



It rubs right in

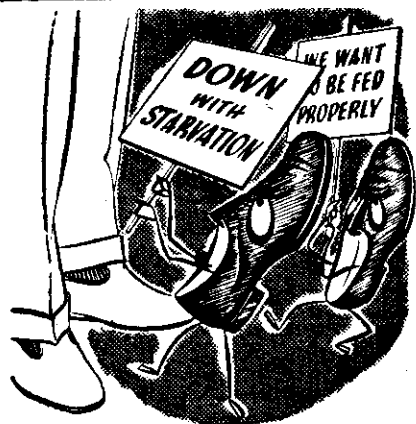
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VIA VIA APPIA

Along the Road to Rome

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

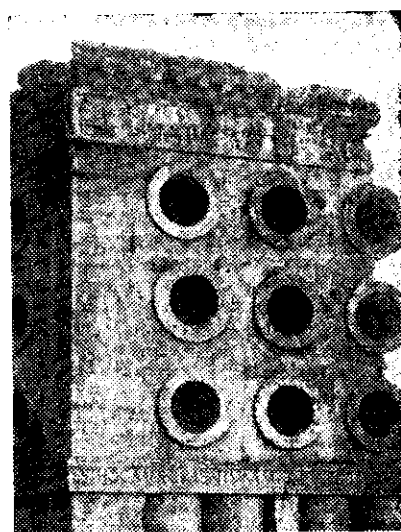
ALL roads lead to Rome. But, though the Eighth and Fifth Armies are getting thither despite the alleged ones that squeeze along between the ranges that rib Italy's waist, their gear will follow by an easier route. "Soldiers!" cried Napoleon, at the Battle of the Pyramids, "The centuries look down on you!" "Drivers!" Montgomery and Clark might radio by analogy (only we know they won't), "you are hurrying over history!" For the Appian Way, constructed from Rome to Italy's far-eastern heel, is Europe's most historic highway.

The original section, that built by the Censor Appius Claudius Caecus in 312 B.C. as far as Capua, I have traversed foot by foot—though only up the hills on foot. This is an attempt, in a less pedestrian way, to help you to move along it in imagination with our advancing armies.

THE northern rim of the dish-shaped Volturno plain consists of soft green, winding, olive-sprinkled downs, on the far side of which a little river-basin lies locked between mountains and sea. Villages are frequent, surrounded by orange groves; for this sheltered nook is the last pocket of citrus country as you move north. And Formia along the bay, which is to-day a ladder of fishermen's cottages leaning against a steep slope that overhangs a beach, used once to be to Rome what Bournemouth is to London. While from the little plain rose the clank, the curses and the groans of manacled slaves planting or scything to numbers, and while Via Appia below the holiday villas swam with wealth ever pouring into Rome from the whole conquered world, the

mistresses of the world's masters lolled through the summer heats in Formia in a modernity of plucked eyebrows, rouged lips, and padded consciences.

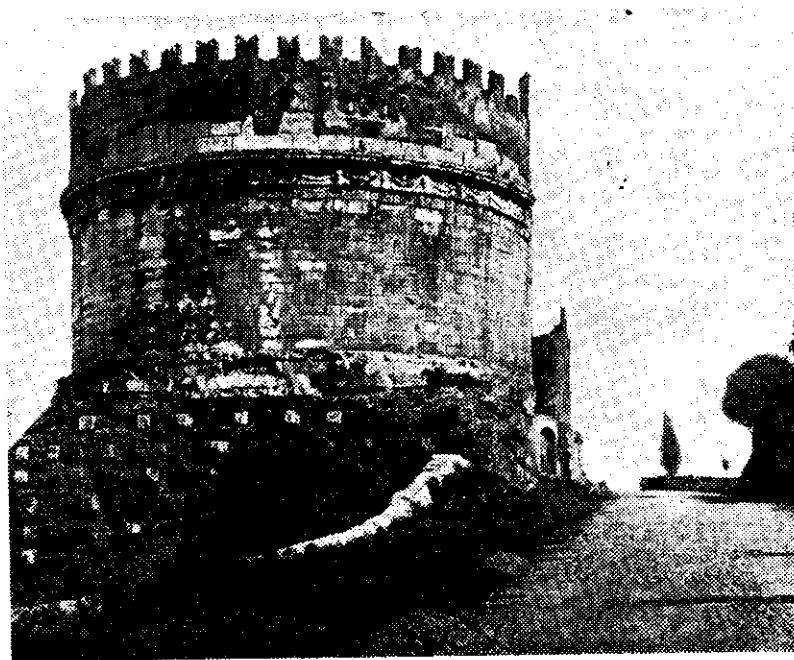
Above Formia is the Pass of Itri, a steep, boulder-strewn mountain ridge, which would make a great line for a retreating army to hold. Fortunately, it is the far side that is really precipitous. The only thing that kept me climbing up its heat-breathing rocks one late summer evening—rocks bare but for stunted bushes peering out of great cracks and clefts—was competition with a donkey-cart top-heavy with firewood and a family, zig-zagging up the track behind. Whether or not the fat driver's constant sympathetic belching at his beast really encouraged it, he certainly



THE TOMB OF THE BAKER on the Appian Way in Rome. It has oven-like holes to indicate the occupation of the deceased.



THE AQUEDUCT OF CLAUDIUS and other ruins along the Appian Way



A monument on the Appian Way: the tomb of Caecilia Metella

kept me anxious to hold my lead ahead.

No Welcome at Itri

Itri itself, a sun-blackened, five-story town under a castle cliff, was the only place in Italy from which I ever fled in haste and fear. Its lowering inhabitants, 5000 without visible means of support in that slab-sided gorge, breathed sour garlic and fanaticism and scowled implacable vendetta. And where I ran was the only farmlet in the peninsula where hospitality was refused, implacably refused. I had, however, to stay, standing helpless in the circle of the kerosene lamp swung over the outdoor dining table, since one could not sleep on boulders or continue in utter blackness down that flood-eroded highway—yes, the Appian Way in its then local state. And when the policeman was sent for, arrived, and shook his head at my trial of French on him—"Moi, je parle Français" cried that adamant old peasant energetically; and insisted thereafter on narrating how he had preserved his estate by 30 years' labouring in France, and insisted, too, on incarcerating me in his bare, furnace-like,

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