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Ah! that's  
**Persil**  
**Whiteness**

P.208.322

# HEADLAND-HOPPING TO ROME

## But We Went By Tandem, Not Tank

(Written for "The Listener" by M.R.)

**T**HREE now the Allied armies in Italy have by-passed land opposition by making another landing further up the coast. Can this "headland-hopping" (as I suppose we may call it), go on indefinitely? Considerations of *material, personnel, transport and terrain* enter into that question. I can tell you only about *terrain*.

Ten years ago, in a super-summer like our last December, I came down that Tyrrhenian coast by the best of all methods for seeing while you travel—a bicycle. By car you see too little altogether (or, if you prefer, too much all together). While if you travel by foot, you generally end up by car. What is better still, I was the "lady back" of a tandem. The "pilot" for'ard kept one eye on the road for both of us. As "observer," I simply observed—and, of course, pedalled.

The far north, coming down from Genova toward Livorno (Genoa to Leghorn) is the well-known Riviera or Blue Coast (Cote d'Azur). The southern curl of the Alps, which later thins into Italy's "shinbone" of Apennines and then frazzles out cat-o-nine-tail-wise into the ranges our armies have been among, hangs here steeply above the sea. The beaches below used to be covered (and I don't write metaphorically), with gaudy bathing boxes and their inhabitants, striped pavilions, spotted tents and jazz sunshades—very Lido-like, but we New Zealanders prefer to see our beaches. To-day, no doubt, they are lined with wire, while binoculars in the mountains above keep a jittery watch on Allied-occupied Corsica, which shows up very tall above the sea on really clear days much like the Little Barrier from Auckland. However, as you work your way out of this too self-consciously picturesque region you run into simple country and a shore which is neither all staked out by tourists and *rentiers* nor so much a right-angled intersection between sea and mountain as to be (I imagine), uninteresting to invasion commanders.

### The Aurelian Road

*"You take the old Aurelian Road by shore—descending pines  
Where, blue as any peacock's neck, the  
Tyrrhene ocean shines."*

Kipling fathered these words on to a homesick centurion in Britain about A.D. 144. But—accepting hearsay evidence about the peacock—they perfectly apply to-day. Livorno is a busy port on the plain of Tuscany that runs up to Florence, Anthony Adverse's city, plus some square concrete wharves and blocks. But on either side of it stretched broad, flat, empty beaches alongside an almost equally level sea. Determined to pitch our moving tent a day's march nearer Rome each night, we pedalled south three days beside it, more often than not with "Tyrrheno's" brisk salt tang fragrantly filtered through an unbroken belt of pines along the sandhills.

On the landward side is Italy as you imagine it—hills of olives and vines; castles (or at least towers), on high points, and elsewhere neat red-tiled cottages among fruit trees; and lumbering solid-wheeled wagons barely moving behind a yoke or two of huge-horned kind-eyed, white oxen.

### Public Observer No. 1

Headlands jut out here and there where the road looks down into pellucid green and blue caves among red rocks. But the most striking possession of the coast mile after mile is the amazingly un-Italian institution of solitude. So, at any rate, we were congratulating ourselves one mid-day halt, stretched sun-bathing on the seaward side of the pine belt, when, happening to look up, we saw about five yards distant an Italian farmhand whom we had passed a full mile back regarding us with an unblinking stare. All Italians are rubbernecks of Dunlop's First Grade, psychological giraffes in fact, but we remember him as Public Observer Number One. Having followed with his eyes each forkload of wriggling *pasta* from billy to mouth, he stumbled down the long beach after us, undressing among the ripples to follow us should we swim out of sight. . . . Even more keenly would the Tuscans greet foreigners coming up those lonely sands to-day—especially if they brought *pasta*. In fact, I suspect that those patriotic artists who painted Il Duce's bulldog features on their house walls (as one frequently saw), have been keeping a pot of whitewash handy for some time. Whether they will give a more material welcome is another matter.

### Don't Carry Mind-Pictures

Moving south along this coast I lost my remaining faith in novels, postcards and travel-folders. Picture-book Italy ended abruptly less than halfway to Rome. Towed behind a friendly lorry on an otherwise deserted road, we flew one whole hot afternoon through a yellow-brown eucalypt-strewn country that would have been way-back Australia if only the occasional two-story square white *casa*, battened down by wooden blinds against the besieging heat, had been a single solitary ruinous iron-roofed shack. Night in the mountains beyond was South Island high country, down to the nip in the air and the lamb bleating in the distance. Morning was Venezuela, with the road lost among head-high pampas vegetation into which the sunning snakes slid away after striking viciously at our spokes. Breakfast brought Grossette, a highly-compressed (almost dehydrated), country centre, practically Spanish in its bareness of high, blank walls. And by evening we were passing women with waterpots on their heads and men on tiny Eastern donkeys. Beware of mind-pictures of Italy. The country varies with the kilo-pegs.

However, there is one stretch—the stretch that is in the news at present—from Orbetello down past Civitavecchia

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