VIII.

BACK.

The sea being steady as a level road, nobody succeeded in being violently sick. My young men rose at dawn--I was not long in following. It was a gray morning on deck, a gray sea, a gray sky, and a gray, spider-cloth, unimportant coast of Italy not far away. The q-b joined me: and quite delighted with her fellow-passenger: such a nice girl, she said! who, when she let down her ordinary-looking brown hair, it reached rippling right to her feet! Voilà! You never know your luck.

The cock that had crowed all night crowed again, hoarsely, with a sore throat. The miserable cattle looked more wearily miserable, but still were motionless, as sponges that grow at the bottom of the sea. The convicts were out for air: grinning. Someone told us they were war-deserters. Considering the light in which these people look on war, desertion seemed to me the only heroism. But the q-b, brought up in a military air, gazed upon them as upon men miraculously alive within the shadow of death. According to her code they had been shot when re-captured. The soldiers had unslung the tarpaulin, their home for the night had melted with the darkness, they were mere fragments of gray transit smoking cigarettes and staring overboard.

We drew near to Cività Vecchia: the old, mediaeval looking port, with

its castle, and a round fortress-barracks at the entrance. Soldiers aboard shouted and waved to soldiers on the ramparts. We backed insignificantly into the rather scrubby, insignificant harbour. And in five minutes we were out, and walking along the wide, desolate boulevard to the station. The cab-men looked hard at us: but no doubt owing to the knapsack, took us for poor Germans.

* * * * *

Coffee and milk--and then, only about three-quarters of an hour late, the train from the north. It is the night express from Turin. There was plenty of room--so in we got, followed by half a dozen Sardinians. We found a large, heavy Torinese in the carriage, his eyes dead with fatigue. It seemed quite a new world on the mainland: and at once one breathed again the curious suspense that is in the air. Once more I read the Corriere della Sera from end to end. Once more we knew ourselves in the real active world, where the air seems like a lively wine dissolving the pearl of the old order. I hope, dear reader, you like the metaphor. Yet I cannot forbear repeating how strongly one is sensible of the solvent property of the atmosphere, suddenly arriving on the mainland again. And in an hour one changes one's psyche. The human being is a most curious creature. He thinks he has got one soul, and he has got dozens. I felt my sound Sardinian soul melting off me, I felt myself evaporating into the real Italian uncertainty and momentaneity. So I perused the Corriere whilst the metamorphosis took place. I like Italian newspapers because they say what they mean, and not merely what is most

convenient to say. We call it naïveté--I call it manliness. Italian newspapers read as if they were written by men, and not by calculating eunuchs.

* * * * *

The train ran very heavily along the Maremma. It began to rain. Then we stopped at a station where we should not stop--somewhere in the Maremma country, the invisible sea not far off, the low country cultivated and yet forlorn. Oh how the Turin man sighed, and wearily shifted his feet as the train stood meaningless. There it sat--in the rain. Oh express!

At last on again, till we were winding through the curious long troughs of the Roman Campagna. There the shepherds minded the sheep: the slender-footed merino sheep. In Sardinia the merinos were very white and glistening, so that one thought of the Scriptural "white as wool." And the black sheep among the flock were very black. But these Campagna were no longer white, but dingy. And though the wildness of the Campagna is a real wildness still, it is a historic wildness, familiar in its way as a fireside is familiar.

So we approach the hopeless sprawling of modern Rome--over the yellow Tiber, past the famous pyramid tomb, skirting the walls of the city, till at last we plunge in, into the well-known station, out of all the chaos.

We are late. It is a quarter to twelve. And I have to go out and change money, and I hope to find my two friends.--The q-b and I dash down the platform--no friends at the barrier. The station moderately empty. We bolt across to the departure platforms. The Naples train stands ready. In we pitch our bags, ask a naval man not to let anyone steal them, then I fly out into town while the q-b buys food and wine at the buffet.

It no longer rains, and Rome feels as ever--rather holiday-like and not inclined to care about anything. I get a hundred and three lira for each pound note: pocket my money at two minutes past twelve, and bolt back, out of the Piazza delle Terme. Aha, there are the two missing ones, just descending vaguely from a carriage, the one gazing inquiringly through his monocle across the tram-lines, the other very tall and alert and elegant, looking as if he expected us to appear out of the air for his convenience.

Which is exactly what happens. We fly into each other's arms. "Oh there you are! Where's the q-b? Why are you here? We've been to the arrival platform--no sign of you. Of course I only got your wire half an hour ago. We flew here. Well, how nice to see you.--Oh, let the man wait.--What, going on at once to Naples? But must you? Oh, but how flighty you are! Birds of passage veramente! Then let us find the q-b, quick!--And they won't let us on the platform. No, they're not issuing platform tickets today.--Oh, merely the guests returning from that Savoy-Bavarian wedding in the north, a few royal Duchesses about. Oh well, we must try and wangle him."

At the barrier a woman trying in vain to be let on to the station. But what a Roman matron can't do, an elegant young Englishman can. So our two heroes wangle their way in, and fall into the arms of the q-b by the Naples train. Well, now, tell us all about it! So we rush into a four-branched candlestick of conversation. In my ear murmurs he of the monocle about the Sahara--he is back from the Sahara a week ago: the winter sun in the Sahara! He with the smears of paint on his elegant trousers is giving the q-b a sketchy outline of his now grande passion. Click goes the exchange, and him of the monocle is detailing to the q-b his trip to Japan, on which he will start in six weeks' time, while him of the paint-smears is expatiating on the thrills of the etching needle, and concocting a plan for a month in Sardinia in May, with me doing the scribbles and he the pictures. What sort of pictures? Out flies the name of Goya.--And well now, a general rush into oneness, and won't they come down to Sicily to us for the almond blossom: in about ten days' time. Yes they will--wire when the almond blossom is just stepping on the stage and making its grand bow, and they will come next day. Somebody has smitten the wheel of a coach two ringing smacks with a hammer. This is a sign to get in. The q-b is terrified the train will slip through her fingers. "I'm frightened, I must get in."--"Very well then! You're sure you have everything you want? Everything? A fiasco of vino? Oh two! All the better! Well then--ten days' time. All right--quite sure--how nice to have seen you, if only a glimpse.--Yes, yes, poor q-b! Yes, you're quite safe. Good-bye! Good-bye!"

The door is shut--we are seated--the train moves out of the station. And quickly on this route Rome disappears. We are out on the wintry Campagna, where crops are going. Away on the left we see the Tivoli hills, and think of the summer that is gone, the heat, the fountains of the Villa D'Este. The train rolls heavily over the Campagna, towards the Alban Mounts, homewards.

* * * * *

So we fall on our food, and devour the excellent little beef-steaks and rolls and boiled eggs, apples and oranges and dates, and drink the good red wine, and wildly discuss plans and the latest news, and are altogether thrilled about things. So thrilled that we are well away among the romantic mountains of the south-centre before we realise that there are other passengers besides ourselves in the carriage. Half the journey is over. Why, there is the monastery on its high hill! In a wild moment I suggest we shall get down and spend a night up there at Montecassino, and see the other friend, the monk who knows so much about the world, being out of it. But the q-b shudders, thinking of the awful winter coldness of that massive stone monastery, which has no spark of heating apparatus. And therefore the plan subsides, and at Cassino station I only get down to procure coffee and sweet cakes. They always have good things to eat at Cassino station: in summer, big fresh ices and fruits and iced water, in winter toothsome sweet cakes which make an awfully good finish to a meal.

* * * * *

I count Cassino half way to Naples. After Cassino the excitement of being in the north begins quite to evaporate. The southern heaviness descends upon us. Also the sky begins to darken: and the rain falls. I think of the night before us, on the sea again. And I am vaguely troubled lest we may not get a berth. However, we may spend the night in Naples: or even sit on in this train, which goes forward, all through the long long night, to the Straits of Messina. We must decide as we near Naples.

Half dozing, one becomes aware of the people about one. We are travelling second class. Opposite is a little, hold-your-own school-mistressy young person in pince-nez. Next her a hollow-cheeked white soldier with ribbons on his breast. Then a fat man in a corner. Then a naval officer of low rank. The naval officer is coming from Fiume, and is dead with sleep and perhaps mortification. D'Annunzio has just given up. Two compartments away we hear soldiers singing, martial still though bruised with fatigue, the D'Annunzio-bragging songs of Fiume. They are soldiers of the D'Annunzio legion. And one of them, I hear the sick soldier saying, is very hot and republican still. Private soldiers are not allowed, with their reduced tickets, to travel on the express trains. But these legionaries are not penniless: they have paid the excess and come along. For the moment they are sent to their homes. And with heads dropping with fatigue, we hear them still defiantly

singing down the carriage for D'Annunzio.

A regular officer went along--a captain of the Italian, not the Fiume army. He heard the chants and entered the carriage. The legionaries were quiet, but they lounged and ignored the entry of the officer. "On your feet!" he yelled, Italian fashion. The vehemence did it. Reluctantly as may be, they stood up in the compartment. "Salute!" And though it was bitter, up went their hands in the salute, whilst he stood and watched them. And then, very superb, he sauntered away again. They sat down glowering. Of course they were beaten. Didn't they know it. The men in our carriage smiled curiously: in slow and futile mockery of both parties.

The rain was falling outside, the windows were steamed quite dense, so that we were shut in from the world. Throughout the length of the train, which was not very full, could be felt the exhausted weariness and the dispirited dejection of the poor D'Annunzio legionaries. In the afternoon silence of the mist-enclosed, half-empty train the snatches of song broke out again, and faded in sheer dispirited fatigue. We ran on blindly and heavily. But one young fellow was not to be abashed. He was well-built, and his thick black hair was brushed up, like a great fluffy crest upon his head. He came slowly and unabated down the corridor, and on every big, mist-opaque pane he scrawled with his finger W D'ANNUNZIO GABRIELE--W D'ANNUNZIO GABRIELE.

The sick soldier laughed thinly, saying to the schoolmistress: "Oh yes,

they are fine chaps. But it was folly. D'Annunzio is a world poet--a world wonder--but Fiume was a mistake you know. And these chaps have got to learn a lesson. They got beyond themselves. Oh, they aren't short of money. D'Annunzio had wagon-loads of money there in Fiume, and he wasn't altogether mean with it." The schoolmistress, who was one of the sharp ones, gave a little disquisition to show why it was a mistake, and wherein she knew better than the world's poet and wonder.

It always makes me sick to hear people chewing over newspaper pulp.

The sick soldier was not a legionary. He had been wounded through the lung. But it was healed, he said. He lifted the flap of his breast pocket, and there hung a little silver medal. It was his wound-medal. He wore it concealed: and over the place of the wound. He and the schoolmistress looked at one another significantly.

Then they talked pensions: and soon were on the old topic. The schoolmistress had her figures pat, as a schoolmistress should. Why, the ticket-collector, the man who punches one's tickets on the train, now had twelve thousand Lira a year: twelve thousand Lira. Monstrous! Whilst a fully-qualified professore, a schoolmaster who had been through all his training and had all his degrees, was given five thousand. Five thousand for a fully qualified professore, and twelve thousand for a ticket puncher. The soldier agreed, and quoted other figures. But the railway was the outstanding grievance. Every boy who left school now, said the schoolmistress, wanted to go on the railway. Oh but--said the

soldier--the train-men--!

* * * * *

The naval officer, who collapsed into the most uncanny positions, blind with sleep, got down at Capua to get into a little train that would carry him back to his own station, where our train had not stopped. At Caserta the sick soldier got out. Down the great avenue of trees the rain was falling. A young man entered. Remained also the schoolmistress and the stout man. Knowing we had been listening, the schoolmistress spoke to us about the soldier. Then--she had said she was catching the night boat for Palermo--I asked her if she thought the ship would be very full. Oh yes, very full, she said. Why, hers was one of the last cabin numbers, and she had got her ticket early that morning. The fat man now joined in. He too was crossing to Palermo. The ship was sure to be quite full by now. Were we depending on booking berths at the port of Naples? We were. Whereupon he and the schoolmistress shook their heads and said it was more than doubtful--nay, it was as good as impossible. For the boat was the renowned Città di Trieste, that floating palace, and such was the fame of her gorgeousness that everybody wanted to travel by her.

"First and second class alike?" I asked.

"Oh yes, also first class," replied the school-marm rather spitefully. So I knew she had a white ticket--second.

I cursed the Città di Trieste and her gorgeousness, and looked down my nose. We had now two alternatives: to spend the night in Naples, or to sit on all through the night and next morning, and arrive home, with heaven's aid, in the early afternoon. Though these long-distance trains think nothing of six hours late. But we were tired already. What we should be like after another twenty-four hours' sitting, heaven knows. And yet to struggle for a bed in a Naples hotel this night, in the rain, all the hotels being at present crammed with foreigners, that was no rosy prospect. Oh dear!

However, I was not going to take their discouragement so easily. One has been had that way before. They love to make the case look desperate.

Were we English? asked the schoolmistress. We were. Ah, a fine thing to be English in Italy now. Why?--rather tart from me. Because of the cambio, the exchange. You English, with your money exchange, you come here and buy everything for nothing, you take the best of everything, and with your money you pay nothing for it. Whereas we poor Italians we pay heavily for everything at an exaggerated price, and we can have nothing. Ah, it is all very nice to be English in Italy now. You can travel, you go to the hotels, you can see everything and buy everything, and it costs you nothing. What is the exchange today? She whipped it out. A hundred and four, twenty.

This she told me to my nose. And the fat man murmured bitterly già!

già!--ay! ay! Her impertinence and the fat man's quiet bitterness stirred my bile. Has not this song been sung at me once too often, by these people?

You are mistaken, said I to the schoolmistress. We don't by any means live in Italy for nothing. Even with the exchange at a hundred and three, we don't live for nothing. We pay, and pay through the nose, for whatever we have in Italy: and you Italians see that we pay. What! You put all the tariff you do on foreigners, and then say we live here for nothing. I tell you I could live in England just as well, on the same money--perhaps better. Compare the cost of things in England with the cost here in Italy, and even considering the exchange, Italy costs nearly as much as England. Some things are cheaper here--the railway comes a little cheaper, and is infinitely more miserable. Travelling is usually a misery. But other things, clothes of all sorts, and a good deal of food is even more expensive here than in England, exchange considered.

Oh yes, she said, England had had to bring her prices down this last fortnight. In her own interests indeed.

"This last fortnight! This last six months," said I. "Whereas prices rise every single day here."

Here a word from the quiet young man who had got in at Caserta.

"Yes," he said, "yes. I say, every nation pays in its own money, no matter what the exchange. And it works out about equal."

But I felt angry. Am I always to have the exchange flung in my teeth, as if I were a personal thief? But the woman persisted.

"Ah," she said, "we Italians, we are so nice, we are so good. Noi, siamo così buoni. We are so good-natured. But others, they are not buoni, they are not good-natured to us." And she nodded her head. And truly, I did not feel at all good-natured towards her: which she knew. And as for the Italian good-nature, it forms a sound and unshakeable basis nowadays for their extortion and self-justification and spite.

* * * * *

Darkness was falling over the rich flat plains that lie around Naples, over the tall uncanny vines with their brown thongs in the intensely cultivated black earth. It was night by the time we were in that vast and thievish station. About half-past five. We were not very late. Should we sit on in our present carriage, and go down in it to the port, along with the schoolmistress, and risk it? But first look at the coach which was going on to Sicily. So we got down and ran along the train to the Syracuse coach. Hubbub, confusion, a wedge in the corridor, and for sure no room. Certainly no room to lie down a bit. We could not sit tight for twenty-four hours more.

So we decided to go to the port--and to walk. Heaven knows when the railway carriage would be shunted down. Back we went therefore for the sack, told the schoolmistress our intention.

"You can but try," she said frostily.

* * * * *

So there we are, with the sack over my shoulder and the kitchenino in the q-b's hand, bursting out of that thrice-damned and annoying station, and running through the black wet gulf of a Naples night, in a slow rain. Cabmen look at us. But my sack saved me. I am weary of that boa-constrictor, a Naples cabman after dark. By day there is more-or-less a tariff.

It is about a mile from the station to the quay where the ship lies. We make our way through the deep, gulf-like streets, over the slippery black cobbles. The black houses rise massive to a great height on either side, but the streets are not in this part very narrow. We plunge forwards in the unearthly half-darkness of this great uncontrolled city. There are no lights at all from the buildings--only the small electric lamps of the streets.

So we emerge on the harbour front, and hurry past the great storehouses in the rainy night, to where the actual entrances begin. The tram bangs past us. We scuffle along that pavement-ridge which lies like an isthmus

down the vast black quicksands of that harbour road. One feels peril all round. But at length we come to a gate by the harbour railway. No, not that. On to the next iron gate of the railway crossing. And so we run out past the great sheds and the buildings of the port station, till we see a ship rearing in front, and the sea all black. But now where is that little hole where one gets the tickets? We are at the back of everywhere in this desert jungle of the harbour darkness.

* * * * *

A man directs us round the corner--and actually does not demand money. It is the sack again. So--there, I see the knot of men, soldiers chiefly, fighting in a bare room round a tiny wicket. I recognise the place where I have fought before.

So while the q-b stands guard over sack and bag, I plunge into the fray. It literally is a fight. Some thirty men all at once want to get at a tiny wicket in a blank wall. There are no queue-rails, there is no order: just a hole in a blank wall, and thirty fellows, mostly military, pressing at it in a mass. But I have done this before. The way is to insert the thin end of oneself, and without any violence, by deadly pressure and pertinacity come at the goal. One hand must be kept fast over the money pocket, and one must be free to clutch the wicket-side when one gets there. And thus one is ground small in those mills of God, Demos struggling for tickets. It isn't very nice--so close, so incomparably crushed. And never for a second must one be off one's guard

for one's watch and money and even hanky. When I first came to Italy after the war I was robbed twice in three weeks, floating round in the sweet old innocent confidence in mankind. Since then I have never ceased to be on my guard. Somehow or other, waking and sleeping one's spirit must be on its guard nowadays. Which is really what I prefer, now I have learnt it. Confidence in the goodness of mankind is a very thin protection indeed. Integer vitae scelerisque purus will do nothing for you when it comes to humanity, however efficacious it may be with lions and wolves. Therefore, tight on my guard, like a screw biting into a bit of wood, I bite my way through that knot of fellows, to the wicket, and shout for two first-class. The clerk inside ignores me for some time, serving soldiers. But if you stand like Doomsday you get your way. Two firsts, says the clerk. Husband and wife, say I, in case there is a two-berth cabin. Jokes behind. But I get my tickets. Impossible to put my hand to my pocket. The tickets cost about a hundred and five francs each. Clutching paper change and the green slips, with a last gasp I get out of the knot. So--we've done it. As I sort my money and stow away, I hear another ask for one first-class. Nothing left, says the clerk. So you see how one must fight.

I must say for these dense and struggling crowds, they are only intense, not violent, and not in the least brutal. I always feel a certain sympathy with the men in them.

* * * * *

Bolt through the pouring rain to the ship. And in two minutes we are aboard. And behold, each of us has a deck cabin, I one to myself, the q-b to herself next door. Palatial--not a cabin at all, but a proper little bedroom with a curtained bed under the porthole windows, a comfortable sofa, chairs, table, carpets, big wash-bowls with silver taps--a whole de luxe. I dropped the sack on the sofa with a gasp, drew back the yellow curtains of the bed, looked out of the porthole at the lights of Naples, and sighed with relief. One could wash thoroughly, refreshingly, and change one's linen. Wonderful!

* * * * *

The state-room is like a hotel lounge, many little tables with flowers and periodicals, arm-chairs, warm carpet, bright but soft lights, and people sitting about chatting. A loud group of English people in one corner, very assured: two quiet English ladies: various Italians seeming quite modest. Here one could sit in peace and rest, pretending to look at an illustrated magazine. So we rested. After about an hour there entered a young Englishman and his wife, whom we had seen on our train. So, at last the coach had been shunted down to the port. Where should we have been had we waited!

* * * * *

The waiters began to flap the white table-cloths and spread the tables nearest the walls. Dinner would begin at half-past seven, immediately

the boat started. We sat in silence, till eight or nine tables were spread. Then we let the other people take their choice. After which we chose a table by ourselves, neither of us wanting company. So we sat before the plates and the wine-bottles and sighed in the hopes of a decent meal. Food by the way is not included in the hundred-and-five francs.

Alas, we were not to be alone: two young Neapolitans, pleasant, quiet, blond, or semi-blond. They were well-bred, and evidently of northern extraction. Afterwards we found out they were jewellers. But I liked their quiet, gentle manners. The dinner began, and we were through the soup, when up pranced another young fellow, rather strapping and loud, a commercial traveller, for sure. He had those cocky assured manners of one who is not sure of his manners. He had a rather high forehead, and black hair brushed up in a showy wing, and a large ring on his finger. Not that a ring signifies anything. Here most of the men wear several, all massively jewelled. If one believed in all the jewels, why Italy would be more fabulous than fabled India. But our friend the bounder was smart, and smelled of cash. Not money, but cash.

I had an inkling of what to expect when he handed the salt and said in English "Salt, thenk you." But I ignored the advance. However, he did not wait long. Through the windows across the room the q-b saw the lights of the harbour slowly moving. "Oh," she cried, "are we going?" And also in Italian: "Partiamo?" All watched the lights, the bounder screwing round. He had one of the fine, bounderish backs.

"Yes," he said. "We--going."

"Oh," cried she. "Do you speak English?"

"Ye-es. Some English--I speak."

As a matter of fact he spoke about forty disconnected words. But his accent was so good for these forty. He did not speak English, he imitated an English voice making sounds. And the effect was startling. He had served on the Italian front with the Scots Guards--so he told us in Italian. He was Milanese. Oh, he had had a time with the Scots Guards. Wheesky--eh? Wheesky.

"Come along bhoys!" he shouted.

And it was such a Scotch voice shouting, so loud-mouthed and actual, I nearly went under the table. It struck us both like a blow.

Afterwards he rattled away without misgiving. He was a traveller for a certain type of machine, and was doing Sicily. Shortly he was going to England--and he asked largely about first-class hotels. Then he asked was the q-b French?--Was she Italian?--No, she was German. Ah--German. And immediately out he came with the German word: "Deutsch! Deutsch, eh? From Deutschland. Oh yes! Deutschland über alles! Ah, I know. No more--what? Deutschland unter alles now? Deutschland unter alles." And

he bounced on his seat with gratification of the words. Of German as of English he knew half a dozen phrases.

"No," said the q-b, "Not Deutschland unter alles. Not for long, anyhow."

"How? Not for long? You think so? I think so too," said the bounder. Then in Italian: "La Germania won't stand under all for long. No, no. At present it is England über alles. England über alles. But Germany will rise up again."

"Of course," said the q-b. "How shouldn't she?"

"Ah," said the bounder, "while England keeps the money in her pocket, we shall none of us rise up. Italy won the war, and Germany lost it. And Italy and Germany they both are down, and England is up. They both are down, and England is up. England and France. Strange, isn't it? Ah, the allies. What are the allies for? To keep England up, and France half way, and Germany and Italy down."

"Ah, they won't stay down for ever," said the q-b.

"You think not? Ah! We will see. We will see how England goes on now."

"England is not going on so marvellously, after all," say I.

"How not? You mean Ireland?"

"No, not only Ireland. Industry altogether. England is as near to ruin as other countries."

"Ma! With all the money, and we others with no money? How will she be ruined?"

"And what good would it be to you if she were?"

"Oh well--who knows. If England were ruined--" a slow smile of anticipation spread over his face. How he would love it--how they would all love it, if England were ruined. That is, the business part of them, perhaps, would not love it. But the human part would. The human part fairly licks its lips at the thought of England's ruin. The commercial part, however, quite violently disclaims the anticipations of the human part. And there it is. The newspapers chiefly speak with the commercial voice. But individually, when you are got at in a railway carriage or as now on a ship, up speaks the human voice, and you know how they love you. This is no doubt inevitable. When the exchange stands at a hundred and six men go humanly blind, I suppose, however much they may keep the commercial eye open. And having gone humanly blind they bump into one's human self nastily: a nasty jar. You know then how they hate you. Underneath, they hate us, and as human beings we are objects of envy and malice. They hate us, with envy, and despise us, with jealousy. Which perhaps doesn't hurt commercially. Humanly it is to me unpleasant.

The dinner was over, and the bounder was lavishing cigarettes--Murattis, if you please. We had all drunk two bottles of wine. Two other commercial travellers had joined the bounder at our table--two smart young fellows, one a bounder and one gentle and nice. Our two jewellers remained quiet, talking their share, but quietly and so sensitively. One could not help liking them. So we were seven people, six men.

"Wheesky! Will you drink Wheesky, Mister?" said our original bounder. "Yes, one small Scotch! One Scotch Wheesky." All this in a perfect Scotty voice of a man standing at a bar calling for a drink. It was comical, one could not but laugh: and very impertinent. He called for the waiter, took him by the button-hole, and with a breast-to-breast intimacy asked if there was whisky. The waiter, with the same tone of you-and-I-are-men-who-have-the-same-feelings, said he didn't think there was whisky, but he would look. Our bounder went round the table inviting us all to whiskies, and pressing on us his expensive English cigarettes with great aplomb.

The whisky came--and five persons partook. It was fiery, oily stuff from heaven knows where. The bounder rattled away, spouting his bits of English and his four words of German. He was in high feather, wriggling his large haunches on his chair and waving his hands. He had a peculiar manner of wriggling from the bottom of his back, with fussy self-assertiveness. It was my turn to offer whisky.

I was able in a moment's lull to peer through the windows and see the dim lights of Capri--the glimmer of Anacapri up on the black shadow--the lighthouse. We had passed the island. In the midst of the babel I sent out a few thoughts to a few people on the island. Then I had to come back.

The bounder had once more resumed his theme of l'Inghilterra, l'Italia, la Germania. He swanked England as hard as he could. Of course England was the top dog, and if he could speak some English, if he were talking to English people, and if, as he said, he was going to England in April, why he was so much the more top-doggy than his companions, who could not rise to all these heights. At the same time, my nerves had too much to bear.

Where were we going and where had we been and where did we live? And ah, yes, English people lived in Italy. Thousands, thousands of English people lived in Italy. Yes, it was very nice for them. There used to be many Germans, but now the Germans were down. But the English--what could be better for them than Italy now: they had sun, they had warmth, they had abundance of everything, they had a charming people to deal with, and they had the cambio! Ecco! The other commercial travellers agreed. They appealed to the q-b if it was not so. And altogether I had enough of it.

"Oh yes," said I, "it's very nice to be in Italy: especially if you are not living in an hotel, and you have to attend to things for yourself.

It is very nice to be overcharged every time, and then insulted if you say a word. It's very nice to have the cambio thrown in your teeth, if you say two words to any Italian, even a perfect stranger. It's very nice to have waiters and shop-people and railway porters sneering in a bad temper and being insulting in small, mean ways all the time. It's very nice to feel what they all feel against you. And if you understand enough Italian, it's very nice to hear what they say when you've gone by. Oh very nice. Very nice indeed!"

I suppose the whisky had kindled this outburst in me. They sat dead silent. And then our bounder began, in his sugary deprecating voice.

"Why no! Why no! It is not true, signore. No, it is not true. Why, England is the foremost nation in the world--"

"And you want to pay her out for it."

"But no, signore. But no. What makes you say so? Why, we Italians are so good-natured. Noi Italiani siamo così buoni. Siamo così buoni."

It was the identical words of the schoolmistress.

"Buoni," said I. "Yes--perhaps. Buoni when it's not a question of the exchange and of money. But since it is always a question of cambio and soldi now, one is always, in a small way, insulted."

I suppose it must have been the whisky. Anyhow Italians can never bear hard bitterness. The jewellers looked distressed, the bounders looked down their noses, half exulting even now, and half sheepish, being caught. The third of the commis voyageurs, the gentle one, made large eyes and was terrified that he was going to be sick. He represented a certain Italian liqueur, and he modestly asked us to take a glass of it. He went with the waiter to secure the proper brand. So we drank--and it was good. But he, the giver, sat with large and haunted eyes. Then he said he would go to bed. Our bounder gave him various advice regarding seasickness. There was a mild swell on the sea. So he of the liqueur departed.

* * * * *

Our bounder thrummed on the table and hummed something, and asked the q-b if she knew the Rosencavalier. He always appealed to her. She said she did. And ah, he was passionately fond of music, said he. Then he warbled, in a head voice, a bit more. He only knew classical music, said he. And he mewed a bit of Moussorgsky. The q-b said Moussorgsky was her favourite musician, for opera. Ah, cried the bounder, if there were but a piano!--There is a piano, said his mate.--Yes, he replied, but it is locked up.--Then let us get the key, said his mate, with aplomb. The waiters, being men with the same feelings as our two, would give them anything. So the key was forthcoming. We paid our bills--mine about sixty francs. Then we went along the faintly rolling ship, up the curved staircase to the drawing room. Our bounder unlocked the door of this

drawing room, and switched on the lights.

It was quite a pleasant room, with deep divans upholstered in pale colours, and palm-trees standing behind little tables, and a black upright piano. Our bounder sat on the piano-stool and gave us an exhibition. He splashed out noise on the piano in splashes, like water splashing out of a pail. He lifted his head and shook his black mop of hair, and yelled out some fragments of opera. And he wriggled his large, bounder's back upon the piano stool, wriggling upon his well-filled haunches. Evidently he had a great deal of feeling for music: but very little prowess. He yelped it out, and wriggled, and splashed the piano. His friend the other bounder, a quiet one in a pale suit, with stout limbs, older than the wriggler, stood by the piano whilst the young one exhibited. Across the space of carpet sat the two brother jewellers, deep in a divan, their lean, semi-blond faces quite inscrutable. The q-b sat next to me, asking for this and that music, none of which the wriggler could supply. He knew four scraps, and a few splashes--not more. The elder bounder stood near him quietly comforting, encouraging, and admiring him, as a lover encouraging and admiring his ingénue betrothed. And the q-b sat bright-eyed and excited, admiring that a man could perform so unself-consciously self-conscious, and give himself away with such generous wriggles. For my part, as you may guess, I did not admire.

I had had enough. Rising, I bowed and marched off. The q-b came after me. Good-night, said I, at the head of the corridor. She turned in, and

I went round the ship to look at the dark night of the sea.

* * * * *

Morning came sunny with pieces of cloud: and the Sicilian coast towering pale blue in the distance. How wonderful it must have been to Ulysses to venture into this Mediterranean and open his eyes on all the loveliness of the tall coasts. How marvellous to steal with his ship into these magic harbours. There is something eternally morning-glamourous about these lands as they rise from the sea. And it is always the Odyssey which comes back to one as one looks at them. All the lovely morning-wonder of this world, in Homer's day!

Our bounder was dashing about on deck, in one of those rain-coats gathered in at the waist and ballooning out into skirts below the waist. He greeted me with a cry of "It's a long, long way to Tipperary." "Very long," said I. "Good-bye Piccadilly--" he continued. "Ciao," said I, as he dashed jauntily down the steps. Soon we saw the others as well. But it was morning, and I simply did not want to speak to them--except just Good-day. For my life I couldn't say two more words to any of them this morning: except to ask the mild one if he had been sick. He had not.

So we waited for the great Città di Trieste to float her way into Palermo harbour. It looked so near--the town there, the great circle of the port, the mass of the hills crowding round. Panormus, the All-harbour. I wished the bulky steamer would hurry up. For I hated her

now. I hated her swankiness, she seemed made for commercial travellers with cash. I hated the big picture that filled one end of the state-room: an elegant and ideal peasant-girl, a sort of Italia, strolling on a lovely and ideal cliff's edge, among myriad blooms, and carrying over her arm, in a most sophisticated fashion, a bough of almond blossom and a sheaf of anemones. I hated the waiters, and the cheap elegance, the common de luxe. I disliked the people, who all turned their worst, cash-greasy sides outwards on this ship. Vulgar, vulgar post-war commercialism and dog-fish money-stink. I longed to get off. And the bloated boat edged her way so slowly into the port, and then more slowly still edged round her fat stern. And even then we were kept for fifteen minutes waiting for someone to put up the gangway for the first class. The second class, of course, were streaming off and melting like thawed snow into the crowds of onlookers on the quay, long before we were allowed to come off.

* * * * *

Glad, glad I was to get off that ship: I don't know why, for she was clean and comfortable and the attendants were perfectly civil. Glad, glad I was not to share the deck with any more commercial travellers. Glad I was to be on my own feet, independent. No, I would not take a carriage. I carried my sack on my back to the hotel, looking with a jaundiced eye on the lethargic traffic of the harbour front. It was about nine o'clock.

* * * * *

Later on, when I had slept, I thought as I have thought before, the Italians are not to blame for their spite against us. We, England, have taken upon ourselves for so long the rôle of leading nation. And if now, in the war or after the war, we have led them all into a real old swinery--which we have, notwithstanding all Entente cant--then they have a legitimate grudge against us. If you take upon yourself to lead, you must expect the mud to be thrown at you if you lead into a nasty morass. Especially if, once in the bog, you think of nothing else but scrambling out over other poor devils' backs. Pretty behaviour of great nations!

And still, for all that, I must insist that I am a single human being, an individual, not a mere national unit, a mere chip of l'Inghilterra or la Germania. I am not a chip of any nasty old block. I am myself.

* * * * *

In the evening the q-b insisted on going to the marionettes, for which she has a sentimental passion. So the three of us--we were with the American friend once more--chased through dark and tortuous side-streets and markets of Palermo in the night, until at last a friendly man led us to the place. The back streets of Palermo felt friendly, not huge and rather horrible, like Naples near the port.

The theatre was a little hole opening simply off the street. There was

no one in the little ticket box, so we walked past the door-screen. A shabby old man with a long fennel-stalk hurried up and made us places on the back benches, and hushed us when we spoke of tickets. The play was in progress. A serpent-dragon was just having a tussle with a knight in brilliant brass armour, and my heart came into my mouth. The audience consisted mostly of boys, gazing with frantic interest on the bright stage. There was a sprinkling of soldiers and elderly men. The place was packed--about fifty souls crowded on narrow little ribbons of benches, so close one behind the other that the end of the man in front of me continually encroached and sat on my knee. I saw on a notice that the price of entry was forty centimes.

We had come in towards the end of the performance, and so sat rather bewildered, unable to follow. The story was the inevitable Paladins of France--one heard the names Rinaldo! Orlando! again and again. But the story was told in dialect, hard to follow.

I was charmed by the figures. The scene was very simple, showing the interior of a castle. But the figures, which were about two-thirds of human size, were wonderful in their brilliant, glittering gold armour, and their martial prancing motions. All were knights--even the daughter of the king of Babylon. She was distinguished only by her long hair. All were in the beautiful, glittering armour, with helmets and visors that could be let down at will. I am told this armour has been handed down for many generations. It certainly is lovely. One actor alone was not in armour, the wizard Magicce, or Malvigge, the Merlin of the Paladins.

He was in a long scarlet robe, edged with fur, and wore a three-cornered scarlet hat.

So we watched the dragon leap and twist and get the knight by the leg: and then perish. We watched the knights burst into the castle. We watched the wonderful armour-clashing embraces of the delivered knights, Orlando and his bosom friend and the little dwarf, clashing their armoured breasts to the breasts of their brothers and deliverers. We watched the would-be tears flow.--And then the statue of the witch suddenly go up in flames, at which a roar of exultation from the boys. Then it was over. The theatre was empty in a moment, but the proprietors and the two men who sat near us would not let us go. We must wait for the next performance.

My neighbour, a fat, jolly man, told me all about it. His neighbour, a handsome tipsy man, kept contradicting and saying it wasn't so. But my fat neighbour winked at me, not to take offence.

This story of the Paladins of France lasted three nights. We had come on the middle night--of course. But no matter--each night was a complete story. I am sorry I have forgotten the names of the knights. But the story was, that Orlando and his friend and the little dwarf, owing to the tricks of that same dwarf, who belonged to the Paladins, had been captured and immured in the enchanted castle of the ghastly old witch who lived on the blood of Christians. It was now the business of Rinaldo and the rest of the Paladins, by the help of Magicce the good wizard,

to release their captured brethren from the ghoulish old witch.

So much I made out of the fat man's story, while the theatre was filling. He knew every detail of the whole Paladin cycle. And it is evident the Paladin cycle has lots of versions. For the handsome tipsy neighbour kept saying he was wrong, he was wrong, and giving different stories, and shouting for a jury to come and say who was right, he or my fat friend. A jury gathered, and a storm began to rise. But the stout proprietor with a fennel-wand came and quenched the noise, telling the handsome tipsy man he knew too much and wasn't asked. Whereupon the tipsy one sulked.

Ah, said my friend, couldn't I come on Friday. Friday was a great night. On Friday they were giving I Beati Paoli: The Blessed Pauls. He pointed to the walls where were the placards announcing The Blessed Pauls. These Pauls were evidently some awful secret society with masking hoods and daggers and awful eyes looking through the holes. I said were they assassins like the Black Hand. By no means, by no means. The Blessed Pauls were a society for the protection of the poor. Their business was to track down and murder the oppressive rich. Ah, they were a wonderful, a splendid society. Were they, said I, a sort of camorra? Ah, on the contrary--here he lapsed into a tense voice--they hated the camorra. These, the Blest Pauls, were the powerful and terrible enemy of the grand camorra. For the Grand Camorra oppresses the poor. And therefore the Pauls track down in secret the leaders of the Grand Camorra, and assassinate them, or bring them to the fearful hooded tribunal which

utters the dread verdict of the Beati Paoli. And when once the Beati Paoli have decreed a man's death--all over. Ah bellissimo, bellissimo! Why don't I come on Friday?

It seems to me a queer moral for the urchins thick-packed and gazing at the drop scene. They are all males: urchins or men. I ask my fat friend why there are no women--no girls. Ah, he says, the theatre is so small. But, I say, if there is room for all the boys and men, there is the same room for girls and women. Oh no--not in this small theatre. Besides this is nothing for women. Not that there is anything improper, he hastens to add. Not at all. But what should women and girls be doing at the marionette show? It was an affair for males.

I agreed with him really, and was thankful we hadn't a lot of smirking twitching girls and lasses in the audience. This male audience was so tense and pure in its attention.

But hist! the play is going to begin. A lad is grinding a broken street-piano under the stage. The padrone yells Silenzio! with a roar, and reaching over, pokes obstreperous boys with his long fennel-stalk, like a beadle in church. When the curtain rises the piano stops, and there is dead silence. On swings a knight, glittering, marching with that curious hippety lilt, and gazing round with fixed and martial eyes. He begins the prologue, telling us where we are. And dramatically he waves his sword and stamps his foot, and wonderfully sounds his male, martial, rather husky voice. Then the Paladins, his companions who are

to accompany him, swing one by one onto the stage, till they are five in all, handsome knights, including the Babylonian Princess and the Knight of Britain. They stand in a handsome, glittering line. And then comes Merlin in his red robe. Merlin has a bright, fair, rather chubby face and blue eyes, and seems to typify the northern intelligence. He now tells them, in many words, how to proceed and what is to be done.

So then, the glittering knights are ready. Are they ready? Rinaldo flourishes his sword with the wonderful cry "Andiamo!" let us go--and the others respond: "Andiamo". Splendid word.

The first enemy were the knights of Spain, in red kirtles and half turbans. With these a terrible fight. First of all rushes in the Knight of Britain. He is the boaster, who always in words, does everything. But in fact, poor knight of Britain, he falls lamed. The four Paladins have stood shoulder to shoulder, glittering, watching the fray. Forth now steps another knight, and the fight recommences. Terrible is the smacking of swords, terrible the gasps from behind the dropped visors. Till at last the knight of Spain falls--and the Paladin stands with his foot on the dead. Then loud acclamations from the Paladins, and yells of joy from the audience.

"Silenzio!" yells the padrone, flourishing the fennel-stalk.

Dead silence, and the story goes on. The Knight of Britain of course claims to have slain the foe: and the audience faintly, jeeringly

hisses. "He's always the boaster, and he never does anything, the Knight of Britain," whispers my fat friend. He has forgotten my nationality. I wonder if the Knight of Britain is pure tradition, or if a political touch of today has crept in.

However, this fray is over--Merlin comes to advise for the next move. And are we ready? We are ready. Andiamo! Again the word is yelled out, and they set off. At first one is all engaged watching the figures: their brilliance, their blank, martial stare, their sudden, angular, gestures. There is something extremely suggestive in them. How much better they fit the old legend-tales than living people would do. Nay, if we are going to have human beings on the stage, they should be masked and disguised. For in fact drama is enacted by symbolic creatures formed out of human consciousness: puppets if you like: but not human individuals. Our stage is all wrong, so boring in its personality.

Gradually, however, I found that my eyes were of minor importance. Gradually it was the voice that gained hold of the blood. It is a strong, rather husky, male voice that acts direct on the blood, not on the mind. Again the old male Adam began to stir at the roots of my soul. Again the old, first-hand indifference, the rich, untamed male blood rocked down my veins. What does one care? What does one care for precept and mental dictation? Is there not the massive brilliant, out-flinging recklessness in the male soul, summed up in the sudden word: Andiamo! Andiamo! Let us go on. Andiamo!--let us go hell knows where, but let us go on. The splendid recklessness and passion that knows no precept and

no school-teacher, whose very molten spontaneity is its own guide.

I loved the voices of the Paladins--Rinaldo's voice, and Orlando's voice: the voice of men once more, men who are not to be tutored. To be sure there was Merlin making his long speeches in rather a chuntering, prosy tone. But who was he? Was he a Paladin and a splendour? Not he. A long-gowned chunterer. It is the reckless blood which achieves all, the piff-piff-piffing of the mental and moral intelligence is but a subsidiary help, a mere instrument.

The dragon was splendid: I have seen dragons in Wagner, at Covent Garden and at the Prinz-Regenten Theater in Munich, and they were ridiculous. But this dragon simply frightened me, with his leaping and twisting. And when he seized the knight by the leg, my blood ran cold.

With smoke and sulphur leaps in Beelzebub. But he is merely the servant of the great old witch. He is black and grinning, and he flourishes his posterior and his tail. But he is curiously inefficacious: a sort of lackey of wicked powers.

The old witch with her grey hair and staring eyes succeeds in being ghastly. With just a touch, she would be a tall, benevolent old lady. But listen to her. Hear her horrible female voice with its scraping yells of evil lustfulness. Yes, she fills me with horror. And I am staggered to find how I believe in her as the evil principle. Beelzebub, poor devil, is only one of her instruments.

It is her old, horrible, grinning female soul which locks up the heroes, and which sends forth the awful and almost omnipotent malevolence. This old, ghastly woman-spirit is the very core of mischief. And I felt my heart getting as hot against her as the hearts of the lads in the audience were. Red, deep hate I felt of that symbolic old ghoul-female. Poor male Beelzebub is her loutish slave. And it takes all Merlin's bright-faced intelligence, and all the surging hot urgency of the Paladins, to conquer her.

She will never be finally destroyed--she will never finally die, till her statue, which is immured in the vaults of the castle, is burned.--Oh, it was a very psychoanalytic performance altogether, and one could give a very good Freudian analysis of it.--But behold this image of the witch: this white, submerged idea of woman which rules from the deeps of the unconscious. Behold, the reckless, untamable male knights will do for it. As the statue goes up in flame--it is only paper over wires--the audience yells! And yells again. And would God the symbolic act were really achieved. It is only little boys who yell. Men merely smile at the trick. They know well enough the white image endures.

So it is over. The knights look at us once more. Orlando, hero of heroes, has a slight inward cast of the eyes. This gives him that look of almost fierce good-nature which these people adore: the look of a man who does not think, but whose heart is all the time red hot with

burning, generous blood-passion. This is what they adore.

So my knights go. They all have wonderful faces, and are so splendidly glittering and male. I am sorry they will be laid in a box now.

There is a great gasp of relief. The piano starts its lame rattle. Somebody looking round laughs. And we all look round. And seated on the top of the ticket office is a fat, solemn urchin of two or three years, hands folded over his stomach, his forehead big and blank, like some queer little Buddha. The audience laughs with that southern sympathy: physical sympathy: that is what they love to feel and to arouse.

But there is a little after-scene: in front of the drop-curtain jerks out a little fat flat caricature of a Neapolitan, and from the opposite side jerks the tall caricature of a Sicilian. They jerk towards one another and bump into one another with a smack. And smack goes the Neapolitan, down on his posterior. And the boys howl with joy. It is the eternal collision between the two peoples, Neapolitan and Sicilian. Now goes on a lot of fooling between the two clowns, in the two dialects. Alas, I can hardly understand anything at all. But it sounds comic, and looks very funny. The Neapolitan of course gets most of the knocks. And there seems to be no indecency at all--unless once.--The boys howl and rock with joy, and no one says Silenzio!

But it is over. All is over. The theatre empties in a moment. And I shake hands with my fat neighbour, affectionately, and in the right

spirit. Truly I loved them all in the theatre: the generous, hot southern blood, so subtle and spontaneous, that asks for blood contact, not for mental communion or spirit sympathy. I was sorry to leave them.

FINIS.