

214671

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_214671

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No.

Accession No.

Author

Title

This book should be returned on or before the date
last marked below.



THE TRAVELLERS* LIBRARY

*

GRECIAN ITALY

THE TRAVELLERS' LIBRARY.

- CAN SUCH THINGS BE by Ambrose Bierce
THE BLACK DOG by A. E. Coppard
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A SUPER-TRAMP
by W. H. Davies
BABBITT by Sinclair Lewis
THE CRAFT OF FICTION by Percy Lubbock
EARLHAM by Percy Lubbock
WIDE SEAS AND MANY LANDS by Arthur Mason
SELECTED PREJUDICES by H. L. Mencken
THE MIND IN THE MAKING by James Harvey Robinson
THE WAY OF ALL FLESH by Samuel Butler
EREWHON by Samuel Butler
EREWHON REVISITED by Samuel Butler
ADAM AND EVE AND PINCH ME by A. E. Coppard
DUBLINERS by James Joyce
DOG AND DUCK by Arthur Machen
ANGELS AND MINISTERS by Laurence Housman
THE WALLET OF KAI LUNG by Ernest Bramah
KAI LUNG'S GOLDEN HOURS by Ernest Bramah
TWILIGHT IN ITALY by D. H. Lawrence
THE DREAM by H. G. Wells
CLORINDA WALKS IN HEAVEN by A. E. Coppard
ROMAN PICTURES by Percy Lubbock
MARIUS THE EPICUREAN by Walter Pater
THE WHITE SHIP by Aino Kallas
MULTITUDE AND SOLITUDE by John Masefield
WILLIAM by E. H. Young
SPRING SOWING by Liam O'Flaherty
WUTHERING HEIGHTS by Emily Bronte
THE COUNTRY OF THE POINTED FIRS by Sarah Orne Jewett
ON A CHINESE SCREEN by Somerset Maugham

Uniform with this volume

GRECIAN ITALY
by
HENRY JAMES FORJIAN

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY HENRY FESTING JONES.



LONDON
JONATHAN CAPE 30 BEDFORD SQUARE

FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE TRAVELLERS' LIBRARY 1927

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

CONTENTS

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY	<i>19</i>
TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL	59
LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS	97
COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES	143
NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA	189

INTRODUCTION

IT has been said that if you were shewn Taormina in a vision you would not believe it. The same may be said of all Grecian Italy. Exaggeration of its beauty and its charm is not possible and, if the reader is one of those who have been there before he reads this book, the magic of its pages will revive old memories and induce a severe attack of nostalgia. Under the author's guidance he will steam, perhaps for the twentieth time, into the harbour of Palermo, with Monte Pellegrino on his right and Capo Zafferno on his left. He will disembark in the glowing sunshine and, after the usual preliminaries of arrival, will go out into the streets. He will wander again along the Via Maqueda, through the markets for fish, vegetables, flowers, inhaling the pot-pourri of their various odours; he will observe the palaces, the

GRECIAN ITALY

advertisements of the marionette theatres; the many different kinds of peaches for sale; the girls at the corners with flowers; the wine-shops, the goldsmiths; the dealers in antiquities, in tobacco, in salami, salted anchovies and stock-fish; he will be surrounded by the eloquent gestures of the people, their princely manners, their friendly eyes. He will become aware again of the presence of the invisible Mafia, but the Sicilian is far too courteous ever to allow this speciality of his island to molest a foreign traveller.

Then he will be taken to the sights and the author will hand out suitable scraps of history with each. All these renowned sights with their historical associations are good as side issues, and we must renew our acquaintance with them; they are indeed indispensable if one is making a special study and wants them for instruction or reference, but they cannot compete with the fascination of the town; they become tedious when compared with the

INTRODUCTION

streets, as dried flowers become tedious when compared with living blooms. After a few visits the ordinary traveller gives them the go-by, and thinks of them chiefly as reminders of the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, the Normans, the Spaniards, the Goths, the Germans, the French, the Italians, down to the English and the modern Americans—nations that have all contributed to the mosaic of civilization which now obtains in the island and tends to obliterate memories of those other mosaics which enrich the walls of the Cappella Palatina and of the Cathedral at Monreale. For, as the author so profoundly says :

' Take it all in all it is not any one thing or "sight" in Palermo of which one would like to give an impression, but the city as a whole, its brightness, its movement, its endless flow and swarm of street life under the Southern sun. It is that which is forever elusive, yet forever exciting.'

After a few pages about the rebuilding

GRECIAN ITALY

of Messina, ruined by the earthquake of 1908, we are brought to Taormina and have to consider and reject the idea of ascending Etna:

'It strikes me,' says the artist companion, 'that the thing to do to a fine volcano like that is not to climb it but—to look at it.'

So instead, they ascend along the flowery path to Mola, meeting women carrying water in jars on their heads, carrying babies in their arms, driving goats before them; and on their way down call at the Castello.

For the majority of travellers a day at Taormina passes somewhat in this manner: after your morning coffee you go to the Greco-Roman theatre and lie on the grass absorbing the panorama till lunch time. After lunch you return to the theatre, lie on the grass and watch the changing lights on Etna till tea-time. Perhaps you take your tea in a pasticceria and musicians come and perform the Pastorale for you, but you return to the theatre till dinner time. After

INTRODUCTION

dinner you go back to the theatre and lie on the grass in front of the panorama. According to the season the sun will set or the moon will rise or there will be a storm. Something will happen. Whatever it may be, the panorama is always there, always the same, and yet never the same. If you feel inclined, you may return to the town for more music and dancing till bed time.

Taormina is irresistible. It is a 'sight' that no one wishes to escape. I know an artist who had been in Venice, making pictures for about sixteen years until Venice no longer inspired him. He tried and tried and could produce nothing. Ruin stared in his face. He determined to return to England and, having heard of Taormina, stopped there on his way intending to stay for a week. He stayed for eighteen months. All his powers returned to him and ruin retired before the innumerable sketches and pictures which he now produced readily.

You may resist the temptation to ascend

GRECIAN ITALY

Etna, but at Siracusa you cannot escape the classical sights. Our travellers saw them all, the Latomie, the Amphitheatre, the Street of the Tombs, Fort Euryalus, the Greek theatre, the Fontana Arethusa, all as per guide-book. And they saw them with the refreshing American eye, and tell us about them in the refreshing American manner. They drove to the Fontana Cyane to see the papyrus, which I am a little sorry for; they would have enjoyed it even more if they had gone in a boat up the Anapo.

They did not omit Girgenti nor Castrogiovanni, where Proserpine was interrupted when making her botanical collection; and, after their return to Palermo, they went to Segesta in a motor—a hundred and forty kilometres through some of the wildest scenery in Sicily—driven by a Mafinsu, and 'it seemed a positive safeguard and protection to have that chauffeur.'

I regret that they did not go to Mount Eryx. I should have liked to read how

INTRODUCTION

it struck these Americans. The author, however, gives a sufficient reason. He was fearful of starting his companion on archaeological lines of speculation.

But I must bring these remarks to a close or they will grow as long as the book they are supposed to be introducing. The author and his artist companion left their families at Taormina and went for a tour in Calabria. While reading about this my nostalgia took a turn for the better, because I hardly know more of the country than I have gathered from Gissing's book. I have passed through it, and twice spent the night at Paola where my experiences closely resembled those of our travellers at Cosenza.

The final division of the book is about Malta and, although I have been there, I must leave the reader to find out about it for himself, merely assuring him that it is treated as Sicily is treated, so that one wants to go back at once—nothing else will do.

HENRY FESTING JONES.

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

I

CLOSE to the ground like an ant heap — that is how I should depict Palermo, if only an ant heap were beautiful and radiant with colour. For Palermo is one of the loveliest cities in the world.

It is no Spotless Town, but it is one of those old-world Mediterranean cities, eternally wise, over which all history and civilization have rolled, eternally primitive, busy, absorbed, swarming with life. The vitality of Palermo is irresistible. It is not so much like a fountain playing as it is like a current leaping, winding, eddying, intent — intent upon what? — upon bread and fish and garlic and trifling small goods.

You meet some one and inquire,

' How do you like Palermo?'

' I hate it,' is the answer. ' I arrived yesterday and I am leaving to-morrow.'

Yet the next person may tell you that he comes there every year, or that he came

GRECIAN ITALY

twenty years ago and has lived there ever since. People hate Palermo or they love it. It is rich man, poor man, beggar man, and all the rest of it rolled into one. Come there in sunshine and you bask; come in rain and you desire to flee. Few of the many who visit Palermo ever really see it.

One of our fellow-passengers, a large, travelled lady known on shipboard as the Duchess of Park Avenue, who allowed it generally to be known that the best was none too good for her, sniffed audibly as we jammed into the customs-shed on the docks.

'What a dreadful little place,' she loudly informed us, 'and how disgusting to have it rain when we arrive!'

She spoke as though the authorities had turned on the rain as a gratuitous insult to her dignity.

The most expensive hotel in Palermo stands well outside the city, and thither promptly moved out the Duchess and her Ditto, another lady of similar tastes, be-

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

cause from a distance you can look with so much more contempt upon the place you have come to visit. But Palermo didn't care.

In all Italy, in all Europe, perhaps, Palermo is the nearest to an oriental city. Wherever the Arabs may have left their greatest, most enduring monuments, here at all events they left behind them some of their vitality, their intense oriental absorption in sheer living, in the very stuff of life itself.

Has there been a war in Europe? Oh, yes—no doubt. There have been many wars. But it is too much to expect Palermo to take count of them. For so long Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Goths, Greeks, Arabs, Normans, Germans, French, Italians, have swept, blustered, wrangled, quarrelled, fought like dogs over Palermo, that you can hardly blame the city for a fatalistic, oriental indifference by now. Like life itself, Palermo goes perpetually on.

GRECIAN ITALY

The great number who visit there remain but the one day the ship pauses in the harbour. Feverishly, they dash in the automobile of a tourist agency to the cathedral at Monreale, to the cathedral in town, to the Palatine Chapel, and say afterward, ' Isn't it good to get back to the ship!'

As the ship steams out towards Naples or towards Gibraltar, and they look back upon the colourful, glittering city, half sprawling, half nestling at the foot of Monte Pellegrino, then for the first time they see that it is really beautiful—that they have missed what is in many respects the most interesting city in Europe.

II

IT is only if you remain there long enough that you learn to shun the broad new thoroughfares and merge again and again into the narrow crowded ones. For there is the life and the vivid chequered soul of Palermo. Your nose is your guide. Where

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

the smells are thickest there is the vitality of Palermo.

At the Quattro Canti, the four corners, where the Corso Vittorio Emanuele cuts the Via Maqueda, I used to stand sometimes for hours, feeling the delicious sense of being immersed in sheer life, as a swimmer swept by surf. A few steps along the Corso and I could enter the most sumptuous club on the island of Sicily, an old Spanish palace, filled now with the grandees of Palermo, who talk foreign affairs, finance, politest of polite letters and the music of *Die Tote Stadt*. In Parisian frocks and London clothes you see there young and old descendants of Phoenicians probably, certainly of Moors, of Normans, of Spaniards, and even of Italians—though no Sicilian will ever call himself an Italian.

'*Sono Siciliano*,' they always answer haughtily.

A few paces to the right in the Via Maqueda and you can step down into fruit and vegetable markets reeking with the

GRECIAN ITALY

smells of centuries, filled with chaffering, dickering, gesticulating women, men, tall, brilliant-eyed Arabs in the shirts and trousers of the Occident, fair-haired Nordic strains, a medley of races, obviously, but all Sicilians, fierce, vociferous, kindly, clamorous, intensely vivid.

I do not mean to imply that there is no other sight-seeing to be done here. The island of Sicily has remains so ancient that by comparison the continent of Europe on the whole is the merest of upstarts. Those long Normans who went about carving out kingdoms with their double-edged long swords built monuments and churches presumably with especially long trowels and by the aid of oversized hods. For those that remain are masterpieces. And the Normans were among the latest conquerors of Sicily.

Intensely human they must have been, those Normans from Normandy. And though you hate them for their cruelties, you cannot but admire them for their cour-

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

age, their prowess, and their shrewd statesmanship. In some respects they were almost superhuman. Their leaders had a way of taking forty knights and giving battle to an army of thousands of Arabs, or of conquering an island like Malta with thirteen followers. It was almost like fictions by Dumas made real. They always fought ostensibly for the Church and generally stood well with the Popes, who were fond of investing them with the sovereignty of lands yet unconquered. But as the Arabs predominated in the Palermitan population, the Norman Rogers, once they took Palermo, proceeded to live like Emirs in their midst. They kept harems, made the Arabic language legal, and employed Arab bodyguards.

That seemed to interfere in no way with their building of such great churches as those at Cefalu and Monreale, as the Chapel Palatine and the Cathedral at Palermo.

Even the tourist of half a day in Palermo is inevitably whirled to the Palatine Chapel.

GRECIAN ITALY

The palace itself, as you approach it from the Gramercy-Parklike Piazza Vittoria, is unremarkable enough—for the most part a seventeenth-century yellowish building where Spanish viceroys ruled on behalf of Philip V. You would scarcely give it a second glance. Few Palermitans give it even a first glance as they saunter by. But once you enter the gate and make your way by the drab stone-paved courtyard up the stairs to the gallery and to the chapel you enter another world.

In the twelfth century the palace was magnificent. In those days Arabs used to write books of travel and possibly magazine articles. One of these Spanish Arab globe trotters, Ibn-Giobair, wrote:

' While being conducted to the Presence, we traversed esplanades, courts and gateways of the King, where the eve met so many noble structures, estraded terraces, gardens and pavilions for the gentry of the Court, that our eyes were dazzled and our spirits astounded,'

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

That is how travel was written in Arabic. Those estraded terraces are vanished as are King and gentry. But the chapel is there as dazzling and astounding as in the days of Ibn-Giobair. Its Latin shape, its Byzantine design, its stalactite ceiling 'dripping with all the elaborate richness of Saracen art/ seem an interior out of the Arabian Nights. It is exactly the kind of tabernacle in which Christian kings, whose vestments were decorated with Arabic inscriptions, who lived surrounded by harems and eunuchs, would desire to worship their cosmopolitan God. Upon the astonished eye suddenly bursts forth the shine and glimmer of mosaic as a fine art, the mosaic of Byzantium which worked in little blocks of coloured, gilded stone and glass, as other arts worked in tempera and paints.

Mosaic in general sounds stiff and unexciting, but seen here in the chapel of the Norman Rogers and of the Sicilian Hohenstaufens, it is a ravishing thing full of charm and light. Whole narratives are told

GRECIAN ITALY

in this seemingly unmanageable medium—the lives of the Saviour, of Peter and Paul, all the legends of the Old Testament in lifelike glowing, scintillant figures and scenes.

The dark shadows of the dimly lighted chapel seem to recede, and the subtle brilliance of the mosaic on every wall, in every corner, emerges with the soft golden glimmer of spiritual things. Christ entering Jerusalem—it seems as if in no other medium, certainly not in mere paints, could that scene be depicted with the appropriate subtle splendour. You are absorbed in the pictures and you suddenly wake to realize you are seeing a lost art.

The Duchess of Park Avenue, however, whom we chanced to meet at the chapel one morning, did not wholly approve of it.

'Don't you know,' she observed, 'it is a little out of date. I ought to value it, for it is Byzantine. And on my mother's side we ourselves are descended from a Byzantine em-

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

per or. But really this kind of thing to-day—'

We did not ask which Byzantine emperor. Anyway, it wasn't all Byzantine. At least some of the work in this Christian church was done by Mohamedan Arabs, just as Frederick II wore robes with embroidered Arabic invocations to the Christ. If ever there was a melting pot here was one. Yet we consider our American melting pot a new phenomenon. It is because Europe has lost the art of fusing that there is still so much unease and unrest there now. Many of the common people I talked with in Europe see no salvation for the suspicious squabbling continent but a United States of Europe—if only the antiquated statesmen could realize it. Well, those statesmen had better go back for instruction to the Norman Hautevilles and the clever Frederick II of Hohenstaufen. Indeed, that the living statesmen shall join those past masters in tolerance and join them soon seems to be the most ardent wish of the European people. . . .

GRECIAN ITALY

III

THE Cathedral almost across the way from the palace, though much altered, amended and rebuilt, is another Norman-Byzantine-Moorish monument of a lovely warm colouring, somewhat resembling St. Mark's in Venice, with Arabic inscriptions still visible on certain columns. Time, that great harmonizer, has fused and coloured many elements into one exquisite design. But to me the notable things in that cathedral are the six porphyry tombs of the Hauteville-Hohenstaufen dynasty.

In a chapel to the left of the entrance those canopied porphyry mausoleums, some eight centuries old, stand massive and solid, yet giving oddly the effect of old-fashioned cradles rocking their burdens in the eternal sleep. I am no specialist in tombs and I generally avoid them. But these alone seem to exhale so much dignity and peace, that somehow they give you the deep, si-

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

lent effect of a group of temples. There they lie enshrined, that King Roger of Sicily and his grandson, Frederick II, who kept harems because many of their subjects were Mussulmans, and, presumably, because they wanted to. Their harems were euphemistically described as the Royal Silk Embroidery Works, because the young women in the eunuch-guarded halls were thus accustomed to pass their time.

Frederick was always being urged to undertake a new crusade, and how he did dread it! The very idea bored him horribly. It was as though the Prince of Wales were urged to 'Enlist in the Navy for Travel/ Frederick had not only travelled all he had desired, but he had the Orient right there in Palermo. There were those Embroidery Works, and he had philosophers, astronomers, learned men, Greeks, Arabs, Jews, always about him for high intellectual conversation. Amid the gardens and fountains of his palace life was fabulously pleasant!

GRECIAN ITALY

Constance also lies in one of those porphyry cradles, as well as her husband Henry VI, son of Barbarossa—the mother and father of Frederick. His wife, another Constance, is near him. The other two are some nobodies among the later rulers of Sicily.

Yet, when one thinks of it, what were they, any of them, but cruel and lustful tyrants, little better than savage chieftains for all their vestments, pomp, and cathedrals? And it is suddenly revealed to one that all our history and all our study of history is still on a semi-savage basis. It becomes apparent that Professor Robinson in his golden book, *The Mind in the Maying*, is correct in showing that we are still amazingly near to the savage and all enmeshed in medievalism; that our teaching of history is grotesquely askew, and that holding up, say, a Richard Cœur-de-Lion as a hero to our school children is little better than making a pattern of Jesse James.

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

Europe is sprawling in misery to-day and all but helpless because such have been her heroes and, inevitably, such her ideals. And we in America are only now becoming alive to the taint we have not wholly escaped.

IV

WAKE up early any morning in your hotel at Palermo if your hotel is in the town—and you will hear grand opera being sung in the alley or courtyard of the house below, magnificent voices, rich, florid, southern.

' Does a singer live there?' you ask the maid who brings the hot water.

' Oh, no signor!' she assures you. ' It is not a singer but a workman going to his work, or possibly the baker's boy.'

The front of that workman's dwelling may, and often does, resemble a combined cellar and stable—windowless, dark,

GRECIAN ITALY

damp. But its occupant is trilling love songs and arias at six o'clock in the morning. And from those stone hovels issue magnificent fellows, often with Moorish eyes and complexions, shouldering their way into the swarming population. Civilization, so far as they are concerned, has been a matter for the kings, the nobility and the rich. It has passed them by. They are merely populace.

Where the houses have grown vertically, as in a busy city even as ancient as Palermo they must grow, the fish and the garlic and the macaroni are sent up to the top-story windows in a basket.

' // *bambino!*' cries the housewife from above to the grocer's lad below. He looks round. There behind his legs is a two-year-old child on the pavement. With one movement of his hand he gathers in the *bambino*, plumps him down in the basket atop of the fish and the garlic, and, overhand, the mother pulls up the groceries and the child to her window ledge. You shud-

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

der to think what would happen if that child moved half-way up in its ascent. But the child is well trained and does not move.

Besides, in the swarming city of Palermo life is cheap. Life has always been cheap in Sicily, from the time when the original Sicilians were first impressed into subjection by the Phoenicians and the Greeks seven or eight centuries B.C. Modern civilization— what is it but a tramway line that demands the exorbitant price of two pence for a ride in these tax-ridden post-war days, or the annoying honk of an occasional motor car nosing through the Corso ? Civilization is little more than that.

Palermo, one imagines, was far more civilized in the time of the Arabs. Ibn Haukal, another of my Arabian predecessors, who visited Palermo just 952 years ago, found it so magnificent and opulent that he was overcome with admiration not only for the great traffic of commerce with Africa, Spain and Italy, but for the three hundred mosques which adorned the city.

GRECIAN ITALY

Every trade, grade, class, and guild of the citizens had its own mosques. No wonder that some of the earliest churches were merely some of these mosques transformed.

San Giovanni degli Eremiti is one such church. With its five red domes or cupolas, with the loveliest of all cloister-gardens surrounding it, it seems to exclude the noise and swarming life of Palermo like some magical palace in a fairy tale. The brief span of a lifetime, all the hurly-burly of to-day are suddenly nullified. A thousand years were veritably but a day, and we suddenly felt a thousand excuses for the foolish humanity of our generation, as one might feel excuses for a schoolboy who has been forced to advance too rapidly. A thousand years—what were they?

Gruger began making sketches with puckers of concentration on his forehead and murmuring that he wished he could spend a month there. It sounded as though he had said a minute. That is one reason why this side of Paradise there seems to be so

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

little comfort in the wise, and why travel of this kind brings to the traveller a new touch of tolerance and patience.

We lingered there in the charming oriental garden with its soft air, its gleaming oranges, lemons and mandarins set in verdure, among the slender time-tinted columns of the cloisters—and life was flowing to another rhythm, like a man's pulse when the fever leaves him. We found ourselves speaking softly as though fearing to break the spell, or to disturb the brooding, smiling genius of the place. The old Moslem Allah, so often invoked there in the past, seems to be looking on with laughter-stirred eyes, saying,

' Well, and do you think your thousand years of progress so very superior now?'

In the centre of the garden was a well, exquisitely shaped and sculptured. We saw a great bulk bending over it. Behold, it was our Duchess—the Duchess of Park Avenue.

' Can't tell me that water is fit to drink,'

GRECIAN ITALY

she muttered sniffing. 'Just smell it. I'd like to send a gallon of that to the Lederle laboratories. These Moors couldn't have been very sanitary, could they?'

'Hardly,' answered her companion.

'But the place isn't bad,' pursued the Duchess speculatively. 'Gives me an idea for our place at Rye.' Finally, however, even the voice of the Duchess was stilled. The exquisite proportions of the columns, the airy grace of the garden set like a jewel, made an impression even upon her. She demanded a chair. She and her 'Ditto' were silent. All in the garden were gratefully silent. They were in the presence of a supremely beautiful creation.

The Martorana not far away resembles the Eremiti somewhat, but nothing on the face of the earth is quite like it, either so eloquent or so peaceful—so near to perfection. The Martorana too has domes, also a garden and some bits of mosaic. But beauty does not reign there secure as at the Eremiti — only memory. Once outside

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

these shrines and you are in the swarming city again and a man offers you cheap German shoelaces at ever so little the pair.

V

THE swarm and the cheapness of modern Palermo drive many to almost continuous sight-seeing—which is regrettable. But lucky Palermo! To have so many sights to see for those who would escape the population!

Monreale alone is worth coming for. I do not mean merely the Cathedral of Monreale, though that is a wonder, but the whole town of some fifteen or sixteen thousand which has grown up round it and the superb view of the *Conca d'Oro* below, the Golden Shell—and surely no more beautiful name has ever been given to a beautiful valley! It is a valley so enriched by nature that no wonder every conqueror since the Phoenicians has felt that a city

GRECIAN ITALY

must remain forever planted there—there among the verdure and the blossoms and the flaming oranges and the golden lemon trees, against the eternal blue of the sea and sky.

The Arabs took a great delight in this *Panormus* of the Phoenicians, and after the Arabs the Normans from Normandy with the salt rime of icy northern waters still in their blood, with the mists and fogs and snows of the north still in their eyes, beheld the Golden Shell of Palermo and knew that their own peculiar Promised Land was attained. The most ruthless of vandals could not bring themselves to destroy it—as another city some fifty miles distant, Segesta, was destroyed, razed, wiped from off the face of its hillside—Palermo is one of those fortunate cities that, like a great legend, must live forever.

The Cathedral at Monreale is a marvel. Baedeker says it contains over 70,000 square feet of mosaic decorations. No doubt it does. We did not measure them. The

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

Duchess, however, whose motor arrived simultaneously with our tramcar, did square off the walls with her eye unaided into spaces the size of her dining-room walls. She made it less than sixty-five thousand feet.

⁴ But you must allow for slight errors,' she conceded.

As she went on, scanning the rods and furlongs of glittering Old and New Testament pictures, she suddenly fixed her eye upon one spot and nudged her companion sharply.

* Look at that,' she whispered hoarsely. 'There is Noah after the Flood. He is letting the lion out at the front door of the Ark, while his wife is letting the lamb out at the back. Can't tell me those animals are not going to meet soon.'

Those thousands of square feet of mosaic are said to be one of the wonders of the world. And having done our duty by them, we left them to the Duchess and quickly passed out to another cloister, next

GRECIAN ITALY

door, that remains over from Saracen times. It is said there are two hundred and sixteen columns, no less, in these cloisters. There may be. We only knew that as we gazed at the light graceful arches, at those slender columns, not tall, not in the least overwhelming, but exquisite models of their kind, we forgot the rate of exchange, forgot that it was Tuesday, or that we had any other business upon earth than just to look. Benedictine monks once used to wander about those cloisters. Of the monks there is no memory now. One thinks only of the nameless architects who planted a rare shape of beauty there on the top of Palermo. But when is an architect's name ever recorded! Tchekhov has a tale somewhere to show that fame attends only upon actresses, prize fighters and demagogues, seldom upon builders and makers.

Through the door in the wall of this cloister-garden you pass out upon the ancient foundations of the Benedictine mon-

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

astery, now also a garden. There another view of the *Conca d'Oro* surprises you. Monte Pellegrino and the other rough-skinned hills form the gray wrinkled background, and the sea, the colour of which it is useless to describe in words, makes the dazzling foreground. Between them lies the Golden Shell and the nestling, gleaming city. You gaze out over this scene, inhale the orange scent, and you wonder why so many Sicilians come to America. Nothing surely could be more alluring than that sun-drenched valley, and that jewel-like city.

The number of 'talking-points' for civic publicity here overlooked is simply criminal. In vain I looked everywhere for large signs from either the 'Booster's Club' or the Chamber of Commerce urging, 'Build Your Factory Here,' 'A Few More Splendid Sites with Trackage,' or * Palermo Is Growing—Come and Grow With Us.' But such is the lack of pep among the Palermitans that they overlook bets

GRECIAN ITALY

right and left and have no idea how to 'sell themselves' to up-and-coming business men. What they need most is a bright young up-to-the-minute go-getter. But except in the matter of your small change and at the hotels they are left at the post.

The only place where I saw any palpable signs of the go-getter spirit was at the *Mnseo Nazionale*. That museum, what with the remains of so many civilizations that have passed over Sicily, contains what is virtually a history of civilization from the Stone Age. But the authorities, on the plea of lack of guards, have so arranged that on the day you are allowed to view the Phoenician pottery or coins or Arabic remains you cannot see the metopes, or mural sculptures from Selinunte.

Now those metopes are among the best known antiquities of their kind in the world. For the city of Selinus was destroyed in 429 B.C. So that in the metopes you get a kind of history of the development of Greek **sculpture**. You discern **what an**

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

aptitude they had for it, yet how far they were from perfection in their 'prentice days until they culminated in Praxiteles.

The Duchess was heard to exclaim that she had better sculptures than that over her large fireplace at Rye. All the same, they are exceedingly interesting, those works from the seventh to the fifth centuries B.C., when the Greeks began, so to speak, to lisp in stone.

You have to come another day for the other things—the *Sala Araba*, the coins, the vases, the antique bronzes, some of the rarest in existence. And, of course, you have to pay another admission. Yet herein alone an efficiency engineer, a go-getter, might discern the one ray of hope for Palermitan enterprise.

Take it all in all, it is not any one thing or 'sight' in Palermo of which one would like to give an impression, but the city as a whole, its brightness, its movement, its endless flow and swarm of street life under the southern sun. It is that which is for-

GRECIAN ITALY

ever elusive, yet forever exciting. You cannot label it with the fez or turban or bur-nous of an oriental city. It is European enough in its way, and at the Club impeccable ladies and gentlemen in fashionable clothes are listening to Brahms concertos and drinking tea and cocktails. But it is an oriental city for all that. There is a mysteriousness about the swift vivid life, from the brightly painted little donkey carts, with whole books of the Bible in pre-Raphaelite colours on each cart, to the inscrutable, invisible Mafia that is supposed to stalk about unseen like a pestilence.

VI

Always you are vaguely aware that the Mafia exists. You read of a stabbing or a murder in the newspapers and involuntarily you murmur 'Mafia.' In some ways you can hardly see how they could do without the Mafia in Palermo. Frederic Gruger and the writer made a hundred and forty-kilometre journey by motor to

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

Segesta to see a famous Greek temple. Through the savage lonely countryside, through mountain passes and forgotten townlets, we were driven by a stalwart two-fisted chauffeur said to be a '*Mafiuso*.' It seemed a positive safeguard and protection to have that chauffeur. Whenever he paused, mysterious strangers appeared seemingly out of nowhere to greet him and to confer with him. He was constantly nodding and greeting people with rifles slung over their shoulders, carried here as six-shooters used to be carried in the West. We felt comfortably safe with him. And he it was whom we commissioned to pay the muleteers for our donkeys. Considering that Gruger rode his ass all the way as Napoleon rode his charger, that ride was worth a good deal of money to both of us. But the charges were very moderate, and here at last we found ourselves paying for something in Sicily without meeting protest or argument. That *Mafiuso* was better **than a passport for us.**

GRECIAN ITALY

Messina is said to be another stronghold of the Mafia.

'Just what is the Mafia?' I asked a resident Messinese.

'Ah, it is nothing,' he answered with a grimace of perplexity — as though he might have said, boys will be boys. 'It is a sort of brotherhood,' he went on. 'But, no, it is not that—more a sort of fellowship. The law, you see, the Government—it is too slow. Sometimes you want quicker action. The Mafia supplies that.'

The same sort of definition has been given of New York's East Side gangs. So quick is the action of the Mafia at times that a man may enter the train at, say, Messina, and arrive a corpse at Palermo. Something like this actually happened in the case of a certain Italian army officer who had shown hostility to the Mafia. He took his seat in a first-class carriage alone. There is a long tunnel just outside of Messina on the way to Palermo. When

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

the train entered the tunnel that officer was still alone and alive. By the time it had emerged he was dead—murdered.

'But not any of this,' my informant explained, 'has any reference whatever to foreigners.'⁵ All these 'accidents' are based on local domestic feuds. Everywhere in Sicily you hear the same thing. Foreigners have nothing to fear. I travelled in a railway compartment with a priest from Girgenti to a junction called Roccapalumba on the way to Palermo. At the stations there were always a certain number of men with rifles hanging from their shoulders.

'What do they carry those rifles for?' I asked the priest.

'For self-defence.' was the laconic reply.

'Do you also have to carry weapons?' I asked. His cure he had told me lay in the region of the sulphur mines through which we were passing.

'Oh, yes, I am armed,' he answered simply and his hand unconsciously strayed

GRECIAN ITALY

to the side of his soutane. But he, too, hastened to add that it was all in the family, that strangers had nothing to fear.

The only evidences of attempts upon the foreigner in Messina are on the part of the railway porters. To them you are heaven-sent prey. They think nothing of demanding forty *lire* for transferring a trunk from one train to another. Once I argued the point with a pack of them.

'I am poor!' cried one of them. 'Look at my shoes. They cost a hundred *lire*!'

'Look at mine, I told him, 'they cost two hundred *lire*—and I am poor, too.'

'You can travel!' he countered triumphantly—a standing proof of the foreigner's affluence.

* Come to the *capo stazione*,' I invited him. * Let the station master settle our dispute.' He laughed, and accepted ten *lire*—which is ten times the pre-war tip for a similar service.

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

VII

THE truth is, living in Italian cities is now furiously expensive and the poor are almost desperate. The taxes and the living costs are at the top of the curve. A medical student of Palermo University bitterly complained to me :

' Before the war I could get board and lodging for seventy-five *lire* a month. Now at the least I must pay five hundred.'

A tourist before the war paid, let us say, ten or twelve *lire* a day in a decent hotel or pension. That was eight and sixpence or ten shillings the day. Now he pays for similar accommodation sixty *lire* a day, plus ten to fifteen per cent of his bill for 'service,' plus about seven per cent for 'luxury' tax, plus a 'sojourn' tax, plus some minor taxes. Even when the pound is worth a hundred *lire*, it brings the expense still to double the pre-war cost. And to know how annoying all those piled up taxes may be you must go to Italy.

GRECIAN ITALY

So far as Messina is concerned, however, few foreigners experience its difficulties. Like Catania farther down the coast, it is studiously avoided except as a point through which to pass on the way elsewhere. It has just now all the characteristics of a boom town. Since the earthquake it has been in a frenzy of construction. The war halted everything, but now it has resumed. The building trades and unions rule the city.

Everywhere are still masses of ruins, houses, buildings, palaces, churches, collapsed into shapeless chaos, with grass and weeds sprouting from the crazy heaps of ruin. A few yards away perhaps are going up new stone buildings, shops, apartments, houses. It gives you oddly the effect of the frantic work upon the Tower of Babel. You wonder when the confusion will come again. Everything has to be built afresh in the city with twenty-six centuries of history, for almost literally not one stone was left standing upon another.

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

The Cathedral of Messina, begun by the Normans in 1098, is a walled-in ruin, and a hastily put together wooden shantylike structure across the way takes its place. The Fountain of Neptune nearby alone remains almost intact. The sea god, with his magnificent chest chiselled by Montorsoli, favourite pupil of Michael Angelo, brandishes his trident stilling the waves. Well, he certainly was unable to still the earthquake—which shows the limitations of those Greek one-job deities.

Down in Catania, less than three hours distant, St. Agatha is always able to check the lava streams from Etna. The lava fields come right down to the city. But once, in 1669, when the lava came too near and doom was certain, the inhabitants held out St. Agatha's veil, and the lava turned away into the sea, filling in part of the harbour. Since then, except for an earthquake now and then, nothing much has happened to Catania, and it rivals for dullness any place one can mention.

GRECIAN ITALY

But Messina, once it is rebuilt, will be the nearest to a modern city on the island. It will certainly be cleaner and more wholesome. The new concrete one-story houses of the railway employees remind one of the houses Thomas Edison was going to invent and decided to forget. But no one lingers for minute observation in Messina. There is only one fairly good hotel and no reason for staying in it. The city is like a family the week after a bereavement. All the tragedies are still too vivid in the hearts and in the eyes of so many people. I met an English business man who lost his entire family the day of the earthquake. He still lives in Messina and still deals in the essential oil of mandarin and orange peel, but at every anniversary of the quake he leaves Messina for a week, so as not to be reminded of the horror.

Always you find yourself leaving Messina with more alacrity than you arrive there. And when you hear of certain public officials who enriched themselves by

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

their proximity to the funds all the world contributed to the relief of Messinese sufferers, you take another look at the mountains of ruin and debris dotting the city and hang your head in shame. Not because, like Mr. W. J. Bryan, you mind being descended from the ape, but because at the moment you could not look an ape in the face with any degree of pride.

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

I

A SICILIAN boy, according to H. Festing Jones, made this reply to a question in geography:

' The five quarters of the globe are four in number, and they are the three following—Europe and Asia.'

Had the scholar been a Taormina boy, he would doubtless have answered even more circumspectly. For in Taormina the world-is largely effaced. It is not forgotten because—what can there be to forget? Here are the sun and the matchless Ionian Sea, the mountains and Etna—and, oh, yes, the lights of Messina in the distance at night. That, however, is far away, fully twenty miles. But Taormina, well, that will not bear talking about. It is so extravagantly beautiful—what can one say? Foreigners come and rave about it and cry out that it is the most poignantly exquisite

GRECIAN ITALY

spot in creation. But, then, who would deny that?

And the odd thing is that we foreigners, when we come there, are soon merged into the same state of aloof and fatalistic superiority—almost imbecility—regarding the beauty of Taormina. Exclamations and comparisons dwindle into silence. One mentions a sunset now and then, a view, a colour, or an aspect of Etna. But of Taormina as a whole one ceases to speak.

Sights! There is not a 'sight' in Taormina, or anywhere else, for that matter, that can compare to the sight of Taormina itself. You may do your sight-seeing through the window or from the Piazza or indeed from any high point in or about the town. It is not any one spot but a configuration, a colouring, an atmosphere that baffles all description. It is pathetic to see artists who have lived there twenty years trying to paint Taormina. It is something like exhibiting a picture of the Grand Canyon at the Grand Canyon. The place makes

GOLDEN CITIES OF SICILY

one dumb, illiterate. It is one spot on the earth made for recollection—recollection in the mystical sense—a gathering together of all one's being to a centre. Then one may begin to see the world and life afresh. The eye will have received its baptism of beauty.

A single street, a Graeco-Roman theatre, ruined—mountains—the sea, and Etna—that is about all. Yet, see the full moon overhanging this enchanted coast, the domed and vaulted sky aglow with stars; the eternal whisper of the wine-dark sea; a sunset, a sunrise; an arch of purple bougainvillea, or a bank of scarlet roses; the light slipping down from the hills into the shadowed, painted valleys, and you experience those moments of eternity, freed from time—initiation, perfection!

'What is the sense,' Gruger demanded, 'of crowding all this beauty into one spot and forgetting the rest of the world?'

I could not tell him.

'I guess,' he answered himself, 'they pay

GRECIAN ITALY

for it here by always living under the shadow of Etna.'

But he was wrong. The human craving for justice does not operate here. Etna is indeed a dread deity, but harmless to Taormina. The patron saint of Taormina, San Pancrazio, when sent upon his mission to convert the Taorminians, demanded three indulgences for his future See:

That no war should ever wholly destroy it; that pestilence should pass it by and that earthquake or eruption should leave it unmolested. The consequence is, that Etna has never harmed Taormina. Lava streams often fill the deep gorges surrounding it, but never reach the town.

And there is Taormina, a sort of Avalon—as Theocritus put it, * with the music of water that falleth from the face of the rock,' with the eternal whisper of the sea below. Stress and storm seem remote and the pace of life is a perpetual saunter. The pipes of Pan are no mere mythical symbol there. **You can actually hear them under your**

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

window or down the winding lane in which you stroll. They are still fluting as in the days of Theocritus. And what is more, you can approach the piper and he will eagerly sell you the pipe.

When Gruger, most equable of men and of artists, arrived in Taormina, he went gently but suddenly mad. Having preceded him by some time I engaged and held rooms for him at a thriftily moderate price. I had held those rooms against all comers, like a paladin.

'He is an artist,' I said, 'and artists first discovered and made Taormina. Artists notoriously are not rich.'

But while driving to the hotel San Pancrazio Gruger's eye had beheld Taormina and his senses reeled. Immediately he took the most sumptuous rooms in the house because of a certain view, and all my painstaking thrift went glimmering. He saw visions of painting Taormina and going down the ages to assured immortality. My polite protests gave way to veiled contempt,

GRECIAN ITALY

but all to no purpose. He almost bought the hotel.

'And here I had been clinging to those decent, inexpensive rooms/ I murmured bitterly, ' on the plea that you could afford no more.'

' Didn't you get my wire saying why I was delayed?' He protested guiltily. I laughed at him. He vowed he had sent a wire — several wires.

As luck would have it, a girl at the hotel began to hear rumours of a cable addressed to her that had not been delivered. When she went to the post-office to inquire she was informed that no such cable existed. Yet people would stop her in the street and say, * You have got your cable, haven't you?' To her bewildered negation they would only reply, ' Oh, don't worry. It's only someone named Jack wishing you many happy returns. You'll get it some day.' She inquired repeatedly, but the nearest she came to that cable was to learn that it had just been delivered to someone else

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

and that doubtless it would come back when nobody wanted it. The greater part of the population knew and quoted the contents of the message, but she never did receive it. Under the happy influence of this episode the number *of* telegrams Gruger had sent me grew to an alarming extent. I decided to drop the matter.

Indeed, any such modern innovation as a post-office in Taormina seemed an absurd anachronism. It assumed the character of a lottery. You might inquire for letters daily for weeks and receive nothing. Then one morning you would receive a batch that had been there a month or more. Upon those addressed *poste restante* you pay extra postage by way of rent for the space they occupy and also because they rob the carrier of his work.

GRECIAN ITALY

II

As an efficient New Yorker, Gruger at once demanded to be led to the sights of Taormina, so that he might go to work without delay. I led him up the street to the Piazza and showed him Etna.

He gazed for a few minutes with a critical, professional eye, and then he sighed deeply.

' I say!' he murmured, but that was all he said. ' Makes me think,' he finally added, ' of the lady who said Niagara was pretty neat.'

What could he or anybody say of that perfect mountain, snow-covered, of a glittering whiteness, with its plume of fleecy cloud hiding the crater, superb, commanding, beautiful, yet with the fires of Hades burning in its bosom? It is no wonder that Taormina seems aloof and isolated, an independent realm, by the sea, part of no other kingdom or republic. More than

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

one supreme allegiance is impossible to man. The Taorminians may be Italian subjects, but their true ruler is the dread god, Etna, lovely, inscrutable, insecure and at times wrathful. 'Pillar of Heaven,' Pindar once called it, but the simpler mind of the fatalistic natives sometimes calls it the mouth of hell. When it speaks, towns, villages and all created things are buried beneath its fiery torrents and the Last Judgment is no mere symbolic phrase. Etna may appear from your window almost as close as a tree in your garden, but it brings very near home the awful omnipresent might of the gods. And the yellow of mimosa in the middle distance, splashes here, there and every where of scarlet, blue and purple only help to domesticate this deadly beautiful deity.

Gruger set about sketching and photographing Etna, and I smiled with superiority. No matter how great an artist he might be, I knew that in this case I could do as much with words as he with brush

GRECIAN ITALY

and pencil — which was just nothing at all. No one has ever really painted or described Etna. The poet Horace could do you a graceful lyric on Soracte, 'candid with snow,' but he never sang of Etna. Nor are the attempts of Pindar or Theocritus memorable.

When we began to stroll about among the hills of Taormina, so that Gruger might observe different aspects of Etna from divers quarters, we found the same curious quality peculiar to them all. They seem luminous and somehow strangely alive, those hills, Ziretto, Venerella—all *of* them—free from the inertia of dead matter common to other mountains. They appear alive with vineyards and chromatic gardens, quick with the life that for thirty centuries and more has passed under their shadows. Cities, sieges, colonies, races—Sicilians, Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Normans—all, all are dead, gone by like a stream that has served only to water their roots. Like tolltakers those

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

hills have absorbed the life for themselves and their sovereign, Etna. And we, too, seemed somehow to be contributing to their eternal life. Beautiful in shape, graceful and tapering like gods, they seem like all beautiful things to hide a secret cruelty. 'Those peasants and toilers in the vineyards and the dark-eyed children,' they seem to say,—'we shall absorb them all at last.'

Wandering among mountains always makes one philosophical. Gruger's philosophy came forth in the shape of a sunny optimism. No use, he thought, to mourn the lack of masterpieces accomplished. The best that we can do is our destined contribution. As to the passing of the years, well, who would desire eternal youth with its storms and poignant sorrows? Better far the table-land of the middle years, where the pace is more even and the landmarks clearer, and happiness is less a thing of the passions than of a reasoned, serene tranquility. Almost he

GRECIAN ITALY

had succeeded in putting me in countenance with myself when I was suddenly inflamed with the idea of climbing Etna.

'Simply to loll in pleasure', I submitted to Gruger, 'eat your meals, drink your wine, gaze at the flowers and the sunsets—what kind of a life is that? You don't even play bridge at night. We must do something strenuous, energetic, to prove our mettle, or we shall become creatures merely—

"Lulled by the song of Circe and her wine
In gardens near the pale of Proserpine,
Where the *Ææan* isle forgets the main."

'I guess you're right,' said Gruger drooping visibly. 'Go ahead. I guess we ought to climb Etna.'

I began to make inquiries concerning the ascent. I only you are willing to undertake something disagreeable, there is a multitude of people always ready with advice. An English antiquarian and curio-dealer who had climbed the peak supplied a fund of information as to the right time for as-

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

cent and descent, to embrace a vision of both sunrise and sunset. Another gave advice as to mules, guides, alpenstocks, gloves, hob-nailed boots and candles.

But suddenly Gruger was visited by one of his startling ideas, which he ungrudgingly imparted.

' You know,' he said, ' it strikes me that the thing to do to a fine volcano like that is not to climb it, but—to look at it. What is the sense of climbing everything and getting to the top of every hill, if only it's high enough? That is all a modern craze. Even the lava comes down from the volcano. You've never heard of it going up, have you? It's against nature—scramble up 11,000 feet in the snow just to look into a hole in the ground.'

An almost apostolic light glowed in his eyes. I had never seen him so moved. And to tell the truth I found myself in agreement with him. I respect genius wherever I meet it. And Gruger suddenly appeared to be enkindled by the light of genius.

GRECIAN ITALY

III

WE were both much relieved to have surmounted Etna so easily. Gruger became assiduous in sketching it, as though he owed the volcano something. I did not envy him his task. Many have tried to paint Etna. It cannot be done. The loafers in the Piazza sitting day by day and gazing at it had much the best of it.

By way of compensation Gruger proposed that we ascend to Mola, a village built upon a rock, some two thousand feet in the air, that overhangs Taormina like a hawk's nest. And if the word ascend conveys to the reader anything heroic or energetic, I wish to disabuse his mind at once. Were it anything formidable Gruger would have found excellent reasons for not attempting it. It was a mere saunter, but one of the most memorable in a lifetime.

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

The path that leads up from the town is persistently steep, but only to softened foreigners. To the native it is nothing. For Mola draws all her drinking water at Taormina and carries it up on its head or on donkey-back to that rocky perch.

And drinking water is the only kind used at Mola. We climbed and we chattered, with roses, hibiscus, and geraniums lining our path, geraniums so opulent they were trees instead of the mere potted plants we know. The peaks rose before us and the donkey-path wound ever upward and the colours under a radiant sky glowed with an unearthly lustre. We began to lean heavily upon our sticks under the rays of a January sun, and an old beldame with skin shrivelled like a dried apple, and great smouldering eyes, with a jar of Taormina water erect upon her head, flashed contempt at us and passed us on the way upward. We even met a woman, a young ox-eyed Juno, with a babe nursing at her breast, a three-year-old child clinging to

GRECIAN ITALY

her skirts, she driving a flock of goats before her. She neither smiled nor flicked an eyelid, but only glanced at the foreigners who trudged up the hill for pleasure. As we looked at her nursing child she turned away and her lips moved.

' To shun the evil eye, did I spit thrice in my breast', says a shepherd in the sixth idyl of Theocritus, ' for this spell was taught me by the crone, Cattytaris, that piped of yore to the reapers in Hippocoon's field.' That old crone is piping yet somewhere about Taormina.

We passed an *octroi* station with a spruce young tax-collector inside it, so that none might bring an untaxed onion into Mola. Since we carried no onions, or anything else dutiable, we passed freely and finally stood within the walls of Mola.

Literally within the walls, for the entire place seems like somebody's walled home, and the little stone-paved Piazza, with the houses about it, is all there is to the town. Simply a few buildings with a stone coping

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

around the front yard so that no one might fall out of town.

' You can imagine mothers,' suggested Gruger with his visualizing habit, ' warning naughty boys not to sit on the wall and perhaps fall down into Taormina, or the next county, and get a bump on the head.'

' Do you realize/ I frowned on him, ' that the Carthaginians, the Greeks, Romans, Saracens and almost everybody has tried to capture this place—and often succeeded ?'

' They must have felt badly fooled when they got it,' said Gruger. ' I haven't seen a grown up human being here yet.'

It was true. All humanity seemed to have scurried to cover in the stones that made up this curious cairn of a town. Presently, however, some school children came, seemingly from nowhere, and with the candour of childhood held out to us their copy-books for our examination. What a moment before was like the platform where Hamlet's ghost might walk,

GRECIAN ITALY

was now populous and vocal with the laughter of children. They seemed the excuse and the explanation of everything. Yet why keep them chained to this sun-baked rock?

The mystery of human habits is something that has always baffled writers and psychologists and caused William James to become lyrical in a text-book. A son of one of these eyries on Mola came back from America and cried out that his parents must be mad to cling to their rock, their all but windowless prison of a house, bitterly cold in winter, filthy, cheerless, a donjon. Why did they cling to it? But — father and mother alike protested — abandon the *proprieta*? That son had yet to learn the passionate tenacity that binds an Italian, a Sicilian to his property—that binds any man to his property.

We began to gaze about us and soon forgot all problems in psychology. Inland was Monte Venere and Monte Zirretto and the peak of Lapa, swimming not in mist

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

but in light. In the folds between them lay gardens and smiling vineyards and here and there, like black shadows dotting the landscape, were the hardy carob-trees.

Towards the sea, on the first tier beneath, is the ruined Castello, ancient citadel of the Taorminians and, on the tier below, Taormina itself, the pleasure city, glowing in the sun, the south wind from Africa fanning it like a slave. There to the right was the painted valley, terraced and rich with many colours and to the left, the hill with the ruined Graxo-Roman theatre. The lowest point of land visible is Naxos on the sea, first of Greek settlements in Sicily. One can imagine the Greek trader Theocles, nearly three thousand years ago, swept by a northeaster towards this spot, which all Greeks dreaded because they believed in Homer.

Had not Homer told of Polyphemus, the one-eyed Cyclops, who had so nearly devoured Ulysses? Well, this was the home of Polyphemus, and of the Laestry-

GRECIAN ITALY

goned, too. And ever smoking Etna, what was it but the forge of the god Hephaestos ? Anything was better than landing on this dreaded shore, anything except death at Scylla and Charybdis, in the Straits of Messina, some parasangs farther on. A Greek, one supposes, would always take his chances with god or monster rather than to go down into Hades, the valley of shadows, that Ulysses found so untellably dismal. The Greeks beached their boats at Naxos and the friendly Sicilian natives proved not at all like Polyphemus. They had sheep, but instead of desiring to eat the Greeks, they eagerly bartered their wool for glass beads and the like. Hence the settlement of Naxos, Taormina, Syracuse, Henna, Gela, Akragas and many another town, like the City of Etna, of which no landmark even remains.

Naxos is but a strip of sandy beach to-day, where now and then a coin, a shard of pottery or a statuette may still be found. Many of the cities are ruins. But the dazz-

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

ling sea, the magically tinted sky, the south wind—these are still engaged in making indescribable beauty such as lured the ancient Greeks. The drip of multi-coloured flowers seems to cascade downward all the way from Mola to the sea.

A completely respectable Boston woman, with sons at Harvard and a home in Back Bay, was so moved by the vista of beauty before us that she lifted her hat and twirled it high on her climbing stick, to the surprise and delight of all. No such humorous event had probably taken place on Mola since the arrival of the Cathaginians. Wine is not necessary for intoxication at Taormina.

We walked down towards the ruined castello, guarded by a child of eight, unaccustomed to the glibness of a caretaker. Repeating her lesson, in which she had doubtless long been drilled, she murmured shyly:

'Io sono da Taormina e il governo non mi paga.'

GRECIAN ITALY

She was from Taormina and the government paid her nothing for her labour.

'That,' said Gruger, who had read many long manuscripts for illustration, 'that is a lesson in compression for you literary men. It's as good as a guide-book full of patter.' Upon rewarding the little maid for her literary style, Gruger suddenly discovered that he was hungry. From that moment all views, all scenery, all beauties receded into the thinness of super-sensual objects. We fairly ran down the mountain path, and I blessed myself for not having undertaken the ascent of Etna with-him.

IV

THAT evening the town's amateur orchestra came to the hotel and played in the dining-room the while Gruger drank his red, red wine. Gruger is at his best in such circumstances and my eyes lingered fondly upon his expression of quiet rapture. That amateur band is composed of a group of

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

geniuses who in private life ply the trade of barbers. Why barbering and music should go together is a nice problem in applied psychology. But even the small boys who danced the tarantella were little apprentice barbers. The musicians have an easy time, since all that is demanded of them is Taormina's speciality, the 'Pastorale.'

The 'Pastorale' is one of the most haunting melodies in the world. The theory seems to be that it was learned from the shepherds in the mountains and taken down,- so to speak, verbatim. The shepherds approach with their bag-pipes in action and the plangent tune comes swelling to the hearer. It grows more and more *crescendo* as they draw nearer, until they pass the well-known given point, whereupon the volume of sound begins to diminish. On the mandolins go, repeating the stirring melody *diminuendo* until, finally, the strings convey only a faint sighing whisper from the hills. No one ever wearies

GRECIAN ITALY

of the 'Pastorale.' It is of the soil of Sicily and Theocritus is supposed to have piped his idyls to the tune. But be that as it may, Gruger felt compelled to have more and more 'Pastorale.'

When the barbers left us we made our way through the darkened street to the Cafe Nuovo, which is the Cafe de la Paix of Taormina. The proprietor of that cafe looks like a poet and shares with the barbers a virtuosity upon the mandolin. Nightly, with his three sons, he sits upon a little platform and charms the hearts out of his hearers with a supreme rendering of the 'Pastorale.' As we sat there spell-bound sipping coffee and Marsala, Gruger was melancholy that he could not paint the 'Pastorale.'

It was late when we left the Cafe Nuovo. There was no moonlight, but the stars were so brilliant they almost took the place of moonlight. The same old stars, Orion and the Dog Star and the ever constant Dipper, yet they seemed to glow here with

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

a passionate intensity, as the south wind fanned us, and the familiar North Star looked remote and alien.

We soon discovered, Gruger and I, that we were very poor sight-seers. Instead of looking studiously at the Badia Vecchia, an ancient Gothic nunnery with a Saracen tower, or at the Arab windows of the Corvaja Palace, or the Norman-Saracen palace of San Stefano, built largely of Greek and Roman stones, we merely glanced at these and spent our time idling like office-holders. Whole mornings and afternoons we passed, in the Graeco-Roman Theatre, Gruger with a pretence of sketching, but both of us, all of us, simply gazing at perfection. There was Etna in the distance, the town and the hills to the right in such contours as no one could believe, let alone describe. To the left the abrupt fall of the land, six hundred feet, to the perfect jewelled sea. An airy lightness pervaded the perspective, celestial rather than earthly, and everything and all things, mountains,

GRECIAN ITALY

gardens, villas, were drenched in colour and flowers. Over all the south wind blew faintly. All memories fell away and wilted, and the ancient Greek serenity—perhaps it was a kind of vacuity—possessed us.

Norman Douglas in his novel 'South Wind,' tells of a certain Bishop coming to such a spot, the island of Nepenthe, and there actually seeing a cousin of his, a charming woman, pushing her graceless husband over a cliff and effectively ridding herself of him. Under the influences of the beauty and the south wind the Bishop could not command the energy to do anything about it. Perhaps the poor lady was right, reflected the Bishop. So it was with us. All categorical imperatives left us and, under the spell of the beauty, we experienced that sense of freedom supposed to be the property of man in a state of nature. Rousseau, however, meant the jungles and forests. He had never been in Taormina.

The ruin of the Roman stage in the theatre, in tile-like brick of the richest

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

brown, seems a thing of recent artifice, and the single, graceful column behind the tiers of seats appears less the part of a ruined whole, than a monument left by capricious chance to a beauty that is complete without it.

We strayed into the ruined passages and chambers back of the stage. Here the actors dressed, and here the beasts were kept, and by means of that water-lifting apparatus, tank, drama fulfilled its needs. Fascinating, beautiful—but nothing here is comparable to what nature herself had done, without the aid of Greek or Roman builders. Cactus grows among the tiers of seats and here and there is a man or a woman sketching languidly. But it is all irrelevant. They are but drunkards of beauty with their brains asleep and strange new centres of their being going into action.

GRECIAN ITALY

V

WE began to feel, Gruger and I, that Taormina was no place for men who must live by the toil of their hands, in the sweat of their brows. Great as was the beauty, it held within it the seeds of corruption and dissolution. This was no place in which to steel the soul for unflinching life. We began to plan our journeys into the rough region of the Aspromonte on the mainland, the rugged Calabria, and to the island of Malta. But again and again we would put off the day of departure, finding a hundred excuses, and evermore we would go loitering through the town.

Now we felt compelled to study the Saracen tombs, that yawned vertical like doorways in every embankment by the roadside, and now we must take note of the 'characters,' such as the red-faced Domenico, who lived by procuring dapple gray donkeys for people to ride a

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

mile away. But like the needy knife-grinder, story, God bless you, Domenico had none to tell. Would you ride to Mola to-day? Here was a fine ass for only ten *lire* the journey. And the ass, as though disapproving the price, would utter his raucous heart-breaking cry, than which nothing on earth sounds more tragic. Or there was the epileptic piper who fluted at odd corners in the lanes and told you with trembling lips that he was not well to-day, and you could have his pipe of Pan for what it pleases you to give. And there was Carmello and Pancrazio and Beppo and Ciccio—the four names to one of which any native of Taormina was sure to answer.

But again and again that beauty-laden scene of the Theatre would leap upward in our minds and once more we would walk up past the bougainvillea terrace of the Timeo Hotel, climb into the tiers of seats and gaze afresh at the light-bathed peak of Etna between the **noble columns**

GRECIAN ITALY

of the proscenium. The pearly translucence of the hills, the shadows in the valleys, the amethystine lightness of the sky overhead—what a joy these must have brought to the Chalcidian Greeks when first they settled here!

Then we would wander downward among the byways where Taormina lived and strange beautiful little pagan scenes would take our eyes. Here some little children would be singing a round song, inviting all to come to the table, but so to conduct themselves as not to be ashamed—*Chi mangia troppo, Tenga vergogna*. Or there, in a byway, lamentation would suddenly break forth in a small stone hut—the unmistakable Sicilian keening for the dead. And neighbours and friends hearing it, would come running and begin their wailing as they ran, so as to be in complete harmony by the time they entered the house. And the amethystine sky overhead continued changeless, the beauty of the prospects unfading.

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

' It is strange,' I remarked to Gruger, ' for how many ages man believed, as in large part he still believes, that nature and all this beauty was created for him, and not that he was a mere trifling element, perhaps an accident in it. That all this has been almost from eternity and will go on to eternity whether there will be a man to see it, or a soft-shell crab, or nothing at all'

' Oh, yes, man is a great little beast,' Gruger agreed. ' Look at that!'

He was pointing to the doorway of a sombre small shop in the Cor so, upon which we had emerged, where little girls ranging in age from three to seven were being taught to knit and make lace. All day those little prisoners sat there crouched over their frames, embroidering or knitting, the while the beauty and the freshness of the world without tempted their small hearts to life and light as birds are tempted. A sweet-faced, *signorina*, or sister, was in charge of them and she reproved them

GRECIAN ITALY

whenever their dark large eyes strayed from their needles to the passing stranger. It was in some respects a heart-breaking scene. But it was not unique. At the cobbler's, the shoe-maker's and tinsmith's shops sat small boys of ten and twelve bent over leather and metal in precisely the same doomed manner, and the muted resigned air of those children lacerated the heart. All beauty, all joy, all serenity, were suddenly eclipsed for us as by a pall of black cloud. Some of the foreign sojourners sauntering by with tennis racquets, or consuming syrups and liqueurs on the patera of a cafe, made the picture the more shamefully painful. And next door to the lace-maker's, perhaps, a piper on his bagpipe would be lilting forth a brusque martial air that seemed to lift those poor captive children from their seats.

' I am sorry,' said Gruger, ' that I wasn't here in time for the Christmas celebration, when the *Bambino* is carried through the town at midnight and, they say, the shep-

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

herds come down from the hills, playing the ' Pastorale ' on their bag-pipes, so that it seems the mountains are making music'

' Who told you this?' I asked him.

' An Englishwoman was telling us.'

That Englishwoman, like Lord Jim, was incurably romantic. It happened that I had witnessed that celebration. After waiting in the piazza in front of the church of the Madonna del Carmine four hours, from eleven until three in the morning, under a fine rain, shivering and eating chick-peas, the procession finally came forth and the hard-used *Bambino* under a canopy, escorted by priests, began to move. In vain we had listened for those legendary shepherds from the hills. The tourists in the crowd had come together for the sole purpose of hearing them. But somewhere, doubtless, the shepherds were peacefully sleeping. The town band crashed into a march and the procession began to move—the few hundred yards to the church of San Pancrazio at the other end of die

GRECIAN ITALY

town. Stray detonations of fire-crackers resounded dismally upon the night. A little bonfire blazed here and there as we shuffled by, chewing our chick-peas, until we trickled away to our neglected beds.

'The only time you hear those shepherds,' I assured Gruger, 'is when the barbers or the proprietor of the Cafe Nuovo render them upon their mandolins.'

The time was pressing for us to begin our journeys into Calabria, to Malta, to Syracuse and to Girgenti. But still we lingered. Perhaps this time it was the magic of the almond blossoms, like faintly tinted pinkish snow upon the trees.

One day, on the way to the villa of D. H. Lawrence, then an inhabitant of Taormina, we met my small son aged ten, upon his donkey, engaged in deep discussion with his contemporary, Carmelo, the donkey-boy. The American boy whipped a pen-knife from his pocket and demanded :

' *uesto?*'

TAORMINA THE BEAUTIFUL

' *Coltello*,' said the Sicilian lad.

' Knife!' cried the other in triumph, and thus they conversed in the gorges behind Taormina, appearing to understand each other completely. We found it necessary to seek in the folds of the hills for Robert Hichens' elusive villa, whose location no one seemed to know exactly. There Hichens had written his Sicilian novel, 'The Call of the Blood,' a work I could not read. Anything served as an excuse for staying on.

We must not miss, we were told, the fair at Letojanni, a village some three miles distant, where everything was sold, from pigs to perfumes. The pigs were assuredly there and they were also the perfumes. The picturesqueness of 'Cavalleria Rusticana' was not at Letojanni, and we knew that all our excuses were exhausted.

We must move on.

' Let us look once more at Etna from the Theatre,' I proposed to Gruger, and solemnly we walked up the ancient road

GRECIAN ITALY

and stood for a space in the centre tier of the seats. And for the last time we gazed between the columns of the proscenium upon the matchless cone of Etna, upon the terraced painted valley at its foot, upon Mola and the hills and the clinging white villas overhanging the town, all drenched in colour and flowers—veritable island of Nepenthe.

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

I

SICILY is the archaeologist's picnic ground. Naturally, therefore, you would expect to meet with archaeologists there. But the first person I met at the admirable Villa Politi Hotel in Syracuse, when Gruger and I arrived there, was a lady who had kept a boarding-house for many years in Fifty-seventh Street, Manhattan.

I realized afresh that O. Henry was an acute psychologist.

The hotel is expensive and my one-time land-lady was scrupulously 'attired' in a Paris evening frock, and when I spoke to her Gruger wanted to know 'who the distinguished aristocrat was'.

Having acquired wealth, that lady felt the lure of the temples and the grandeur that was Greece in Sicily, and there she was, now that leisure was hers. Sooner or later everyone feels that particular lure. And Schliemann, a retired German grocer,

GRECIAN ITALY

became famous for digging up the foundations of Troy. Things like the Renaissance, castles on the Rhine, and Imperial Rome become objects of an upstart yesterday compared with the Greek temples and theatres of Sicily.

You arrive at a place like ancient Syracuse and all the atmosphere and all the conversation on a sudden turn classical on your hands. Here are the Latomie de' Cappucini at the very door of your hotel, and the waiter shows you the steps by which to descend into the quarry where the seven thousand Athenian prisoners languished and died twenty-three hundred years ago. Arrows point the walk to the Greek Theatre and the Ear of Dionysius. Bankers and 'prominent clubmen,' who probably have talked nothing but golf and money for forty years, will suddenly startle you with references to Thucydides, Archimedes and the Fountain of Arethusa. And I saw one man whose sole interest in Taormina had seemed the quality of the cock-

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS
tails fingering in Syracuse the page of the
' Idyls ' of Theocritus.

If anyone tries to show you a Roman remains in Syracuse, you become superior, not to say snobbish. Near the modern railway station, as we drove by on our way to see the Anapus river, the Fountain of Cyane, and the papyrus plants, the misguided cabman tried to show us the remains of a Roman gymnasium. The frown that Gruger give him subdued even me. It amounted to what is called a ' dirty look.' After all, to that poor driver it was all *antichita* and he was trying to earn his *lire*. But for all that, Gruger was right. How can you think of prosaic Roman youths wrestling when you are going to see the spot where the nymph Cyane tried to stop Pluto from dragging Persephone down into the infernal regions? That was probably the first instance of a woman marrying a man to reform him. Her fate is well known. He dragged her

GRECIAN ITALY

But the Greek Theatre is the great *antichita* in Syracuse. On a certain brilliant February morning we walked there, Gruger and I, through walled lanes of gardens and villas fringed with oranges, lemons and almond blossoms. The population, except for an occasional *cantadino* with his donkey-cart, seemed to be composed wholly of idle cabmen, so cheerful and hilarious in the sunlight, that our patronage was a matter of indifference to them. They were happy, we were happy—and we walked.

We joked and we laughed as we walked and, passing a Roman amphitheatre on the left, we laughed at it, though it dated from the time of Augustus Caesar. We scarcely gave it a glance.

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

II

THEN, suddenly, we were facing the Greek Theatre, one of the largest in the world. Gruger gave what is sometimes described as a low whistle. We were both suddenly grave. The expanse of circular rows of seats before us, hewn out of the rock, a stretch five hundred feet in diameter baking in the sun, the orchestra with its canals, the stage where Æschylus had directed his own plays, where Plato had stood and addressed the people, where Pindar had sat, where Timoleon had actually harangued long before Plutarch wrote his life—it startled us like a shock. Even Gruger ceased his joking and automatically fumbled for his sketch book.

Little green lizards darted back and forth over the seats and the heat rose in quivering waves. We began to descend one of the passageways among the tiers that still bear in Greek the inscriptions of Hiero II,

GRECIAN ITALY

and the tyrant's queen, Philistis. We kept descending and looking back, and our 'spirits were astounded' like those of the Arabian writer in Norman Palermo. We were wishing all the little-theatre movements of all the Main Streets could come and see this. It is so vast that it is a little stupefying. And what they gave here were plays by Sophocles, Æschylus, Euripides, and Aristophanes — not a Hippodrome show. The question arises, what did the box-office say? But at that time the question did not arise. The show was free!

The odd thing was that the more we looked at the theatre, the less we thought of the Hippodrome. The evocation of the life in ancient Greece suddenly began to hum like bees in our brains, before our eyes. We saw the vast throng of white-robed citizens, thousands upon thousands of them, tramping in among those seats to have their souls stirred and chastened for a better civic, national and spiritual life.

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

'They were rather different from us, weren't they?' I ventured.

'You've said something there, boy', responded Gruger. Dickens' Mrs Blimber flashed through my mind, the lady who was always wishing she could have been at Tusculum when Cicero disputed his * Disputations.' For, seasoned vagabond though I was, I found myself wishing I could have been there seeing a play of Sophocles with Sophocles present, or listening to a discourse by Plato. That is the way your thoughts run there, if you let them, on a sunny day. You see people sitting on the top tier of seats looking now at the stage a tenth of a mile away, now at vacancy all round, and you wonder whether their thoughts are like yours. Late in April every year the University of Catania does give a performance of a Greek play in that theatre. But somehow I had no great fancy for seeing those *cunei*, or wedges of seats, filled with a straw-hatted audience.

GRECIAN ITALY

I could hardly tear Gruger away from the place. He began to develop theories in the most alarming manner. Those channels cut in the rock near the stage, that were said to be grooves for the moving of scenery and properties, were probably meant, he thought, to carry off rain-water from the enormous area of the seats. I saw at once that I had an amateur archaeologist on my hands. That he may have been right made no difference.

'Come away,' I urged, 'before we settle here for life. There is the Street of Tombs just above. Let's go and see the tomb of Archimedes—and be gay.' Gruger left the theatre with reluctance, returned once or twice for another sketch or snapshot, by way of memorandum for his drawings, and finally we did wander into the narrow winding road, deeply cut by chariot wheels, between low steep cliffs in which the ancient lights of Greater Greece were buried. Innumerable are the square openings into the hollow cliffs with marks where

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

the square tablets had commemorated the worth and names of the occupants. All are gone, all the tablets and the remains, rifled doubtless long ago, though boys were still prowling about in the hope of finding coins or antiques. The tomb of Archimedes is unknown, though Cicero claims to have seen it when he visited Syracuse while getting up his case against Verres. But Cicero himself was only an amateur archaeologist, like Gruger.

III

THE deathlike silence of the Street of Tombs soon oppressed our spirits. Even a full cemetery leaves much to be desired as a place of entertainment. An empty one . . .

' Suppose we go to the Ear of Dionysius?' I suggested.

' All right' agreed Gruger. ' Might hear something there.'

The Ear of Dionysius, cut in another of

GRECIAN ITALY

the stone quarries from which ancient Syracuse was built, is a toy, though a gigantic one; but it is one of the most amazing toys ever devised by man. The familiar story is that Dionysius the Tyrant stood at an opening above it and listened to the groans, and particularly the swearing, of the Greek captives who were imprisoned in this quarry also. If they groaned he was glad. If they called him names he killed them, sensitive soul that he was.

Be that as it may, it is an amazing thing. If you whisper at the entrance into that enormously high ear-shaped passage cut in the rock, your whisper comes back magnified, seemingly repeated by a hundred spirits. If you shout, you regret it. If the guard claps his hands, your own hands go up to your ears to protect the drums against deafening crashes of thunder. If he offers to fire off a pistol you must not let him. Above the entrance the sun is radiant on the yellow rock and the quarry is all overgrown like a park with imme-

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

morial trees. Some rope-makers occupy another part of the quarry for a rope-walk and they offer to sell you some cord—presumably to hang yourself with.

There is an opening out of the Ear above the highest tier of the seats of the neighbouring theatre. The guard said archaeologists told him the cave, which is artificially made, was used in some unknown acoustic device. Quickly I fed the guard and tore Gruger away before he began to develop theories himself. We walked back more quickly than we had come. The table d'hote luncheon at the Villa Politi was excellent that day, and the Capri wine delicious.

* The greatest of Greek cities, the fairest of all cities'—that is what Cicero said of Syracuse. It is certainly not a wonder now, as a modern town. If you want to walk from the Villa Politi into the town in winter you must either swim or hire a cab. The mile of roadway is a morass. When you drive out to the Anapo river your cab-

GRECIAN ITALY

man curses the legislators and the government picturesquely because they will not give him better roads, while his cab is jolting to pieces. Yet the people bear their burdens of taxation here with singular docility, in a spirit almost of fatalism.

'Of course it is easy for you Americans/Sicilian fellow passengers remarked to Gruger and the writer in the train to Syracuse. 'You have exchange in your favour and everything here is cheap for you.'

Nothing irritated me so much as this placid sophistry. Italy was twice or three times as expensive as it had been before the war.

'*Lei s'inganna,*' became almost the chief phrase of my vocabulary. 'You are mistaken, sirs,' I told them. 'We can live in America more cheaply and perhaps twenty-four times more comfortably than here. Exchange, as you say, favours us. But when a man pays seventy *lire* a day plus taxes instead of ten, as before the war, why then I make you a present of the favour'.

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

'Ah, if the Signor will stay in hotels—' with a gesture of the hands that expresses hopelessness.

'Where should one stay, then, Signor? In one of those huts you see there by the salt marsh?'

I never needed to labour the point. The argument invariably collapsed at this stage.

But—the greatest of Greek cities Syracuse has been called. And that was the cause of all the jealousies of the Athenians which led to the war so fully described by Thucydides for those who wish to read it. Hellenic culture might have permeated Europe and the world, and advanced civilization by at least a thousand years, but for those internecine Greek wars. But our so-called human race cannot give up its wars, and we of the present have nothing to say to the foolish races of the past. Having their example and their fate before us, we are not only foolish but criminal. Some junker of an Alcibiades always arises and demands war, and sheeplike nations,

GRECIAN ITALY

'mostly fools', with the slumbering savage and the animal roused in their bosoms, vote him power and acclaim. Then there is war, horror, defeat for some, and thousands of prisoners, like the seven thousand Athenians in the quarries of Syracuse, rot and die for the glory thereof—for the glory! Only to-day none of them get released for reciting Homer or Euripides prettily, as some of those hapless Greeks were released in Syracuse.

IV

ANYWAY, Syracuse, the island of Ortvgia, with its four cities or suburbs on the mainland, Achradina, Neapolis, Tyche and Epipolae, must have been a magnificent Hellenic city when the Athenians besieged it twenty-three centuries ago. Some of the worst and some of the best of mankind in history lived and fought and died in and for Syracuse. If the city had its Dionysius the Tyrant, him of the Sword of

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

Damocles legend, who slept in armour, and had a moat round his bed, it also had Archimedes and Theocritus and Timoleon, the man nearest in character to our own George Washington. In something like three centuries from its foundation in 734 B.C. it had become one of the most powerful and civilized cities of its time.

To-day it gives one a curious Dr. Jekyll-and-Mr. Hyde effect. When you go down to the island of Ortygia, which is the present city, you fear that all history is a lie—that greatness for that Sicilian provincial town is an impossibility in any stage of its history. Once, however, you go out into the suburbs and see the Latomie de' Cappucini in the Achradina (by the Villa Politi Hotel), the theatre in Neapolis and the fortress Euryalus at Epioolae, the ancient grandeur that was Syracuse lies like an open book before you. It requires only a modicum of imagination. Gruger, my archaeologist friend, was thrilled by Syracuse, and here I egged him on, for most

GRECIAN ITALY

artists find other parts of Sicily more paintable.

Nevertheless, you must go down into the modern town, if only to see the Fountain of Arethusa that burning Shelley loved and sung. It used to be part of the water supply of the ancient city, but now it is brackish, for the submarine stream, into which the nymph Arethusa, when pursued by the river-god Alpheus, was changed by Diana, turned salt, owing to an earthquake. Papyrus plants are growing in the basin. It is a memory rather than a fountain.

Not so the Cathedral, however. That is more than a memory. There one may see how a conquering religion is superimposed upon a defeated one. Originally, that Cathedral was the Temple of Minerva, with thirty-six great Doric columns, almost the same size as the Temple of Neptune, on the marsh at Paestum. Then came Christianity, to which Minerva was nothing, and made a church of the temple.

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

And the columns were built into the walls and they protrude from the walls both outside and inside the church. Then came the Saracens, who made a mosque of the church and put Saracenic battlements upon it. Then came the Normans, a couple of centuries later, and the mosque became a church once more. Now the priests are collecting a building fund so as to change the walls and free the Doric columns from the subsequent masonry. Gruger and I both gladly contributed to the fund.

We gazed dutifully *on* the Statue of Archimedes in the act of destroying the fleet of Marcellus with a burning glass, on the Saracenic palace of Montalto and the eleventh-century Castello Maniace, and went on a Sunday morning to the admirable Museum, which, like all good museums in Sicily, begins with prehistoric times and gives an almost continuous record of its region in terms of pottery, arms, statues and coins. In this museum is the well-known Venus Anadyomene

GRECIAN ITALY

which Maupassant preferred to her of Milo. But mere sight-seeing of this character ruined Gruger's disposition. I could not hold him to it. And, truly, he was more to be pitied than censured. It is a weary business, fit only for the young—who can stand anything—in charge of a schoolmaster.

Papyrus interested us much more. Syracuse is the one place in the world where papyrus still grows wild. Even in Egypt, home of its origin, it is extinct. Being, both of us, people who spoil much paper in our work, we naturally wanted to see the grandfather of modern paper pulp. We hired the most disreputable cab in all Syracuse, because the cabman, a redhaired devil, appealed to us. He greeted every passerby and had a word and a laugh for every woman at every window and doorway he passed. He had seen service during the war on the Austrian front, and intimated that were he possessed of an education, conditions might be reversed

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

and he might himself be driven to see sights—he almost intimated that one of us, probably Gruger, might be the driver. We did not care. He rattled our bones for miles out into country over villainous roads towards the part of the Anapo river where the papyrus grows. It was February, but the meadows, fields and marshes were green, though a chill wind blew through us from the flats, where so many armies, beginning with the Carthaginians, had fought; from the harbour, where the Athenian fleet was bottled up. At last we came to the papyrus.

The origin of that papyrus is a charming episode of history. Hiero II, King of Syracuse, at about the time Theocritus was at his court composing the 'Idyls,' built and fitted out a marvelous ship equipped with gardens, stalls for horses, and stairways and columns of Taorminian marble—a ship of four thousand two hundred tons in those days! Archimedes doubtless helped to build it—a present to Ptolemy of Egypt.

GRECIAN ITALY

As part of the acknowledgment of the gift from Alexandria came the papyrus planted along the banks of the Anapo, and there it has been growing ever since.

I had hoped Gruger would make a picture of it as it grows along that narrow, winding stream of mythological origin. The plants are green-stemmed, like reeds, or bamboo, the thickness of a man's wrist, with a circular spray of flowers at the top unique among plants. They bow and droop and sway mournfully, but full of dignity, in the breeze, those tail stalks, and they mirror themselves Narcissus-like in the clear-cold Anapo. People sentimentalize over the printing press, and well they may. But who can blame us for being a trifle sentimental over these mysterious reeds that supplied a medium for the first chronicles of mankind in distant, earliest Egypt, in ancient Syracuse, in Greece itself! And if culture is a living force, as it surely is, these plants should be perpetually cared for and honoured.

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

V

THERE was still the fortress of Euryalus.

'Do we have to see that?' asked Gruger.

'Think if it—a Greek fortress built by Dionysius the Tyrant, stormed by Timoleon, taken by Marcellus, by Belisarius!'

'But it's a long drive,' protested Gruger.

'But what quantities of culture and illumination you will acquire!'

'Lead me to it!' he announced with decision, and we drove out one fair morning to farthest Epipolae. After an hour and a half in our rickety cab over a wretched road, past old aqueducts, through a deserted countryside, we arrived finally at Euryalus.

It took Dionysius about six years to build this fort, and it is doubtless a marvel of masonry and strategy. With its strategic position commanding the city and the interior, or source of supplies, with its labyrinthine passages, either cut in the solid

GRECIAN ITALY

rock or built of great blocks of stone, with its towers, provision rooms, underground stalls for horses, the very rings to which horses were tethered cut in stone, it presents an aspect of ancient warfare such as can nowhere else be seen. For the archaeologists it is a wonder, and there are Greek inscriptions on some of the chambers still undeciphered. It stretches over a space of fifteen thousand square yards. But I had promised it to Gruger as a source of culture. And the only source of culture I could see in that overpowering mass of rock was a very sincere humility. It seemed proper and fitting enough for the race twenty-three hundred years ago, **but** people are building fortresses yet, and **that** seems black disgrace. The Kaiser visited the place, and they show you the wooden steps built for him over the broken stone stairway underground. But if there is any one thing that place cries out, it is the eternal folly and futility of all fortresses and all war, the criminal stupidity of a

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

race that can learn ten thousand clever and pretty trifles, but not one grain of sense or wisdom.

Very soberly we drove back the eight kilometres to Syracuse. I offered Gruger the sight *of* the Villa Landolina, where some American sailors, of the fleet that chased the Barbary pirates, lie buried in a quarry since 1805. But he refused to see any more that day.

¹ But we must stop at the church of San Giovanni,' I told him. 'It is built over the crypt of St. Marcian, and St. Paul preached there when he tarried three days in Syracuse.' Gruger was willing to look at it from the outside. A monk within showed me the crypt, the tomb of St. Marcian, the granite column upon which he suffered martyrdom. He was a young monk, the guardian of this spot, utterly solitary. Not a human soul besides ourselves was visible. He spoke in a gentle voice, but with the burr of Sicilian clinging to his Italian, like a peasant.

GRECIAN ITALY

'Did St. Paul really preach here?' I asked him.

'That is the tradition/ he answered briefly.

He also showed me the catacombs, and proceeded to light a candle with the idea of taking me into them. But I was not 'taking in' catacombs just then. I thanked him and we parted amiably, he deprecating my offer of money which, however, he accepted, *per la chiesa, signore, per la chiesa*, for the good of the church.

VI

SYRACUSE clings to you even after you leave it. With the Roman general Marcellus, who conquered it, you feel like weeping over the glorious city that it had been, now more desolate than any widow. When you roll away in the wretched post-war train, that can never be cleaned any more, but that ought to be burned, you see Euryalus receding, and the images of ancient

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

grandeur keep haunting you. On the way to Castrogiovanni, the ancient Henna, from the junction point of Catania, the legend of Persephone again returns to you. For here it was that Persephone danced amid her maidens in meads of asphodel when the unpleasant old god Pluto came out, perhaps from Etna, and ravished her away without a word to her mother Demeter, or Ceres. It was not until his chariot got down to the river Anapo that anyone had the courage to protest. It was the nymph Cyane who protested. The tyrannical old god, as is well known, promptly changed her to a spring. The meadows are not so rich as once they were, nor are any nymphs or goddesses visibly dancing. But it was still only March and Persephone was not yet come forth for her six months vacation from her lame **old** husband. The land was beautiful, nevertheless, and the hillsides green. So fragrant were the flowers here in the days of Theocritus that the hounds **lost the scent**

GRECIAN ITALY

of their game, baffled by the perfumes. Syracusans had founded Henna shortly after their own city, and the town suffered the fortunes of Syracuse. The Arabs when they took it called it Kasr-Yani, and then it became Castrogiovanni. It looks picturesque on its mountain like some robber-lord's stronghold. But we could not linger there. We travelled on through the sulphur regions to Girgenti, the Acragas of old, that Pindar had called 'the most beautiful city of mortals.'

What the result of turning Gruger loose among the temples of Girgenti might prove to be, I could not tell. Every classical archaeologist goes there sooner or later, and Gruger had undoubtedly shown grave symptoms. We arrived there with our families at night at a dark station which, like all southern Italian railway stations, is placed as far as possible from the town—presumably that cabmen might live. Two of my bags were missing when we landed at the excellently conducted Hotel des

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

Temples, and that seemed to cheer Gruger perceptibly. As I was managing that particular excursion, my disgrace was complete. But his craving for food was such, that not even this fact could restore his good humour until we sat down to chocolate and bread and butter at ten o'clock. When after a long silence Gruger came up for air, he wiped his lips complacently and murmured:

'That's too bad about your bags,' With a frozen Charlie Chaplin smile, I told him that it was nothing, that there were many other bags in the world. I had already spoken a few plain words to the head porter. Inwardly, I thought of bandits and wondered why at least one of the bags had not been Gruger's.

'Can I lend you some pyjamas?' he inquired sweetly, licking his lips.

'No, thanks,' I went on smoking, like General Foch on the Western front. 'Those bags will turn up before long.' And for a wonder they did arrive almost as I spoke,

GRECIAN ITALY

from another hotel. I glanced at Gruger placidly, feeling inwardly as though I had smashed the Hindenburg line. I sauntered out to the porte cochere, slipped ten *lire* into the hand of the astonished donkey-cart man, who had brought them, and with supreme indifference, I asked Gruger if there was anything I could do for him before turning in.

'No—no thanks,' he muttered in a tone of bitter disappointment. 'Glad you found your bags.'

'Oh, that!—I hardly gave it a thought. Let's take one look at the flight.'

The next morning was Sunday and we had our breakfast in the hotel garden that was a mass of roses, almond blossoms, flowering plants, and looked out upon the tender blue of the African Sea, upon Porto Empedocle, the ancient harbour of this place, upon the golden temples dotting the plain.

And immediately I knew that I had seen nothing like this picture on the face of the

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

earth. The temples at Paestum are magnificent, but the empty forbidding marsh in which they stand strips them of all that happy serenity which we associate with Hellenic life. Here, upon the other hand, the softness of the plain, the radiant sunshine, the verdure of almond and olive trees, bring back an unforgettable image of what must have been the life of Athens.

'Do you know,' I said to Gruger, 'that Sylvestre Bonnard, an old man, made the long journey just to see this sight?'

'I don't blame him,' said Gruger.

Simplicity, harmony, serenity — the things we have lost — those things were here.

A soft languor, a blessed credulity, steal into your mind, into all your members. The harsh world of rushing action, of force **and** drive, the clangour of machines, **all** drop away from you. And since all we can imagine of the Golden Age is that it was an age of blissful idleness, we can **easily** come to believe **that this was the**

GRECIAN ITALY

geographical home of the Golden Age. We can come to believe anything of this spot. Legend says that long before the Greeks came here (about a century and half after they came to Syracuse) the land was peopled by an aboriginal race who were the Lotus Eaters of Homeric poetry. I can imagine no choicer background for eating lotus — particularly if you like to eat lotus. All the garden was dotted with lotus eaters. We were lotus eaters all! In the distance on the right a serpentine little train was winding its way to Porto Empedocle over the dark ribbon of railway. It appeared a mad, grotesque little toy. How the ghosts of the bygone Lotus Eaters must have laughed — not too loudly!

We strolled up the hill on foot towards the modern town. It is a backward enough little Sicilian city, with here and there a picturesque angle. But in Baedeker's phrase, it was not 'rewarding.'⁵ Who that was dwelling amid **the Lotophagi would**

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

fritter his moments upon bits of mere medievalism? I begged Gruger to waste no time sketching any of that 'city.' We walked back to our high-terraced garden overlooking the plain that had been the Acragas of old, the city Pindar had celebrated.

'Most beautiful city of mortals!'—and how rich she was for all the languid airs! It was nothing to send out three hundred chariots drawn by white horses exclusively, to meet a victor returning from the Olympic games. Olympic victories were numberless, and the portrait of Helen of Troy painted by Zeuxis was said to have been taken from five Acragas maidens. They used to put statues up to favourite horses and even to pet birds. A certain Gellias was so rich that he always had rooms in readiness for strangers, whom his servants sought out in the highways and invited in. He once lodged in his house five hundred horsemen coming from Gela and gave **them** each a change **of raiment**. **His cellar**

GRECIAN ITALY

was not one of the *six* best, but the greatest ever heard of. Another citizen, at the marriage of his daughter, served a dinner to every soul in Acragas, and to each in his own dwelling place. The Carthaginians took the city, as all such cities are ultimately taken. A deep regret filled me at the thought. No land of Cockayne, no Sybaris, no city of Lotus Eaters is ever allowed by the pulling-down process of life to survive, even as a specimen or an object lesson. We Americans are undoubtedly touched with puritanism, but we are not alone. All the world is struck through with the same ism.

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

VII

THE carriages are at the door, old-style funeral hacks with two horses each, for there are no automobiles at Girgenti. We are going to visit the temples. The small boy of the party is on the box with one of the drivers chattering in broken Sicilian, which he had learned from his donkey-boy at Taormina, living the life of a fairy story. Everything is fairy like under this almost African sun in the land of the Lotus Eaters. There is something mythical and legendary about the scene, not only with the myths and legends of the Greeks, of Empedocles and Theron, but of the fabled civilization of Atlantis, that grew up and prospered and perished along these azure waters, under this ungrudging sunlight.

Over a winding road through this warm bottom land we drive, pausing first at a small Roman temple which nobody wants to see. Then to the very edge of the

GRECIAN ITALY

ancient city, where remains of the ancient wall still ramble on towards the sea. We wind and turn and approach the terrace of the Temple of Concord. We all pause—speechless.

The word golden-hued occurs to one, but gold seems suddenly drab in face of this perfect colouring that time has bestowed upon the fluted columns, upon architrave and pediment, upon every stone of the hollow building. Every line and every curve merge into an utter, a complete harmony. It is so delicate, so massive and so beautiful, it makes your heart ache.

'My God!' murmurs Gruger in pious amazement and he throws himself suddenly into the business of sketching, photographing, leaping like a chamois from rock to rock, to get the different aspects. The blinding blue of the sea and the softer blue of the sky, the verdure of plain and hills and gardens, the gold of mimosa, show through among the columns, and here and there a little lizard darts by at your feet

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

and looks with cold reptilian curiosity at you from a niche. Perfection—indescribable perfection!

And the profound sigh of deep immemorial content escapes you, as it always does at the inrush of beauty into the soul. It is one of those moments when the rhythm of your life changes to a finer one. And the thought comes to you that if our modern American civilization declines and falls and perishes, it is not temples like this that will remain, but heaven knows what monstrosities. We speak of the Greeks as pagans, yet every ruin that remains is either a temple or a theatre with the temples predominating. What a serenity those fanes must have cast on all the life, civic and social, in those bygone days! And we realize that our modern cities are jumbled and violent, whereas the cities of Greece were beautiful, calm and serene.

'That guide-book says that this temple is peripteros-hexastylos,' I inform Gruger.

'Is it?' he murmurs absently. He does

GRECIAN ITALY

not ask me what that means, whereat I am glad, for I could not tell him. He is fairly drunk with the colour and the beauty of it. All the thirty-four columns are intact because for a time this temple, like that of Minerva at Syracuse, had been a church—St. Gregory of the Turnips.

The next temple, however, called the Temple of Juno, has never been a church, therefore only twenty-five of its columns are standing. But it is almost as lovely as the other. And you cannot help wondering why all the surrounding plain that was once the city of Acragas, or Agrigentum, is turf and garden land. But the temples, even though ruined, remain. The piety, or superstition, as you will, that respected the seats of even the so-called pagan religion, must have lingered long in the hearts of the populace. And it occurs to you that all religions are good, if only they are free from savage rites and contain a strong infusion of reverence.

Yet, what reverence could the Catha-

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

ginians have felt for Grecian temples? The Temple of Hercules is a ruin, and the vast sanctuary of Jupiter, uncompleted when the Cathaginians attacked, lies a broken mass of stones and columns and capitals amid the luxuriant herbage.

'How could they transport all these great blocks of stone?' marvelled Gruger. I could not inform him. I only know that they had no steam derricks and no engines. They had only man power and horse power. Yet one column in the temple of Jupiter is twenty feet in circumference and the stone from which the figure of Atlas was carved must have been enormous. Atlas is enormous now as he lies there broken, vast, tragic, in the sod.

The custodian stood by silently as we 'viewed the remains' of what seemed almost living things.

'Have you been here long?' my wife asked him.

'I have been here always,' he answered, 'except when I was in the army. My father

GRECIAN ITALY

was here before me and before him, my grandfather.'

Guarding ruins! Yet for the moment that middle-aged quiet Sicilian seemed the noblest inhabitant of Girgenti.

We drove hotel ward, craning our necks behind us towards the golden ruins, towards the four columns of the Temple of Castor and Pollux and the bit of architrave over them, recently set upright, but none the less beautiful. We drove through the gardenlike plain again, past groves of olive whose gnarled roots come out of the soil twisting their long; fingers over rocks, past gentle yellow mimosa trees, fit emblem of the land of Lotus Eaters.

VIII

ONCE in Palermo again, we felt we **had** returned to the Metropolis. The traffic, the crowds and the motor cars enchanted us. There were tea parties at the delight-

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

ful English tea rooms and one talked of going to the opera.

The Duchess of Park Avenue was there after a journey to Tunis.

'You have been to Tunis,' someone politely remarked by way of a mere civility in passing.

'Yes, and I shall be *glad* to tell you about it/ sang out the Duchess. The good lady was seemingly pining for an audience which the Barbary coast had not afforded her. She fixed her full eye upon all and sundry, but that epic was heard by few. There were other interests pressing.

'Gruger', I suggested, Met us go to Selinunte, the Selinus of old, a place of wonderful temples.'

'Are they standing up?' asked Gruger cannily.

'No, they are lying down—all ruins, something like the Temple of Jupiter at Girgenti. Remember those metopes at the Palermo Museum? They all came from Selinus. The town was destroyed only

GRECIAN ITALY

about twenty-three hundred years ago by the Carthaginians.'

'What is the use of a lot of stones after those gorgeous temples we saw at Girgenti?' demurred Gruger.

'Well, then how about Segesta?'

'Anything standing on its feet there?'

'Only one of the most perfect temples in existence,' I told him.

'Then let's go,' cried Gruger resolutely. That was the time we motored a hundred and forty kilometres with a Mafiuso chauffeur, through some of the wildest scenery in Sicily. The shuttling of the car back and forth, but steadily upward, in the mountains above Palermo, is in itself an experience never to be forgotten. At points the zigzag path turns so abruptly that the driver must halt his car, back it, and make it climb like a goat into the new ascent.

'Is this church from Norman times?' I would ask the chauffeur as we passed through a town.

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

'*E antico*,' would answer the chauffeur sapiently.

'And those ruins, are they Roman or Greek?'

'*E antico*,' was the unvarying answer.

In Alcamo we found a town that had once been Saracen, but rebellious. Frederick II of Hohenstaufen 'substituted' a Christian, and presumably a German, population in place of the Arabs. The result is a tow-headed blond populace in the midst of Saracenic architecture and remains.

Once you approach the temple at Segesta, however, you forget all such ethnic trifles. In Girgenti, when you see the group of temples, you are elated. But here you are simply overawed. Complete, perfect, except that the columns are unfluted, the temple stands on its own little plateau on the hillside with its back to a mountain, with its massive front overlooking a valley.

The solidity, the beauty and the intense *peace*, all these together seem to be speak-

GRECIAN ITALY

ing with a voice, strange, serene, musical, a trifle high and infinitely haunting. I meant to ask Gruger whether he received this sensation of a voice, but, oddly, I found I could not speak.

We dismounted from our asses, by which motive power the temple is reached, and drew near like a group of the old worshippers approaching their shrine. Once in the temple itself, the great grey drums of the columns, unfluted, because the temple was unfinished when Segesta was destroyed, seemed rough, immense. And quite normally we proceeded to unwrap our packages of luncheon and to eat like—tourists, chattering, joking. But with one accord we gathered the papers and debris lest any soilure should remain within the temple. We mounted our asses again to ride up the neighbouring hill to the sight of Segesta. At a little distance, as we looked about, we paused and the same impressive awe fell upon us. And vaguely, yet somehow distinctly also, I heard the hollow high

LAND OF THE LOTUS EATERS

voice of the past—of something—of the gods that haunt and people the place.

We rummaged about the emplacement of Segesta. The lines of the streets could still be dimly seen in the herbage, the lines of the foundations of the houses the Carthaginians had razed. Microscopic pots—herds of ancient vessels still peered out of cracks in the herb-covered soil. And the theatre—oh yes, there was a theatre here, also — excellently preserved, but always, like a magnet, the temple behind us drew the eyes—solid, serene, immemorial, inspiring a primeval awe, the awe for things sacred, that even barbarians could not despise enough to destroy wholly.

'Look,' said the custodian, pointing in another direction. 'This on the coast far away is Trapani, and there is Mount Eryx. Beyond is Marsala.'

Dearly would I have wished to go to Mount Eryx, the ancient seat *of* a temple of Astarte, and in Greek times, to Venus Erycina, the laughing Venus, that Greek

GRECIAN ITALY

sailors saw long before they entered the harbour. This Venus worship of classical times was a comparatively late development, probably, of the ancient Mediterranean worship of the Earth-Mother, signs of which we later saw in the neolithic temple at Malta. But I was fearful of starting Gruger in those archaeological lines of speculation.

We descended the hill and turned our asses' heads towards the waiting car. Even at the risk of missing a moment of Gruger's superb horsemanship on his diminutive ass, I turned and looked back at the temple. The hollow musical voice seemed faint, but still it sounded plainly in my ears, hunting, pursuing. ,

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

I

To any part of this Italy you may go without giving any particular reason. But not to Calabria. If you go to Calabria you must give some good utilitarian, plausible object or be branded an eccentric. You must say, if you are an American, that most of our Italian immigrants come from that part, and that you are curious about their habitat in order 'to understand them better.' You must say — something — give some colourable reason.

Speaking for myself, I went to Calabria without any worthy reason whatsoever. I knew that nobody goes there. Even Italians discouraged me from going during the winter. Only a George Gissing now and then, or a Norman Douglas, or an archaeologist like Lenormant, ever travels in the toe of the boot that is Italy.

But an irresistible whim drove me to

GRECIAN ITALY

Calabria. I said I wanted to see the site of ancient Sybaris, the city that gave the world a synonym for luxury. I wanted to see the old Crotona, where Pythagoras, the first of the Greek moral teachers, established almost a city of God in pagan Greece. I don't know what I said. But Fred Gruger, like the good sportsman he is, agreed to accompany me, and we went.

We went like tenderfeet. We were told to carry our own food, and we did nothing of the sort. We were told to carry our own drink, and we didn't. In addition to a handbag apiece, Gruger was equipped with films and sketching paper and I with a small box of insect powder. We reminded ourselves of the Caliph Omar who conquered Arabia with a small bag of meal at the saddlebow. If trains run in Calabria, we said, we shall do well enough. We had much to learn.

We left Taormina in a rain, shooting down the steep magnificent zigzag road to the station at Giardini, at breakneck speed,

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

in which Gruger cheerily encouraged the chauffeur. The most placid of men in ordinary life, Gruger, I soon discovered, had at least two fatal weaknesses. He became hungry on the slightest provocation and—he was a speed maniac. To him an automobile is a meteor and a railway train a contrivance that goes very rapidly. In Calabria, however, things proved otherwise.

At Giardini we grandly took first-class places for Messina and very promptly abandoned them for third, because the third was vastly cleaner.

'Never mind,' said Gruger, still cheerful because Messina and breakfast were only little over an hour away. 'We are going to the country of the Sybarites, where they lived purely for pleasure—didn't they?'

'Well, they lived for pleasure, I told him.

It is curious that no sooner do I mention Gruger than I have to speak of food. The high thinking to which from earliest infancy I have naturally been accustomed,

GRECIAN ITALY

could prosper in Gruger's presence only on a full stomach, and even then future food lured him more.

The very first thing we did in Messina was to get breakfast at the station. The next was to get money at the bank. We were going into the country of the brigands, but still we were compelled to carry cash. For express checks, tourist's drafts, or letters of credit are as unknown in Calabria as is Thomas Cook himself.

The Straits of Messina, which we crossed in a modern American ferryboat that takes two entire trains aboard, seemed to thrill Gruger strangely. With agile movements he swung himself out of the window of the car to the deck of the ferryboat, darted about hither and thither in order to gaze round at the pictures of Scylla and Charybdis. Those formidable monsters so potent in Homeric times are utterly subdued by the modern screw propellers that navigate between them. Or perhaps the wine is weaker to-day. Crossing to Reg-

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

gio, Calabria, from Messina was like crossing to Hoboken from the Twenty-third Street slip.

'There are legends of a mirage peculiar to the Straits,' I told Gruger, 'a mirage of wonderful sparkling fairy palaces seeming to stand upright on the face of the waters. Do you see them?'

'No,' said Gruger, 'I had only one pint of white wine at lunch. But if you had mentioned the palaces sooner . . .'

Of Reggio at this time we saw nothing but the station. After taking the trouble of ferrying a train across the Straits, the authorities make you change into another at Reggio. It is a point of honour in Italy to change trains as often as possible.

On a sudden, after we had settled in the first-class carriage, Gruger felt a little stinging sensation at the back of his neck. He brushed at it as though it were a fly and felt something more solid.

'What is that?' he cried, jumping from his seat and wheeling about.

GRECIAN ITALY

A green lizard about eight inches long was reposing on his back. It seemed poignantly funny to me as I tried to brush it off, and poignantly serious to Gruger as with its sharp talons it continued to cling to his good woollen coat. I don't understand now why a lizard on another man's shoulder can be so funny. I laughed so hard that my efforts were prolonged, and even the lizard seemed to be grinning. Finally, I managed to flick it off outside the window to the platform. The lizard looked grieved. All the rest of the afternoon Gruger's hand kept gingerly stealing to the back of his neck, his mind running on St. Paul and the adder. But such is Gruger's saintly piety that no harm resulted even to me.

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

II

I TRIED to show Gruger Scilla — the ancient Scylla—shortly after we left Reggio. It is a town that thrusts a massive beetling rock into the sea, a sort of little Gibraltar, which seems to defy ships to make a landing there. The rock is surmounted by a castle, which oddly seems to make it more savage. I tried to tell Gruger the Homeric legend of the monster Scylla that, like the dog described by a certain child, kept 'emitting short whelps.' But Gruger was still under the influence of his lizard, and nothing could cheer him. It was obvious that he wished both Scylla and me at the bottom of the sea. And yet every time his fingers stole unobtrusively to the back of his neck I could not help laughing when I pictured the adventurous lizard, like something in Hawthorne, some secret sin, mysteriously, symbolically, blazoned on his back.

GRECIAN ITALY

Our destination for that day was Cosenza. Theoretically, we were to arrive there between eight and nine o'clock. But the rachitic, asthmatic Italian train had no sooner started than we knew that we were building on sand. We knew where we were going, but we were not on our way. We were seemingly on everybody else's way. We would stop at some small station and the guards, conductor, engineer, fireman would descend and hold converse with the idle straggling population. Then we would move on for a few miles and stop perhaps to let a freight train pass.

⁴ Yes,' a guard would cheerfully respond to my anxious question. * We are accumulating a *rttardo*,

Accumulating a *ritardo* is the best, indeed, the only thing an Italian train can do competently. It does it easily without effort, with genius, like a virtuoso. It was on this journey that Gruger, whose intellect at times astounded even me, his warm admirer, uttered the brilliant suggestion

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

that if only one of these trains accumulated *ntardo* to the extent of twenty-four hours it might be on time—the next day. So penetrating was this observation that a day or two later I offered it to a train crew, for what it was worth, between Sybaris and Cotrone. They laughed at me.

'It has been tried over and over,' said one stalwart Socialist of the crew. 'But what will you do if a train is twenty-six or thirty hours late? It is all in vain then. Why, *signor*,' he clinched his speech, 'there are records of trains that have never arrived at all.'

We were going to dine (Gruger fondly repeated) somewhat late, at Cosenza. But by nine o'clock we were at Paola, a little more than half-way to Cosenza. The chill brisk air along the Tyrrhenian Sea had made us sharply hungry, and avidly we had consumed the few sandwiches we had brought from Messina. At Paola began our martyrdom, defraying all our disregard of good advice. From a cheerful

GRECIAN ITALY

companion, Gruger had sunk rapidly like the mercury in a thermometer to a sceptic, a pessimist, a man finally, of sorrows. As dinner became more dim and recessive, his bitterness flared out at the dismal little station of Paola.

Men, train officials, station masters, workmen, were lounging and chattering, heedless of the stalled train, heedless of the time, of the passengers. We had changed trains, of course, and, wretchedly, we were sitting in dark cars, waiting, waiting.

'Suppose you find out what's keeping us,' muttered Gruger after a miserable silence. Obediently, with a docility that always rose up in me before the terror of his hunger, I strolled over and engaged the officials in talk.

'What is the matter with the train?' I inquired in my politest Italian.

'E chi lo sa?' smiled the guard,

'But surely you know why we are not moving!'

'E sempre cosi' was his patient **answer.**

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

Always thus!—my heart sank. I saw tragedy before us.

'But where is the *macchina*—the engine?' I insisted.

'It has gone to the roundhouse and has not returned,' he shrugged placidly. The roundhouse, I learned, was a hundred and fifty meters away, and it would occur to nobody to go there and inquire. I had a brilliant idea! Why not telephone, I suggested. There was no telephone. So we waited. By 10.45 the wheezy locomotive came squeaking towards us, and it took only fifteen minutes to couple it and to start over the densely wooded hills to Cosenza.

We sank into a sort of coma, both of us, emerged at the gnawing of hunger, drowsed again and so, after three ghastly hours, arrived at Cosenza.

'What is the best hotel at Cosenza?' I asked of a new guard.

'How should I know?' came the answer in Pittsburgh English. 'Think I'd live in

GRECIAN ITALY

a dump lika dat? I coma from Pittsburgh to fight in da war—now no money to go back. I worka here—gotta live'.

He was at pains, however, to find out that we must go to the Hotel Vetere. That was the Ritz of Cosenza.

'Where are the cabs?' we queried petulantly as we finally stood on the platform.

Of cabs there were naturally *niente* at one o'clock in the morning, but there was a half-witted lad of sixteen or seventeen who consented to carry our bags.

Solemnly, silently, with Gruger three-quarters asleep, we set out into Cosenza.

III

UNDER the argent light of the full moon this mediæval town suddenly assumed a romantic, a magical aspect that made us both thrill from head to foot. Or possibly it was a shiver in the chill of a February night. Anyway, as the town with the narrow streets and massive stone buildings

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

that somehow looked crenellated, began to climb upward, dead silent, deathly still, we had a feeling that mediaeval ruffians or drunken soldiery might fall upon us at any moment, and unconsciously we looked for the lanterns and halberds of the watch. Also, we thought of bandits, for this was the bandit country. Gruger was wide awake now. He gazed about him with grunts of artistic satisfaction. Cosenza by moonlight was a superb spectacle.

We started from our reverie to realize that we were absolutely alone in the hands of the half-witted lad in the middle of nowhere—a dream city, as unreal as a fairy tale.

'Are we still far from the hotel?' I inquired.

'*Gia*,' said the boy. *Gia*, was his only word of conversation, the universal Italian affirmative, though we always think of *si* as the proper word. Its similarity to the German *ja*—it occurred to me—may be a legacy of German Holy Roman emperors

GRECIAN ITALY

in Italy. But I was too tired and hungry to carry on the speculation.

On a sudden a little old man came shambling along, and the boy, in reply to a muttered query from him, answered '*Gia*

There, I thought, was the first bandit and now our time was come. The stone walls of the dead moonlight town looked peculiarly baffling and menacing. ^{^*}

'Come along, *signori*,' snuffled the man. W

'Where to?' I demanded, startled.

'To the hotel,' he mumbled, 'to the *albergo*'—as a spider might soapily suggest—'to my parlour.' Gruger looked strangely alert, and I hope he was as scared as I was. I never asked him. But we went—now a procession of four. The balance of the walk was long, and we seemed somehow utterly oblivious of the scenery. Why, the query kept throbbing in my brain, should this nightbird come out to meet us when he knew nothing of our arrival?

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

'There is the *albergo*,' snuffled the old man cajolingly, and as we approached a darkened building I felt like Childe Roland—if that was the way Childe Roland felt. He opened a vast creaking door upon cavernous darkness and—we followed. I know no one is going to give us a Carnegie medal for heroism, but if they' knew how we felt that moment 'Key' surely would.

By the light of sputtering sulphur matches we were led upstairs, broad shabby stone stairways, and how hollow were the echoes of our tread!

A room finally — a huge room in this stone barn of a place, and an electric-light globe that made a lot of light! Then it *was* a hotel. A great sigh of relief left me, and even before asking the price, I turned to the little old man:

'How did it happen you came to meet us, *signor*?'

'I didn't come to meet you,' he croaked with the aged phantom of a grin. I do

GRECIAN ITALY

not live here. I live at home. I had locked up and was going home. I am the *concierge*. It is lucky you met me, *signor*, or you could not have got in.'

This porter, night clerk and watchman combined, lives in a decent hut somewhere in the town. At a certain hour he locks the guests, if any, in the hotel and goes home to a better fate.

Once we saw he was not a bandit, our American arrogance or, let us say, aplomb, returned apace and we demanded the cleanest and best he had.

'It's clean—all clean,' he mumbled defensively, 'but as for the best, that is costly. This is the best. This room with two beds will cost twelve *lire* the night.'⁵

'Twelve *lire* for both of us?'

'*Gib!*'

That made thirty cents apiece.

'The old Get-rich-quick Wallingford'. I muttered to Gruger. 'I knew he was a bandit.' We made him show us the beds. I laid my insect powder like a weapon on

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

the table and he again reassured us '*E pulito, e pulito.*' And the beds really were clean, though you hated to touch the door handles, the tables, the chairs. We got rid of him and the boy finally and we heard the lower door slam as in a prison. But how we shook and rocked with laughter once we were securely alone in that room! And we did not again worry about bandits in Calabria.

IV

THE horrors of morning ablutions in a Calabrian hotel may not be described. But when we asked for breakfast they laughed at us. The little old bandit was back on the job. Breakfast, he intimated—and a maid making beds laughingly supported him—might almost lead to having a kitchen and keeping servants. No hotel keeper in Calabria would be so bothered for so trivial a meal as breakfast. Breakfast! It seemed a side-splitting joke. The

GRECIAN ITALY

odd thing was, all foreigners talked in exactly the same strain as we did.

We found coffee and bread at a sort of bakery, and, equipped with a two-horse hack, we set out to explore the town. It looked much less romantic and a good deal dirtier than the night before and seemed dedicated chiefly to the retailing of small German-made goods. I know Gruger and I each bought a folding pocket corkscrew and other German trifles for small sums.

We had foresworn cathedrals, so we refused to enter the Gothic church with a front of coloured marbles which Cosenza boasts, and we drove instead to the Bridge of Alaric, where the Goth of that name was buried after sacking Rome at the beginning of the fifth century. Where the Busento and the Crati rivers meet, that victorious Goth, who had sickened and died, was buried under the yellow waters, together with all his treasures.

'That is all very well,' remarked Gruger gloomily, 'but where are these here now

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

Sybarites? Isn't that what we came to see?

'Wait,' I pleaded with the hard-hearted artist. 'Give me time. Do you know that in this town was published a mystery by a certain Salandra called "The Fall of Adam," some eighteen years before Milton published "Paradise Lost," and that Norman Douglas and others prove that Milton cribbed from that book?'

'I always thought "Paradise Lost" too good to be original,' observed Gruger.

'Applying the deadly parallel, the thing is uncannily flagrant,' I told him. 'Suppose we could find a copy of the "Adamo Caduto" in this burg!' The thing was hopeless, however, and I knew it. The bookshops revealed only the shoddiest kind of modern literature.

'You'd better buy some decent drinking water,' admonished Gruger. 'That would be more to the point.'

The only place where we could buy bottled water was at the chemist's. At the chemist's I timidly broached my quest for

GRECIAN ITALY

Salandra. The town gossips of Cosenza, crowding the place and discussing politics, shook their heads.

'No one of that name now lives in Cosenza,' they informed me.

A stout woman with a shawl, who had been dogging our footsteps, attracted, I thought, by Gruger's manly beauty, now rushed in and begged the druggist to beg from us for her, because, she cried, 'she had a creature in the hospital.' We gave her a small bill, but she was unsatisfied. The chemist looked coldly at her. Intelligent Calabrians are exceptionally self-respecting.

'What will the strangers think?' he grumbled angrily. We added another small bill and the woman stalked away.

'Poor devil! Ought to have given her more,' said Gruger. His hardness of heart was only for me and the sight-seeing. At a touch of sentiment or suffering he wanted to spend all our store of travelling money. For a good meal and a good hard-

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

luck story no price was too high for Gruger.

⁴ 'Let's get out of this place!' he demanded suddenly. 'Let's find out about trains.'

Tyrant that he was, I could not possibly resist him. I despaired of finding Salandra. I found a time-table instead. There was a train at noon.

'Where do we go from here?' he asked.

'To Sybaris.'

'That's the ticket!' he exulted. 'A little luxury won't hurt us any after this.'

Equipped with bread, butter, water, and wine, we embarked in a red-plush compartment upon the very heart of our quest, Sybaris!

V

THE greatest city of her time, greater than Athens and the most luxurious! If anything was taxed there, it was necessities, but never luxuries. Invitations to dinners and banquets were sent out a year ahead. They crowned with a golden wreath a man **who gave the best dinner, just as in other**

GRECIAN ITALY

laces they crowned a man for great or heroic deeds. Great cooks were more royally treated than great generals or statesmen. A cook could patent his dishes and draw royalties on them.

'Think of it, Gruger', I cried, 'doesn't that appeal to you? It was the Sybarites who invented the anchovy sauce!'

'Only lead me to it/ whispered Gruger, his mouth watering.

'All the streets' I told him, 'were covered with silken awnings from roof to roof, so no one would get sunburned. Their motto was, If you wish to live long, never see sunset or sunrise. All blacksmiths and cocks and all noisy trades were banished outside the city, so they wouldn't wake or disturb anyone. The children were all dressed in purple silk, with gold bands upon their heads. And there were women professors in the art of husband-winning engaged for the daughters of every house. Only one Sybarite ever won in the Olympic games, because it was too much like

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

work. A Sybarite walking in the country one day saw some men ploughing.

"The sight almost gave me a feeling of effort/' he narrated in horror.

"Your very story almost disturbs me," replied Mr. Bones.'

'Will you tell me again what you said about the cooks and the dishes?' put in Gruger.

The train crept on languidly along the valley of the Crati and the Coscile, a lovely valley, sunlit and warm with the rich meadowland that anciently fed the Sybarites, with miles of mulberry plantations for the silkworm whose silk no longer clothes the Sybarites. Beeches and willows and poplars fringe the river, and everywhere is the Australian eucalyptus, planted against the malaria. At every station was the ubiquitous lad who had been to America and wanted to air his English; and the honest bare-legged girls, to whom the daily train is the one event, stared at us candidly with bovine eyes.

GRECIAN ITALY

'Sibari! Sibari!' finally cried the guard.

'Where is it?' inquired Gruger huskily.

We gazed with incredulity. Except for the station, some railway shops, and a few houses of railway employees, there was nothing. Nothing but a plain, flat as the palm of one's hand, spreading under a twin-peaked mountain—that was the site of ancient Sybaris. Bullocks were grazing peacefully and clumps of sage showed in the distance. It was green—not a plain of salt. But otherwise the plain of Sodom and Gomorrah could not have been more traceless. Only the distant snow-clad hills seemed eternal. They had doubtless known the silk-clad Sybarites.

'Are there no excavations?' we inquired.

'*Niente* excavations,' we were informed by the station master. 'Who would excavate here? This is not Sybaris, but Siberia. The railway employees are sent here by the Government and in a short time they sicken and die.'

'But why?'

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

'The malaria, *signor*. There is a government quinine station here. But neither quinine nor eucalyptus trees help us. We come, we sicken, we die. It is the malaria.

Is that, one wonders, what happened to the inhabitants of Sybaris, before the eucalyptus came and before the quinine stations?

Of course there was a war, the usual war of Greek and Greek—between Sybaris and Crotona, a little farther south. Some Crotonian ambassadors, sent to Sybaris to settle a dispute, were slain without even a hearing. Then, of course, there was a war and Sybaris was systematically destroyed. Her arrogance left her no sympathizers. Those who escaped founded other cities nearby, but always there was the invisible foe—the malaria. The destruction of Sybaris was the deathblow to Greek civilization in Europe.

Archaeologists of various nations have offered to excavate the site of Sybaris, but

GRECIAN ITALY

the Italians would neither permit others nor excavate it themselves.

'All this is very well,' said Gruger, 'but, man, we've got to eat!'

For a wonder this isolated malarial railway station had a buffet which served bean soup. No bean soup, it is safe to say, had ever tasted as that bean soup tasted. It was a relic surely of that bygone Sybaritic cookery upon which some patent had lapsed. It was a dish fit to offer Lucullus, or Gruger, or Sybaris. Gruger's radiant cheerfulness suddenly lighted up that dingy lunch room like a ray of sunshine. I mentioned to him Joseph Hall's satirical 'Utopia,' where it was a capital crime to drink alone and where a man who so far erred as to go four hours hungry was instantly haled before a judge and sentenced to a heavy supper. Gruger's smile expanded broadly.

'Tell me, honestly,' he cajoled, 'is that the place where you are leading me to? I don't care where it is—I am going.'

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

'Wait and see', told him.

That afternoon we took a train for Cotrone—the Crotona of Pythagoras.

Yes, we fled from Sybaris—now Siberia, with its gray oxen, gray folk, gray life, gray malaria.

'Do you think,' said Gruger thoughtfully, 'Fifth Avenue is going to look like that some day?'

'Not on account of malaria,' I told him, 'but if we keep on having wars, it probably will. And so will Piccadilly, and so will the Champs Elysees. The Sybarites might have learned how to conquer malaria, but the attack by Crotona was too much for them. The survivors founded cities afterward, but never again a Sybaris.'

VI

ALONG the Ionian Sea our train went sauntering southward, past olive groves and meadows and willow-hung pebbly

GRECIAN ITALY

streams, through a rich-bosomed peaceful land basking in the February sun.

'This country appears so rich,' I remarked to the guard, 'why are the people so miserably poor and wretched?' He laughed bitterly.

'Why? Because, *signor*, only two or three families own all this province. They spend their time and money in Rome, at Monte Carlo, while all the population works for them and derives a bare subsistence. That is why all our young men go to America and Argentina, *signor*. There is no spirit or enterprise left in the people.'

'And how is Cotrone,' I asked, 'is it like Sibari?'

'No—*signor*, but—' and he grinned, '*e un paese sporco.*'

I did not translate this to Gruger. To tell him we were going to 'a filthy burg' after Cosenza and Sibari, might, I feared, dampen his spirits.

On we ambled by the Ionian Sea, beautiful as a dream, through a land rich yet

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

wretched and dead. The train began as usual to accumulate its *ritardo*. At every station the cynical guard would loaf on the platform and smoke, or chat, or play with a child or the station master's goat, thus carrying on the good work of the *ritardo*. Hunger entered our compartment again. From gay cheerfulness, Gruger changed to monosyllabic moroseness. From pleasant philosophic discussion, the conversation turned into irritable grumbling. Talk about an army moving on its belly! Everything living moves in the same manner.

'That was terrible about that city being destroyed like that,' mourned Gruger lugubriously—'wiped out.'

'Cheer up,' I implored him, 'that was twenty-four hundred years ago.' But I could not be very cheerful myself. We had no food and nearly all our drinking water was gone. It was nine o'clock—dark and chilly.

'What is the best hotel in Cotrone?' I asked the guard.

GRECIAN ITALY

'Oh, the Pythagoras,' he assured me blithely. 'It is the newest. That is where I should go.'

'Cotrone! Cotrone!' he shouted suddenly. We had arrived.

'Shows'—muttered Gruger a shade more cheerily—'if you stick long enough to a train here—no telling—you may even arrive at the place you started for.'

A miserable skeleton of a horse from the boneyard, hitched to a ramshackle paintless vehicle from the junk-heap and driven by a puny withered gnome out of an Albrecht Durer illustration, conveyed us to the Hotel Pitagora.

'You wait,' I told him, 'and I'll see if they have rooms.'

'There are always rooms,' he snuffled oddly, in a queer ventriloquial voice. I mounted unspeakable stone stairs and came to a table at the top of them where a family quarrel was going on between a woman and two shabby beaded men. A ten-cent Bowery lodging house with such condi-

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

tions as were there visible would be closed by the police.

On the plea that I had come to the wrong hotel, I turned tail and fled.

'Drive to the Concordia', ordered the gnome savagely. Gissing had stayed at the Concordia and Norman Douglas and Lenormant. They must have been more discerning than the railway guard. The exterior of the Concordia was much the same. But at the desk sat a woman with a proud and tragic countenance and her face relaxed somewhat as we entered. She announced to the atmosphere in general:

'These *signori* will want Number One.'

The room was clean for Calabria and the beds seemed clean enough, except that one dreaded the idea of getting into them.

But there was food downstairs in the restaurant—dingily served, but excellent food and wine, a dry light wine, that seemed to penetrate our vitals like music.

'This is the place, boy,' chuckled Gru-ger, the colour coming back to his counten-

GRECIAN ITALY

ance. * I move we don't go far away from this table.'

We ordered everything, from fish to nuts, as the phrase goes, and I thought of the bizarre characters Gissing saw in this cafe. They were not bizarre now, mostly commercial gentlemen who talked of ships and cargoes and drank their macaroni with unrivalled efficiency.

I don't know why I feel romantic about Gissing, since I have read only a few of his novels, and those in general depressed me. But Gissing had stayed here, had been ill here, and had written 'By the Ionian Sea' about this region—that somehow thrilled me. Later, in London, a great bookseller in New Oxford Street showed me the original thin manuscript of that book, in its inimitable microscopic script, and I thrilled afresh—despite my experience of Calabria.

Even under the glare of electric light, the town was not inviting to stroll about in after dinner. We took a turn under the

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

heavy colonnade of the hotel and retired to our massive wooden twin beds with uneasy expectations. We opened the windows on a squalid back yard adorned with a solitary fig tree, hung thickly with clusters of the golden fruit.

VII

THE morning when we awoke was bright without being brilliant. It seemed as though nothing could be brilliant in Cotrone. The very sun himself had a tarnished look. The arrangements for the toilet were outside the pale of probability. Breakfast presented a problem in engineering. A German maid, stranded here in some mysterious fashion, was terrifically sweeping the musty corridor between the rooms and, like some creature accursed in a fairy tale, she seemed doomed to make more dust than she could clear away. A Calabrian hotel is a place that you leave with eagerness and re-enter with regret. I asked the

GRECIAN ITALY

proud and tragic landlady about ways and means of getting to Capo Nao or Capo Colonna—the Cape of the Column, as it is called. Upon that headland stands a solitary column remaining from the temple of Hera, of Pythagoras' time, a temple famous throughout the Hellenic world.

'How should I know about that?' retorted the landlady. 'Does the *signor* imagine,' she added with bitter contempt, 'that I belong to this place?' I intimated that such had been my mild assumption.

'No, *signor*, I come, thank God, from a real place—' I think she mentioned Salerno— 'I too am a stranger here. You are, I take it, a Calabrian with an American fortune come back to see the sights?'

I disavowed that identity modestly, but I looked at Gruger haughtily. If he entertained any light notions concerning my manipulation of the vernacular, now was by brief moment of triumph. Hastily I translated the landlady's remark.

'Lord!' said Gruger with pious sincerity.

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

'I never said anything to you half so unpleasant as that—even when I was hungriest—now, did I?'

It was useless to attempt to triumph over Gruger. We fared forth into the city. This was the city whose women had been the most beautiful in Greater Greece and the men, according to Strabo, were all cut out for soldiers and athletes. On one occasion all the seven victors at the Olympic games were Crotonians. So salubrious was the city that it passed into a proverb—'healthy as Crotona.'

To this spot had come Pythagoras, after his long studies in Egypt and the East, to found a religion, spiritual instead of physical. He was the definite point of departure from the remnants of the neolithic cults, with the savage elements of blood-sacrifice in them, towards a religion of the spirit, based on justice, harmony, charity, peace. From the Mosaic tablets he brought the commandment, Honour they father and they mother; and he preached charity.

GRECIAN ITALY

Like the early American colonists, the Pilgrims, he went to Colonial Greece because he could not make headway in Ionian Greece. The materialism there was too strong for him. And from this magnificent city, whose walls were twelve miles in circumference, his influence soon spread and became enormous. It had reached even Gruger and myself, for here *vyb* were.

We wandered out among the squalid winding streets towards the harbour, thinking we would take a boat and sail out to the Cape of the Column. The imposing Castle built by Charles V with vast walls and battlements overlooking this harbour, seemed like some grotesque fortress guarding something that was not worth guarding. Everything was dead. The walls were dead; the streets, the houses, the harbour—all were lying as under a deathly spell. An old weather-beaten sailor about four feet tall lay on the sand and greeted us cheerfully.

'Tedeschi?' he queried good-humour-

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

edly. No, we were not Germans. Ah, English, then. He knew England. He had sailed to Hull and Bristol. . . . Not English? Americans. *Per Diol* That is far—and it is a warmish day. No, there were no boatmen available to-day. A voyage to Capo Colonna—that must be arranged well in advance.

Gleaming on the distant headland, we discerned the solitary column of Hera's temple pointing skyward. That was the Lacinian promontory that guided Æneas, and all that remained of the temple where the beautiful women of Crotona left their jewels and pledged themselves to lead a better life under Pythagoras' influence.

VIII

WE wandered on by the palaces of the Berlinghieri and the Luciferi, the families who own most of the region, back into the squalid streets and to the public square, near our hotel.

GRECIAN ITALY

In the square, before the ugly cadaverous Cathedral, a throng of people was gathering. An important funeral, the obsequies of a good lawyer, was being held. That throng of people sealed the fate of our stay at Cotrone! Nowhere on earth, not even in the flood area of China, have I seen a population so stricken, so stunted and sickly as in the piazza of Cotrone.

'And they called this the country of the brigands!' muttered Gruger contemptuously.

The malaria-ravaged faces of young and old, often distorted, mounted upon puny, undersized bodies, alternately struck pity and chill terror into our hearts.

'Look at their eyes,' I whispered to Gruger. Every second person almost was either blind of an eye, or had some disease like trachoma, or other eye afflictions that made us shudder. The plumed hearse drove up. The tarnished sun shone overhead. The populace stood mutely gaping or talking in low tones. But more and

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

more our spirits recoiled from the place. The very air seemed *infecte*, unwholesome, in need of a vast cleansing process that will probably never be administered.

'I can't stand it,' muttered Gruger hoarsely. 'I can't breathe this air. It's unclean.' And, oddly, I also experienced some of the feeling I remembered in catacombs. We turned away towards the colonnade of the hotel. The natives started after us and murmured information to one another behind our backs. On a sudden I saw the picture of the thin, sad face of Gissing, lying sick with the fever in a Concordia room. Gissing saw some wonderful fever-visions of ancient life there—'thronged streets, processions, triumphal or religious, halls of feasting, fields of battle.' But he had nearly died there, and I had no desire to emulate him.

'Must we stay on here?' demanded Gruger.

'Well, I should like to see the Cape and the Column', I murmured.

GRECIAN ITALY

' But we did see that—at a distance. A bare rock with a post—after all the gorgeous temples we have seen!' . . .

We inquired about trains. Early that afternoon a train was leaving for Reggio.

'Let's order lunch put up' — Gruger uttered the thought nearest his heart. An expensive lunch was put up, with inedible meat, with goat's butter sealed in some little cone-shaped cheeses, with sticky raisins kept in dry leaves from last year, with wine and drinking water. We took another look at the melancholy fig tree in the back yard, at the palaces *of* the rich, who were entitled to all the riches for living there at all, opined Gruger, at the ancient city of Hellenic light that was now so desolate and squalid. We paid our score, and the landlady looked triumphant, as though she had laid a wager we would stay no longer. The aged, stunted cabman cracked his whip over the pitiful protruding bones of his aged, stunted horse and we were off. Once again we crossed the

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

bridge over the Esaro with its fringe of palm trees trimmed very high, so that their tips were like bouquets held up in the air. There Pythagoras may have walked meditating his Golden Verses.

* First, serve the gods as by the laws decreed
And next, to keep your sacred oath take heed.'

But Pythagoras was not walking there now.

'I am glad we are leaving,' said Gruger as we approached the dingy station, * or we might have knifed each other.' Once in the train, no power on earth could have called us back. Yet, Norman Douglas, a cultivated modern Englishman and an excellent writer, spent many days at Cotrone, at the Concordia, in midsummer. Tastes diverge widely.

All that day we rolled dustily southward and ever southward, to round the toe of Italy's boot, with Reggio as the objective. A young Italian from America, visiting relatives in these parts, attached himself to us as we promenaded dully during long

GRECIAN ITALY

waits at stations, and industriously kept apologizing for the poverty and squalor of Calabria. Catanzaro—Squillace —Virgil's Scylaceum—Locri (Gerace), and Caulonia, that once sheltered Pythagoras when he was a fugitive — all famous places of Magna Graecia, but now poverty-stricken, meaningless aggregations of small stone houses and hovels that look as though civilization had never touched them since neolithic times. The home of luxury, the home of wisdom, of a rich and varied culture—dead, all dead, because mankind has not yet learned how to live. Is that, one could not help wondering, what in turn would happen to our present great cities? Does the Tree of Knowledge bear so corrupting a fruit that none who partakes of it may survive?

We were, of course, unbearably late and we consumed all consumable food and grew first philosophical, then morose, then irritable. But we had left the malaria behind us and at every spot farther south the

COUNTRY OF THE SYBARITES

breezes from the Aspromonte were more and more chill and bracing. We grew weary finally of the eternal Ionian Sea and glad when we rounded Cape Spartivento and our dismal locomotive turned towards Reggio.

A splendid motor from the Albergo Centrale was at the station, and Gruger, like the citizen of the world he is, promptly climbed into it as though it had been waiting for us. And it seemed that if only you knew how to claim a thing it was yours. For further guests who came politely asked for our permission to enter the car. Like the wind, we were driven through the electric-lighted streets of this earthquake-shaken city to a hotel that was at last passable — on a par, say, with a fourth-rate hotel in America or China. There was dinner still to be had in a dining room filled with spruce Italian business men and commercial travellers, and the waiters served us with quite cosmopolitan indifference. For the first time Gruger felt at

GRECIAN ITALY

home. The wine was good, the food filling, and the almost white table linen intoxicating.

Across the Strait of Messina, as we stepped to a window, we could see the lights of Sicily blinking and there, perhaps, were the lights of our own apartments in Taormina with our families around them. To-morrow we should be there.

'Do you know,' chortled Gruger as though his good humour had never left him, 'now that it's over, I wouldn't have missed this trip for a great deal?' Which shows that much of the charm of travel lies in retrospection.

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA

I

'THAT is certainly Malta,' we told each other as we stared out into the almost painfully shimmering lapis lazuli Mediterranean. Bystanders on the deck of the little Italian tub murmured that they could see nothing.

But Frederic Gruger and I are exceedingly nautical persons. So eager were we to leave our ship after only some fifteen hours aboard her, that we were scanning the horizon for landfall, and we raised land, I am certain, long before the Sicilian skipper did. He had held his ship a whole night in the harbour of Syracuse because he had not dared to sail out in a breeze—to undertake an eight-hour voyage! And now a faint pearly shadowiness in the translucence beyond cheered us with the hope of land. We could not possibly go wrong.

GRECIAN ITALY

Somewhere ahead of us in that cobalt sea must be the island of Malta.

Two hours later we were entering one of the most exciting harbours in the world. 'Under the guns of St. Elmo' is a phrase that reverberates in one's mind from recesses of past reading; and here were St. Elmo and the Ricasoli fortress of a creamy yellow against the blue of the harbour, seeming to make for us like great battle-ships about to bear us down. A brilliant sun was pouring a warm tremulous light upon waters, forts, and shipping, and suddenly Valetta, a radiant orange-coloured city, touched up with green like some successful stage setting, began to cascade backward before us, to lure us up the rock, to lure and to invite.

'So this is Malta,' we concluded brilliantly, and a great sense of cheerfulness, of jubilation almost, flamed up in our minds. For, like only a very few spots upon the earth, like Venice, Taormina, and possibly Bruges, reading and pictures **and**

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA

post-cards had failed to ruin it for us. It surpassed our most elaborate expectations. It is beautiful with a beauty that no one can render upon canvas or paper. It has a sense of life, a soul and a mystery, that cannot be reproduced. At once all the discomfort and hardship of attaining it are wiped out like a sum upon a slate. Eagerly we hailed a boatman.

In the Mediterranean, if it is at all possible to avoid a pier, your ship will scrupulously avoid a pier. It is not because landing must be made as difficult as possible, though that is a worthy object. But the boatmen, who have been boatmen since the days of Ulysses, must somehow live. Those boatmen in their brilliantly painted gondolas take violent possession of you and bargain in shillings. English money again after the filthy currency of Italy! Then suddenly you hear a stream of language that sounds like Hebrew, and is in reality a mixture of Arabic, Punic and Italian, and you know you are in Malta, notwith-

GRECIAN ITALY

standing the shillings. Smart British naval uniforms in cutters and dinghies flit about you. A British cruiser rides at anchor in the lower harbour.

'I'd like to spend about a week just rowing about this bay, making sketches,' observes Gruger. In every spot he wanted to spend either a week or a month.

The customs and police lines are easily passed. The stilted little *carrozin*, a fragile, rattling one-horse vehicle that seems built for a child, carries us all, driver, self-attached guide, and all of our hand luggage, in a mad climb up the rock. The driver makes an observation to the trifling horse in Punic and up he goes rattling in and out, ever upward, through the tunnel-like balconied streets, oriental, Italianate, but of amazing cleanliness—English.

Massive buildings are the shops and warehouses and massive swarthy gentlemen are the proprietors at the doors. They have had so many masters since the days of the Phoenicians! They are themselves

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA
said to be part Phoenician. But they survive. Their eyes are as shrewd and alert now under the Union Jack and the Maltese Cross as they probably were in 1500 B.C.

II

THE first impression of Malta is simply delightful. Hotels were full and no wonder. We drove to several before we found lodgment. Gruger's perpetual hunger that accompanied us like an intimate third person, now rose up lustily and at four o'clock in the afternoon we set out in search of luncheon. All the life and colour of the Strada Reale, which I expected to captivate the artist's eye, seemed to make the slenderest of impressions upon him. The Maltese guide still faithfully dogging our footsteps, with gazelle-eyed meekness, offered to lead us to the best restaurant in Valetta—the National. The artist's eye brightened for a moment—until we took

GRECIAN ITALY

in the exterior of that restaurant. That exterior was less brilliant than it might have been.

In reckless mood, under pressure of hunger, one of us abruptly demanded:

'Where would the Governor go if he were hungry and wanted a good meal?'

'The Governor!' gasped the dapper little guide with a startled look in the gazelle eyes. 'The Governor has three palaces—he can eat in any of 'em.'

'How snobbish of him!' we murmured, and decided to risk the restaurant—which after all, proved excellent. But the little guide vanished away. The sacrilegious reference to the Governor was a bit too disturbing for him.

When we emerged replete, with that feeling of a kindly opulent nature that a good meal can give, the artist's eye, now singularly bright and genial, roved up and down the Strada Reale, towards the Library Square, toward the Guard House of yellow stone, over the lovely simple facade of the

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA

Governor's Palace, with its long straight line of green-shuttered balcony, against the chrome-coloured walls, and he laughed aloud for joy.

III

VALETTA was a city in a thousand, we knew. We knew that to have missed it would have been to miss one of the sights of the world. The declining sun over the orange tints seemed to evoke a city of gold. Trees are scarce in Malta, but in the square were trees and flowers. It was February, but warmer than the Riviera in April or England in May.

We wanted to make a meal of Valetta—to swallow it whole. We roved about aimlessly this way and that, and everywhere were new pleasures. Imagine coming upon a street that is all steps, half a mile of steps leading down, down to sea level, and all the massive houses and buildings arranged in two beautiful rows, with per-

GRECIAN ITALY

feet sky lines, going down to the vanishing point like a lesson in perspective!

' Those Knights of Malta knew how to build/ we said, for it was they who had built Valetta, symmetrical as an American city but of a colour impossible in America. To tell the truth, however, you give them little credit enough. Though you see their handiwork everywhere, you keep perpetually forgetting them. For Malta is so much more than the product of some three centuries of the Hospitallers! One of its neolithic temples alone—but to that I shall come later. In any case, the city is so alive, so vivid with sunlight and brightness, so full of gay uniforms, good cigarettes and Bond Street shops, that you find it difficult to think of the bygone Knights and dead Grand Masters filling the crypts of St. John's Cathedral.

English lads and girls in white flannels, jolly clear-faced little midshipmen and young officers, were going out in motors and *carrozins* to the polo ground or the

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA

tennis courts across the bridge at Marsa, or crowding into Blackley's for tea, or hurrying into the clubs, formerly the seats of the Knights. And, moving up and down the pavements and the square were the Maltese themselves, dark as Orientals and light as Saxon Englishmen. They have generally been considered as principally a Semitic race, with much of the Arab in them, but recent scholarship makes them out a Pre-Aryan Mediterranean race of African origin, kindred with others in Europe of a great antiquity, and extraordinary purity. Be that as it may, they are now a free people since, in 1921, they ceased being a Crown Colony and now have a constitution and parliament of their own; and the streets are full of politics.

As our hotel terms included afternoon tea in the general *pension*, Gruger began to turn his steps homeward with the unmistakable indications of hunger. By the time we reached the hotel tea was over, and

GRECIAN ITALY

to go forth to seek it in the highways seemed too great a labour. So Gruger, never to be foiled, took it out by sleeping until dinner time, with an innocent infant's readiness to slumber the moment his head touched the pillow.

We dressed like gentlemen in the evening, and with English currency in our pockets set out for the opera. 'Pagliacci' with an act of 'Forza del Destino' for a curtain raiser, was admirably sung, but that was hardly the point for us. We are neither of us musicians. What struck us most, coming as we did from Sicily, was the magnificence of the opera house, its cleanliness, the absence of fleas and dirt from the floors, the dress of the women, Maltese and English alike, and the charm of British uniforms. They have a way, these British officers in distant spots of the Empire, of looking their parts so satisfyingly. The English subaltern looks as English as Westminster or Trafalgar Square, and if you can take your eyes from the

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA

knees and the kilt of the youth from the Highland regiment, you see a Scottish face that you could not mistake for anything but Scots the world over.

IV

THE scene shifts. (It had better shift rapidly if I am to describe Malta in a single chapter.) By way of the euphonious suburbs and towns, Floriana, Bircarcara, Attard, we are spinning in an excellent American car to Notabile—Citta Vecchia, the ancient capital of Malta, before the Grand Master Jean de la Valetta had built Valetta. Imagine a country made up entirely of chrome-yellow, orange, and red stone! All the stone walls are of these colours, and the soil itself seems to shade into the fences harmoniously, or the walls into the soil—a whole glowing world under a cloudless sky, a careless sun. Here and there the black-green bushy heads of carob-trees dot the rufous expanse. Farm

GRECIAN ITALY

houses of stone, their walls of stone, their ancient wells—a red petrified land, but for the laborious swarthy men in the furrows and the donkeys patiently ambling.

'It's like the Holy Land, by George!' exclaims Gruger. He has never been in the Holy Land. But such is the depth of his piety, he has intuitively divined it. And, indeed, this sun-baked petrous landscape realizes all the visions you have formed of the Palestinian region. No wonder St. Paul felt at home here after his shipwreck!

The car winds in and out among narrow streets of massive buildings, the same Maltese red stone, all stone—not a tree, or shrub, not a blade of grass visible anywhere—into the piazza of the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul.

The piety of the Maltese is extraordinary. They are always praying, always filling their many churches. A mass was being celebrated in the choir of the Cathedral as we entered. And it is no wonder. Their

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA

religion is very close to them, very personal. That very Cathedral stands upon the site of the house of Publius.

And Publius, as the verger easily informs you, was the son of the Roman Governor of Melita when Paul was shipwrecked there. Paul was entertained in this house. He was made much of. He converted both the Governor and his son to Christianity and ordained Publius the first Bishop of Malta. It is all very simple to the Maltese, a thing of yesterday, and the fixing points of their narrative are there at their hands.

The church is beautiful, cool, tranquil as churches should be. It contains some rare and lovely things. There is the usual Madonna, painted by St. Luke—one of scores throughout the churches of Southern Italy; but what interested us more was a tall silver cross brought by the Knights from Rhodes, a marvellous picture of St. John, paintings of scenes in the life of St. Paul, and so on. I am not going to describe it. To me the notable thing was the

GRECIAN ITALY

personal memory the votaries harbour of the Apostle. There on the right of the choir was the exquisite little chapel standing, so they said, precisely over the spot where stood the house of Publius. In their minds they could easily see Paul sitting down there in the cool Roman room, rising up there, narrating the catastrophe of the prison ship, his experience with the lizard, or adder—an eloquent talker, no doubt, as his writings show.

Of course, that is not all there is to Citta Vecchia. It is full of wonders, that red, silent city, that might have been hewn out of a monolith. Pilgrims from all the world continually arrive there. There is St. Paul's cave beneath the church of St. Publius just outside, a step, in the suburb of Rabato. In that cave in the soft rock Paul is said to have lived for three months. Why in a cave, when the governor's house was open to him, appears uncertain. But there, at any rate, is the cave, and in the dusk of the long stair leading downward many

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA

a devotee sits and prays whole hours, days, weeks.

'And here', said the guide who showed us the cave, 'is daily enacted the miracle of St. Paul. For though it is now more than 1864 years since St. Paul was here and pilgrims during all that time have chipped away the stone for mementoes, the cave remains exactly the same size it has always been.'

We refused to despoil the cave further by taking any chips of stone from it ourselves, and went upward again into the air.

And this outer air of Notabile in Malta is quite peculiar and apart from all others in the world. It is very clean for one thing, and the reddish-yellow buildings seem to have a consecrated atmosphere without any of the glare and squalor so often belonging to shrines. No troops of beggars molest you. only a few native men and women stare after your car. A barefoot boy offers to lead you to the next 'exhibit', Red, dignified, monolithic city — how superbly it

GRECIAN ITALY

stands there after all vicissitudes and conquests! You almost resent its indifference, but the thick ochre walls seem to be saying:

' St. Paul stopped here but yesterday on his way to Rome. Do you think we can be excited about you?'

V

No human being, it seems, can resist catacombs. Personally, I cannot bear them, and yet always if a catacomb is near by I must enter it, gaze into the dark recesses, satisfy that something of the cave-dweller which, I suspect, remains in us all. Catacombs are all alike, but each seems novel, strange, mysterious. Gruger is the only man I have met who seems completely at home in them.

In those catacombs of Citta Vecchia at Malta I was almost suffocated. They are called the catacombs of St. Paul. A glib boy with Maltese English tells you the most

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA

preposterous stories as he guides you. The burial bins, or recesses, where you see the stone hollowed for the heads and bodies of the eternal sleepers now gone, he glibly declares, were homes of early Christians or of prehistoric families who lived there for generations.

'Here slep' the fadder, here the mudder and 'ere was the baby,' he rattles on. The round stone tables where the last supper of the friends of the dead took place was, according to the boy, the mill where the families dwelling in that luxury ground their corn. Your head swims and reels. Your breath automatically shortens as your lungs resist that dead sunless air, and the force of life in you sinks, sinks——

'Where is the door?' I demanded of the wretched boy.

'Only three minutes away', he replied absently, going on in his monotone about 'fadder and mudder and baby.'

'Lead me to it at once,' I cried, stifled, 'by the shortest way.'

GRECIAN ITALY

Gruger, however, seemed happy, composed and calm, perfectly at home in those nether regions.

Once you emerge from the catacombs, the city presents a new aspect to you. It is a dead city you realize—all dead—a tomb. No birds sing, no trees rustle. Even the living there are only ministers of the dead. It is beautiful, but you feel you must flee it—this vast mausoleum, this museum of eschatology.

'Drive fast,' you say to the chauffeur and put your head out of the car to fill your lungs with the wind of motion.

'Where shall I go?' he asks.

'Go to St. Paul's Bay.'

'It is five miles,' he says.

'I wish it were ten. Let's go.'

Once you descend the steep slope over perfect roadways and look behind you toward Notabile—or Medina, as the Arabs called it—the impression of a mausoleum is stronger than ever. With its cathedral and blocks of masonry, it seems to rise like

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA

a gigantic monument, a vast necropolis, yet commemorating a great and living event.

Through well-tilled fields with their perpetual stone fences you drive towards that spot of beach where the ship of Caesarea, bearing St. Paul and his fellow-prisoners of Rome, struck 'between two seas' nearly 2,000 years ago. The Euroclydon, or the Gregale, as it is now called, the cold north-easter that bore the ship ashore, can blow as chill and wet to-day as it did in A.D. 58, and not so long ago the British war-vessel *Sultan* was lost there in very similar conditions. A watch tower, built by the Knights in 1610, and a small church stand on the spot where St. Paul landed. A village has spread round these monuments and there is even a hotel. On the little twin island, Il Gzira, stands a titanic statue of St. Paul to commemorate the great event. But, indeed, the whole of Malta commemorates it. In a way, that is the gateway by which entered Christianity into Europe, and every creature on the island

GRECIAN ITALY

seems in a manner conscious of the fact.

Everyone had insisted that we must see the church of Moustá. Neither Gruger nor I are any longer of those inveterate sightseers that dare not leave a church or chapel unseen. The fresh dry air of Malta suited us better. But infallibly the chauffeur drove up to the great-domed church, and a handful of priests and worshippers stood on the steps gazing at the arriving strangers.

The priests politely lifted their hats. We did the same. In the church, as bare and new an edifice as any, there surely was the great naked dome—as large as—I forget how large it is. But they compare it with St. Peter's in Rome. It did not detain us, however. Through the clear twilight we drove hotel ward very rapidly.

The sun was warm and brilliant, the streets and the library square were full of people, and Gruger was bent on roving up and down the city, sketching and photographing angles, scenes and corners.

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA

VI

BUT, like a conscientious schoolmaster, I nagged him with the duty of seeing the Governor's Palace—the residence of the bygone Grand Masters, the elaborate remnant of chivalry of the Hospitallers. Gruger desired to 'snap' another herd of milch-goats, another market, another *car-rozin*, but with a moral force greater than his own, I carried him off into the precincts of authority.

The sweetness of his disposition, however, his docility, went to one's heart and I promised him we should not linger there a moment longer than necessary.

Which brings me to a point. Has anything suffered a greater eclipse of late than the interest in palaces? The traveller and tourist in time gone by could no more slight a palace than a donkey could pass a green bush without nibbling at it. Now, however, they seem mostly fed up with palaces.

GRECIAN ITALY

Gruger, who had rebelled against the interior of the palace, and desired only to sketch the outer court, soon became intensely interested in the toy pistols, daggers, swords, scimitars, and primitive cannon with which the Knights for so long had fought the Turks.

Personally, I hate collections of weapons. To me they are no different from so many implements of the mediaeval butcher's craft.

'Come this way, Gruger,' I called the artist to a glass case, 'and I'll show you the original Bull by which Paschal II in 1113 officially assumed the protection of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem.'

'I have heard of so many bulls,' he answered absently, and riveted his gaze upon a combined dagger and pistol that looked particularly blood-thirsty. We saw them all—the early cannon, the pikes and the halberds, the deed to the island from Charles V of Spain, dated March 23, 1530, and the trumpet that sounded the retreat from Rhodes in 1522. We saw ballrooms,

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA

chairs, candelabra, all the showy appurtenances of a palace. We saw portraits of so many Grand Masters, our heads swam.

What interested us as much as anything was the Parliamentary Chamber where the quondam Governor-General is now merely the presiding officer. All the elected members of parliament are equipped with sumptuous desks and outfits in grand style. The Governor on his dais sits at a small deal kitchen table, and that must be very pleasant to the Maltese, who have had so many rulers since Phoenician days that they cannot remember them.

To discipline Gruger because he had seemed so eager to get out of the palace, I made him see the Cathedral the same day.

'Couldn't you just take a squint at it,' he begged, 'and let me bum around out in the streets?'

'No!' I told him vociferously. 'All the Grand Masters lie buried in that church. What will you say to your grandchildren when they ask you about the place?'

GRECIAN ITALY

' Oh, I'll tell them a few things', he muttered, but with his usual docility and patience he came.

It was then we realized that the palace had exhausted us. All of Citta Vecchia had left us less fatigued than that one palace. There is something devastating in staring at other people's living quarters and furnishings. It is like accompanying one's wife on a shopping expedition.

VII

THE Cathedral was cool and empty except for a couple of workmen repairing the mosaic of a tomb worn beneath the feet of the worshippers. Grand Masters galore are buried here all up and down the nave in the chapels, corners and crypt. That is what is left of the Knights of Malta—dust under little oblongs of fine mosaic and names daintily embroidered in stone—

The different *langues* (languages) or nationalities had each its chapel, for the

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA

Knights of Malta were a sort of international soviet, and each *langue* vied with the others in making its chapel the most splendid in the cathedral—the *langue* of Provence, of England, of Portugal, of Spain, of Austria, of Auvergne and Italy. From being merely a monkish order of Hospitallers bent upon helping the pilgrims on their way to and from Jerusalem, they very soon donned the sword and mail and became a fighting order like the Templars. They were supposed to hold the Turk at bay. Anyway, they had a very good time fighting, ruling, collecting slaves for their galleys; and, if pilgrims did stop at Malta between Europe and Jerusalem, they were doubtless well entertained. But the way is so long and Malta is, after all, only a dot in the Mediterranean.

It was on the 9th of June, 1798, that Napoleon Bonaparte sailed in with his fleet and insisted upon entering the island, but he did not hold it long. England has held it longer—in fact, ever since.

GRECIAN ITALY

And there they lie, all those Grand Masters who made such a to-do while in life, their armorial bearings in rare and coloured stone, as if, said Thackeray when he saw them, 'as if in the next world they expected to take rank in conformity with their pedigrees.'

There are one or two excellent paintings by Carvaggio and II Calabrese, and there is the wonder of the silver railings in the chapel of Our Lady of Philermos that had been painted black by some clever person and so fooled Bonaparte into leaving them alone. A very lovely church.

'But you know it's lunch time,' whispered Gruger suddenly. 'And whatever else we can miss we can't afford to miss lunch.'

The truth is we were mad to get out into the open air. In this sun-baked island everyone is something of a sun-worshipper. The crowd, the colour, the goats—but chiefly the colour! It is so dazzling and yet so soft. It stimulates like champagne. You are always wanting to do something,

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA

to buy something, to go somewhere. If you cannot think of anything else to do you buy a new kind of cigarette, or have some coffee. And you wander—you wander about with a smile in your eyes evoked constantly by those sunbright colours.

Malta is the kind of a country where touristry is not organized, where even the most abject and helpless of tourists can wear for a few days all the dignity of a competent independent traveller. Nobody tries to cheat you. The English garrison life has accustomed the natives to youth, gaiety and attentive service. It is that happy blend of East and West which poets tell us never meet. They do meet in Malta, and by consequence you have a feeling of being on a crest of two uniting waves—very exhilarating.

East and West—their meeting place is everywhere in Malta; in the language, in the faces of the natives, in the soil and climate, in the manners and customs, even in the dress. The black faldetta of the

GRECIAN ITALY

women has suggestions of the Moorish woman's veil, of the Hindu woman's sari, of the rural English and American sun-bonnet, and who knows what strains besides! When one reflects that Malta has been successively held by Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs, Normans, Spaniards, the Knights, and England, one ceases to wonder at its strangely and peculiarly eclectic character. English officers say the Maltese are not good fighters. The wonder is they should survive at all after all those conquests. They deserve to live pampered and taken care of in a museum as an ethnic curiosity.

They seem to have lived through everything, to have suffered all, to have experienced all things. The result is a curious sort of docile tolerance in their eyes, unlike even to that of the peasants of southern Italy. Side by side almost, stand the Addolorata cemetery, one of the most beautiful Christian *campi santi* in Europe, a terrain of marbles and armies of firs and cypresses,

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA
and the Mohammedan cemetery with its slender towers, cupolas, minarets and crescents, dedicated to a faith that for nearly fifteen centuries has been hostile to the Maltese. But the Maltese, notwithstanding their intense piety and orthodoxy, are used to diversity in faith. The Mohammedan cemetery is neglected, whereas the Addolorata is meticulously kept, but that is not the fault of the Maltese.

VIII

BUT over and above all sight-seeing and all superficial observation, Malta astonished both Gruger and the writer by suddenly converting us into archaeologists. As a man who 'gets religion' abruptly realizes that mundane preoccupations no longer exert the same pull upon him, we both stood overawed by certain neolithic temples and remains that make mere classical antiquity a thing of yesterday.

One may imagine a school-girl after

GRECIAN ITALY

reading H. G. Well's remarkable *History* suddenly gushing out with conviction: 'I do so perfectly adore the neolithic—don't you?'

And that is what happened to us, hardy travellers, newly come from Sicily, where the whole island is literally a museum of antiquity and every step a classic memory. We were face to face with some of the earliest known beginnings of civilization, and we adored the neolithic!

Hagiar Kim and Gigantia, remains of Phoenician temples vaguely reminiscent of Stonehenge, with immense upright slabs and monoliths, I am obliged to pass over. For what, after all, were the Phoenicians? Mere parvenus and upstarts. In Malta they date only to 1500 B.C. But the newly discovered Stone Age temple in the suburb of Hal Tarxien (pronounced Tarsheen) is dated to at least 3000 B.C., and is probably older. The excavation was made during the war, when Malta was hermetically sealed. The world has scarcely heard of it as yet because archaeologists are

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA

still busy studying it. The excavation is barely finished. And the discovery is a romance of science.

In 1913, just before the war broke out, a peasant, digging his field, found some well-squared blocks of stone beneath the surface, only about two feet below. In July, 1915, when the war seemed to have settled down to a normal condition of existence, Professor Zammit of the Valetta Museum began digging, and, to make the story brief, found, as he says, 'three pairs of symmetrical apses, connected with each other by means of narrow passages, formed by large slabs placed on end.' The floors of the ellipsoid rooms, which seemed to grow like leaves from the stem of the passageway, are paved with enormous flagstones. All, all stone, everything is stone, cut with implements of stone and flint, chert and obsidian.

An altar stone in one of the largest of these rooms is elaborately carved with spiral ornaments, such as we often make on

GRECIAN ITALY

a pad absently while waiting for a telephone connection, or such as are familiar to keepers of lunatic asylums. The altar stone is hollow, and the sacrificial knife of flint found there, the bones and skulls in the niches, and the cleverly concealed oracle room behind the sanctuary, dimly show the processes of religion in those distant days, when humanity was cave-dwelling and when even the celebrated 'vamp' Calypso inhabited a grotto de luxe, so different from her modern sisters in the films.

Some of these niches, by the way, amount to actual stone cupboards with a top and a shelf beneath. There are quite elaborate relief carvings on some of the slabs of bullocks and sheep, and there are statuettes of enormously fat ladies whose flesh cascades down in waves to their toes. Banting had not yet been invented in those neolithic times and the survival of the fattest was evidently the accepted doctrine.

'How does it strike you?' I asked Gruger as he gazed spellbound the while the Maltese

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA
caretaker stood by, bored and muttering.

'I'd like to spend a month here/ he murmured huskily—'or at least a week.'

A curious find in connection with this place was a piece of the Bronze Age overlaying this spot. About a fourth of the building was used in the Bronze Age as a cemetery. And in the trench the excavators dug you could see Bronze Age implements, skulls and pottery above and three feet lower, the remains of the Stone Age civilization under it. The farmer who unearthed it and we who looked on were presumably of the Iron Age, and there we were in a happy completeness, awaiting only the Radio Age to overlay us in turn.

We were actually in the centre or on the outskirts of a neolithic village, for not far away, at Hal Saflien, is a hypogeum or an underground temple of another style. This has a domed roof and catacomb-like recesses cut in the living rock, painted ceilings and immense quantities of bones. But it was not so interesting as the temple at **Tar-**

GRECIAN ITALY

xien lying under the brilliant Maltese sun.

The truth is, all Malta is a museum of archaeology, where man may examine his prehistoric ancestry and assure himself of a descent longer than the best-paid genealogist can trace. Gruger and I were greatly cheered when we left that spot. We realized with triumph how important we were when it took all those layers of civilizations to produce us and the motor car awaiting us.

The only thing to do after that was to go straightway to the admirable Valetta Museum and see in detail what the prehistoric temples showed in broad, general, though concrete, outline. There if you say 'neolithic' to the curator's assistant, he will show you all the pottery, implements, clay figurines, potsherds, and so on, found in Malta of that period. He will lead you to the Phoenician age next with its wonderful jars, black dishes, weapons, statuettes and the like that seem to restore that bold seafaring Semitic race before your eyes. The

NIGHTS AND SIGHTS OF MALTA

Greek period, the Roman, the Byzantine, the Arab, the Norman, seem mere trifles of yesterday by comparison, richly represented though they are.

When you go forth into the streets and see Ford cars again and straw hats, the world takes on a look absurdly thin and unsubstantial. Your mind reverts to really important things like food, the passage home, and the price of tobacco.

Impressed and replete with knowledge, only one exterior circumstance weighed heavily upon us. The preceding day Gruger had ordered a luncheon put up for us at our favourite restaurant to be eaten on a boat we did not take. There lay that elaborate luncheon such as only an artist could select, uneaten, unhouseled, unannealed. I suggested that we demolish it in our rooms and wash it down afterwards.

'Eat lunch out of a paper package with all these hotels and restaurants around us?' exclaimed Gruger aghast. I saw at once that I had uttered sacrilege.

GRECIAN ITALY

'No, of course' I corrected myself hastily. 'That—that is out of the question.'

'Here is what we can do', announced Gruger with a new light in his eye. 'We can go out into the country and eat it there.'

Happy thought! Eagerly we boarded the tiny tot railway train to Citta Vecchia. Are there any good hotels in Citta Vecchia? Aye, are there! On a balcony overlooking one of the finest Maltese prospects, with lovely fields and gardens stretching towards St. Paul's Bay and the opal sea beyond, we spread out our packet and ordered something dark and light and agreeable. That luncheon (I remember every detail of it yet) was a monument to the artist's perfect taste. We smoked our pipes for a space, told each other how it sometimes snows in New York in February, chatted so amiably, it would have done your heart good. Then we paid our bill and went back Valetta-ward satisfied. No one can tell me that that eight-mile journey was in vain. We shall never forget the island of **Malta**.

A LIST OF VOLUMES ISSUED IN
THE TRAVELLERS' LIBRARY

3s. 6d. net each

JONATHAN CAPE LTD.
THIRTY BEDFORD SQUARE LONDON

THE TRAVELLERS' LIBRARY

A series of books in all branches of literature designed for the pocket, or for the small house where shelf space is scarce. Though the volumes measure only 7 inches by 4¾ inches, the page is arranged so that the margins are not unreasonably curtailed nor legibility sacrificed. The books are of a uniform thickness irrespective of the number of pages, and the paper, specially manufactured for the series, is remarkably opaque, even when it is thinnest.

A semi-flexible form of binding has been adopted, as a safeguard against the damage inevitably associated with hasty packing. The cloth is of a particularly attractive shade of blue and has the author's name stamped in gold on the back. Each volume costs 3s. 6d. net (postage 3d.)

1. CAN SUCH THINGS BE ? A volume of Stories
by Ambrose Bierce
' Bierce never wastes a word, never coins a too startling phrase ; he secures his final effect, a cold thrill of fear, by a simple, yet subtle, realism. No anthology of short stories, limited to a score or so, would be complete without an example of his unique artistry.' *Morning Post*
2. THE BLACK DOG. A volume of Stories
by A. E. Coppard
I ' Mr. Coppard is a born story-teller. The book is filled with a variety of delightful stuff: no one who is interested in good writing in general, and good short stories in particular, should miss it.' *Spectator*
3. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY of a SUPER-TRAMP
by W. H. Davies. With a preface by G. Bernard Shaw
3 Printed as it was written, it is worth reading for its literary style alone. The author tells us with inimitable quiet modesty of how he begged and stole his way across America and through England and Wales until his travelling days were cut short by losing his right foot while attempting to ' jump ' a train.

4.. BABBITT A Novel
by Sinclair Lewis

- I ' One of the greatest novels I have read for a long time.'
H. G. Wells ' *Babbitt* is a triumph.' *Hugh Walpole*
' His work has that something extra, over and above, which
makes the work of art, and it is signed in every line with the
unique personality of the author.' *Rebecca West*

5. THE CRAFT OF FICTION
by Percy Lubbock

- ' No more substantial or more charming volume of criticism
has been published in our time.' *Observer*
' To say that this is the best book on the subject is probably true ;
but it is more *to* the point to say that it is the only one.'
Times Literary Supplement

6. EARLHAM
by Percy Lubbock

- ' The book seems too intimate to be reviewed. We want to be
allowed to read it, and to dream over it, and keep silence about
it. His judgment is perfect, his humour is true and ready ; his
touch light and prim ; his prose is exact and clean and full
of music.' *Times*

7. WIDSEAS & MANYLANDS A Personal Narrative
by Arthur Mason.

With an Introduction by MAURICE BARING

- J ' This is an extremely entertaining, and at the same time, moving
book. We are in the presence of a born writer. We read with
the same mixture of amazement and delight that fills us through-
out a Conrad novel.' *New Statesman*

8. SELECTED PREJUDICES A book of Essays
by H. L. Mencken

- ' He is exactly the kind of man we are needing, an iconoclast,
a scoffer at ideals, a critic with whips and scorpions who does
not hesitate to deal with literary, social and political humbugs
in the one slashing fashion.' *English Review*

9. THE MIND IN THE MAKING An Essay

by James Harvey Robinson

* For me, I think James Harvey Robinson is going to be almost as important as was Huxley in my adolescence, and William James in later years. It is a cardinal book. I question whether in the long run people may not come to it, as making a new initiative into the world's thought and methods.' *From the Introduction* by H. G. WELLS

10. THE WAY OF ALL FLESH A Novel

by Samuel Butler

3 'It drives one almost to despair of English Literature when one sees so extraordinary a study of English life as Butler's posthumous *Way of All Flesh* making so little impression. Really, the English do not deserve to have great men.' *George Bernard Shaw*

II. EREWHON A Satire

by Samuel Butler

* To lash the age, to ridicule vain pretension, to expose hypocrisy, to deride humbug in education, politics and religion, are tasks beyond most men's powers; but occasionally, very occasionally, a bit of genuine satire secures for itself more than a passing nod of recognition. *Erewhon* is such a satire. . . . The best of its kind since *Gulliver's Travels*? *Augustine Birrell*

12. EREWHON REVISITED A Satire

by Samuel Butler

3 'He waged a sleepless war with the mental torpor of the prosperous, complacent England around him; a Swift with the soul of music in him, and completely sane; a liberator of humanity operating with the wit and malice and coolness of Meplustopheles.' *Manchester Guardian*

13. ADAM AND EVE AND PINCH ME Stories

by A. E. Coppard

Mr. Coppard's implicit theme is the closeness of the spiritual world to the material; the strange, communicative sympathy which strikes through two temperaments and suddenly makes them one. He deals with those sudden impulses under which secrecy is broken down for a moment, and personality revealed as under a flash of spiritual lightning.

14- DUBLINERS A volume of Stories

by James Joyce

- 3 A collection of fifteen short stories by the author of *Ulysses*. They are all of them brave, relentless, and sympathetic pictures of Dublin life ; realistic, perhaps, but not crude ; analytical, but not repugnant- No modern writer has greater significance than Mr. Joyce, whose conception and practise of the short story is certainly unique and certainly vital.

15. DOG AND DUCK

by Arthur Machen

- ' As a literary artist, Mr. Arthur Machen has few living equals, and that is very far indeed from being his only, or even his greatest, claim on the suffrages of English readers.' *Sunday Times*

16. KAI LUNG'S GOLDEN HOURS

by Ernest Bramah

- 3 * It is worthy of its forerunner. There is the same plan, exactitude, working-out and achievement; and therefore complete satisfaction in the reading.' *From the Preface by HILAIRE BELLOC*

17. ANGELS & MINISTERS, AND OTHER PLAYS

by Laurence Housman

Imaginary portraits of political characters done in dialogue—
Queen Victoria, Disraeli, Gladstone, Parnell, Joseph Chamberlain, and Woodrow Wilson.

- 3 ' It is all so good that one is tempted to congratulate Mr. Housman on a true masterpiece.' *Times*

18. THE WALLET OF KAI LUNG

by Ernest Bramah

- I ' Something worth doing and done. . . . It was a thing intended, wrought out, completed and established. Therefore it was destined to endure, and, what is more important, it **was** a success.' *Hilaire Belloc*

19. TWILIGHT IN ITALY

by D. H. Lawrence

This volume of travel vignettes in North Italy was first published in 1916. Since then Mr. Lawrence has increased the number of his admirers year by year. In *Twilight in Italy* they will find all the freshness and vigour of outlook which they have come to expect from its author.

20. THE DREAM A Novel

by H. G. Wells

'It is the richest, most generous and absorbing thing that Mr. Wells has given us for years and years.' *Daily News*

'I find this book as close to being magnificent as any book that I have ever read. It is full of inspiration and life.'

Daily Graphic

21. ROMAN PICTURES

by Percy Lubbock

3 Pictures of life as it is lived—or has been or might be lived—among the pilgrims and colonists in Rome of more or less English speech.

* A book of whimsical originality and exquisite workmanship, and worthy of one of the best prose writers of our time.'

Sun Jay Times

22. CLORINDA WALKS IN HEAVEN

by A. E. Coppard

'Genius is a hard-ridden word, and has been put by critics at many puny ditches, but Mr. Coppard sets up a fence worthy of its mettle. He shows that in hands like his the English language is as alive as ever, and that there are still infinite possibilities in the short story.' *Outlook*

23. MARIUS THE EPICUREAN

by Walter Pater

3 Walter Pater was at the same time a scholar of wide sympathies and a master of the English language. In this, his best known work, he describes with rare delicacy of feeling and insight the religious and philosophic tendencies of the Roman Empire at the time of Antoninus Pius as they affected the mind and life of the story's hero.

24. **THE WHITE SHIP** Stories

by Aino Kallas

With an introduction by JOHN CALSWORTHY

J 'The writer has an extraordinary sense of atmosphere.'

Times Literary Supplement

* Stories told convincingly and well, with a keen perceptive for natural beauty.' *Nation*

25. **MULTITUDE AND SOLITUDE** A Novel

by John Masefield

'As well conceived and done, as rich in observation of the world, as profound where it needs to be profound, as any novel of recent writing.' *Outlook*

'This is no common book. It is a book which not merely touches vital things. It is vital.' *Daily News*

26. **SPRING SOWING** Stories

by Liam O'Flaherty

'Nothing seems to escape Mr. O'Flaherty's eye; his brain turns all things to drama; and his vocabulary is like a river in spate. *Spring Sowing* is a book to buy, or to borrow, or, yes, to steal.' *Bookman*

27. **WILLIAM** A Novel

by E. H. Young

* An extraordinary good book, penetrating and beautiful.' *Allan Monkhouse*

'All its characters are very real and alive, and William himself is a masterpiece.' *May Sinclair*

28. **THE COUNTRY OF THE POINTED FIRS**

by Sarah Orne Jewett

'The young student of American literature in the far distant future will take up this book and say "a masterpiece!" as proudly as if he had made it. It will be a message in a universal language—the one message that even the scythe of Time spares.'

From the preface by WILLA CATHER

29. GRECIAN ITALY

by Henry James Forman

'It has been said that if you were shown Taormina in a vision you would not believe it. If the reader has been in Grecian Italy before he reads this book, the magic of its pages will revive old memories and induce a severe attack of nostalgia.' *From*

the preface by H. FESTING JONES

30. WUTHERING HEIGHTS

by Emily Bronte

'It is a very great book. You may read this grim story of lost and thwarted human creatures on a moor at any age and come under its sway.' *From the introduction* by ROSE MACAULAY

31. ON A CHINESE SCREEN

by W. Somerset Maugham

A collection of sketches of life in China. Mr. Somerset Maugham writes with equal certainty and vigour whether his characters are Chinese or European. There is a tenderness and humour about the whole book which makes the reader turn eagerly to the next page for more.

32. A FARMER'S LIFE

by George Bourne

- 3 The life story of a tenant-farmer of fifty years ago in which the author of *The Bettesworth Book* and *The Memoirs of a Surrey Labourer*, draws on his memory for a picture of the every-day life of his immediate forebears, the Smiths, farmers and handicraft men, who lived and died on the border of Surrey and Hampshire.

33. TWO PLAYS. *The Cherry Orchard & The Sea Gull* by Anton Tchekoff. Translated by George Calderon

- 3 Tchekoff had that fine comedic spirit which relishes the incongruity between the actual disorder of the world with the underlying order. He habitually mingled tragedy (which is life seen close at hand) with comedy (which is life seen at a distance). His plays are tragedies with the texture of comedy.

