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THE INCREDIBLE ITALIANS

(Continued from page 12)

action against him and his rhetoric.

Around the time of the First World War an attempt at obtaining international importance, even using some of the modern methods of propaganda (manifestos, speeches), had been made by F. T. Marinetti with his movement called "futurism," a noisy affair intended to influence not only literature (e.g., with an idea of poems as *parole in libertà*, "words at liberty," and other such harmless, mildly offensive, and hence catchy bywords: "Let's kill the moonlight... The gondola is the rocking-chair of cretins," he would say for instance in public speeches to the Venetians), but also art styles in general and even manners and feelings. The movement had no lasting literary importance or influence. Marinetti's strategies are indicative in connection with some of our earlier remarks: to launch his movement he went to Paris; his first manifestos, in French, were published in a Parisian newspaper (he was bilingual).

After the First World War a less noisy but literarily more significant attempt at capturing international audiences was made by Massimo Bon-

tempelli with his review entitled *900*. During its first years, it was published in French. Such writers as Corrado Alvaro and Alberto Moravia published their first stories there in the late Twenties. Again a tag was possible, the notion of a movement called "900" (standing in Italian for "twentieth century"), though entirely indefinite in its nature, was often repeated as a kind of formula.

A SLOGAN that never caught on, as far as serious literature is concerned, is the "Fascist" slogan; a Fascist literature in Italy to all practical purposes did not exist. To some this may seem a pity, for a shelf of tales about Fascist hierarchs and warriors drawn to heroic scale, or a collection of odes celebrating the dictator could have had some interest as period-pieces or literary monstrosities. The world expected a critical, rebellious, or satiric literature reflecting life under Fascism; for obvious reasons this could not openly come out of Italy as long as the totalitarian regime lasted. Nor did foreign audiences possess sufficient interest and linguistic equipment to ap-

Your Literary I.Q.

By Howard Collins

LITERARY MONEY

Dr. Dan Laurence, of New York University, asks you to identify the following literary figures whose lives were affected by money, and also the works in which they appear. Allowing five points for each correct answer, a score of sixty is par, seventy is very good, and eighty or better is excellent. Answers on page 37.

1. A good-natured young man gives his last two guineas to a highwayman upon discovering that he has been driven to crime by direst poverty.
2. A woman wheedles money from her husband to pay a debt of which he has no knowledge but which was responsible for saving his life.
3. A powerful magnate tells his estranged daughter that his religion is being a millionaire.
4. An old man is forced by his son to choose between the woman they both love and the fortune which has been stolen from him.
5. An army officer causes the death of an old woman and her ward when he attempts to discover a secret formula for gambling success.
6. A successful paint manufacturer goes bankrupt in preference to permitting an unscrupulous partner to involve him in a dishonest business deal.
7. A young lady receives an unexpected inheritance from an uncle whose son has requested the bequest so that she may be free to follow her natural bent.
8. A wealthy man, endowed with every grace and the envy of all the townsfolk, goes home and ends his life.
9. A misanthropic old man hoards his money for fifteen years, only to have it stolen by the son of the town's most influential citizen.
10. A businessman is haled into court to pay a fatal forfeit for having failed to make good on a usurer's loan.

preciate a certain type of between-the-lines, allegorical, or cryptographic writing which was not uncommon in Italy during the last years of Fascism (cf. the already-mentioned "In Sicily," or some of the allegories in Moravia's collection entitled in Italian "I sogni del pigro," not to mention his novel "The Fancy Dress Party," or the definitely cryptographic "Man Is Strong," by Corrado Alvaro).

What readers outside Italy wanted they found in the only Italian writer who had attained a wide American reputation between Pirandello and the present revival of interest, Ignazio Silone. Italians generally, as is well known, find it hard to grant Silone a high place in the history of their recent literature; his character-drawing seems shallow and *passé*, his writing and his dialogue clumsy, his situations scarcely persuasive however noble the spirit that animates them. Nor did success seem to help him; his first novel, "Fontamara," possessed an intensity and a vernacular forcefulness not to be found in the succeeding and more ambitious ones. Since his return to Italy from exile he has written little; he has been most active as a wise and influential member of one branch of the Socialist Party. "A Handful of Blackberries," his only novel to be published here since "The Seed Beneath the Snow" in 1942, will appear this year.

While Italy did not develop a Fascist literature of apologia and celebration, and on the other hand could not develop one of topical satire and invective as long as the dictatorship lasted, we should recall that during those years most of her writers did manage to maintain what seems an essential premise for the existence of any sort of literary civilization: the sense that literature is one of the arts. By art I suppose we all mean not only something emphatically different from documentary information or propaganda but also something which, as a form of knowledge and a record of experience, is infinitely more relevant, subtle, and mature than those forms of communication; and also, incidentally, more entertaining. There is nothing exceptional about such notions yet I suppose Italian writers have in the ordinary practice of their craft implied them as clearly and naturally as anyone working today.

IN maintaining such artistic concepts of literature, the Italian counterparts of the "little magazines" obviously played their role. In the period following the First World War, besides the already mentioned 900, a considerable importance is attributed to the Roman *La Ronda*, whose function

was a sort of "call to order" in the name of classicism against the noisier and shallower varieties of the *avant garde* on the one side and literary commercialism on the other. Some of the principal exponents of a kind of literature which is most difficult to translate (because it depends on an especially intense and subtle use of linguistic effects) emerged from the Roman circle around that review—Emilio Cecchi, Vincenzo Cardarelli, Antonio Baldini, and the most classical of the recently translated novelists, Riccardo Bacchelli. There was formed, in that and other groups, a kind of *avant garde* which had no longer the aimless bombast of the "futurists" but had, instead, quite subdued and exclusive qualities.

This *avant garde*, especially in its poetic products but also in its prose and criticism, was often accused of ivory-tower preciousness, of lack of real content, of obscurity, of hermeticism. While Fascism lasted some of those accusations were more clearly suspect than they are in other countries, for the critic could conceal within them the recommendation that a specific, propagandistic political coloring be adopted by literature. This did not happen to any important extent, but it is only fair to say that in the peculiar situation of Italy the so-called "difficult" writing did contribute to the preservation of certain standards of artistic integrity at a time when language, style (and style is, in the last analysis, the concrete sign of a

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT No. 458

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 458 will be found in the next issue.

HTMHJX WZXLENXL H

XNPDEQZKHLF MUD KFYFE

RZKQX RHNTL MZLU

UZX XNAFEZDE.

—IDUK G. GDTTZKX.

Answer to Crypt No. 457

The superior man is polite but not cringing; the common man is cringing but not polite.

—CONFUCIUS.

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