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hermetically-sealed, best bedroom for the night . . . . I am wondering how the Germans have managed among those dark, dour, un-Italian, pre-Italian Itri people.

If the Fifth Army forces this pass as it did the far higher but less defended mountains at Salerno, there is as strong a natural barrier right behind it. For after the queer, land-locked, lagoon-filled, sea-level plainlet of Fondi the Volscian range rises, bleak as the moon. It is no height here at its end, but it runs right into the sea—or did until the Romans by sheer wedge-and-chisel-slogging, cut a deep horizontal U along its seacliff face.

#### Fifty Miles from Rome

But thereafter Rome is only 50 miles distant as the crow flies, and the Appian Way flies nearly as direct. The highway shoots up at a brake-burning gradient whenever a spur of the inland ranges sticks out its neck into the plain. And as one donkey-cart kept me sweating up to Itri, so another took me up Alba Longa—psychologically speaking. For one other fool was travelling in that pitiless, windless, small hour siesta heat. He sat in the roasting-chamber of the gaudy canvas hood of a little brightly-painted cart—fast asleep. With every sway his head swivelled round, his jaw snapped shut and open. Thankfully I fell in behind, pushing my iron steed.

But from the summit what a view! The houses of the township, grappled in straggling line along the underside of the road, hide all the lower slopes. One is floating in a heavenly coolness of fresh mountain air and cypress shade, like Rossetti's Blessed Damozel, gazing out over some altogether other, distant, hot, tortured planet far below. Southward, the inland mountains and the seawards straight-edge of white-fringed blue mark out the Pontine Plain, split down the centre by the avenue of the Appian Way and its accompanying canal, and ending in an Ultima Thule of many-hued haze, amid which floats Monte Circeo (or Circello)—the promontory island of Circe the Enchantress. Inland along the ridge stretches Castel Gandolfo—the Papal State's one foreign possession. Beyond is Nemi, a lake on a mountain, among whose groves glided that "priest who slew the slayer and shall himself be slain," and who inspired Frazer to write the 12 tomes of *The Golden Bough*. Along the scalloped bays of the hillside lies Velletri, Imperial Rome's mountain holiday resort. And northward—Rome itself, distantly visible among its uncertain number of malarious hollows conventionally called Seven Hills. So shall our soldiers catch their first glimpse of the Eternal City.

#### Fascism's One Permanent Conquest

However, the Pontine Plain itself is not only the longest section of the Appian Way, but the most interesting of all. In history's dawnlight it supported flourishing cities. Yet by the time The Road was necessary, it had sunk into waterlogged marsh. Appius dug a canal straight through from Terracina to Velletri and built his causeway on its bank. Then Martinus—a person otherwise unknown—drained the whole swamp, and cities again flourished. In the dark days of Rome's downfall, mosquitoes and the Rio Martino—now swollen by neglect from a drain into a river—drove out the colonists once more. Even the Appian Way was completely lost until Pope Pius VI. excavated his "Holy

Line" (Linea Pia canal), and so laid bare the pavement down which the legions had thundered to the conquest of the East, and up which that little hook-nosed political prisoner Paul, had limped "in bonds" to capture Rome itself.

Our supply lorries trundling along the 34-mile tree-lined bitumen straight

will see the last scene of all this strange eventful history in the blue-walled, red-tiled cottages of the new colonists from the over-crowded north who settled on fields recently reclaimed again. For the Pontine Plain ("Marshes" no longer), is Fascism's one permanent territorial conquest, sole incontestable title to glory.

And so, via Via Appia, to Rome.

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