

He sat straight and still, as he talked with long pauses; his old blue eyes, bloodshot from much exposure to chips and mortar, surveyed me gravely.

"What do we want with those people? Why should we go and kill them? 'They' are going to dress it up as if it were the last squeeze of the Piave, watch'em, but it's not. We're going a long way out. And those people may say, 'You've come all this way. I may be black, but I'm at home here. What do you want?' That might mean trouble.

"I'll tell you what. It's just prepotenza. (Bullying.) This crowd are a bunch of prepotenti, and they have to behave that way, inside and out. It's because they don't know any better. What can you say? Nothing. Now I've got some friends - old-timers, regular fellows - charcoal-burners and the like from Albano and those parts, old syndicalists that quote Mazzini and sleep with their pistols beside their beds - fine men for organizing. Maybe you still remember how they pulled off that election

*planned*

*other way?*

in Genzano against hell and the authorities, a great stunt that was. Well, they too know there's nothing they can do. So do you know what they do by way of protesting? They go to the Protestant Church. Yes sir, I once found them at the Waldensian Chapel in Via Nazionale, all sitting there."

"So you go yourself, eh?"

"I go once in a while, just to get a feel of something. And there are men from San Lorenzo there, and Trionfale - from the brick furnaces and so on. But mostly old men, grey-haired like me. The young 'uns go another way."

He does not insist. Going communist is a risky job, and nobody's business.

"Have a glass of wine, Master."

"Thanks. Good stuff. We had good men in those days, and good organizations too. Mussolini - who's Mussolini? I knew him well. Just a kind of walking delegate, always trying to make trouble. He didn't cut any ice with the boys. He used to hang out at the Five Moons, and he left a string of unpaid checks there that are still waiting. Used to eat there regularly. The innkeeper is my friend, he showed them to me, all signed for credit. I said, why don't you go up to Palazzo Venezia with the stuff, maybe now he's got the dough. But he doesn't want to end up in jail. He says it'd hardly be diplomatic.

"Mussolini - what does he think he knows about ruling? The only way he knows is prepotenza. Now

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