

History has repeated itself and once again the land of the proud Caesars has been humbled. The land that has felt the tread of Roman, Barbarian, Fascist, and German invaders has succumbed to the heavy blow of Allied arms.

I saw war-ravaged Italy not long after its proud capital had bowed to the second invader within a year---the ~~Aer~~ American doughboy--in August of 1944. The Italian people have accepted the new rulers as phlegmatically as they had bid goodbye to the old ones and life continues to run its ceaseless course in Italy as it has for so many centuries. The Italians pursue their daily life philosophically ignoring the invader---or making money off him.

Beautiful Naples ushered in Sunny Italy to me. In the morning haze that covered the blue harbor I could see Mastodon Vesuvius poking its blunt nose into the bright sky. The horse-shoe harbor was bounded by hills-like an amphitheatre---and covered completely by slums and castles and medieval fortresses. This was Italy! My feet threatened to beat an eager tattoo on the deck as I impatiently watched the prow of the ship feel its way into the harbor--holding its place in the convoy which by then had resolved itself into an Indian file of ships. Through the mist of the harbor I could make out over a hundred ships riding at anchor and the thought occurred to me that perhaps the Allies were once again going to strike somewhere along the European coast and strike hard. It was just five days before the invasion of South France and though I didn't know it then I had helped bring a substantial part of the

supplies for it.

Instead of dropping anchor we fell out of the now disintegrating convoy and docked at Pozzulli Bay, some ten miles further north, for fueling. Here the bombed-out fuel dock plus a half-submerged French submarine beside it gave eloquent testimony to both the Allies' acumen and accuracy in pushing the assault on Naples. A hasty Saturday afternoon dinner in the wardroom and I was off for Naples with Fresh provisions hunting as my excuse and my storekeeper (who had been here before) as my guide. It was with a sense of great expectation that I set out and my expectations were met fully.

Still ten miles from Naples proper we had to wait on a siding for the suburban train. It was not long in coming-- and we were glad, for the stench of the little station euphemistically speaking was not pleasing to the olfactory organs. The train, a faded relic of Mussolini's attempts to modernize Italy---was crowded and became more so at every station until people were literally hanging out of windows and doors. The little Italian conductor vainly tried to preserve some semblance of his peacetime functions by collecting fares from those who would pay. Most people ignored him/; others expostulated; some paid. So far as I could see it made no difference what one did.

Here in the suburbs I got my first glance at Italian poverty--not new, but accentuated by the war. By the time I reached downtown Naples my heart was sick for the Italian people and each new street that unraveled itself to my gaze

merely revealed the same story over and over again. Little children with skinny arms and swollen ~~to~~ stomachs and shaven heads covered with sores. Old women fighting off death by ~~by~~ begging on the streets. Children playing in the dust of the cobblestone streets and peddlers trying to sell imperfect, rotting vegetable produce. Mothers scavenging food for the hand to mouth existence they live. An occasional beggar-cripple--probably a veteran from any one of Italy's bleeding colonial campaigns--asking pitifully for food or lire or anything. On every side dirt, narrow streets, and screaming children. This was Naples downtown.

The main thoroughfares were different only insofar as they were wider and hence could accommodate a little more filth and a few more screaming children. A few respectable stores were to be seen with very meager stock displayed in barred windows. Barber shops were everywhere in evidence indicating that the Italian caterer in America is not innovating trades for himself.

I had been warned about moral depravity in conquered countries--and it wasn't long before it struck me full in the face. Any town invaded by an army attracts a swarm of moral locusts. Naples was the exception--it had attracted several swarms. At least three times a block servicemen would be approached by solicitors for the public women whose knowledge of the English language was confined to the few foul words of salesmanship necessary to pursue their business.

Most of these were children of from eight to fifteen years--defying in their circumstances the worst that Dickens could portray in any of his youthful characters. From the number of these little scouts-for-depravity I would hazard a guess that the prostitutes numbered in the thousands. Almost every sidestreet was a restricted area for Allied troops, but the restrictions signs were jokes.

Allied troops thronged the streets in great numbers--Americans, of course; and English, Scotch, French, Poles, free Italians, Sikhs, Indians, Moroccans, South Africans, Australians, and Brazilians.

At this point let me mention the Italian's innate love of ornamental display. The best example is his love of uniforms. Undoubtedly the Italian soldier has the snappiest uniform of them all--smart, green affairs with sam brown belts and leather leggings and shiny, black shoes. But the Italian military was outdone by the Italian civil servants. The Italian police, for instance, had pitch black uniforms with wide padded shoulders and shiny black sam-brown belts. The wide North^west Mounted Policetype of jhodpur pants were made to seem even more extravagant by the slim, corset-bound waists of these protectors of public peace. The whole outfit was topped off by a neat military hat, a petite little pistol at the hip, and knee-high, spotless, coal-black boots. They were a case for psychological study in their efforts to live up to the noble reputation implied by their uniforms and at the same time keep face as scores of M.P.'s ignored their efforts to keep traffic flowing uniformly. Even the

conductors in trains wore visored and belaced military hats--reliquaries of worn out uniforms that at one time must have been a sight to behold. The historical and colorful Italian carabinieri were occasionally to be seen guarding public buildings conspicuous in their Napoleonic headdresses, prominent epaulets, and hip boots. Yes, the Italian even in war-weary Italy clings to his uniforms and tries to imagine himself out of the present.

But money was the pressing need of the moment and I proceeded to fill/ it. The exchange rate in Italy has been pegged by the Allies at one lire for one American cent--roughly one-quarter of its former value. Consequently there is inflation plus a very flourishing black-market for American dollars the passing of which is forbidden by law. A day later when I was on my way to exchange money for the ship an Italian guide affixed himself to me and tried to divert me from the official bank to a lesser one where he indicated I would get more lire for my dollars--obviously black market. A narrow alley entrance led me into Naples's largest bank and finest building where my money was ~~exchanged~~ exchanged by army finance officers working in collaboration with the English and French.

Among other things I spent my money on champagne, Italian pastry, and a much-needed haircut. The champagne at 350 lire a bottle was not what I had expected. An efficient lad of fifteen with many flourishes popped off the cork like a pistol shot and poured the sparkling wine. It was refreshing but not especially good. In a neighboring shop we picked up a bit of Italian pastry--very doughy but good-tasting. The

haircut was half necessity half a desire to explore one of those many little shops that dotted the town. The barber who tackled my mat of tangled curls was another lad of about fifteen. He gave me a very fine haircut in a very old chair in a very dim light. I was a bit haggard looking, no doubt, so he invited me to go to sleep in the chair. Instead I asked questions and he answered them in pidgeon English. In the process of answering my queries he let me know that the Germans had been generous with their money. I still do not know whether it was a statement of fact, a gentle hint, or both. He accepted my forty lire with alacrity after informing me that I could pay "as I wished" for the haircut. And well he might for I later learned that barbers in the Red Cross club were getting seven lire for the same job.

Which brings me to prices. Food could be had if one were willing to trust himself to Italian food and Italian prices. Most restaurants on the side streets offered a triple bill---food, drink, women. In general, food, when you could find it, ran from a quarter to a half higher than the same in the states---too high for the average Italian. Liquor was slightly lower than in this country---but the quality was open to dispute. Street vendors occupied every free bit of space on the crowded sidewalks offering cheap hankerchiefs, table cloths, and very cheap jewelry---all at outrageous prices. Occasionally an offer of American cigarettes would produce an immediate contract with the seller. The acquainted foreigner always bargained with the ever-present possibility of cutting the price down by a third. Every street conner had its gesticulating pair of seller and prospective buyer haggling over the price. Clothing shop prices were high with small stocks to offer.

Up~~z~~ to this time my smattering of Spanish served to get me by only fairly so that when I ran into our ship's Italian born laundry man I grabbed him off quickly as my interpreter.

We set off to find the Cathedral of Saint Januarius of which I had heard much from those of the crew who had been in Naples before. It is in this Cathedral that the dried blood of this saint liquifies twice yearly. I had read about the cyclical miracle just before I left the states and the old guide who showed us through the church assured me that thousands witnessed the liquification each time it occurred.

The original chapel had been built in the fourth century and was used by Constantine, the first Christian emperor of Rome. The columns were taken from pagan temples dating before the time of Christ. Among other things the chapel contained a solid silver statue of the Virgin four feet high and a mosaic work gleaming dully with dozens of rubies. The rest of the church kept pace with this beauty---especially the huge main altar---but it was to become merged in a wave of such beauty within the week as I journeyed to timeless Rome.

Our guide grabbed us the minute we got into the Cathedral and his two little sons accompanied us all through the edifice considerably awe-stricken but quite proud of their father who bespoke the marvels of the church in broken English to these foreigners. It was typical of an Italian father to start his son young in following his footsteps and it was for this reason that he had his two little ones tagging along. Tourist parties wandered freely about the church. To me it seemed then and later that the Italians treasured their churches as national institutions of art almost as much as places of worship. And

commercialism generated by this art was not entirely absent. Two old Italian women, for instance, tried to interest us in visiting a tomb under the main altar. They were very insistent upon us seeing it, and when we finally ~~w~~ consented they were just as insistent ~~w~~ in their demands for a contribution for services rendered.

It was always thus with the Italians I met over there--- as with any devastated people I suppose. The search for the American dollar was timeless and untiring; a "sucker" never got a second chance. But disease and hunger are hard bedfellows: they influence people to do strange things. Perhaps the Italian viewed in a different age would reflect more fully the nobility implicit in the art so evident on every side.

Naples suffered extensive war damage. Whole buildings in uptown Naples were leveled. The hotel section of the city faced the waterfront. Very fashionable places in peacetime, the Germans had gutted them--scores and scores of them---by planting time bombs in the centers of the buildings. The greatest time bomb of all had been planted in the sub-basement of the large, modern post office in the very center of the town. Army engineers knew that tons of explosives had been planted there and were in the process of removing it when explosives were detonated. It is said that over four hundred American soldiers in the building were killed and many hundreds of civilians.

The British took over a massive medieval fortress built by the Spanish rulers of Naples many centuries previously. Used as a prison by the Germans its six story embattlements and six foot thick walls suited the purpose admirably.

Amid all these scenes a steady, never-ending stream of Allied trucks and other military vehicles seemed to come from nowhere and retreat again aimlessly in the same general direction. This was war-time Naples--an interesting and even absorbing subject for a sociological study, but not a pleasant sight for the finicky.

But far-removed though Naples proved to be from the glory that belonged to the Italy of history books, Rome sustained the link with the past despite the war.

I had always read a lot about Rome. As the seat of my Church it was indelibly impressed upon my imagination from childhood on. A college course in Renaissance history had put the finishing polish to my concepts. But well as I could visualize that timeless citadel of Christianity, I never thought I should see it/; and even in my wildest dreams not as part of a conquering army like the barbarians of old. But see it, I did; and ---with a little rationalizing---as part of a conquering, or should I say, liberating army. For it was as a military man that I was able to enter the city; and it was--figuratively speaking---as a rear guard of an advancing rather than a retreating army that I entered it barely eight weeks after its fall. True, my entry was not made with a blazing fanfare of trumpets as the van guard of long columns of jubilantly shouting soldiers. Instead it climaxed what had been a piece-meal modest journey across the Naples-to-Rome countryside via an assorted variety of army vehicles, one that had been made by hundreds of sight seers before me.

In fact, I must confess that in this "dangerous" enemy country I didn't even tote a weapon, the nearest thing to one being the gas mask bag I carried sans the mask in deference to far more practical sandwiches. There was not a shot fired at me all the way, though I averted starvation only through the cooperation of a splendid Red Cross canteen in uptown Rome. In fact, the last leg of my wartime journey into the formidable capital of Fascism was--via an innocuous Italian trolley which I boarded on the outskirts of the city.

It was the youngest officer aboard who first suggested it--and then encouraged pressed it upon the skipper. A trip to Rome a hundred and fifty miles distant, particularly for navy men appeared a bit formidable, particularly in wartime. Fighting was still raging furiously 40 small miles above Rome. The subject had been broached at the Sunday evening meal. I retired to my cabin and when I emerged at seven oclock after a catnap the skipper and two other officers had already taken off.

I, the junior officer aboard, left with two rellow officers the next morning. My lack of sea-experience stood me in good-enough stead to enable me to see Rome, for the executive officer would not countenance a skeleton officer force aboard in a foreign war port including inexperienced littl~~e~~ me as one of the ribs.

Dawn of Monday morning found us on our way to the airport where we failed to scure rides on transport planes to Rome. I argued the merits of switching to Plan "B" which concerned

ground work instead of air. Fifteen minutes later we were whizzing up Via Roma boulevard on our first lift towards the objective--Rome. The time was 7:15 a.m.

By 1:15 p.m. we were in Rome climbing down from our fifth lift, a British lorry, and looking for the nearest trolley.

But a bit about the countryside. I considered it fully as interesting as Rome itself. The numerous villages were poor and dirty--but the dirt was the healthy dirt of peasants and cobblers and blacksmiths, not the personal and moral filth of Naples. In the larger villages the two-story masonry house fronts towered over the narrow, winding road. Most of the buildings seemed to have a small inner courtyard--well-filled with children and manure and fowl. The ground floor was in most cases used as a stable with the lucky inhabitants living just above it where they could absorb the full "benefits" from below.

Rome is some 150 miles due north of Naples. For twenty odd miles out of the latter city there was an almost endless string of Allied camps and dumps. After that point we saw only countryside--and ruined villages. The Allies pushed two armies northward on this side of Italy, one along the coast and another farther into the interior. We followed the latter on the way up, the former on the return trip.

Except for a stretch of flat land along the coastlines, Italy is dotted with mountain ranges--really very large, barren hills in the southern half. The village of Monte Cassino was at the base of one of these hills--a solitary, imposing bald one, jutting out prominently from the surrounding valley

and from a range of neighboring hills a few miles to the east. Perched on its very cape was the Abbey of Monte Cassino-- the home of Benedictinism founded by Benedict in the sixth century.

It is ironical that at this spot where Benedict had founded a monastery in an attempt to give some degree of stability to learning and education in the face of barbarian invasions the tenacity of German resistance should reach its greatest ferocity. Not even the barbarian avalanche had wrecked a fraction of the destruction that now ~~greeting~~ greeted my eyes as I looked upon the mass of rubble that had once marked the village and abbey of Monte Cassino.

Large signs warned all travelers that they were entering the region at their own risk while other signs warned the bold against leaving the road because of land mines and booby traps. Of the village of over a thousand not a wall over ten feet was left standing. Every structure in the place had been leveled by the intensive and persistent Allied bombing attacks. The place was utterly dead. Not even a bird chirped in the town; and the half dozen shreds of trees that were left standing through some miracle were lost in the green, slimy water of a rubble-blocked creek that had completed the ruin, if that be possible, by seeping through a third of the small village.

The old abbey way up at the crest of the hill was a shapeless mass of ruin seen from below. It had been the recipient of the heaviest concentration of bombs in the history of warfare up to this time--greater even than the island fortress of Pantalleria. The several hundreds of Germans entrenched

in the caves and subcellars of the abbey died at their posts after checking the Allied drive for weeks. It was to break this deadlock, I am told, that the British and Americans launched the bloody beachhead attack at Anzio which I was to see on my way back.

From this point on ~~to~~ until fifteen miles from Rome the Germans contested every foot of ground desperately. Occasionally a field, the scene of a pitched battle, would reveal a scarred surface of shell and fox holes as well as a few burned out tanks which had not yet been hauled away to dumps. Rarely a group of small white crosses would testify to casualties that could not be hauled away--the Germans usually wither hiding or carrying away their casualties. All bridges had been demolished by the Germans, but efficient army engineers had already spanned the gulleys with single-track, pre-fabricated steel bridges.

Once in Rome we struck out in the general direction of the Vatican. I used a hybrid jumble of Spanish and English to get us a broken-down taxibab that must have been the very first one manufactured in Italy. We had learned through previous sad experience that it is always best to negotiate beforehand in ordering anything from an Italian. No matter how unintelligible the rest of our English might be, I never saw one Italian who did not know what ~~these two words~~ ^{"how much?"} meant and who did not take fullest advantage of ~~them~~ ^{it}. This particular cab driver wanted five hundred lire (five dollars) to take three of us to Vatican city. Figuring we were still many leagues from the place we haggled him down to three.

He drove us twelve blocks for that money and then had the nerve to ask for cigarettes and a drink from our canteen of what he thought was cognac. He refused our proffer of water with a grimace that plainly indicated what he thought of mere H₂O.

An Italian guide affixed himself to us for the tour through Saint Peters. His enthusiasm was outmanned only by the strength of the garlic he had eaten for dinner. What can I say about the Vatican or how can I describe its priceless treasures. I leave to your imagination (it will fall short) the beauty and symetry and grace of the greatest concentration of art in the world by the greatest artists of all time. Thousands upon thousands of G.I.'s will back up that statement. It constituted the most expensive and elaborate free show they have seen.

We went up into the dome of St. Peters, up and up over 700 steps into the gold ball at the very top which from below had seemed too small to support one man much less seven of us. The art galleries were closed much to my disappointment and we did not again get to see them.

By four oclock, our sandwiches exhausted, we began to look for food and lodging. Food is difficult to find in Rome--as we discovered to our discomfort. The next twenty four hours we were to exist on ice cremm and cookies supplied by the Red Cross. The same organization directed us to an ~~apartment~~ apartment for the night. After considerable searching and palavering in Spanish-English we located it. Right next door a stick of bombs had leveled a similar building. That night was spent with a pleasant Italian family.

^{same evening}
That ~~night~~ we talked an army officer into lending us his jeep. We toured wartime Rome--we three American navy-men--in the best sight-seeing vehicle the army could afford us. Rome had been hit hard only in three sectors--the railroad station, the airport, and an apartment district known by the Allies at the time as German-occupied. I noticed in particular that the Italians of Rome seemed cleaner, healthier, and more modern in their outlook than the Napolitans. Rome, itself, had all the aspects of a modern European capital. The difference between the lethargic people of southern Italy and their more northerly countrymen had become increasingly evident as we traveled northwards. And when I mentioned this to the Italian family with which I stayed the night, they agreed heartily with me--naturally.

The next morning we had to pack everything in that we had not yet seen. The highlight of the day was an audience with the Pope. We hooked on to a Red Cross sightseeing bus and finished off the coliseum and the catacombs. At noon we were in the audience room of the Holy Father together with three thousand other servicemen. At 12:30 a hush ran over the crowd of military men and the Pope entered at the far end of the beautiful room carried on a palanquin by four bearers. The famed Swiss guards were arrayed in their most colorful uniforms--amply splashed with red and green. The Holy Father clad in his Cardinal's scarlet bent down from his chair as it went by to touch the hands of men who ~~reached~~ reached out to him. He spoke briefly in French and English and then began

blessing rosaries and talking to visiting G.I.'s at the head of the room. I left at that point as it was time for our bus to leave the Vatican for the uptown Red Cross center.

At 2 oclock we were at the Red Cross asking for any possible lift back to Naples. At 2:15 we three were seated in the rear seat of a tiny jeep with an army lieutenant driving. The fifth man was an elderly field worker for the Red Cross bumming a reid ride like ourselves. And what a ride! On a sky larking tour like ourselves the lieutenant had read of the invasion of South France that morning. He was fearful that his division had left him behind. Consequently, he was in the greatest hurry to get back to Naples--and did despite himself.

You can imagine what an invading army with heavy tread tanks and huge trucks can do to a macadam highway. Well, the Yanks did all that and more to the Rome-Anzio road. Our driver adopted the strategy of hitting the first hole hard enough to leap the next two. And jeeps, mind you, have no cushions in the rear seat which is built for one but can hold two without too much trouble. Three of us were in it! We resolved that bounce though we did all the way to Europe and all the way back in tin cans the navy still got our vote after that jeep ride.

Fortunately for our role as sightseers we were taking the seashore route back to Naples. This road took us through the Allied beachhead at Anzio---one of the most costly assaults of the entire Italian campaign. It was here, twenty odd miles southwest of Rome, that we launched what was supposed to have been a diversionary attack to break the impasse at Cassino. The Germans surprised at the initial landings

recovered themselves quickly and covered the shallow beaches with a blanket of criss-crossed machinegun fire. The first day Americans got within sight of Rome but quick German counter attacks plus our own failure to carry the initiative soon forced us back within three miles of the sea--and for weeks the hold was so precarious that all ships in the Naples area were alerted for a possible Dunkirque rescue attempt. There is a huge graveyard at Anzio that must contain thousands of plain white crosses, American doughboys who will never see America again. Anzio itself was not as badly wrecked as we had expected. A peacetime, flourishing resort city of some 5000 inhabitants it had once witnessed the death of one of the Popes who had been staying there for a vacation.

While at Anzio we saw flights of B-24 bombers towing gliders as they made their way towards the French coast invaded the previous day. I did not envy the men in those gliders with their behind-the-line objectives.

Refueled--both the machine on gas and we on^e delicious army bread and jam--we left Anzio now having seen the macabre spectacle of two large casualty sectors--Cassino for the Germans, Anzio for ourselves---both grim monuments to the ruthlessness and futility of modern warfare.

As we left Anzio behind and passed through a score of small towns and villages I wondered just where the townspeople fled to in time of attack. Judging from the ruin in every village along the coastline they had to leave or be killed. The hills probably afforded temporary shelter. It was not difficult for me to appreciate the grief and sorrow of these

simple people leaving their few possessions behind to be smashed up by shell fire. But return they did, even if it was only to occupy four walls and a door post. They just sat in the ruin of their homes wondering what this was all about paying the toll for lassitude in political life.

The Pontine farm country--reclaimed from marsh land by Mussolini--was on our homeward route. His answer to Italy's grain shortage was a ten year project ~~to~~ to drain these sea-side marshes and plant grain. It was this reclaimed land that the Germans flooded in an effort to halt the Allied advance. The water had ebbed considerably when I saw it though⁹ the fields were still too wet to plant crops if seed were to be had. All of the farm homes were of brick apparently well constructed and comparable in every outward respect to our better farm homes. They were a far cry from the average peasant hutch that we had seen on the way up.

As I noted some of the results of Mussolini's domestic policies I saw much in them that was commendable and I wondered what a man who had been making such progress as he should throw it all overboard in an abortive attempt to grab off barren desert lands from ignorant African natives and then tag along on Hitler's coattails by marching into defeated France. It just did not add up. And I gathered from the Italians I talked with that this same jaw-boned dictator had at one time been the idol of every Italian but that their enthusiasm cooled rapidly once he entered the war against the Americans. That perhaps was one of the great factors in the collapse of Italian resistance. The guide in Rome had proudly informed

me that he owed his highschool education to the United States while a merchant in Naples made haste to tell me that he had worked six months in this country. Still others had brothers and sons and parents in the Bronx or Flatbush.

Three weary but still enthusiastic travelers we were let off at the foot of the landing pier just five hours after leaving Rome. It was a never-to-be-forgotten journey and I promised myself as I sailed out of Naples harbor that some day I should be back to see Italy again---at a time when the Italians would be in better shape to ~~illustrate~~ show off the land that had been the cradle of civilization for ~~the~~ the Western World.

A few days after we left Naples a poem began making the rounds of the ship. Whence it came or who was the author I know not. I take the liberty of transcribing the poem here because I think it typifies most succinctly what Naples meant to visiting sailors of the United States fleet.

"Pan-Aroma" of Naples --anonymous

I I were an artist with nothing do do
I'd paint a picture, a composite view,
Of historic Italy, in which I'd show
Visions of contrast, the high and the low.
There'd be towering mountains, a deep blue sea,
Filthy brats yelling "Caramella" (candy) at me;
High-plumed horses and colorful carts,
Two-toned tresses on hustling tarts.
I'd show Napoleonic cops, the Carabinieri,
Dejected old women with too much to carry.
A dignified gent with Balboa beard
Hundreds of children with faces all smeared.
Castle and palace, opera-house too,
Hotel on a mountain, marvelous view.
Homes made of weeds, bricks, and mud,
People covered with scabs, scurvy, and crud.
Chapels and churches, great to behold,
Each a king's ransom in glittering gold.
Poverty and want, men carwling for food,
Picking through garbage, practically nude.
Stately cathedrals with high-toned bells,
Riovero shelters with horrible smells.
Moulding catacombs, a place for the dead,
Noisy civilians begging for bread.
Palatial villas with palm trees tall,
A stinking hovel, mere hole in the wall.
Tree-fringed lawns, swept by the breeze,

Goats wading in filth up to their knees.
Creeping boulevards, a spangled team,
Alleys that wind like a dope-fiends's dream;
Flowers blooming on the side of a hill
Narrow gauge sidewalk with privacy nil.
Two-by-four shops with shelving all bare,
Gesturing merchants, arms flailing the air.
Lumbering carts, hogging the road,
Non-descript trucks, frequently towed.
Diminutive donkeys, loaded for bear,
Horse-drawn taxis, seeking a fare.
Determined pedestrians, courting disaster
Walking in gutters where movement is faster.
Italian drivers, all accident-bound,
Weaving and twisting to cover the ground.
Home-made brooms, weeds, tied to a stick,
Used on the streets to clean off the brick.
Bicycles and ^hpuscarts, blocking your path
Street corner politicians, needing a bath.
Barbers galore with manners quite mild,
Prolific women with many a child.
Il Duce's secret weapon, kids by the score,
Caused by his bonus which is no more.
Arrogant wretches, picking up snipes,
Miniature cars of various types.
Young street singers, band organ tune,
Shoe-shining boys, a sidewalk saloon.

u

A beateous maidan, a smile on her face,
With breath of garlic fouling the place.
Listless housewife, no shoes on her feet,
Washing and cooking out on the street.
The ~~fae~~ family wash of tattle tale gray,
Hung from the balcony, blocking the way.
Italian zoot-suiters, flashily dressed,
Bare-footed beggers, looking depressed.
Mud-smearred children, clustering about,
Filling their jugs from a community spout.
A dutiful mother with a look of despair,
Can't see her face, it's all in her hair.
Capable craftsmen, skilled in their art,
Decrepit old shacks, falling apart.
Intricate needlework, out on display
Surrounded by filth, rot and decay.
Elegant caskets, carved out by hand,
Odorous ractories, where leather is tanned.
A shoemaker's shop, a black market store,
Crawling with vermin, no screen on the door.
I've tried to describe the things I've seen,
Panorama of Italy, the brown and the green.
I've neglected the war scars, visible yet,
But they are the things we want to forget.
I'm glad I came, but damned anxious to go,
Give it back to the natives, I'm ready to blow.