The Italians

Luigi Barzini
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In this consummate portrait of the Italian people, bestselling author, publisher, journalist, and politician Luigi Barzini delves deeply into the Italian national character, discovering both its great qualities and its imperfections.Barzini is startlingly frank as he examines “the two Italies”: the one that created and nurtured such luminaries as Dante Alighieri,

St. Thomas of Aquino, and Leonardo da Vinci; the other, feeble and prone to catastrophe, backward in political action if not in thought, “invaded, ravaged, sacked, and humiliated in every century.” Deeply ambivalent, Barzini approaches his task with a combination of love, hate, disillusion, and affectionate paternalism, resulting in a completely original, thoughtful, and probing picture of his countrymen.

The New Yorker Searching into every corner of Italian life and scrutinizing every cliché concerning it, from the charm of the people (an illusion, he maintains) to the consolations of la dolce vita (another one), Mr. Barzini has written an invaluable and astringent guidebook to his country.About the AuthorLuigi Barzini, was born in Milan, Italy, in 1908. After completing his studies in Italy and at Columbia University, he worked for two New York newspapers. He returned to Italy in 1930 to become a correspondent for Corriere della Sera. In 1940 he was confined by the Fascists. With the Allied liberation he returned to publishing and founded Il Globo. Subsequently he served as the chief editor of several newspapers and magazines. His books include Americans Are Alone in the World (1958), From Caesar to the Mafia (1971), and Peking to Paris (1973). He died in 1984.Excerpt. CHAPTER ONETHE PEACEFUL INVASIONItalians are pleased and perplexed. Every year since the end of the war they have seen the number of foreign visitors to their country increase at an incredibly rapid rate. The phenomenon has now reached unprecedented, practically inexplicable, and almost alarming proportions. In the 1950s the tourists numbered eight, ten, twelve million yearly. A little later, only yesterday, they were fifteen, seventeen, nineteen million. They have now passed the twenty million mark, a proportion of more than one tourist to every two and a half Italians, and the total is still growing. It appears that, if circumstances remain favourable, the travellers will reach thirty million within a decade, and will eventually match and even surpass the number of native inhabitants in the peninsula. Nothing daunts foreigners. Nothing frightens them. Nothing stops them. They arrive in a steady stream, by all forms of transport and even on foot, by day and night, from the sea or via the Alps. What is but a small trickle in the winter months grows in the spring to the size of a stream, and, in April, May, and June, turns into a monsoon flood, breaking all dikes, covering everything in sight. It begins to recede in September. It never completely dries up.People come from all parts of the five known continents, from the old established nations of Europe and America and from the newly founded ones in Africa and Asia. The largest number come from the north, the vast, democratic, bourgeois, industrial north of Europe and America. Some now also come from Russia, in some ways the most northerly of all countries, organized parties of sightseers, behaving like military units traversing a dangerous territory inhabited by treacherous natives, as diffident and self-contained as Xenophon's Greeks marching across Asia Minor. Russian tourists all wear the same box-like clothes, as new as those of provincial newly-weds, and ankle-length raincoats. They look well-fed, self-satisfied, and well-behaved. They appear eager to acquire as much culture, in all its forms, as rapidly and cheaply as possible. They have a disturbing resemblance to the diligent German tourists at the beginning of the century, the solid subjects of William II.There are many travellers who, in order to obey the urge that drives them south, abandon their own countries, whose delights and tourist attractions are being advertised and celebrated all over the world. What do they seek that is better than what they left behind? Not many Italians willingly travel abroad in any direction, north, south, east or west. They always feel more or less exiled and unhappy in alien lands, and honestly believe the attractions of their homeland to be most satisfying. They are the first victims of the famous charm of Italy, never satiated with her sights, climate, food, music and life. Familiarity never breeds contempt in them. Neapolitans, for instance, after many thousand years, still gaze with the same rapture on their native landscape, eat spaghetti alle vongole as if they had never tasted them before, and compose endless songs dedicated to the immortal beauty of their women and their bay. Those Italians who travel abroad are, as a rule, the privileged -- Milanese industrialists and Roman princes who have adopted foreign ways, cabinet ministers, diplomats, newly-weds -- and the disinherited who go looking for work. They are usually all equally homesick abroad; the rich and the poor look for caffè espresso, a good Italian restaurant, wherever they go, and sigh for the day of their return.At the high tide of the tourist season, from early June till late September, visitors fill every empty space available in Italy. Trains, buses, boats, restaurants, churches, museums, Greek and Roman ruins, chapels, concert halls, historic landmarks, and famous belvederes, whence romantic landscapes (two stars in the guide books) can be admired, are packed to capacity with foreigners. One literally finds them everywhere, often at one's table, unknown friends of friends, sometimes even in one's bathroom and bed. They also fill a couple of universities, Perugia and Urbino, set aside for them, where they study the language, imbibe the Latin sun-drenched culture, make love, go swimming, and feed themselves cheaply on pasta, olive oil, tomatoes, and garlic. American universities sometimes hold summer sessions, in art appreciation, history of civilization, and related subjects, in some ancient villa on a hill-top near Florence with a view over the whole city, or a palazzo on the Grand Canal. Swedish and Norwegian workers' clubs have purchased wooded strips of deserted Italian coastline, where they have built their own club-houses and recreation centres.There are sultry days in July and August when the cities, emptied by the natives, are almost completely taken over by the swarms of dusty and perspiring foreigners. During the siesta hour, when even the carriage horses sleep under their straw hats, the relentless tourists finally slow down. They bivouac everywhere. They recline on park benches, kerbstones, the stone brims of fountains, or ancient ruins. They place their heads over their crossed arms on café tables for a siesta among the empty

bottles, the dirty napkins, and the recently purchased souvenirs. They then really look like a tired and bedraggled army after a fatiguing battle, who have occupied a city abandoned by their fleeing enemy. They have conquered. The place is theirs.I am not talking here of the minority, the experienced foreigners who know why they come to Italy and what Italy is. Many have come here before and know their way about, others have never been here but somehow know what to do and what they want. They all avoid the heat and the dust, seldom visit the obvious places but, when they have to (the obvious places are often the most desirable), they go at convenient hours, when the crowd is away and the air is cool. They wear ordinary clothes, the same as everybody else. Some are in love with nature, others with art, culture, archaeology, or music. Some like meeting people and making friends, others discover little-known beaches or unexplored islands. There are those who make lengthy detours, to see some little-known masterpiece, and those who like food and wine and know the trattorie which only few natives and no foreigners have yet discovered. There are many who speak the language well. These easily disappear in the background. They do not interest me here. There is nothing peculiar about them. I am talking of the vast majority of tourists, the millions driven by some unknown urge.They are so punctual and numerous that their mass arrival, in the eyes of ordinary Italians, appears as irresistible as a natural event, as ineluctable as the seasonal return of migratory birds, swallows, quails, or partridges, driven by instinct; or as an anthropological phenomenon like the migration of nomadic tribes seeking green pastures for their herds. The impression is heightened by the fact that many of these travellers look somewhat alike to Italian eyes. They dress in garishly-coloured clothes, much as the members of the ancient barbaric hordes once did and as the Gipsies and Berbers still do. A great number of Germans, Scandinavians, Britons, and Dutch have pink skins, which the sun seldom succeeds in tanning a decent brown but reddens to the tender colour of prosciutto or covers with freckles. They perspire freely in the heat, under their nylon shirts. They wear barbaric sandals. They have dark glasses over their eyes and their heads are bare or covered with cheap straw hats on whose brims are printed or embroidered the names of cities, sanctuaries, beaches, islands, or other famous landmarks.There is something mysteriously significant about the behaviour of many of them. A mild frenzy takes most of them and transforms them once across the Italian border. It resembles the irresistible excitement which captures some living organisms and makes them forget themselves and everything else, when, like salmon going upstream, they obey some deep and secret impulse of Nature; or the intoxication, the gentle and sweet delirium, which makes all honeymooners quietly mad everywhere in the world and honeymooners in Italy doubly so, both because they are on their honeymoon and they are in Italy. Like all newly-weds, in fact, many ordinary travellers seem deliciously drunk with new illusions and hopes. The sedate professional man, the sober shopkeeper, the loyal employee, the rigorous scientist, the stern educator, the tidy housewife, the bespectacled spinster, the innocent maiden, the virtuous wife, the resigned husband, all behave as they probably never dared to behave before and as they probably would not behave publicly in their native habitat. More exactly, they behave as if they had shed the rôles assigned to them and the personalities bestowed on them by Nature, because such rôles and personalities had suddenly become repugnant and alien to them; or as if all the rules of the game of life had been changed or suspended. Some seem strangely deprived of all, or part of, their customary discernment, of their powers of control and discrimination, and of the scepticism, diffidence, prudence, suspicion, and fear necessary for survival in most countries. They get into all sorts of scrapes. They make friends with all sorts of people. They look at all things with indulgent and dewy eyes, apparently ready to love, admire, understand, or, at least, excuse and forgive almost everything, the good, the bad, the indifferent, the repugnant. They are often easily swindled, but many do not always mind if they are.Most of these visitors from Northern Europe drink vast and indiscriminate quantities of wine. They drink, with equal good-natured enthusiasm, anything at all: costly vintages from famous vineyards, raw wines still smelling of sulphur and wooden staves, sweet and syrupy wines made for people who know little about such things. It is, for some curious reason, the first thing Germans and Austrians do, as soon as they cross the Brenner pass on their southward trip. They stop the car at one of the many wineshops which line both sides of the valley road, just beyond the border, as frequent as the petrol stations. Each osteria has a wrought-iron hanging sign, a terrace in the quivering shadow of a leafy pergola, checked table-cloths, waitresses in dirndl, everything designed in a tasteful fairy-story style, a style which is a mixture suited to the geographical and psychological spot, half German and half Italian, half Walt-Disney-Tyrolean and half Il Trovatore or Palio-di-Siena-Medieval. On the Brenner road, German and Austrian tourists behave as the Americans did under prohibition, when they rushed for the first bar across the Canadian border. There is no obvious explanation for this phenomenon. There is no scarcity of cheap wines, local or imported, in Germany and Austria. Perhaps these people are trying to quench not a physiological but a psychological thirst. This may be an unconscious magic rite; they drink wine as if it were a potion necessary to acquire a new personality, or they drink it as one drinks champagne on New Year's eve, on the stroke of midnight, to celebrate the crossing of a spiritual border and to inaugurate new hopes and a new life.With equal indulgent enthusiasm, these summer visitors indiscriminately enjoy all kinds of doubtful attractions, things they probably shunned at home. They listen with the same breathless rapture and delighted smiles to the best opera singing in the world at Rome, Milan, or Spoleto, and to wheezy village bands, to impeccable Vivaldi quartets and to tinny dance orchestras. They eat the dainty food of famous chefs with the same pleasure with which they devour gross peasant dishes, mostly composed of garlic and tomatoes, or fisherman's octopus and shrimps, fried in heavily scented olive oil on a little deserted beach.

They buy vast quantities of souvenirs to take home, smart things they cannot find elsewhere, cheap trinkets made in Japan, costly masterpieces, tawdry imitations.Many try to speak Italian. A few creditably manage this in a short time. Others think they do. Things seem, of course, more significant and enjoyable when expressed in the native language. A spade is only a spade, a Shaufel but a Shaufel, but a badile cannot help being a pagan, Mediteranean, intoxicating badile. Some study lists of words phonetically spelled in handbooks. Some pick them up in random conversations. They also try hard to gesticulate wildly as they speak. They usually manage it in the style of amateur comedians playing an Italian character. They laugh loudly and converse with everybody, the people at the next table, travelling companions in the trains, the waiters, the beggars, the street singers, the cicerones, anybody in sight, with the same good-natured lack of discrimination with which dog lovers pet any dog.The men, many men at least, those of all ages who have a natural bent for that sort of thing, admire and pursue Italian girls. It must be said that the Italian girls and young women, for reasons nobody knows for sure, are now more disturbingly beautiful than they have ever been in men's memory and perhaps in history, certainly more attractive and desirable than the models of the most famous statues and paintings in the past; Botticelli's 'Venus', Titian's 'Sacred Love', and Raphael's 'Fornarina' would not make anybody turn around in the streets. Italian girls are more attractive, and approachable, not only than in the past but also than in many other countries today. Feminine beauty, before the war, like prosperity, seemed to be a privilege reserved to rare local cases, but widespread among many foreigners, especially Americans. Smart Italian young men of the time anxiously awaited the disembarking of the American girls in the spring, well-shaped, well-washed, well-dressed, and incredibly long-legged, who always looked as if they really arrived from another and younger world. They were healthy, witty, free, and unafraid. Now our women, too, have somehow surprisingly acquired long and shapely legs; they have lovely and pert faces, overbearing breasts, thin waists, and harmonious behinds like double mandolins. But, more than this, they have simple, unembarrassed, friendly manners: they can say tender words with heart-breaking candour or, at times, prettily pronounce unprintable ones.Foreign men, it is true, have always pursued women in Italy. The courtesans of Venice and Rome during the Renaissance were much appreciated. The Carnival season in Rome and Venice was for centuries merely an excuse to chase masked girls through the streets. Now the hunt has acquired a more determined, almost desperate, character. Many visitors are fascinated by the girls to the point that they often lose all powers of coherent speech and judgment: they are bewitched by the girls' sinuous and provocative walk, their inviting and hospitable ways, their smart clothes which often look as if they are sewn on them, or, more especially, their tiny two-piece bathing suits. Foreign men sometimes follow some specially provocative specimens in the street like hungry dogs following butcher boys delivering meat. Striking up an acquaintance is not always difficult, in a caffè or on the beach. Many men easily, too easily perhaps, find their way to some girl's bedroom. Some of these always fall deeply in love. They earnestly want to get married. They want to bring back a living souvenir of the land of sunshine and amiable ways to their gloomy countries. At the end of every summer, there are men who threaten suicide (a few kill themselves), for the love of a beautiful woman, with whom they can scarcely talk, and who would possibly discredit them and make them unhappy if she became their wife.Many foreign women think Italians are irresistible. The men too have a long-established reputation. Some are indeed irresistible. Their charm, skill, lack of scruples, and boldness are proverbial. Most of them always feel free as birds, even the married ones, or those who are deeply in love or engaged. Many are disposed to make love at the drop of a hat, anywhere, in a car, on a beach, behind a bush, on mountain summits, under water, or even in a bed, during the day or at night. They are not too difficult to please, young or mature men, fat or lean, peasants or city playboys with Maserati cars. They seldom waste time. All that a woman has to do in many cases is throw a meaningful glance across a café table, smile cryptically to herself, wave a hand, or put an unlighted cigarette in her mouth and look vainly for matches in her handbag. The better men take just a little more effort to attract. Naturally, some women, the ugly ducklings with flat chests, the middle-aged who still feel young at heart, the lonely and well-preserved grandmothers, all come to Italy with the hope of enriching their lives with the souvenir of an Italian love affair, a pagan romance under the stars, by the sea, accompanied by guitar music. There are even inexpensive camps, collections of straw huts on lonely beaches in Southern Italy and on the islands, founded by foreign institutions, dedicated to the meeting of neglected and impecunious foreign women and eager Italian men, whatever men the primitive surroundings provide, fishermen, sailors, soldiers, and unemployed farm-hands, with brilliantine in their curly hair and flashing smiles.Many foreigners come back the next year. Some come back more and more often. Some stay a little longer, every time, and decide to live in Italy for a spell. A few eventually discover to their dismay they can no longer leave. They cannot help feeling there is something cowardly in the decision to live here for ever. Their sensations have been well described long ago by Nathaniel Hawthorne, a tourist in Rome, who watched himself gradually turning into an expatriate: 'The years, after all, have a kind of emptiness,' he wrote, 'when we spend too many of them on a foreign shore. We defer the reality of life, in such cases, until a future moment, when we shall again breathe our native air; but, by and by, there are no future moments; or, if we do return, we find that the native air has lost its invigorating quality, and that life has shifted its reality to the spot where we have deemed ourselves only temporary residents. Thus, between two countries, we have none at all, or only that little space of either in which we finally lay down our discontented bones.'How many of these transplanted foreigners are there in Italy today? A few hundred thousand? One million? Nobody knows. Some are inconspicuous.

They are the Italianizanten, in love with the place, those who have always been here and who know why they are here. A special mental disposition, an elective affinity makes them honorary Italians. A few of them are more Italian than the Italians themselves: they know more about the country, its literature, its manners, its past history, its hidden treasures, and its possibilities than many natives. Those who interest me are the others. The most conspicuous are naturally the rich, the millionaires from turbulent South American countries afraid of revolutions, the successful artists, the Hollywood actors, the dilettanti rentiers, the world-weary aesthetes with Swiss bank accounts.They spend a season, a few years, or a lifetime in a house in Florence or in some stately Medicean villa overlooking the town, among priceless paintings and frescoed walls (like Queen Victoria, the Brownings, Mark Twain, Bernard Berenson, Aldous Huxley). They rent a palazzo on the Canal Grande, complete with gilded gondolas and liveried gondoliers (like Lord Byron, de Musset, Ruskin, Wagner, Barbara Hutton, and Cole Porter). Or, like a character out of a Henry James novel, they settle in the piano nobile, the noble first floor with the high-ceilinged rooms, in some Roman palazzo. Some prefer to inhabit quaint and dramatic houses, perched on hill-tops, overlooking the sea or a lake (like Shelley at Lerici; Axel Munthe, Norman Douglas and Krupp von Bohlen in Capri; Gorki in Sorrento).The rich come because, understandably, they want to avoid paying heavy income tax at home, or have their fortunes riddled by death duties. Others want to go on living opulently, surrounded by servants, as the rich have always done, and as it will be possible to do in Italy for but a few years more. The nouveaux riches crave the reassurance of noble surroundings. All of them want a maximum of visible splendour with the minimum possible outlay of money. But there is something more. Many clearly want to withdraw from the rude turmoil of active life, to preserve and cherish a romantic illusion about themselves, their excellent taste, genius, beauty, and rank, which could be shattered by unkind confrontations in their own country. They pathetically want not to be contradicted by facts.Then there are the poor expatriates. They greatly outnumber the rich, and they increase yearly. Many of them, as they were in past centuries, are artists, some are good artists, others are the struggling young, the old failures and the young hopefuls, the successful and those who will never amount to anything; they know it, and do not care. Italy suits them, a country in which one may work, decant one's own and other people's ideas, experiment, meet stimulating people and generally develop latent possibilities. There are all kinds: writers, painters, dancers, musicians, actors, sculptors, poets, or followers of new and as yet unnamed arts. Some are mere dabblers, dilettanti, people whose love for art is much greater than their modest capacities and talents, who somehow eke out a living in artistic surroundings, on the margin of the art world. For all these, Italy is the world's timeless refuge, the river bank on which to withdraw from the rapidly rushing stream.The inartistic impecunious are perhaps more numerous than the artists. They are of all sorts. There are German war widows, decrepit French courtesans who live on the prizes of love games of a forgotten era, Indian Army colonels, pensioned Scandinavian school teachers, American grandparents who dislike Southern California, misfits, déclassés, divorcees of all nations, and all kinds of beachcombers. Many live in the big cities, where they often rent tiny furnished flats in decrepit houses or artists' studios. They avoid the busy industrial centres and the brazenly new and anonymous blocks of flats. They prefer Italy picturesque, poor, and decrepit. There is comfort in decay. Many also prefer the historic hill-towns, the villages perched on mountain tops, the tiny fishing ports along the coast, the rocky islands. Some of the delightful spots impecunious foreigners discovered in past generations, like Capri, Ischia, Ravello, Taormina, or Bordighera (where Edward Lear lived his last years and wrote his last limericks), have now become very famous, expensive, noisy, and overcrowded. But there are always others, new unspoiled ones.The impecunious wear shabby but picturesque clothes, sometimes cook their own meals, sometimes board with peasants or fishermen, or eat in a cheap pizzeria or wineshop for a few lire. Ordinary food is as good as in provincial France or as it once was in China. Most of these poor foreigners say they came to Italy mainly because the climate is milder and the money goes further than anywhere else. What they like, of course, is not only low prices and sunshine but a place where indigence looks like modest affluence by contrast with the surrounding poverty, where poverty can be worn with dignity, as it is not noticeable or embarrassing. Lack of wealth, in fact, is seldom the object of pity or contempt among ordinary Italians. It is considered the natural condition of man. Poverty is a private matter, like religion, politics, or other qualities, habits, and vices, not to be questioned. What these people look for, in other words, is the Italians' traditional indifference to other people's personal appearance and idiosyncrasies, poverty among them, and indifference which verges on indulgence and sometimes on encouragement.The Italy of these foreigners, both rich and poor, is mainly an imaginary country, not entirely corresponding to the Italy of the Italians. The expatriates often do not really pay attention to, see clearly, or like the Italy of the Italians. Many know too few natives, to begin with, and see them too fuzzily to understand them and their problems. The poor foreigners mostly meet servants, hotel concierges, waiters, shopkeepers, an artisan or two, the postman, and sundry hangers-on. The rich also meet bright members of the local café society, the Italians who speak foreign languages, have travelled abroad, sometimes have foreign relatives, and drink whisky. Few ever know the great mass of the people. These foreigners treat natives kindly enough: many mistake the amused and indulgent manners with which the Italians treat them, which sometimes approach the condescension with which one treats children, for courtesy and sympathy.The problems of contemporary Italy are too disturbing and too difficult to understand; local political events have always seemed mysterious and negligible. Before the war, many who disliked the Fascist régime nevertheless thought it was a harmless and

picturesque buffoonery, 'good enough for the natives'. After the war, there were some who believed that a little Communism 'would do the Italians good'. Ezra Pound's ideas about Mussolini and his government, before and during the war, are perhaps the most illustrious example of this kind of utter but honest confusion. There is also a minority who heartily dislike the Italians. These think that the beautiful scenery, which is the stage setting of their own dream life, is incongruously cluttered up by millions of extras, men, women, boisterous children, and ruined by vespas, fluorescent lighting, noise, modern constructions, pretensions and complications of all kinds. The country most of these foreigners really inhabit is the tiny Italy of the expatriates, made up of a few celebrated quarters of the ancient cities, some towns, villages, famous landscapes, three or four islands, where they consort mostly with people like themselves.Many find, at one point, like Hawthorne, that they can no longer leave this practically non-existent country. They can no longer face the harsher world where they came from, where they see things perhaps too clearly, and where every word in their familiar language has a precise meaning. They have become hopelessly addicted to the amiable and mild ways of Italy. Many also have nobody left to go back to. They cling to their little lair, the view of the sea from the hill, the view of the Coliseum from the window if you turn your neck far enough to the right, the view of the Grand Canal, the roofs of Florence, the decayed villas of Rapallo, a clutter of antiques they picked up during the years, and their set habits. Italy is filled with people growing old, who can no longer think of leaving, living alone, comforted by a cat or a dog, waited on by a servant, an honest person at times but often enough an unscrupulous maid who feeds her family with what she steals. A day comes when these old people grow ill and helpless, far from the familiar sights and sounds of their youth, self-exiled for reasons which have become dim in their memories, in an alien place which they never really saw as it is and quite understood. At the end, they wait for death, some of them still dressed in gaudy and youthful resort clothes, surrounded by foreign sights and people who have somehow become the necessary props and conventional supporting characters of the imaginary drama of their lives. Many die every year and are buried hurriedly in the corner of an Italian cemetery reserved for heathens or heretics; some bodies are shipped home to practically unknown and indifferent relatives. Many die without having really discovered why they chose to live the last years of their lives in Italy, of all places.Many idle expatriates are not old but young. They do not seek a princely life of splendour at reduced rates, modest and easy comfort, or the slightly cowardly peace without competition and adverse criticism which Italy can afford. They do not want to nourish illusions about themselves, pursue unusual inclinations, or prepare themselves for a future of glory. Many of them are not weak and desperate but vigorous, hopeful, lively, and healthy. On late summer afternoons in Rome, when the sea breeze, or ponentino, cools the leaden air, these young foreigners of both sexes, uncombed, sun-burned, wearing crumpled cotton clothes and dusty sandals, the men sometimes looking strangely feminine and the girls strangely masculine, crowd the stairway of Trinità dei Monti on the Piazza di Spagna.They lean against the old travertine stone balustrade, sit or lie on the steps, and wait. For what or for whom do they wait? Without knowing it, they occupy one of the spots where, in past times, one hundred years or so ago, other youths met, lazy artists' models waiting for a job. There, on the Spanish steps, sat holy monks with white beards, brigands, pilgrims with their scallop shells, and beautiful contadine in their costumes, prepared to pray at some painter's wayside shrine, off-duty bandits with conical hats and bushy beards, Holy Families appropriately grouped. There were theatrical assassins, Judases, Bacchuses, young Saint Johns, shepherds in cloaks of goatskin or buffalo hide, looking like antique satyrs, white-bearded Eternal Fathers, and fierce-eyed peasants from the hills. Without knowing it, these young foreigners also occupy one of the spots where, before the artists' models, thieves, murderers, and other desperate people, pursued by the Papal gendarmes, once found inviolable asylum. According to an ancient privilege, they could not be arrested as long as they did not stray from there.The contemporary youths have an improbable appearance of make-believe like the models of old, and look, in their shabby and crumpled clothes, as if they, too, had run away from home and were seeking some sort of asylum. They also are left alone by the Italian authorities, to do and dress as they please, as if they were protected by some ancient privilege. From what unnamed and unknown modern crimes and horrors are these young foreigners fleeing? What mysterious emptiness in their souls is filled by merely standing on Italian soil?