GOETHE 13 II

introduce me. We entered a large hall, which was already rather crowded, and took our seats in the middle of the front row, facing a high desk. More and more spectators kept arriving. An imposing elderly man took the empty chair on my right, who, to judge from his clothes and the respect with which he was treated, must have been a cardinal.

Speaking from the desk, the custodian made a few general introductory remarks and then called on several persons by name, who recited either in verse or in prose. After this had gone on for quite a time, the custodian delivered an address, which I shall omit because it was almost identical with the diploma I received and which I reproduce below. When this was over, I was formally declared a member, and everybody clapped loudly, while my sponsor and I rose to our feet and returned the applause with many bows. Then he too made a well-turned speech, which was not too long and to the point. This was again applauded and then I took the opportunity to thank various members individually and say some polite words. I also did my best to make the custodian feel highly satisfied with his new fellow shepherd.

The diploma, which I received the next day, follows here in the original Italian. I have not translated it because it would lose its distinctive flavour in any other language.

C. U. C.

Nivildo Amarinzio Custode Generale d'Arcadia

Trovandosi per avventura a beare le sponde del Tebbro uno di quei Genij di prim'Ordine, ch'oggi fioriscono nella Germania qual'è l'Inclito ed Erudito Signor de Goethe Consigliere attuale di Sua Altezza Serenissima il Duca di Sassonia Weimar, ed avendo celato fra noi con filosofica moderazione la chiarezza della sua Nascita, de suoi Ministerij, e della virtù sua, non ha potuto ascondere la luce, che hanno sparso le sue dottissime produzioni tanto in Prosa ch' in Poesia per cui si è reso celebre a tutto il Mondo Letterario. Quindi essendosi compiaciuto il

suddetto rinomato Signor de Goethe d'intervenire in una delle pubbliche nostre Accademie, appena Egli comparve, come un nuovo astro di cielo straniero tra le nostre selve, ed in una delle nostre Geniali Adunanze, che gli Arcadi in gran numero convocati co' segni del più sincero giubilo ed applauso volle distinguerlo come Autore di tante celebrate opere, con annoverarlo a viva voce tra i più illustri membri della loro Pastoral Società sotto il Nome di Megalio, e vollero altresi assegnare al Medesimo il possesso delle Campagne Melpomenie sacre alla Tragica Musa dichiarandolo con ciò Pastore Arcade di Numero. Nel tempo stesso il Ceto Universale commise al Custode Generale di registrare l'Atto pubblico e solenne di sì applaudita annoverazione tra i fasti d'Arcadia, e di presentare al Chiarissimo Novello Compastore Megalio Melpomenio il presente Diploma in segno dell'altissima stima, che fa la nostra Pastorale Letteraria Repubblica de' chiari e nobili ingegni a perpetua memoria. Dato dalla Capanna del Serbatojo dentro il Bosco Parrasio alla Neomenia di Posideone Olimpiade DCXLI Anno II. della Ristorazione d'Arcadia Olimpiade XXIV. Anno IV. Giorno lieto per General Chiamata.

Nivildo Amarinzio Custode Generale
Corimbo Melicronio, Florimonte Egireo Sottocustodi

The seal shows a wreath, half laurel, half pines, in the centre of which is a syrinx. Underneath, the words *Gli Arcadi.*

THE ROMAN CARNIVAL

In undertaking to write a description of the Roman Carnival, I know I shall encounter the objection that a festivity of this kind cannot really be described, that such a tumult of people, things and movements can only be absorbed by each spectator in his own way. The objection is not without point, for I must admit that, on a foreigner who sees it for the first time, the Roman Carnival cannot make an altogether agreeable impression: it will neither please his eye nor appeal to his emotions. There is no point from which the whole of the long, narrow street where it takes place can be overlooked; in the milling

crowd within one's range of vision, it is hard to distinguish details, the noise is deafening, and the end of each day unsatisfactory.

The Roman Carnival is not really a festival given *for* the people but one the people give themselves. The state makes very few preparations for it and contributes next to nothing. The merry-go-round revolves automatically and the police regulate it very leniently.

Unlike the religious festivals in Rome, the Carnival does not dazzle the eye; there are no fireworks, no illuminations, no brilliant processions. All that happens is that, at a given signal, everyone has leave to be as mad and foolish as he likes, and almost everything, except fisticuffs and stabbing, is permissible.

The difference between the social orders seems to be abolished for the time being; everyone accosts everyone else, all good-naturedly accept whatever happens to them, and the insolence and licence of the feast is balanced only by the universal good humour.

During this time, even to this day, the Roman rejoices because, though it postponed the festival of the Saturnalia with its liberties for a few weeks, the birth of Christ did not succeed in abolishing it.

I shall do my best to bring the tumult and revelling of these days before the imagination of my readers who live elsewhere, to revivify the memories of those who have seen it, and provide those who are planning to visit Rome with a general introduction to its overcrowded and torrential merriment.

The Corso

The Roman Carnival assembles in the Corso. Since it would be a different kind of feast if it took place anywhere else, I must begin by describing the street.

Like many other long streets in Italian towns, it takes its name from the horse races with which each evening of the Carnival concludes. Elsewhere, similar races conclude the feast-day of a patron saint or the dedication of a church.

The Corso runs in a straight line from the Piazza del Popolo to the Piazza Venezia. It is approximately 3500 paces long and lined with high and, for the most part, magnificent buildings. The width bears no proportion to its length or to the height of the buildings. The pavements on both sides take up from six to eight feet, leaving a space between which in most places is not more than twelve or fourteen paces wide, barely sufficient for three carriages to drive abreast.

During the Carnival the Corso is bounded at its lower end by the obelisk in the Piazza del Popolo and at its upper by the Palazzo Venezia.

Driving in the Corso

Actually, there is nothing quite novel or unique about the Carnival. It is linked quite naturally to the Roman way of life, being only a continuation, or rather the climax, of the pleasure drives which take place on every Sunday and feast day.

All through the year on these days, the Corso is full of life. An hour or an hour and a half before sunset, the more eminent and wealthy Romans set out in their carriages in one long unbroken line and drive for an hour or more. The carriages start from the Palazzo Venezia, keeping to the left of the street, pass the obelisk and, in good weather, drive out of the Porta and along the Via Flaminia, sometimes even as far as the Ponte Molle.

The returning carriages keep to *their* left, so that the two-way traffic remains orderly. Ambassadors have the right to drive in either direction down the middle of the street between the two lines of carriages. This prerogative was also granted to the Young Pretender, who resided in Rome under the name of the Duke of Albany.

But as soon as the evening bells have rung, all semblance of order disappears. Looking for his quickest way home, each driver turns wherever he likes, frequently blocking the way and holding up other carriages.

The evening carriage drive, which is a brilliant sight in all

large Italian cities, and is imitated in every small town that has any carriages at all, attracts many pedestrians to the Corso; everyone flocks there either to see or to be seen.

Climate and Clerical Dress

There is nothing unfamiliar about seeing figures in fancy dress or masks out on the streets under the clear sky. They can be seen every day of the year. No corpse is brought to the grave without being accompanied by hooded religious fraternities. The monks in their many kinds of costume accustom the eye to peculiar figures. There seems to be Carnival all the year round, and the black cassocks of the *abbati* seem the model for the more dignified kind of fancy dress, the *tabarro*.

Opening Days

The Carnival really starts with the opening of the theatres at the New Year. Now and then one sees one of the Fair Sex, sitting in a box, dressed up as an officer and displaying her epaulettes to the public with the utmost self-satisfaction; and already the number of carriages driving up and down the Corso is beginning to increase.

Preparations for the Final Days

Various preparations announce to the public the blissful hours to come.

The Corso, which is one of the few streets in Rome to be kept clean all the year round, is now swept and cleaned even more carefully. This street is beautifully paved with small pieces of basalt cut into almost equal squares; when these have worn unevenly, they are now removed and replaced by new ones.

Living presages of the future event begin to appear. As I said, every evening of the Carnival ends with a horse race. The horses which are specially trained for this purpose are mostly small ones, called *barberi*, because the best of them are of foreign breed.

Each horse is covered with a white linen sheet, bordered with

brightly coloured ribbons at the seams and fitting closely around the head, neck and body, and led to the obelisk, from which the races start. It is turned to face the Corso and trained to stand there for some time without moving. Then it is led very slowly up the length of the street to the Piazza Venezia, where it is given some oats so that, when it comes to the race, it will have an incentive to run fast to its goal.

Often fifteen or twenty are put through this exercise at the same time, and their promenade is always followed by a crowd of cheering boys.

In the old days, the first families of Rome used to keep racing stables, and it was considered a high honour if one of their horses carried off the prize. Bets were laid and victory celebrated with a banquet. Recently, however, horse racing has lost favour with the nobility, and the passion has descended to the middle and even the lower classes of the population.

It is still the custom, which probably dates from earlier times, for a troop of horsemen, accompanied by trumpeters, to parade the streets of Rome, displaying the prizes, and enter the palazzi of the nobility, where, after a flourish of trumpets, they receive a gratuity.

The prize itself is a piece of gold or silver cloth, about three and a half yards long and a yard wide, with a picture of running horses woven diagonally across its lower border, and attached like a flag to a painted pole. It is called *palio*, and there are as many of these quasi-standards as there are days of Carnival.

Meanwhile the Corso is beginning to take on a different look. A many-tiered grandstand, looking directly up the street, is erected in front of the obelisk. In front of this are set up the lists from which the horses will start. The street is also extended into the piazza by stands abutting on to its first houses. On each side of the lists are small raised and covered boxes for the starters. At intervals all along the Corso you can see more stands, and the Piazza San Carlo and the Piazza Colonna are barricaded off by railings. Finally the street is strewn with *pozzolana* to prevent the horses from slipping on the smooth paving.

The Signal for Complete Licence

Shortly after noon the bell of the Capitol tolls, and from that moment on, the most serious-minded Roman, who has so carefully watched his step all year, throws dignity and prudence to the winds.

The workmen who have been banging on the paving stones up to the last minute pack up their tools and move off, cracking jokes. Carpets are hung out from one balcony and window after another; the stands are decorated with old embroidered tapestries. Chairs are placed all along the pavements, and the common people and the children pack the street, which has ceased to be a street and looks more like an enormous decorated gallery. The chairs accentuate the impression of a room, and the friendly sky makes one forget that it has no roof. When one leaves the house, it feels as if one were entering a salon full of acquaintances.

The Guard

The Corso grows livelier and livelier and now and then a Pulcinella appears among the crowd of people in ordinary dress. A troop of soldiers assemble in front of the Porta del Popolo, wearing brand-new uniforms. Led by their commander on horseback, they march along the Corso in good order to the stirring strains of a band, posting guards in the principal squares and occupying all the entrances to the street. Their task is to maintain law and order during the whole affair. Those who let the chairs and the seats on the stands now begin to importune the passers-by, crying out: "*Luoghi! Luoghi, padroni! Luoghi!*"

Masks and Fancy Dress

The number of people in fancy dress begins to increase. Young men disguised as women of the lower classes in low-necked dresses are usually the first to appear. They embrace the men, they take intimate liberties with the women, as being

of their own sex, and indulge in any behaviour which their mood, wit or impertinence suggests.

One young man stands out in my memory. He played the part of a passionate, quarrelsome woman perfectly. "She" went along the whole length of the Corso, picking quarrels with everyone and insulting them, while her companions pretended to be doing their best to calm her down.

Here a Pulcinella comes running along with a large horn dangling from coloured strings around his thighs. As he talks to women, he manages to imitate with a slight, impudent movement the figure of the ancient God of Gardens — and this in holy Rome! — but his frivolity excites more amusement than indignation. And here comes another of his kind, but more modest, accompanied by his better half.

Since the women take as much pleasure in dressing up as men as the men do in dressing up as women, many of them appear wearing the popular costume of Pulcinella, and I must confess that they often manage to look very charming in this ambiguous disguise.

Now an advocate elbows his way quickly through the crowd, declaiming as if he were addressing a court of justice. He shouts up at the windows, buttonholes the passers-by, whether in fancy dress or not, and threatens to prosecute every one of them. To one he reads out a long list of ridiculous crimes he is supposed to have committed, to another an exact tabulation of his debts. He accuses the women of having *cicisbei*, the girls of having lovers. He consults a book he carries with him, and produces documents — all this in a shrill voice and at great length. He tries to make everyone disconcerted and embarrassed. When you think he is going to stop, then he really gets going with a vengeance; when you think he is going away, he turns back; he walks straight up to one person and then does not speak to him, he grabs at another who has just passed; but should he come across a colleague, his madness rises to its highest pitch.

The *quaccheri** are another great sensation, though they are not as noisy as the advocates. The *quacchero* costume seems to have

become universally popular, because of the ease with which old-fashioned dresses can be found in second-hand shops. The main requisites for a *quacchero* are clothes which, though old-fashioned, are made of rich material and still in good condition. Most of them are dressed in silk or velvet and wear brocaded or embroidered waistcoats; further, the wearer must be corpulent. The face mask is a full one with puffy cheeks and little eyes; the wig has an odd little pigtail; the hat is small and usually trimmed with braid.

One notices that this figure is very like the *buffo caricato* of Italian comic opera, and like him, the *quacchero* usually plays the part of a silly, infatuated and betrayed old fool; but some of them also play the vulgar fop. Hopping about on their toes with great agility, they carry mock lorgnettes, large black rings without glass in them, through which they peer into carriages and look up at windows. They make low stiff bows and express their delight, especially when they meet each other, by leaping straight up into the air several times and letting out high, piercing, inarticulate cries, joined together by the consonants *brr*.

Often they make this sound as a signal, which is taken up by those nearest to them and passed on, so that in a few minutes the shrill cry runs up and down the whole length of the Corso.

Meanwhile mischievous boys blow into large spiral shells and offend the ear with intolerable sounds.

The space is so cramped and disguises are so alike — there are at least several hundred Pulcinelle and about a hundred *quaccheri* running up and down the Corso — that, unless they arrived early, very few of the maskers can have come with the intention of creating a sensation or drawing particular notice to themselves. Almost everyone is simply out to amuse himself, have his fling and enjoy the freedom of these days as much as he can.

The girls and married women, especially, try and manage to have fun after their fashion. They all want to leave their houses and disguise themselves in any way they can. Since few of them have much money to spend, they show great ingenuity in inventing all sorts of disguises, though most of these conceal rather than display their charms.

Beggar masks, male or female, are very easy to make. All that is needed is beautiful hair, then a full white face mask, a little earthenware receptacle, held by a coloured ribbon, a staff and a hat carried in the hand. With a humble air they stop under a window or in front of someone, and instead of alms, receive sweets, nuts or whatever tasty thing one cares to give them.

Others take still fewer pains and wrap themselves in furs or appear in a pretty house dress with only a face mask. Most of them have no male escort but carry, both for defence and offence, a little broom, made from the blossoms of reeds, with which they ward off persons who become too importunate, and mischievously flourish in the faces of strangers and acquaintances who are not wearing masks. Anyone marked down as a target by four or five of these girls has no hope of escape. The tightly packed crowd prevents him from getting away, and whichever way he turns, he feels the little broom under his nose. To defend himself effectively against teasing of this sort would be very dangerous, for the maskers are considered inviolable, and every guard has orders to protect them.

The workaday clothes of all classes can also serve as fancy dress. Persons appear dressed up as stableboys with great brushes, with which they rub the back of anyone whom they care to pick on. *Vetturini* offer their services with their usual importunity. Others put on more handsome fancy dress and appear as peasant girls, women from Frascati, fishermen, Neapolitan boatmen and *sbirri*, or as Greeks. But the *tabarro* is considered the most dignified of all, because it is the least conspicuous. Occasionally a theatrical costume is copied. Some do no more than wrap themselves in sheets, tied over their head, and hop out suddenly into your path in the hope of being taken for a ghost.

Humorous and satirical masks are very rare because they have a specific meaning, and those who wear them wish to be noticed. But I did see one Pulcinella who was playing the role of a cuckold. His horns were movable, so that he could protrude and retract them like a snail. He would stop under the window of some newly married couple and show just the tip of one horn, then

under another and shoot out both horns to their full length. Little bells were attached to their tips, which tinkled merrily whenever he did this. Now and then the crowd would notice him for a moment and roar with laughter.

A conjuror mingles with the crowd and displays a book of numbers to remind them of their passion for lotteries.

Someone wearing a two-faced mask has got stuck in the crowd; nobody knows which is his back and which is his front or whether he is coming or going.

Strangers must also resign themselves to being made fun of. Northerners are taken by the Romans to be masquers on account of the strange round hats and long frock-coats with large buttons that they wear. The foreign painters, especially those who, because they are studying landscape and architecture, have to sit and draw in public and are therefore a familiar sight to the Romans, often encounter caricatures of themselves running about in the Carnival crowd in long frock-coats, carrying enormous portfolios and gigantic pencils.

The German baker-apprentices have a reputation in Rome for often getting drunk, so figures may be seen, dressed up in their ordinary or slightly decorated costume, staggering about with flasks of wine. I can remember seeing only one obscene mask.

A proposal had been made to erect an obelisk in front of the Church of Trinità dei Monti, which was unpopular with the people because the piazza was too small, and to raise it to the proper height, the little obelisk would have to be set on a very high pedestal. This had given someone the idea of wearing a cap shaped like a huge white pedestal with a tiny red obelisk on top. The pedestal bore an inscription written in large letters, but probably only a few people could guess what it meant.

Carriages

All the pavements are blocked by stands or chairs which are already occupied by spectators. Carriages are moving up one side of the street and down the other, so that the pedestrians are squeezed into the space between them, which is at most

eight feet wide, pushing their way through as best as they can, while another packed crowd looks down from windows and balconies upon the crush below.

During the first days the carriages one sees are mostly ordinary ones, for those who have any more elegant and sumptuous vehicles to display are reserving them for the days to follow. But presently open carriages begin to appear, some of which can seat six; two ladies facing each other on raised seats, so that one can see their whole figure, and four gentlemen in the corner seats. Coachmen and footmen are always masked and the horses decorated with gauze and flowers. Often one sees a beautiful white poodle, decorated with rose-coloured ribbons, sitting between the feet of the coachman while bells tinkle on the harness of the horses, and attracting momentary attention from the crowd.

As one might expect, only beautiful women have the courage to expose themselves so conspicuously to the gaze of the whole population, and only a great beauty dares to appear without a mask. Her carriage moves very slowly, all eyes are riveted on her, and she has the satisfaction of hearing on all sides: "*O quanto è bella!*"

It seems that in earlier times these gala coaches were more numerous, more costly and more interesting, because they represented subjects drawn from myth and allegory. But lately, for some reason or other, persons of rank have come to prefer the pleasure of losing themselves in the crowd during this festival to that of distinguishing themselves from others.

With each succeeding day of Carnival, the merrier the carriages look. Even the most sedate, who sit in their carriages without a mask, allow their coachmen and footmen to wear fancy dress. Most of the coachmen choose to dress up as women, so that, in the final days, the job of driving horses seems to be reserved for women only. Often their costumes are very proper and even alluring; now and then, however, there comes a squat ugly fellow, dressed up in the latest fashion with a high coiffure and feathers, who looks like a crude caricature. Just as the beautiful lady has to

listen to eulogies, he has to put up with people shoving their faces into his and shouting: *"O fratello mio, che brutta puttana sei!"*

When a coachman spots women in the crowd whom he knows, it is customary for him to lift them up on to his box. They are usually dressed up as men, and there they sit beside him, dangling their pretty Pulcinella legs with small feet and high heels over the heads of the passers-by. The footmen follow suit and haul up their friends, male and female, on to the back of the carriage. A few more and they climb on to the roof as people do on English stagecoaches. Yet their masters seem pleased to see their coaches so thoroughly loaded up; anything is allowed and proper during these days.

The Crush

As I said, two lines of carriages are moving up and down both sides of the street, and the space between them is packed with pedestrians who do not walk but shuffle along. So long as it is possible, the carriages keep some distance between each other so as to avoid a collision every time the crawling line is brought to a halt. To slip out of the crush or at least get a breath of fresh air, many pedestrians take the risk of walking between the wheels of one carriage and the horses of another, and the more dangerous this becomes, the greater their audacity.

Since the majority, who stick to the middle of the street in their anxiety to protect their limbs and their clothing from being caught by a wheel, leave more space between themselves and the carriages than is necessary, any pedestrian who dares to use this space can cover a considerable distance before some new obstacle halts him.

The Procession of the Governor and the Senator

Now and then a member of the Papal Guard comes riding through the crowd to deal with a traffic block, and one has no sooner got out of the way of a coach horse before one feels a saddle horse breathing down one's neck. But there are worse discomforts in store.

In his large state coach and followed by a cortège of other coaches, the Governor comes driving down the middle of the Corso, preceded by footmen and Papal Guards, who clear the pedestrians out of the way while the procession passes.

But like water which, at the passage of a ship, divides for a moment and then immediately flows together again behind the rudder, the crowd immediately re-forms into one solid mass behind the procession.

But soon it is broken up by another commotion. This time it is the Senator who is advancing with a similar cortège. The coaches look as if they are swimming above the heads of the crowd they have squeezed aside, and, though the hearts of Romans and foreigners alike have been captivated by the charm of the present Senator, Prince Rezzonico, the Carnival is the only occasion, perhaps, on which everybody is happy to see his back.

These two, one the Chief Justice, the other the Chief of Police, drive through the Corso only on the first day to inaugurate the Carnival with due solemnity. But the Duke of Albany made this drive every day, to the great inconvenience of the crowd, reminding Rome, the ancient ruler of kings, throughout these days of universal mummery, of the Carnival comedy of his kingly pretensions. The ambassadors, who enjoy the same privilege, made use of it sparingly and with a humane discretion.

The Fashionable World at the Palazzo Ruspoli

In the neighbourhood of the Palazzo Ruspoli, the street is no wider than elsewhere, but the pavements are higher. Here fashionable society congregates, and the stands and chairs are soon occupied or reserved. The most beautiful women of the middle class, in charming fancy dress and surrounded by their friends, expose themselves to the inquisitive looks of the passers-by. Everyone who finds himself in their vicinity lingers to look up and down the pleasing rows; everyone is curious to see if, among the many male figures who seem to be sitting there, he can pick out which ones are ladies, and discover, maybe, in a handsome officer the object of his longing.

It is here that the general movement first comes to a standstill, because here the carriages linger as long as they can, and if one must stop at all, one would rather do so where the company is so pleasant.

Confetti

Now and then, a masked fair lady mischievously flings some sugar-coated almonds at her passing friend to attract his attention and, naturally enough, he turns round to see who has thrown the missile. But real sugared confetti is expensive, so a cheaper substitute must be provided for this kind of petty warfare, and there are traders who specialize in plaster bonbons, made by means of a funnel, which they carry in large baskets and offer for sale to the crowd. No one is safe from attack, everyone is on the defensive, so now and then, from high spirits or necessity, a duel, a skirmish or a battle ensues. Pedestrians, coachmen, spectators alternately attack others and defend themselves.

The ladies carry little gilded or silvered baskets filled with these confetti, and their escorts are very adroit in defending their fair companions. The windows of the coaches are lowered in anticipation of attack, and their occupants exchange pleasantries with their friends or defend themselves stoutly against strangers.

The great place for these mock battles is around the Palazzo Ruspoli. The maskers sit there with baskets, bags and handkerchiefs tied together by their four corners. They take the initiative in attacking others: no carriage passes without being molested by at least some of them, no pedestrian is safe, and when an *abbate* in his black cassock comes into range, he is attacked from all sides, and, since gypsum and lime leave marks, he is soon covered all over with grey and white spots. But sometimes these mock battles turn serious, and, to one's amazement, one sees personal jealousy and hatred being vented in public.

A masked individual sneaks up and flings a handful of confetti at one of the ladies in the front row with such force and success of aim that her mask rattles and her neck is injured. Her escorts, sitting on each side of her, become furious and pelt the assailant

with the contents of their bags and baskets; but he is too well padded and armoured to feel their missiles and increases the violence of his attack, while the lady's defenders protect her with their *tabarros*. Presently, in the heat of battle, the aggressor manages to injure several of her neighbours, and they join in. Some have a heavier kind of ammunition in reserve, almost as big as sugar-coated almonds, with which the assailant is now pelted from all sides until, when his own ammunition is exhausted, he is forced to retire.

A person who sets out on such an adventure usually has a companion hand him fresh ammunition, and, during the fight, the dealers in plaster confetti run from one combatant to another, weighing out as many pounds as he asks for.

I witnessed one such battle at close quarters. When the combatants ran out of ammunition, they started throwing their little gilded baskets at each other's heads, without heeding the warnings of the guards, who were getting hit themselves as well.

There is no doubt that many of these fights would end with knives being drawn if that famous instrument of torture of the Italian police, the *corde*, was not hung up at various corners to remind everyone, in the midst of their revelry, that it would be very dangerous to use a dangerous weapon at this moment.

An open carriage full of Pulcinelle comes driving towards the Palazzo Ruspoli, intending to pelt one spectator after another as they pass; but the crowd is too thick and they come to a dead stop. With one mind all the spectators turn on them, and a hailstorm descends on the carriage. The Pulcinelle have soon exhausted their ammunition and for some time are exposed to a crossfire from all sides, until the carriage looks as if it were completely covered with snow and hailstones. It slowly moves off, amid shouts of laughter and cries of disapprobation.

Meanwhile, at the upper end of the Corso, another kind of public is enjoying another kind of entertainment. Not far from the French Academy, the so-called *Capitano* of the Italian theatre, in Spanish dress, with feathered hat and large gloves, steps forward from a crowd of maskers on a stand and begins telling

the story of his great deeds by land and sea in stentorian tones. Before long he is challenged by a Pulcinella who, after pretending to accept everything in good faith, casts doubts and aspersions on the hero's tale, and interrupts his rodomontade with puns and mock platitudes. Here again, everyone who passes stops to listen to the lively exchange of words.

The King of the Pulcinelle

Often a new procession increases the general crush. A dozen Pulcinelle, for example, assemble, elect a king, crown him, put a sceptre in his hand, seat him in a decorated carriage and accompany him along the Corso with music and loud cheers.

Now one perceives that each of them is wearing his own individual variation of this commonest kind of fancy dress. One wears a wig, another a bonnet, and another has a birdcage on his head instead of a cap, in which a pair of birds, dressed up as an *abbate* and as a lady, are hopping about on their perches.

Side Streets

The terrible crush naturally forces many of the maskers off the Corso into the side streets. There, loving couples can find more peace and privacy, and merry young blades the space to put on all kinds of grotesque performances, especially in the Via del Babuino and the Piazza di Spagna.

Here, for example, comes a group of men, wearing short jackets over gold-laced waistcoats, the Sunday clothes of the common people, and with their hair gathered up in nets which hang down their backs. With them are other young fellows dressed up as women, one of whom seems to be far advanced in pregnancy. They are all strolling up and down peacefully until, suddenly, the men start to quarrel. A lively altercation ensues, the women get mixed up in it, and the brawl grows more and more violent, until both sides draw huge knives of silver cardboard and attack each other. The women cry murder and try to part them, pulling them this way and that. The bystanders

intervene, just as if they believed the affair were in earnest, and try to calm both parties down.

Meanwhile, as if from shock, the pregnant woman is taken ill. A chair is brought, and the other women give her aid. She moans like a woman in labour, and the next thing you know, she has brought some misshapen creature into the world, to the great amusement of the onlookers. The play is over, and the troupe moves on to repeat the performance, or some farce like it, elsewhere.

It seems that the Roman, who is constantly hearing stories of murder, is glad of any opportunity to toy with the idea of assassination. Even the children play a game they call *Chiesa*, which is somewhat like our Prisoner's Base. The *he* is an assassin who has taken sanctuary on the steps of a church; the other children pretend to be the *sbirri*, who must try to catch him somehow without entering his sanctuary.

A crowd of *quaccheri* are performing a manoeuvre which makes everyone laugh. They come, twelve abreast, marching straight ahead on tiptoe with quick, tiny steps. They preserve an unbroken front until, on arriving in a square, all of a sudden half of them wheel right, half left, and they trip off in single file until they come to another street, when they make a sudden right turn and march down it abreast again, then, quick as lightning, another left turn; the column is shoved, like on a spit, into the doorway of a house, and the madcaps have vanished.

Evening

As evening draws near, more and more people press into the Corso. The carriages have come to a standstill long ago. It can happen that, when night falls, they haven't been able to budge for two hours.

The Papal Guard and the Watch are now busy seeing to it that all the carriages are lined up in straight rows along the sides of the street, a procedure which is the cause of much disorder and irritation among the crowd. There is a lot of backing and pushing and lifting. When one coachman backs, all those behind him have

to back too. At last one of them gets into such straits that he has to lead his horses out into the middle of the street. The guards start cursing and threatening him, ordering him to get back in line, while the unfortunate coachman pleads in vain that this is obviously impossible and that it is not his fault. Either he must get back into line or drive into a side street, but these are usually already full of standing carriages, which came too late to get into the Corso, because the vehicles there had already ceased to circulate.

Preparations for the Race

It is nearing the time for the horse race, the moment when the excitement of the thousands of spectators reaches its peak.

The chair vendors grow more insistent than ever with their shouts of "*Luoghi! Luoghi avanti! Luoghi nobili! Luoghi, padroni!*" and, to make sure that all their seats are sold, offer them in these last moments at a reduced charge. One is lucky if one can still find a seat. Now the General comes riding down the Corso, preceded by some of the guard, who chase the pedestrians away from the only space that was still left to them. Everyone tries to find a place somewhere, on a coach, between two carriages or at some friend's window.

In the meantime the space in front of the obelisk has been completely cleared of people and presents one of the finest sights that can be seen anywhere in the world today. Against the three carpeted façades of the grandstand, thousands and thousands of heads, in row upon row, recall the picture of an ancient amphitheatre or circus. Above the centre stand, which hides only its pedestal, the obelisk soars into the air, and it is only now, when measured against the immense mass of people, that one realizes its stupendous height.

Everyone is looking at the empty lists which are still roped off. The Corso has now been cleared, the General is coming, and the guard behind him sees to it that no one steps out into the street again. The General arrives and takes his place in one of the boxes.

The Start

In an order decided by lot, the horses are led into the lists behind the ropes by grooms in splendid livery. The horses wear no harness of any kind. Now spurs, in the shape of spiked balls, are attached by cords to their bodies, but the places they touch are protected until the last moment by pieces of leather. Large sheets of tinsel are also stuck on them.

Most of them are already frisky and impatient; the presence of so many people makes them nervous, and the grooms need all their strength and skill to manage them. They kick against the partition or try to jump over the rope, and all this commotion increases the excitement of the onlookers.

The grooms, too, are overexcited, because, in deciding the outcome of the race, much depends upon the skill with which the horse is released at the start.

At last the rope falls, and they're off.

So long as they are still in the square, each one strives to gain the lead, but once they enter the Corso, the space between the two lines of carriages is so narrow that overtaking is almost impossible.

A few horses are usually out in front, straining every muscle. In spite of the scattered *pozzolana*, their hooves strike sparks from the pavement, their manes are flying, the sheets of tinsel crackle, and they are gone in the twinkling of an eye. The ones behind jostle and chase each other; a lonely late straggler comes galloping along; pieces of torn tinsel flutter over the empty track. Soon the horses are far out of sight, the crowds flock together from all sides, and the racecourse is again full of people.

In the Piazza Venezia other grooms have been waiting for the horses. When they arrive, they are skilfully caught and tied up in an enclosure. The prize is awarded to the winner.

And so the festivity for which thousands have been waiting for hours is over in a flash; perhaps only a very few could explain why they had waited for this moment or why they had enjoyed it so much.

It will be evident from my description that this sport can be dangerous both for animals and men. For instance, the space between the two lines of carriages is so narrow that a rear wheel has only to project a little into the street to create a hazard. A horse, jammed in a row with others and fighting for room, may easily collide with it. I myself saw one horse trip and fall in this way. The three horses following stumbled over it and fell too. The ones behind cleared them with a jump and continued their race.

Often a falling horse is killed on the spot, and several times spectators have also lost their lives. A similar disaster can occur if the horse turns around. Malevolent and envious persons have been known, on seeing a horse out far in front, to flap their cloaks in front of its eyes, forcing it to turn aside or around. It is still worse if the grooms in the Piazza Venezia fail to catch their horses, for then there is nothing to stop them from turning back, and, since the racecourse by this time is again crowded with people, accidents must often occur which one does not hear about or of which no notice is taken.

Order Is Suspended

The race usually starts just before dark. As soon as the horses have reached the Piazza Venezia, little mortars are discharged, and this signal is repeated, first halfway down the Corso and then nearer the obelisk.

Immediately, some carriages turn round into the middle of the Corso, causing confusion, and should one driver take it into his head to drive up the street and another to drive down it, neither is able to move an inch, and the more reasonable drivers who have stayed in line are also prevented from making any progress. Should a runaway horse now run into such a tangle, more trouble will ensue.

Night

The muddle is finally straightened out, though not without delays and mishaps. Night has fallen and everyone is hoping for some peace and quiet.

The Theatres

From this moment on, all masks are taken off, and a large section of the public hurries to the theatre. In the boxes, one may still see some *tabarros* or some ladies in fancy dress, but the whole of the parterre are in their ordinary clothes. The Aliberti and the Argentina give *opera seria* with ballets between the acts; the Valle and the Capranica comedies and tragedies with comic operas as intermezzi. The Pace does the same, though its standards are lower, and there are many other minor kinds of performance, down to puppet shows and tightrope dancers.

The great Teatro di Tordinona, which burned down and then collapsed the moment it was rebuilt, is no longer there, unfortunately, to amuse the people with its historical melodramas and other spectacular shows.

The Romans have a passion for the stage, and in the old days, were all the more ardent theatre-goers during Carnival because this was the only season at which they could satisfy it. Nowadays, at least one playhouse is also open during the summer and autumn.

The Festine

I must say a few words about the *festine*, as they are called, the great fancy-dress balls which are given on several nights in the splendidly illuminated Teatro Aliberti. On these occasions also, the *tabarro* is considered the most elegant costume both for men and for women, and the whole ballroom is filled with black figures, with only a sprinkling of more colourful ones. The curiosity is all the greater, therefore, when an imposing figure appears dressed up as one or another of the statues in Rome. One sees Egyptian deities, priestesses, Bacchus and Ariadne, the Tragic Muse, the Muse of History, a City, Vestal Virgins or a Consul.

PART THREE

The Dances

The dances at these balls are usually danced after the English fashion, in long rows, the only difference being that their few steps usually pantomime some typical action; for example, the falling-out and reconciliation of two lovers, who part and meet again.

Their ballets have accustomed the Romans to an emphatic style of gesture, and, even in their social dancing, they love expressive movements, which to us would seem exaggerated and affected. No one dares to dance unless he has studied it as an art. The minuet, in particular, is treated as a work of art, and it is only performed by a few couples. The other dancers stand in a circle round such a couple, watching them with admiration and applauding when their dance is over.

The Morning

While the fashionable world is amusing itself in this manner into the small hours, workmen are already busy at dawn, cleaning and tidying up the Corso. Particular care is taken to distribute the *pozzolana* evenly over the middle of the street.

Presently grooms come leading back to the obelisk the horse which came in last yesterday. A little boy is seated on its back, while another rider urges it with a whip to strain every muscle to run the course as swiftly as possible.

The Last Day

Stands and chairs are occupied earlier than on previous days, although the seats are now more expensive, and the horse race is expected with greater impatience than ever.

When they have flashed by, and the signals announce that the race is over, neither the carriages nor the maskers nor the spectators make the slightest motion to leave, while the dusk slowly deepens. All is silent, all is still.

Moccoli

The darkness has scarcely descended into the narrow, high-walled street before lights are seen moving in the windows and on the stands; in next to no time the fire has circulated far and wide, and the whole street is lit up by burning candles.

The balconies are decorated with transparent paper lanterns, everyone holds his candle, all the windows, all the stands are illuminated, and it is a pleasure to look into the interiors of the carriages, which often have small crystal chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, while in others the ladies sit with coloured candles in their hands as if inviting one to admire their beauty.

The footmen stick little candles round the edges of the carriage roofs; open carriages have paper lanterns, some pedestrians carry lanterns on their heads shaped like tall pyramids, others stick their candles on reed poles which often are two or three stories high. It becomes everyone's duty to carry a lighted candle in his hand, and the favourite imprecation of the Romans, "*Sia ammazzato*", is heard repeatedly on all sides.

"*Sia ammazzato chi non porta moccolo*": "Death to anyone who is not carrying a candle." This is what you say to others, while at the same time you try to blow out their candles. No matter who it belongs to, a friend or a stranger, you try to blow out the nearest candle, or light your own from it first and then blow it out. The louder the cries of *Sia ammazzato*, the more these words lose their sinister meaning, and you forget that you are in Rome, where, at any other time but Carnival, and for a trifling reason, the wish expressed by these words might be literally fulfilled.

Just as in other languages curses and obscene words are often used as expressions of joy or admiration, so, on this evening, the true meaning of *Sia ammazzato* is completely forgotten, and it becomes a password, a cry of joy, a refrain added to all jokes and compliments. Someone jeers: "*Sia ammazzato il Signore Abbate che fa l'amore*"; another greets a good friend with: "*Sia ammazzato*

il Signore Filippo"; another combines flattery and compliment: "*Sia ammazzata la bella Principessa! Sia ammazzata la Signora Angelica, la prima pittrice del secolo.*"

All these phrases are shouted loudly and rapidly with a sustained note on the penultimate or antepenultimate syllable. Meanwhile, the business of blowing out candles and relighting them goes on without stopping. Wherever you meet someone, in the house, on the stairs, in a room with visitors or leaning out of the window next to yours, you try to get the better of him and blow out his candle.

All ages and all classes contend furiously with each other. Carriage steps are climbed; no chandelier and scarcely a paper lantern is safe. A boy blows out his father's candle, shouting: "*Sia ammazzato il Signore Padre!*" In vain the old man scolds him for this outrageous behaviour; the boy claims the freedom of the evening and curses his father all the more vehemently. The tumult subsides at both ends of the Corso, for everyone is gathering at its centre till the crush is beyond conception and even the liveliest imagination cannot recall it later.

No one can move from the spot where he is standing or sitting; the heat of so many human beings and so many lights, the smoke from so many candles as they are blown out and lit again, the roar of so many people, yelling all the louder because they cannot move a limb, make the sanest head swim. It seems impossible that the evening can end without some serious injury, that the carriage horses will not get out of hand, that many will not get bruised and crushed.

Still, in time, everyone begins to feel the need to get out of the throng, to reach the nearest side street or square and catch a breath of fresh air; the mass of people begins to melt away and this festival of universal freedom and licence, this modern Saturnalia, ends on a note of general stupefaction.

The common people are leaving in a great hurry to feast with relish on the meat which will be forbidden them after midnight, while the fashionable world goes to the various playhouses to bid farewell to the plays, which are cut very short this evening,

for to these pleasures, too, the approaching hour of midnight will put an end.

Ash Wednesday

And so the exuberant revelry has passed like a dream or a fairy tale, leaving fewer traces, perhaps, on the soul of the author, who took part in it, than on the souls of his readers, to whom he has attempted to present it with a certain coherence.

In the course of all these follies our attention is drawn to the most important stages of human life: a vulgar Pulcinella recalls to us the pleasures of love to which we owe our existence; a Baubo* profanes in a public place the mysteries of birth and motherhood, and the many lighted candles remind us of the ultimate ceremony.

The long, narrow Corso, packed with people, recalls to us no less the road of our earthly life. There, too, a man is both actor and spectator; there, too, in disguise or out of it, he has very little room to himself and, whether in a carriage or on foot, can only advance by inches, moved forward or halted by external forces rather than by his own free will; there, too, he struggles to reach a better and more pleasant place from which, caught again in the crowd, he is again squeezed out.

If I may continue to speak more seriously than my subject may seem to warrant, let me remark that the most lively and exquisite delights are, like horses racing past, the experience of an instant only, which leaves scarcely a trace on our soul; that liberty and equality can be enjoyed only in the intoxication of madness, and desire reaches its highest pitch of excitement only in the presence of danger and the voluptuous half sweet, half uneasy sensations which it arouses.

In so concluding my Ash Wednesday meditation, I trust that I have not saddened my readers. Such was very far from my intention. On the contrary, knowing that life, taken as a whole, is like the Roman Carnival, unpredictable, unsatisfactory and problematic, I hope that this carefree crowd of maskers will make them remember how valuable is every moment of joy, however fleeting and trivial it may seem to be.