



A pleasant Italian coast road

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and the Tiber mouth to where the landings have been made that is all of a piece. It is called the Roman Campagna. But if "Campagna" brings you visions of green fields and vines, please think instead of a shaved plain, sun-cracked into gullies of coarse, tawny grass, and looking down on a distant, strangely unfriendly sea. Seen from the top of the famous Alba Longa near Rome—Long Alba indeed, to a cyclist!—when Kesselring is probably regarding it at this moment, it is desolation. Seen riding through it as we did, it shows unexpected life.

But first about Orbetello, since it cannot stay out of the news for long. It used to be a miniature and primitive fisherman's Venice on the land side of Insula Argentaria, a blue forested island much like Kapiti, only smaller and nearer to shore. Within recent centuries, sandbanks have crept out on either side and have changed it into an all-weather seaplane base lagoon. Balbo's air fleet to America had set out from here the week before we camped on the now well-shrubbed sandbank. To-day Orbetello probably wards off return visits along this whole shore.

Ants drove us from a spot where every prospect pleased and man, the vile, the rubberneck, was absent—ants, not, as usual, preserving our siesta from interruption by never allowing it to start, but pilfering our panniers with a pertinacity, organisation, and ruthless disregard for ownership that would have shamed any human army. We considered their ways and were wise. We left.

Sirocco!

Night found us tented on the baked Campagna, still weary and still sleepless. But now the reason was drifting chaff, the husks of a recent reaping. And in dawn light we pushed down the gully sides, past the strange hill top shape of Tarquinia (hometown of Rome's first kings and continuously inhabited ever since).—yes, we pushed our steed, down hill, on foot. Civita-vecchia appeared, a considerable fishing town, overcast, yet sweltering. When we tried to light the primus in the shelter of the sea rocks nearby our matches were too wet to strike. When we lay down out of the wind behind a wall, we steamed with sweat. When we tried

in the open, we grew clammy and brine-soaked. Atmosphere parching, wind sticky and wet, wind-pressure so constant as to hide its gale force—and then a totterer-by panted the secret: "Ah! Ah! Troppo caldo! Ah! Ah! Troppo vento! Troppo Aqua! SIROCCO!"

We were exhausted long before daylight was, and crawled gratefully across to a railway settlement of three houses that gradually approached. "Camp in my garden," invited one owner. But he had just flooded it from the engine tank. "In mine, then," begged the second. But his was a rockery. "Ah, I have something ideally level," sighed the last. It was level—a concrete yard. To hurt no feelings we pretended that we were recovered enough to push on to Rome. "Quite wise. It's a mere 25 kilos," said A. "You'll be there in an hour—35 kilos," said B. "—40 kilos," said C.

We were not nearly so elastic. In fact, we were stretched to breaking-point before reaching the next dwelling, two miles ahead. It was a huge red concrete block, a city tenement down to its many stories and windows flagged with washing, and to the human ants surging to meet us out of its tunnel entrance. But they were adamant as the wall: only the manager could give water, straw and permission. And where was he? Out at another State Grain Farm, two miles off our route. Water and protection from that tickling, flying straw we must have, however. We staggered on. But inside the tunnel of this State Agricultural Factory (à la Russe), we did at least find welcome, a swallow of water and fruit, a bed on the harness-room floor—and oblivion. Nevertheless, the teamsters coming to harness-up at dawn found us already packed and cooking the breakfast rice. Stamina? Not at all. The chaff-cutter through the wall had started up at 3.0 a.m.

Maybe the Campagna is less unfriendly in winter to foreign invaders. But I doubt it.

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