

By the same author

STORIES TOTO TOLD ME
IN HIS OWN IMAGE
CHRONICLES OF THE HOUSE OF BORGIA
HADRIAN THE SEVENTH
DON TARQUINIO
THE WEIRD OF THE WANDERER
THE DESIRE AND PURSUIT OF THE WHOLE
HUBERT'S ARTHUR
NICHOLAS GRABBE
DON RENATO
COLLECTED POEMS
THE ARMED HANDS

BARON CORVO

The Venice Letters

EDITED AND
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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derfully. And of course, Peter has been talking. Well, all I can say is that if this is a real Knight of the Round Table and knows his way to Caerleon, you may depend on me to collect information, which I of course will verify *the first moment I am able*. Peter, Gildo, Carlo and the Greek (and I take it also Eduardo) are private practitioners: for none of them have let slip the password. But this florescent creature one would think is a professional. However there will be news tomorrow. Here I stop to leave a blank space to show through the envelope. N.B. 'Signore' not 'Seniore' which means 'Elder.' Do write. I have only you to speak to. R.

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November 28, 1909.
Continued from Last Issue.

I had another smack in the face the next day. In the afternoon I went round to the Monte di Pietà (the government pawn-shop) being in funds, intending to pay up interest on and re-pawn two bundles of silver curiosities (antique rings, seals, chains and a massive cross) which I had put in six months ago. They were for 34 and 57 francs respectively. And I was informed that they had been sold (according to rule) that very day at 11 a.m. to a little jeweller who deals in antiquities for 7.50 more than the loan made and interest on it. Which 7.50 francs they handed over to me. I got the address of the jeweller and went to see him. After about an hour's quarrelling he let me pawn them privately with him at double rates, as I hadn't enough to redeem them: that is to say he holds them for three months more, not making me any loan but accepting double interest, 12% instead of 6%, and if I pay that I can have the things in three months at 50 and 73 francs respectively. I was frightfully upset: but what could I do?

From there I went off to the Quay of San Basegio on the Zattere to see the Knight of the Round Table. It was getting dusk and I was just in time to see his lissome muscular figure come dancing down the long plank from the ship with his last sack of dried lily flowers silhouetted against the sunset. As he passed, I said, 'Do me the pleasure to come and drink a little beaker of wine.' 'With the

greatest possible respect to your valorous face,' he answered, passing on. When he had delivered his load in the warehouse, he came out and joined me. While he was working he had on a pair of thin flannel trousers tightly tucked into his socks, canvas slippers, and a thin sleeveless shirt open from neck to navel. Over this, his day's work done, he wore a voluminous cloak of some thick dark stuff and a broad-brimmed hat. He flung one end of the cloak over his shoulder like a toga. I describe his attire thus particularly, for reasons which will appear later on. 'Take me,' I said, 'to a quiet wine shop where we can have much private conversation.' We went through a few back alleys to a little quay in a blind canal off the Rio Malcontent where there was a very decent wineshop kept by an apparent somnambulist. I called for a litre of New Red (very fresh and heady) at 6d. We sat at the back of the shop among the barrels, our two chairs being together on one side of the only table there. The counter with its sleepy proprietor was between us and the door; and no one else was present.

I asked him to tell me about the Round Table; and took care that he drank two glasses to my one. Of course I fed him with cigarettes. He said there was formerly a house on the Fondamenta Osmarin: but, owing to the fear which struck all Italy last year, when Austria seized Herzegovina and suddenly placed 80,000 men on the frontier where Italy has only 6,000 (remember this frontier is not 30 miles away, and Venice I know was frightened out of her wits) then the Venetians took a hatred of all Germans and went and smashed the windows, calling the boys and men there 'Eulenbergs'. Wherefore the committee (*comitato*) of the club, for it was a private club of Signiori of the very gravest respectability, moved the club to a house which they purchased at Padova, about an hour and a half by steamer and train. He said that the club used to be open day and night; and ten boys were there always ready for use. The fee was 7 fr. payment for the room and what you pleased to the boy, but you had to pay the latter in the presence of the steward and never more than 5 fr. even though you stayed all day or all night, i.e. 5 fr. and 7 fr. for 12 hours. Beside the staff, any boy could bring a Signore. And many did, chiefly school-boys at some of the public or technical schools who liked to make a little pocket-money. But now, unfortunately, these and other Venetian boys were out of employment; for at Padova there is a great University with about

1,300 students of all ages, besides many schools; and students were generally in want of money. However, some of the Venetian unemployed occasionally have the luck to find an employer; in which case they make a little journey to Padova together, generally from Saturday to Monday, and derive mutual satisfaction from a Sabbath's concubinage. (I'm translating his Italian almost literally, because it's so comically naive.) He himself began at 13 or thereabouts in this way. One of his cousins being left an orphan suddenly came to live in his house and sleep in his bed. The cousin was 14 and, the bed being narrow, there was a certain mixture which pleased both. And suddenly both spat together. (You'd have shrieked to see his great black eyes and his big white teeth and his rosy young lily-fragrant face simply burst out laughing.) This being very diverting they hugged and hugged, belly to belly and did it again. So for many nights. Then a whore ate 80 francs of his elder brother, act. 20, and gave him a disease, very disgraceful and perturbing to the family. Whereat, he and his cousin congratulated themselves on knowing a safer pleasure, and vowed to touch no whores. In a little while his cousin (they were both occasional gondoliers as I had suspected) heard of the Osmarin. A patron took him there. Amadeo Amadei, rather bucked, also went and asked for a job. They said 'Bring a Signore'. So he went and prayed to the Black Madonna of Spain at San Francesco della Vigna and she sent him a Count. Then he began. Many Counts and Princes and illustrious Signori had he served there, having much strength and ingenuity in finding out ways to give pleasure, all of which pleased him too, as well as filling his pocket.

He found his patrons in this way. His first, the Count, had spoken to him on the Giardinetto where he was by chance lounging one morning, being out of work, and his shirt being open as usual, because he was appassionate for the air, the Count had stroked his breast while saying that he was a fine boy. To whom he said that he was as God made him and preferred to be naked. Upon which the Count took him to the Osmarin for the day. Thereafter, he always went with his breast bare, even in Piazza, and soon Signori walked after him, to whom he nodded in the first discreet corner and so he gained patrons. But, since the Club was moved to Padova, it was difficult for an honest lad – he is 16½ – to find a way of employing his nights. During the day he works as a stevedore along the Zattere

or in the harbour of Marittima, earning 3.50 generally, of which he has to give 3 fr. to his father, also a stevedore and earning the same. His elder brother is doing military service. His cousin gondoloes for a merchant, i.e. a grocer with whom he lives and sleeps. One younger brother of 12 earns 1.50 as a milk-boy. Beside these three there are a mother and grandmother, five sisters and three small brothers to be kept out of the joint earnings of 8 fr. a day. Naturally he wants to earn money for himself.

He assured me that he knew incredible tricks for amusing his patrons. 'First, Sior, see my person,' he said. And the vivacious creature did all which follows in about 30 seconds of time. Not more. I have said that we were sitting side by side of the little table. Moving, every inch of him, as swiftly and smoothly as a cat, he stood up, casting a quick glance into the shop to make sure that no one noticed. Only the sleepy proprietor slept there. He rolled his coat into a pillow and put it on my end of the table, ripped open his trousers, stripped them down to his feet, and sat bare bottomed on the other end. He turned his shirt up right over his head, holding it in one hand, opened his arms wide and lay back along the little table with his shoulders on the pillow (so that his breast and belly and thighs formed one slightly slanting lane unbroken by the arch of the ribs, as is the case with flat distention) and his beautiful throat and his rosy laughing face strained backward while his widely open arms were an invitation. He was just one brilliant rosy series of muscles, smooth as satin, breasts and belly and groin and closely folded thighs with (in the midst of the black blossom of exuberant robustitude) a yard like a rose-tipped lance. And – the fragrance of his healthy youth and of the lily flower's dust was intoxicating. He crossed his ankles, ground his thighs together with a gently rippling motion, writhed his groin and hips once or twice and stiffened into the most inviting mass of fresh meat conceivable, laughing in my face as he made his offering of lively flesh. And the next instant he was up, his trousers buttoned, his shirt tucked in and his cloak folded around him. The litre of wine was gone. I called for another. 'Sior' he said, 'half a litre this time, with permission.' So we made it half. Would I not like to take him to Padova from Saturday till Monday? Indeed I would. Nothing better. But because I see that you, my Amadeo, (i.e. Love God, quite a Puritan name) are a most discreet youth as well as a very capable one, I shall tell you my

secret: for, in fact, you shall know that I am no longer a rich English but a poor, having been ruined by certain traitors and obliged to deny myself luxuries. To hear that gave him affliction and much dolour. But he wished to say that he was all and entirely at my disposal simply for affection; because, feeling sure that he had the ability to provide me with an infinity of diversions, each different and far more exciting than its predecessor, he asked me as a favour, as a very great favour, that I should afterwards recommend him to nobles who were my friends. And, without stopping, he went on to describe his little games.

He would let me lie on his belly, my yard in the warmth of his thighs, his body in my arms, his throat in my mouth, or his breast, his shoulders, his armpits to be bitten at my will, and I might lie there, still, so still, with his legs held in mine, my hands under his thighs to guide my yard when it swelled, as swell it should, swell, swell, stiff, till all of me throbbled and I thrust and thrust, striving to pierce his thighs, thrusting 242 times fiercely and more fiercely, thrusting with all of me – then – suddenly – a little opening of the fat of the thighs to let the strong yard through, panting and spitting with joy. Such indeed was his power of giving joy that he would urge me on, even then, to thrust more, fifty times more, even through, and a second time spit deeper joy before my yard should tire. He, if I wished it so, would spit simultaneously. Or, if I preferred, would lie on me while I was resting and spit four times in twenty-two minutes of the clock.

This for the beginning of the evening. Then we could rest in each other's arms to recover breath for a little kissing and fondling. And he knew how to wriggle just a little all the time, flesh to flesh, entirely naked for the diversion of Signiori. Kissing, he thoroughly understood in every part, especially a certain kind of kissing in his patron's armpit, whose body he held in his arms, clasping his legs with his legs – kissing of a fury inconceivable, admirable for excitation. Next, he was ready to be rammed behind, spreading his knees as wide as they would go, and as for bounding meanwhile, well, I ought to see it, for truly he could bound (opening himself) so well that he would have the whole yard thrust among his hot interiors, till he himself was stiffened with it and the spitting took place in his throat. And also, as to spitting in the throat, let his patron but lie on the bed, legs hanging over the end, and he above would lie on the body,

breast to belly, arms in advance opening the thighs; and he would suck at his patron's yard with his mouth, but his own feet high on the bed head, his thighs also open, he would dangle his own yard to be sucked at will by his patron's lips till, both together at a signal, both might drink the juices of one another.

A little sleep, locked together, for an interval. Then, both being very hot, for the sake of coolness before sleeping for the night and to appease his patron's lust, he would extend himself across the bed, his legs hanging here and head and arms hanging there, his body and thighs ready to receive his patron. Let him mount. Let him ride. I stretched out with him to do with me what he will. And then a night of sleep in embrace. Who wakes first lies along and on the other, taking his fill of pleasure. Perhaps the patron wishes a little passage in the streets to take the air. We return and begin again. I shall always have new twists of my body for the Patron. We eat lunch. We spend the afternoon in bed. We eat dinner. Perhaps we see a kinematograph. Then another night, meeting together for diversion as before. In the morning early we wake and cling together before parting. And so to Venice. Sior, I pray you to try me. Only for affection (*pro affetto*) let me make you know what I can do. I said I couldn't afford it. Would I not then let him come to my palace. Any evening after five till six in the morning he was at the disposal of this Signore. No: I couldn't have him there; it was not convenient. Did he know of any place where we could go for an hour or so? It grieved him, but, No, not now. He had a patron, an artist, in Calle something on Zattere, also an English, who at 3.50 a day painted him naked on Wednesdays and used him for diversion then – but he could not take another patron there. I should think not, indeed. If I would go to Padova, he would pay his own fare. No. No. I was sorry. I was in despair. I would let him know when I could and then I most certainly would. Have some more wine. A thousand thanks but, no. Another cigarette. Twenty thousand thanks. So we came away.

He says that Peter and Zildo love each other and do everything to each other but to no one else, though he and Peter once had a whole summer night together on the lagoon in P's father's gondola. P. also is in much request among women but cannot spit more than twice a night. Whereas Amadeo has done it 8 times and vows that he could do 12 with a hot patron! Comments please. R.

BARON CORVO

and Heaven only knows how I'm to find it. However I've had another shot with a *post-card* now. And will report if anything occurs.

I'm glad you like my descriptions. Tell me, do they make you see, and feel, and give you pleasure, really? I particularly want to know: because writing is my trade, and I am always seeking to find out my faults and weaknesses so that I may improve them. Writing's a poor sort of job: but I want to get mine as perfect as I can. And it's only perfect when I succeed in exciting my reader, carrying him out of himself and his world, into my world and the things which I am describing. The newspaper critics (who are about as tedious a class of men as you can find anywhere) say that my writing is 'extraordinarily vivid'. But that's not good enough for me. It doesn't tell me what I want to know, viz. whether my writing makes my readers' imagination see and smell and hear and taste and feel what I describe. I'm afraid I made rather a failure of the Amadeo incident. But it was so utterly out of the common, even here – his quick hot chatter, all to the point, poured into my ear like a torrent – his feverish anxiety to give himself, every atom of himself inside and out, entirely away – his lightning-like exposure of his stock-in-trade, stripping in a flash, tossing his big, rosy, muscular nakedness backward – the wriggle, the stretching out of all, the instant of stiff waiting, the alluring grin – and then the quick recoil and covering up. What he would be like in use I tremble to imagine. The boiling passion of him was absolutely amazing. As far as I am concerned, I'm certain that a Saturday to Monday at Padua would simply be one long violent bout of naked wrestling and furious embracing so strengthening and invigorating to mind and body that I should be set up for a month. I'm not by any means a weak creature myself; and though I'm very slow to work up to a pitch, yet, when I am worked up I can behave quite terribly and not tire. And Amadeo is just ripe, just in his prime. I know that type so well. A year ago that day when he came to take the 3rd oar in my *pupparin*, he was a lanky uninteresting wafer. Since then, the work of dancing up and down planks with heavy sacks has filled him out, clothed him with most lovely pads of muscular sweet flesh, sweated his skin into rosy satin fineness and softness, made his black eyes and his strong white

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teeth and his mouth like blood glitter with health and vigour, and fired his passions to the heat of a seven times heated furnace. He'll be like this till Spring, say 3 months more. Then some great fat slow cow of a girl will just open herself wide, and lie quite still, and drain him dry. First, the rich bloom of him will go. Then he'll get hard and hairy. And, by July, he'll have a moustache, a hairy breast for his present great boyish bosom, brushes in his milky armpits, brooms on his splendid young thighs, and be just the ordinary stevedore to be found by scores on the quays. Oh Lord – and not to be able to devour his beauty so freely offered now! That's the sort he is. Do you know I'm convinced of this – there's a lot of lovely material utterly wasted and thrown away. Boys who *like* sporting with their own sex are rare. Oughtn't they therefore to be made welcome and carefully cultivated when they're found? And, isn't this a fact also? Given a boy, a fine strong healthy boy, who does actually enjoy the love of a male with all its naked joys, who burns for it, seeks it, flings himself gleefully into the ardent strivings of it with no reserve, with utter and entire abandon, offering himself a willing sacrifice or operating in turn with equal and greedy unreservedness, is it not a fact that such a one keeps his youthful freshness and vigour infinitely longer than the ordinary lad who futters the ordinary lass from puberty on? And isn't it also true that the passionate boy must have an outlet for his passion; and, if he (preferring the male) can't for whatever reason have what his nature prefers, doesn't he almost automatically sink into the arms of a female and instantly become 'man-like'. Look at Fausto. That Jew is a begetter of offspring. He certainly isn't a source of pleasure, pure pleasure, to his kind. He's young enough yet to be amusing, perhaps for ten minutes. But I defy anyone to regard him as a dainty morsel to devour, as a piece of sweet young flesh for the embracing of one's arms and thighs, as a lovely body panting with love to be hugged to one's own. And so I say with regard to all of the present set – unless they are used and cultivated *now*, they will flower at Easter, fruit at Midsummer, and be fallen by the Autumn. Of course there are others. But how to find them ready when wanted? – Now I must tell you about my typhoid boy and his brother. I think I mentioned the first to you, Bettamio by name. I used to go and see him every day when he had typhoid (caught at Castelfranco³⁹) last August. We went a very long way *in words* on the road of love then. He was

beautiful in bed, what I saw of him, which was not much, for his people were always present. But once we kissed hands. His father's a captain-engineer in the Navy. He lives with his mother (separated privately from the father on account of difference of temperament, but not divorced) and two brothers of 13 and 11 (he is 16) in a poor but very respectable way. When he got better, he took a clerkship at 7 fr. a week; and I used to walk home with him at night. Of course I don't go to his mother's house ever. (He was ill at an uncle's house.) A bachelor can't go to a semi-divorced woman's house. Well: we were very friendly. He is dark, tall, slim, straight, very sweet-spoken, with engaging manners and a charming way of fondling one's arms. In fact we had just got to the point when he would have been delighted to be kissed on parting. Kissing would have become habitual. And, a boy like that, although he does go occasionally to a bordel, would only have been too glad to learn the safer sweeter way. Well, one day he didn't keep an appointment. After that, for various reasons, I made no attempt to see him for some days. First, because I am easily offended: next, because I was desperately poor, miserable, and unable to take the next step, to do what I wanted, in short to go with him to Burano for a night and a day, say Sat. to Mond. where we could have slept together. And for several weeks, until yesterday actually, we neither met nor had any communication. We had no quarrel. I simply made no movement to avoid him, nor to see him because I hadn't the means to see him naked. And he made no movement to see me, no doubt because he was shy. Then, yesterday he called me up on the telephone, would I meet him that evening as usual, said very shyly and hesitatingly. I said that I would write. This morning at 8 I was rushing out to hear a mass (I've been in bed since my last to you³⁰) when I ran bang into Bettamio. (He was exquisite.) He raised his hat and held out a nervous hand and began to explain. He had forgotten the appointment. 'Why have you left me alone?' Silence. 'I can't wait.' So I rushed on. I have just written him this:- 'I don't understand why thou hast saluted me on the street this morning. Either thou wishest to have me for your friend, or thou dost not. If, in truth, thou wishest to have me for a friend, why hast thou deserted me all these weeks? The appointment was that I might see thee in uniform (he's a Volunteer). I was at the Bridge of St Euphemia³¹ from 6.30 to 8.30 and thou didst not come. Several weeks of silence followed. Thou

hast not sought me, in person, or by letter, to explain or to excuse thyself. And now, after long negligence, thou treatest me as though I had offended thee. Thou makest me tired. I have not offended thee; but by thee I am offended, me, a friend ready to give thee my all. If any trouble or ill fortune prevented thee, why hast thou hidden it from thy friend? Why hide anything at all of thine from him? Why dost thou not give me the frankness and the confidence and also the affection which I have given to thee, and which thou must give to me if thou wishest to have me for a friend. I have been ill in bed and am not able even now to come out at night to talk. Therefore, write, if thou desirest, from heart to heart.'

I think you'll agree that this is a pretty plain declaration which either will finish with him or will bring him to my arms. If the former, he is not worth worrying about. If the latter, Heaven send me means to *take him on the hop*. This will be from Sat. to Mon. next ensuing. I do hope it will come off; for I believe him capable of causing and enjoying ecstasies of pleasure. There is another reason also why I earnestly desire it: I have my eye on his brother (Gallieno or some such name) aged 13. When Bettamio was ill this youngster must needs have a day in bed in the same room too with a cold. He was quite naked and much too active to remain still, bounding about and scrambling across the room every now and then in an entrancing manner, manifesting fine and joyous thighs and a perfectly lovely little breast muscle extended to the shoulder. He is a lively creature with a sunny skin, hot eyes, chestnut locks, a big burning mouth; and likely by next Summer to be a bounding bouncing piece of virgin flesh well worth squeezing. I have an eye to the future you see. Oh pray do work hard for me now. I got a frightful cold directly after my last to you. The sunless cold of this windy stone landing is simply unspeakably atrocious. Consequently I had to go to my bed (one blanket) and heap my clothes on it. 'My way of treating a cold, dear Rolfe,' sweetly said the Dr 'is a sure but a hard one. Pray earnestly to God either to deliver you from it or to sanctify it to you and give you patience to bear it. This, with 8 days on pure barley water alone will do you good. After that, don't eat so much. Coffee and bread twice a day is what I recommend for your ordinary diet.'

So I prayed, and drank the beastly barley water, and now I take the filthy coffee and bread twice a day: and I've coughed so much

and shaken myself so horribly over it that I can't cough any more but just sit up in bed trying to keep warm and write. But it's slow and wretched work. I've only been out once all the time. Oh my dear C. do for Friendship's sake, come to my rescue instantly. Here's Christmas close at hand. Is it to be my second in this miserable and hopeless impotence or the first of a new era? R.

N.B. On no a/c speak of Nicholson to me. He burned my papers out of sheer cowardice and spite. What about that photograph of two entwined? Do get the confession but first describe the confessor to me, age, appearance, condition, disposition, history.

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December 28, 1909.

Dear F.,

A thousand thanks for your letter and the P.O's. The last have been a real joy: for they have enabled me to see the Alphabet³² and keep them in a good temper. These Venetians think such a lot of Christmas and the New Year that to let these festivities pass without the usual acknowledgements would have fatally injured future prospects. I told them that the tips came from you; and you would have chuckled to hear their comments. Piero was particularly touching. 'Sior, is it from the lord with the moustaches or from the [erasure]?' I said that it was from the lord with the moustaches. 'Ah,' says P., 'it goes well. That lord has a heart like his moustaches, of pure gold. May his soul sit on Mary Virgin's lap!' None of them [erasure]. They [erasure]. I can't get anything else from them but that: except that Carlo explains elaborately that G. threw him without warning. Piero and Zildo instantly asked for the favour of my company at a cinematograph. So we went. It was a beastly show: but the step was in the right direction. You simply have no idea what magnificent creatures they are, both huge, growing larger every day, Piero long and sinewy, Zildo long and muscular, fine upstanding figures both plump enough to damn a saint, and as hot as fire. And Zildo's slow sweet splendid smile. Lor!

My second postcard to Eduardo is quite unsuccessful. I haven't

the faintest notion how to find him. I rather fancy that I passed him in this Campo³³ one evening at dusk, but am not sure. If I were decently dressed, and had a place to ask him to, I should stroll nightly in Piazza San Marco. If he is anywhere, he is sure to be there. But I'm convinced that he is frightened, and will take some finding and some management when found.

And my postcard to Bettamio also failed entirely. He hasn't said a single word. But I met his young brother – Saverio is his name – in San Trovaso. He took off his cap most politely and would have spoken: but I just nodded and passed on. The game to play in that quarter is to keep them at arm's length for the present. Later, when one is capable of doing anything it would not be a bad notion to cultivate Saverio at the expense of his brother. There's nothing wrong with the last, I'm sure, he's only very young and shy, and proud, and could be easily broken in, if one were not so helpless.

As for me, things have gone from bad to worse. I have never had such an unchristian Christmas in my life. Never! Neither beef nor turkey nor plum-pudding nor mince-pie have passed my lips, and I ADORE them all. Not a single soul said or sent a single Christmas word to me excepting the servants here and the boys. No, not one. That abominable Nicholson sent me a picture of a gondola (coals to Newcastle) and a verse out of Isaiah about affliction being for one's good. He has a talent for the inopportune which amounts to positive genius. – I don't think I have ever felt so utterly and hopelessly miserable before. Worse remains. Our dear pious Plymouth Brother of a doctor dismissed three of his six servants when I last wrote to you,³⁴ the man and two maids: and shunted on to me their work which I have been doing ever since. This gets me up at 5.30 to light fires, fill cisterns, work the cream-making machine, and get up wood for the stoves. It's devilish hard work. The wood comes in barges and is stacked in the cellar in logs. There are 2 kinds, one for kindling and the other for burning. And I saw the logs into shape, split the kindling into sticks with an axe and carry up stairs, about 10 basketsful a day, each weighing 140 lbs. That's the minimum. I wear a long blue blouse and am in fact a *facchino*. One reason why I am so infinitely obliged to you for the P.O's is that it enabled me to tip the three remaining servants. If I hadn't been able to do that at Christmas, they would have treated me as one of themselves; and their insolent familiarity would have become intolerable. As it is,

pleasure. This agreement was made last summer. Piero accordingly gave up going to the Osmarin, and devoted himself entirely to Zildo till I should be ready for them. And, on New Year's Day, Zildo slips off secretly to the Osmarin *with Carlo* – (the insult to Piero of that, Carlo being an outsider!) – and enjoys five girls, one after another, stark naked and in broad daylight from 2 to 4 p.m. And Carlo followed on. 'Oh, what ugly creatures there are in this world!' comments poor Piero. (But imagine the joys of those girls over those two lusty and till then virginal ruffians!)

Piero found it out at night when Zildo had nothing to give him. He says that he couldn't sleep and took his clothes and went home.

Whereupon Zildo takes Carlo in his place; and those two have resolved not to risk disease but to be content with each other. 'So Sior, you see me friendless now' the piteous Peter ended. 'No, no,' I hastened to say, 'I am your friend always!' Whereat he burst into tears and began to kiss my hand. Oh my God, what a time I had to calm him. I was at my wits' end. At last, to gain time, I told him to meet me at the same place tomorrow and meanwhile I would try and think about something. But what to do I really do not know. If only another letter comes from you all would be well. At least I could give him a day's pleasure.

January 27.

Now I'm going to make you sit up. First of all I see that I've got this letter rather mixed, so I will finish it off as I began it, with number 4. I told you that I had tipped Zildo and Carlo in your name. Two days after they wrote hideous picture postcards saying that they had been to see Cavalleria and Pagliacci at the Rossini Theatre and thanked you for the pleasure of your gracious gentility. Very well. That ends that.

Now about yesterday. It appeared to me that the time was come *to break out of all caution and prudence. So I did, as thoroughly as you please.* Peter met me as agreed on Fondamenta Nuove. I explained to him exactly how I stood as to money, and I offered to give him all I had left of yours for his needs, or else to take him out for a day's pleasure.

If you could have seen how he beamed on me! He instantly chose the last. 'My pleasure is to be with my Paron,' he said. Fancy a great big boy of seventeen being as sweet as that! And he took

my bag – I had a satchel full of papers for the sake of looking business-like – and declared himself at my disposition. So we took the steamer to Burano where we lunched on beef steaks and cheese and wine, not at the inn you went to but another up the street. Lord, how he wolfed. It was a fiendish day – snow all night and the snow at Burano a good yard deep and still snowing.

While lunch was preparing I buried myself in my papers, asking questions of the landlord as to population, depth of water in canals and so on, and making notes for my book. While we lunched I had a scaldino of charcoal placed in a bedroom to make it comfortable for my siesta.

Then Piero and I went upstairs. I never saw anyone slip out of his clothes as he did – like a white flash – he must have unlaced his boots and undone all his buttons on the way up. Then he turned to me. He was scarlet all over, blushing with delight, his eyes glittered and his fingers twitched over my clothes with eagerness. As for his rod – lawks! As I came out of my guernsey he flung himself back on the bed, across the bed as he knows I like it, throat up, ankles crossed, thighs together and body expectant.

The clutch of us both was amazing. I never knew that I loved and was loved so passionately with so much of me by so much of another. We simply raged together. Not a speck of us did not play its part. And the end came simultaneously. Long abstinence had lost us our self-control. He couldn't, simply couldn't wait his turn, and we clung together panting and gushing torrents – torrents. Then we laughed and kissed, rolled over and cleaned up and got into bed to sleep, embraced. His breath was delicious. He pressed his beautiful breast and belly to mine and our arms and legs entwined together. So we took a nap.

I was wakened by a gentle voice 'Sior, Sior, Sior, with permission!' And his rod was rigid and ready. I took him on me. 'Slowly, and as hard as you like' I said. Oh what a time we had. He took me at my word splendidly and laboured with the sumptuous abandon of a true artist, straining his young body to his very utmost but holding himself in control prolonging the pleasure for the pure joy of it. As he writhed, I became excited in my turn and rolled him over to do with him; and close-locked we wrestled, how long I don't remember but I know that presently we were both gasping for breath and as rigid as ever. For a few minutes we lay side by side,

hugging, laughing, devouring each other's lips and each trying to clip the other's thighs with his own. Then we began again, more fiercely than ever, and finished the matter. 'Oh, *che bel divertimento!*' says Peter, squeezing me as we spouted – 'Oh, what a beautiful diversion.'

We took the 5.30 steamer to return to Venice. On the way he was most affecting. What a lover that boy is. He said that Zildo was nothing in comparison with me, that of all the pleasures he has taken, nothing has ever equalled this afternoon. As for the girls, let Zildo and Carlo take evils from them. They were 'ugly', and never had he believed that it could be as good as it was. Would I command him to come to my palace to serve me? No, that was impossible; when I was able to take a little apartment of my own, he should come and live with me. When? I did not know. Pray Sior, let it be soon. I asked whether he would serve if you came here. He blushed; 'I am the servant of the Paron and will be obedient always; but Sior, I pray to sleep sometimes in your arms.' His word for action is 'unlock'. He said that my key unlocked him most easily; if I wished him to try your key he would do his very best most willingly. But would I teach him to speak English so that he might surpass that ugly Carlo.

I got out my papers and made a little book, in which I wrote some Italian words with their English equivalents, like this:

Stupido scioce – siliful (i.e. silly fool)
and numbers up to twenty and a few other words. He sat and learned them by heart, taking no end of pains. You can't think what a beautiful creature he really is, young, strong as a horse, slim and lithe and supple as a serpent, magnificently virile, with soft downy skin and firm hot flesh sweet as a baby's.

I asked him about sucking. No, he had never done nor had it; but gladly would he from me. Did one drink? Yes. Ah, what a beautiful diversion! So you see what joys are in store. And as to posterior treatment, he pronounced it 'ugly'. Zildo had done it once in the night and Peter had beaten him for being so 'ugly', i.e. brutto. How, he asked, could kisses of lips take place that way, kissing being part of the diversion of 'unlocking'. Dear thing!

When we parted I gave him the last two francs remaining to me and promised to write to you at once. This is the first chance I've had. And while I've been writing enclosed came. I thought you'd

like to see it, so I translate it literally. Isn't it delicious?

God knows what's going to happen to me. There's some delay about the Doctor's moving which I don't understand; so I still stick on here. But I can't possibly move for the better on my own account in any way, nor do any new work, nor finish any old as things are. Don't think me impatient. I know you're doing your best and leaving no stone unturned for me and I'm quite content to leave it at that. Of course I'm awfully grateful. That you know. But you just wait and see how grateful I can be, tangibly, when once I'm free to make use of my powers. I think I shall surprise even you.

N.B. *I really think I'd risk starting on my own with £50, if that could be got in the meantime, and the £200 and a weekly allowance a little later.* I fancy it would be safe. Anyway, though my only hesitation is on account of seeming too sanguine, *I do most earnestly yearn to finish off this damned book and float it and get on with a new one.* It's a waste of time to chop the Doctor's logs when I ought to be writing.

Do write oftener.

R.

I send two photos of Piero taken last year at the wells in the Civic Museum. He wore that uniform when in my service. Do send me as many photos as you can spare.

I 2

February 10, 1910.

Dear G.,

Thanks for your letter. I was getting dreadfully alarmed about your health. It is a great relief to know that it has not suffered under the strain of the election or the weather. Here we have been having an abominable time, and the last night of the carnival was simply a torrential downpour which ruined everything. I saw nothing of the carnival myself, having other affairs to attend to all the time.

The Carnival of Venice has been going down for some years; but this year an effort was made to restore it to something of its old distinction. I'm told that the masked ball at the Fenice was really wonderfully beautiful and the price of the tickets (1.50 each) kept it