Naples under Mussolini

Il Duce seen as miracle man

By Dr. A. Richards

STAZIONE ZOOLOGICA AT NAPLES

Naples and then die!

See Naples and then die!

Well, we saw Naples, saw it daily from the inside of it, from the Mergellina, Villa Comunale, Via Roma, the Municipio, Corso Umberto Primo, saw it from above Virgil’s tomb and Posilipo (the hill above it), from Sorrento and from Capri, and we not only did not die, but have lived to be persuaded by the editor of The Sooner Magazine to tell the tale. In fact we are not sure we want to die after seeing Naples. It was certainly not as bad as to make one wish to die, although there were times when we wished heartily for the simple pleasures and busy life of the prossic Norman, Oklahoma. Nor were the thrills from seeing Naples so exquisite as to make one feel there was nothing in life elsewhere to live for. I think the latter is the interpretation that the natives who still quote the old saying wish you to make of it; contrariwise some facetious Americans have tried to substitute the former way of looking at it, but we feel that both are wrong.

It was with some trepidation that we journeyed to Naples, for we had been told many times that one must not drink the water there, one must not eat lettuce, one must not eat too much fruit, one must beware of fleas and one must hold onto his pocketbook for dear life. We were also told that one could not avoid the beggars, and that when the sirocco blows one would see his own spirit departing with its evil breath. The sirocco part is true. That wind is the dry spirit of the African desert, and when it has lapped up a good share of the Mediterranean sea and then strikes southern Italy there is nothing to do but sit still and long for it to pass. But the other evils mentioned did not materialize and many of the charms which we had also been led to expect were there to enchant us. To be sure, we found some evils of our own. During the past spring Naples was cold. Oh so cold! Of course they told us the same thing we hear in Oklahoma every year, that this was an unusual spring. But sunny Italy certainly did not greet us with smiles and we did long for our winter wraps. All the houses we knew were of stone with very high ceilings and with floors of cement and mosaic work, by no means a good combination for warmth. The pension in which we stayed had "central heating" (and how proud they were of it!) but the periphery where the bed rooms were got very little warming. We piled everything on our beds imaginable and then went to bed to get warm and got up for the same reason when the sun rose. This was just one of our pet minor evils and there were numerous others of its tribe, but we now forget them easily enough. Oklahoma in September usually is sufficient to make you forget any cold of the preceding spring.

What really sticks in our memory is a sort of mystic charm about Naples and all of its region. It left a vague, indefinable memory that is difficult to separate from longing. Undoubtedly we would go back again at once if opportunity should offer.

They tell us that Naples of the present day is very different from that of former years, and most of the changes for the better are attributed to Mussolini. Mussolini is the sort of figure about whom traditions are made and around whom legends are woven. Of course we read a lot about him, as every American has, and we thought him high-handed, stern, dictatorial, tyrannical, and perhaps unreasonable. We had heard stories of people who were summarily removed from the borders of Italy because of fancied disapprobation on the part of the Fascists and we had heard that the soldiers are everywhere like goblins ready to gobble you up "if you don’t watch out." But of these terrors we saw nothing. It is true, there are many soldiers, for Italy has two years’ compulsory military service and there are many barracks around Naples. We didn’t object to them, although one cannot get out of sight of a pair of them anywhere in Naples. But an Italian soldier in uniform is one of God’s choicest objects; no more beautiful male specimens exist in all the world.

The more we learned of Mussolini and his doings and of the conditions under which he is working and has worked, the higher our respect for him mounted. I feel now that he is to be regarded more as a miracle man than as a tyrant, more as a miracle man than as a tyrant, more as a man of astonishingly great vision and of far-reaching insight than as one whose régime is to be feared. He is indeed Il Duce, the leader. One must interpret human institutions and societies by their effects upon human character and human welfare; one must judge human customs and human governments by their adaptability to serve the people whose lives they touch. With these standards in mind, I believe that the world will conclude that Mussolini and Fascism have worked for the greater good and that they have wrought with the single purpose of establishing a great Italian nation. When one studies the material which they have at hand for nation building, when he realizes the chaos of political conditions which followed the Great War in Italy, and then sees the success of the seven-year-old experiment in Fascist government, he finds his former unfavorable opinions were only prejudice and he quickly comes to admire the man who has been the guiding spirit of the New Italy.

The making of the new Italy has been no easy task, even for Mussolini. During only half a century has Italy had the form of a nation, for it was in 1861 that Garibaldi united the small states of the region and Vittorio Emanuele became "King of Italy," the first ruler in all history to have that title.

A national consciousness is slow to develop anywhere, and this has been notably true in Italy where it has taken
long for the common people to awaken from the centuries of decline, from the intellectual and governmental efficiency of antiquity. In some sections and among certain classes the march of progress which aroused the remainder of Europe found only placid disinterestedness here. If the material for nation building had not been indifferent, twenty-eight centuries of contact with civilization would not have been so long for the common people to awaken from the centuries of decline, from the intellectual and governmental efficiency of antiquity. In some sections and among certain classes the march of progress which aroused the remainder of Europe found only placid disinterestedness here. If the material for nation building had not been indifferent, twenty-eight centuries of contact with civilization would not have been seen the country entering the last stages of decomposition at the end of the Great War.

Mussolini has found it necessary to go all the way back to Roman civilization for the symbolism and watchwords of his new nation. Upon taking over the control of the government seven years ago he had to undo the works of a disastrous socialism not unlike that of Russia, and to replace worn out political organization with new forms and machinery adaptable to a new régime. Furthermore, he was forced to combat an inertia akin to nothing else in Europe. The Italian temperament is placid and contented, not fond of innovations. (Even the eruptions of Vesuvius do not drive the inhabitants from its slopes. After each new eruption of the volcano they merely rebuild their homes and vineyards as before.) Small wonder is it that he has seemed harsh and dictatorial and his edicts are by no means always welcome. For example, he has ruled against the importation of foodstuffs such as white flour, fruits, etc., for, as one of his slogans has it, "Italy can supply enough wheat for its own needs."

This has been by no means a popular edict. Also we were told that country dwellers have been forbidden to move to the city without special permission. These and other measures not to the liking of many have been deemed necessary for the general cause. Great reforms are not slow to carry through any thing new ideas and new policies into Italian life, some of which are of direct importance to the foreigner living in Italy. Mussolini's first months saw a complete overhauling of the Italian foreign policy and the beginning of a reconstruction of the government's financial procedures. The result of this has been that for nearly two years Italy has had a stabilized money, the lire now being rated at nineteen to the dollar. With it has came the "fixed price" on ordinary commercial transactions and the foreigner who goes out to buy in the better shops may feel that the price asked for standard goods is the correct one. For souvenirs and unusual articles it is still possible to bargain to good effect, although the day of the fixed price is supposed to have come for everything.

I doubt not that the first question which occurs to everyone who visited Naples in the old days had to do with the cleanliness of the place. I have been told that the cab horses would slip and stumble and the cabs stall on the filthy, dirty pavements of the city even in the best streets—and that only a few years ago. But now Naples has been cleaned up, although there are still places no more sanitary than some of the darker districts of the large American cities. But the poor classes have not yet responded wholeheartedly to the new order and in some streets not often seen by tourists, garbage and refuse still litter the pavement. It is better now than formerly, but we could see why in years gone by so many of the poor were happy to come to New York where the East Side slums were more to be desired than their one-room houses on Posilipo had been. But in general we found no more dirt and uncleanliness now than we would find in many cities in both the Old and New World which have a much greater reputation for spotlessness. The city water supply, from the Serino Springs, is pure and wholesome to drink. Even yet, however, I cannot quite describe the enthusiasm displayed for the new Naples by a traveler on board the boat to Capri. She loved Naples, and she resented any suggestion that everything there was not perfection. She even declared that she would be willing to eat her dinner anywhere on the pavement in Naples, so clean is it now.

The Italian school system has undergone very complete reorganization. The new government has rather contemptuously discarded the old democratic concept which considers the state school an institution for everyone, and now the state provides schooling only for those who because of their special merits deserve it. For the education of the remainder, society looks to other agencies, such as the church, to provide the education they may. It was not clear to me how the selection of those deserving was made. At all times children could be seen on the streets going or coming from school, whether public or private I do not know. Many did not go to school at all and the school buildings are difficult to find. Never conspicuous as in an American city, they are hidden away in some court or are approached only from some tiny side street. The public schools in the grammar grades provide only a few years of education. The secondary schools care for the needs of only a small part of the population and the universities a disproportionately smaller part. And yet the better class of Italians is certainly a well-educated group of people. Because of the state of the public schools I think the two years of compulsory military service should be looked upon not only as preparation for defense of the nation but also as an educational device, since in addition to discipline they teach many things of value to the youth of nineteen, the age at which his service begins, in his future relations to society.

There are also other organizations by which Fascism has hoped to develop and train the citizenry. These organizations even extend down to small children who are grouped together in the National Organization of Balilla, a name derived from a legendary Genoese hero. Gymnastic exercises and rigid discipline and the general rules of "well ordered national life" are inculcated in these organizations. In the museums, in galleries, and in parks it was no unaccustomed sight on holidays and Sundays to see groups of black-shirted children with their leader going about for instruction and pleasure. We were quite impressed by what we saw but it was not easy to estimate the value of these activities.
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Florence Mitchruch, '28, is teaching music in the Roosevelt, McKinley and Washington schools of Ponca City. Her address is 419 N. Fourth street.

Louise Madeline Olson, '28 arts-sc., is a partner in the Lear Insurance Co. of Guthrie.

Ruby Grambling, '28 home-sc., is on the dietary staff of the Presbyterian hospital in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She recently visited in Norman but returned early in October for her second year at the Presbyterian hospital.

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F. Burton Jordan, '29, is an attorney with the Tulsa Abstract and Title Co. at 520 South Boulder avenue.

Frank Weimer, '29, is employed in the land department of the Barnsdall Refining Co. in Tulsa.

James Ludlum, '29, is attending the Collier School of Aeronautics in Tulsa.

Richard Mason, '29, is an electrical engineer with the General Electric Co. in Lynn, Massachusetts. He is using his work with this company to apply on a master's degree from the Boston Institute of Technology. His address is 124 Franklin street.

Ina Griffith, who has just completed the requirements for a B. S. in pharmacy, and Ralph Wilson, '29 pharm., are assistants in the school of pharmacy and are taking work toward their M. S. degrees.

Wood Rigby, '29 law, has been appointed secretary of the state bar commission. He is in charge of the offices of the commission in the Commerce Exchange building, Oklahoma City.

Dorothy Ann Parker, '29 arts-sc., is an assistant in languages at the Oklahoma A. and M. college.

Six members of the class of '29 have found geology and the Gulf coast field of Louisiana to their liking. They are: Floyd M. Ayers, Jess Jones, Victor Grage, Tom McGlothin, Hastings Faulkner and C. W. Wade and are all associated with the Gulf Refining Co. of Louisiana.

Lionel V. Murphy, '29 M. A., is teaching in the political science department of the University of Illinois at Urbana and is working towards a doctor of philosophy degree in political science.

Ella Mae Sigmoid, '29, who teaches home economics at Poteau reports that there are four other Sooner teaching in the high school there. They are Margie Bell Yerby, 28; Agnes Lloyd, '25; Deborah Long, '29 and C. C. Beard, superintendent. Dr. William Lunsford, '24 medic, and Dr. Lotna Shippey are nearby, practicing in Wister.

W. R. Means, '29, is operating as a geologist in Holdenville.

NAPLES UNDER MUSSOLINI

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this group education. If Mussolini and his régime are spared long enough for these children to reach maturity, the foundations of the new Italy may be regarded as established.

Among the educated Neapolitans with whom we spoke, the fear was often expressed that some disaster might occur before Mussolini's successors have been thoroughly schooled. This was the only cause for apprehension that we discerned among the acquaintances made in Naples.

It is feared that if an assassin's bullet should remove Mussolini, as has been at least four times attempted, revolution would result. If he lives, however, to see the education of a single generation complete, serious calamity can scarcely overtake Italy.

The reason for our three months in Naples was that we might study certain Mediterranean forms of animal life which are not available in America. The Stazione Zoologica was founded in 1872-74 by Dr. Anton Dohrn and under the patronage of the German government rapidly became the foremost institution of its kind in the world and the most profound influence upon zoological science of the closing century. It became the ambition of every zoologist of America to spend a season at Naples. Of course with the World War, the old relationships of the station were broken and for a time support was very doubtful. Dr. Reinhardt Dohn, who succeeded to the directorship of the laboratory upon the death of his father in 1909, was able to guide the institution through the difficult times and at length secured enough financial support to maintain it from the Italian government, various scientific societies, receipts from occupants of the research tables, and especially from the daily admissions to the great aquarium which is run in connection with the laboratory. The coming of fascism has had little direct effect upon the laboratory other than to require that all heads of departments should be of Italian citizenship. Life at the station now is quite normal and is a happy one indeed.

See Naples and then die? Not now. See Naples and then come again and enjoy its beauties and charms.