

Italy. *Four books on Italy occupy our attention this week. Undoubtedly destined to be the most widely read is Jerre Mangione's "Reunion in Sicily," in which, as Henry James Forman remarks in his review, those rare attributes good taste and the gift of good prose are happily mingled. The legendary beauty and present acute distress of his "liberated" ancestral island come feelingly alive in the pages of this delightful successor to his popular "Mount Allegro." Mangione's book serves well as an introduction to Giuseppe Marotta's pleasing and colorful "San Gennaro Never Says No" (or, perhaps, the order should be reversed). For both books seem to have caught the struggle under the sun that shines so brightly over Sicily and Naples alike. As final flavoring we have journalist Cecil Roberts producing one of the best of the books about Rome. And for the traveler, literary or otherwise, there is Horace Sutton's guidebook "Footloose in Italy."*

Once the Playground of the Gods

REUNION IN SICILY. By Jerre Mangione. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 288 pp. \$2.75.

By HENRY JAMES FORMAN

IF AN American of foreign descent, as so many of us are, wishes to return to the home of his ancestors and see how they tick, the island of Sicily was made to order as that home. The people are colorful, homogeneous, loyal, talkative, fiercely proud, and "blood poor." They are convinced that only a Sicilian man can think straight, that only a Sicilian girl makes the best of wives, that Sicilian blood is a priceless essence. Mr. Mangione was born of Sicilian parents in Rochester, New York. He had already written about Sicilians in America. After the war he went to the ancestral island to write about Sicilians in Sicily.

His resulting book, "Reunion in Sicily," makes easy and delightful reading. Mr. Mangione happens to possess not only good taste but the gift of good prose, none too common now in any land. He is a young man. But as a girl of Sicilian parentage he meets on the steamer informs him, "We Sicilians are born old, wise—and worried."

They are. But they are the gayest of worried people in Europe. Like other old races, and particularly Mediterranean races, they can be light-hearted in the midst of misery and joke at their own expense. They have long since discovered that to be somber only makes the face long. They have been through a war—yes. But they have been through so many wars. Everybody has conquered Sicily. Nobody has conquered the Sicilians.

Their ancestry is so mixed no analytical chemist could possibly identify its elements. Scratch a Sicilian and you may find a Phoenician, a Moor, a Norman, almost everything. But the ancestry they are proudest of is that of ancient Hellas. For was this not Magna Graecia? The Greek colonies of the ancient world on this island were the American Colonies of their time. They achieved a wealth, an

ease of life, a luxury that surpassed in many respects the motherland. Plato was a little snobbish about them. But, then, they almost kept him a prisoner there, simply because they did not want to let him leave. They could produce Olympic athletes and speedy horses but not Platos.

Today, as Mr. Mangione found, they are not thinking much about either race horses or Plato. They are concerned about a competent government that might bring them a decent economic condition. They are so desperately poor—and resentful. Relative after relative—nearly the whole population is related to Mr. Mangione—demands: "If the Americans did not want to govern us why did they conquer us?" Their experience of conquerors does not square with our idealistic way of liberating a people for self-government. When Mr. Mangione tried to explain this to them they were too polite to tell him that he was talking through his hat. They changed the subject.

But as relatives they were fiercely loyal to their American nephew, cousin, or whatnot. They numerously met him on station platforms and showed a possessive devotion to his blood. When at Agrigento he was about to go to a hotel an uncle indignantly protested: "Please stop talking to me as if we were strangers. How can you possibly suggest such

THE AUTHOR: It was salting a canteloupe to put an Amish hat on Jerre (Gerlando Amoroso) Mangione, but the portraitist thought it made him look more Sicilian—and perhaps less like a copywriter who spends hours in the library digging up Ripley-like intelligence. ("Did you know that during the French Revolution children used to play with miniature guillotines?") Anyway, since his mid-teens, when he was an extra in stock and chorus boy in "Sally," he's had a flair for the dramatic. Just recently the Experimental Theatre in Philadelphia, where he lives, presented a playscript of his "Mount Allegro," a sunny reminiscence of the *paisanos* in Rochester, N. Y., now undergoing further refinements by him and Edwin Peeples for who knows what glossier boards. Mangione's first paid writing assignments (at age ten) were ghosted love letters for ardent relatives; a precocity that flowered from insatiable reading—"most of it in the seclusion of bathrooms and under beds, because my family had the notion that too much reading would lead to insanity." At Syracuse University he founded and edited the *Chap Book* and after graduation got a job with *Time* "to write articles for the Business and Finance page, on the grounds that since I knew nothing about the subject I would be able to treat it interestingly." No criterion that, he was soon freed for handsomer rewards elsewhere, among them with publisher R. M. McBride, the U. S. Resettlement Administration, Census Bureau, Federal Writers' Project, Department of Justice, and Immigration and Naturalization Service. He also visited Sicily twice, contributed book reviews, articles, and stories to New York newspapers and national magazines, and published "The Ship and the Flame," a novel. And he'd still rather waltz than write. To avoid buckling down to that one can, he asserts, "accomplish almost anything."

—R. G.



a thing?" "I may stay a year," said Mr. Mangione. "Stay ten years," said the uncle and the argument was closed.

Then he began to absorb the beauty of Sicily, which is legendary, and the distress of Sicily, which is acute. Numerous as are the books about Sicily, it always seems new with every new book. It is now a quarter of a century since this reviewer wrote about that sea and sky and the matchless beauty of the land itself. But to read about it afresh in a well-written book is a memory-stirring experience. Are those Greek temple ruins still as perfect and are the golden mimosa trees as ever-lovely? No book can really convey the feel of that landscape, once the playground of the gods. The joy of life finds its proper theatre here and some day the present Sicilians will yet emerge from their distress.

The distress originates not in nature but in man. As a certain Don Gaetano, a retired custom shoemaker of Rochester, said:

Politically we do not know where we are going. That is why we have so many political parties and why, instead of trusting any of our leaders, we spend most of our time throwing mud at them. Our experience with Fascism has made us men of bad faith. We don't believe anyone. We don't believe anything. We measure other men by the bad faith in our hearts.

That is why so many parties bedevil them and so many slogans confuse them. Here are some Mr. Mangione copied from a single wall: "Viva Comminismo." "Viva Separatismo." "Viva Socialismo." "We Want an American Sicily!" "Sicily—the 49th American State." "Vote for the Monarchy." "Viva DDT."

America, despite the work of the bombers on what Churchill called the soft underbelly of Europe, has left a lingering nostalgia in the hearts of many Sicilians. Some, as we see, want Sicily to become the Forty-ninth state of the Union. But many of the young women who had become friendly with American soldiers live with the hope that either the soldiers will return to claim them or that they themselves can go to America. Otherwise life seems to them hopeless. It is so even with the young men. Mr. Mangione asked Dante, a cousin of his, what he could send him from the United States. The cousin shouted: "Hedy Lamarr!"

Altogether Mr. Mangione has written a sincere, a readable, and a useful book. In its way it is a contribution not alone to the literature of travel, but to the feeling of responsibility to which we must more and more awaken.



Naples & the Eternal City

SAN GENNARO NEVER SAYS NO.

By Giuseppe Marotta. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 255 pp. \$3.

AND SO TO ROME. By Cecil Roberts.

New York: The Macmillan Co. 284 pp. \$5.

By LAWRENCE GRANT WHITE

HERE in "San Gennaro Never Says No" is the Naples of the pungent alleys inhabited by the desperately poor, who in their losing struggle for existence are obliged to exercise their native talent for swindling and thievery. But the squalor is bathed in Neapolitan sunlight, just as the sordid tales themselves are illuminated by the author's brilliant presentation.

Giuseppe Marotta is a journalist, born in Naples, who has recently returned there after twenty years' absence in the North of Italy. He is a good reporter; in search of copy he masqueraded as an employee of the gas company and interviewed the inhabitants of the slums while he was taking down the pitifully small readings of their gas meters. He talked to the fishermen — those who fish legitimately with nets and also the "bombardiers," who fish illegally with dynamite; with the cab drivers and the black marketeers, and with "King Giuseppe," the beneficent ward politician who helps the poor with money and food and lodging. From each he

gets a good story, which he tells with gusto in an intimate, colloquial style, without any pretentious trimmings.

It is a pleasant book to read, a book of the moment, giving a contemporary picture in which, perhaps, the local color may be laid on with too heavy a brush. But how can one describe Naples in black and white? Naples is the most superlatively colorful of all cities. Her sky and her sea are the bluest, her sunsets the pinkest and purplest, and even Neapolitan ice cream, to be found all over the world, is the closest possible approximation of the solar spectrum.

Naples was at her colorful best a few days after the city was taken by the Allies, when a pyrotechnic display was staged simultaneously by God and man. Seen from the terrace of the Palazzo Donn' Anna, the night sky was darkened by a pall of smoke, forty thousand feet high, from Vesuvius; in the smoke were periodical explosions of lava and bursts of lightning. From the crater cherry-red rivers of lava were streaming slowly down the mountain side, engulfing villages in their path. Then came an air raid and hell let loose from the antiaircraft batteries, the oerlikons casting necklaces of blazing rubies across the diamond sunbursts of the high-altitude shrapnel. This was the usual spectacular pattern of air raids but what made it unforgettable were the matchless stage settings of the Bay and the contrast between the

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