

this lovely country which is only now coming into sight of the modern world, with so many wounds to heal, so many just desires to be granted."

Chevalley would perhaps have continued for some time in this vein if Bendicò, from behind the door, had not asked "the wisdom of his Sovereign" to admit him. Don Fabrizio made as if to get to his feet and open the door, but slowly enough to allow the Piedmontese time to open it himself; Bendicò meticulously sniffed around Chevalley's trousers, after which, having decided this was a good man, the dog lay down under the window and slept.

"Just listen to me, Chevalley, will you? If it were merely a question of some honor, a simple title to put on a visiting card, no more, I should be pleased to accept; I feel that at this decisive moment for the future of the Italian State it is the duty of us all to support it, and to avoid any impression of disunity in the eyes of those foreign States which are watching us with alarm or with hope, both of which will be shown unjustified but which do at the moment exist."

"Well, then, Prince, why not accept?"

"Be patient now, Chevalley, I'll explain in a moment; we Sicilians have become accustomed, by a long, a very long hegemony of rulers who were not of our religion and who did not speak our language, to split hairs. If we had not done so we'd never have coped with Byzantine tax gatherers, with Berber Emirs, with Spanish Viceroyes. Now the bent is endemic, we're made like that. I said 'support,' I did not say 'participate.' In these last six months, since

your Garibaldi set foot at Marsala, too many things have been done without our being consulted for you to be able now to ask a member of the old governing class to help develop things and carry them through. I do not wish to discuss now whether what was done was done well or badly; for my part I believe it to have been done very badly; but I'd like to tell you at once what you'll understand only after spending a year among us.

"In Sicily it doesn't matter whether things are done well or done badly; the sin which we Sicilians never forgive is simply that of 'doing' at all. We are old, Chevalley, very old. For more than twenty-five centuries we've been bearing the weight of a superb and heterogeneous civilization, all from outside, none made by ourselves, none that we could call our own. We're as white as you are, Chevalley, and as the Queen of England; and yet for two thousand and five hundred years we've been a colony. I don't say that in complaint; it's our fault. But even so we're worn out and exhausted."

Chevalley was disturbed now. "But that is all over now, isn't it? Now Sicily is no longer a conquered land, but a free part of a free State."

"The intention is good, Chevalley, but it comes too late; and anyway I've already said that it is mainly our fault. You talked to me a short while ago about a young Sicily facing the marvels of the modern world; for my part I see instead a centenarian being dragged in a Bath chair around the Great Exhibition in London, understanding nothing and caring about nothing, whether it's the steel factories of

Sheffield or the cotton spinners of Manchester, and thinking of nothing but drowsing off again amid beslobbered pillows and with a pot under the bed."

He was still talking slowly, but the hand around St. Peter's had tightened; later the tiny cross surmounting the dome was found snapped. "Sleep, my dear Chevalley, sleep, that is what Sicilians want, and they will always hate anyone who tries to wake them, even in order to bring them the most wonderful of gifts; and I must say, between ourselves, I have strong doubts whether the new Kingdom will have many gifts for us in its luggage. All Sicilian expression, even the most violent, is really wish-fulfillment: our sensuality is a hankering for oblivion, our shooting and knifing a hankering for death; our laziness, our spiced and drugged sherbets, a hankering for voluptuous immobility, that is, for death again; our meditative air is that of a void wanting to scrutinize the enigmas of nirvana. That is what gives power to certain people among us, to those who are half awake: that is the cause of the well-known time lag of a century in our artistic and intellectual life; novelties attract us only when they are dead, incapable of arousing vital currents; that is what gives rise to the extraordinary phenomenon of the constant formation of myths which would be venerable if they were really ancient, but which are really nothing but sinister attempts to plunge us back into a past that attracts us only because it is dead."

Not all of this was understood by the good Chevalley, and the last phrase he found particularly obscure; he had seen the variously painted carts being drawn along by

horses decorated with feathers, he had heard tell of the heroic puppet shows, but he had thought, too, they were genuine old traditions. He said, "Aren't you exaggerating a little, Prince? I myself have met emigrant Sicilians in Turin—Crispi, for example—who seemed anything but asleep."

The Prince said irritably, "When there are so many of us there are bound to be exceptions; anyway, I've already mentioned some of us who are half awake. As for this young man Crispi, not I, certainly, but you perhaps may be able to see if as an old man he doesn't fall back into our voluptuous torpor; they all do. I've explained myself badly; I said Sicilians, I should have added Sicily, the atmosphere, the climate, the landscape of Sicily. Those are the forces which have formed our minds together with and perhaps more than foreign dominations and ill-assorted rapes; this landscape which knows no mean between sensuous slackness and hellish drought; which is never petty, never ordinary, never relaxed, as a country made for rational beings to live in should be; this country of ours in which the inferno around Randazzo is a few miles from the loveliness of Taormina Bay; this climate which inflicts us with six feverish months at a temperature of a hundred and four; count them, Chevalley, count them: May, June, July, August, September, October; six times thirty days of sun sheer down on our heads; this summer of ours which is as long and glum as a Russian winter and against which we struggle with less success; you don't know it yet, but fire could be said to snow down on us as on the accursed cities

of the Bible; if a Sicilian worked hard in any of those months he would expend energy enough for three; then water is either lacking altogether or has to be carried from so far that every drop is paid for by a drop of sweat; and then the rains, which are always tempestuous and set dry river beds to frenzy, drown beasts and men on the very spot where two weeks before both had been dying of thirst.

"This violence of landscape, this cruelty of climate, this continual tension in everything, and these monuments, even, of the past, magnificent yet incomprehensible because not built by us and yet standing around like lovely mute ghosts; all those rulers who landed by main force from every direction, who were at once obeyed, soon detested, and always misunderstood, their only expressions works of art we couldn't understand and taxes which we understood only too well and which they spent elsewhere: all these things have formed our character, which is thus conditioned by events outside our control as well as by a terrifying insularity of mind."

The ideological inferno evoked in this little lecture disturbed Chevalley even more than the bloodthirsty tales of that morning. He tried to say something, but Don Fabrizio was now too worked up to listen.

"I don't deny that a few Sicilians may succeed in breaking the spell, once off the island; but they would have to leave it very young; by twenty it's too late: the crust is formed; they will remain convinced that their country is basely calumniated, like all other countries, that the civilized norm is here, the oddities are elsewhere. But do please

excuse me, Chevalley, I've let myself be carried away and I've probably bored you. You haven't come all this way to hear Ezekiel deplore the misfortunes of Israel. Let us return to the subject of our conversation: I am most grateful to the Government for having thought of me for the Senate, and I ask you to express my most sincere gratitude to them. But I cannot accept. I am a member of the old ruling class, inevitably compromised with the Bourbon regime, and tied to it by chains of decency if not of affection. I belong to an unfortunate generation, swung between the old world and the new, and I find myself ill at ease in both. And what is more, as you must have realized by now, I am without illusions; what would the Senate do with me, an inexperienced legislator who lacks the faculty of self-deception, essential requisite for wanting to guide others? We of our generation must draw aside and watch the capers and somersaults of the young around this ornate catafalque. Now you need young men, bright young men, with minds asking 'how' rather than 'why,' and who are good at masking, at blending, I should say, their personal interests with vague public ideals." He was silent, left St. Peter's alone. Then he went on, "May I give you some advice to hand on to your superiors?"

"That goes without saying, Prince; it will certainly be heard with every consideration; but I still venture to hope that instead of advice you may give your consent."

"There is a name I should like to suggest for the Senate: that of Calogero Sedàra. He has more the qualities to sit there than I have: his family, I am told, is an old one or

soon will be; he has more than what you call prestige, he has power; he has outstanding practical merits instead of scientific ones; his attitude during the May crisis was not so much irreproachable as actively useful; as to illusions, I don't think he has any more than I have, but he's clever enough to know how to create them when needed. He's the man for you. But you must be quick, as I've heard that he intends to put up as candidate for the Chamber of Deputies."

There had been much talk about Sedàra at the Prefecture; his activities both as Mayor and as private citizen were well known. Chevalley gave a start; he was an honest man, and his esteem for the legislative chambers was paralleled by the purity of his intentions; so he thought it best not to say a word in reply, and he did well not to compromise himself, as ten years later Don Calogero did in fact gain the Senate. But though honest, Chevalley was no fool: he certainly lacked those quick wits which in Sicily usurp the name of intelligence, but he could assess slowly and firmly and also he had not the Southern insensibility to the distress of others. He understood Don Fabrizio's bitterness and discomfort, he reviewed for an instant the misery, the abjection, the black indifference of which he had been witness for the last month; during the past few hours he had envied the Salina opulence and grandeur, but now his mind went back tenderly to his own little vineyard, his Monterzuolo near Casale, ugly, mediocre, but serene and alive. And he found himself pitying this Prince without hopes as much as the children without shoes, the malaria-ridden

women, the guilty victims whose names reached his office every morning; all were equal, at bottom, all were comrades in misfortune segregated in the same well.

He decided to make a last effort. As he got up his voice was charged with emotion. "Prince, do you seriously refuse to do all in your power to alleviate, to attempt to remedy the state of physical squalor, of blind moral misery in which this people of yours lies? Climate can be overcome, the memory of evil days cancelled, for the Sicilians must want to improve; if honest men withdraw the way will be open for those with no scruples and no vision, for Sedàra and his like; and then everything will be as before for more centuries. Listen to your conscience, Prince, and not to the proud truths that you have spoken. Collaborate."

Don Fabrizio smiled at him, took him by the hand, made him sit beside him on the sofa. "You're a gentleman, Chevalley, and I consider it a privilege to have met you; you are right in all you say; your only mistake was saying that 'the Sicilians must want to improve.' I'll tell you a personal anecdote. Two or three days before Garibaldi entered Palermo I was introduced to some British naval officers from one of the warships then in the harbor to keep an eye on things. They had heard, I don't know how, that I own a house down on the shore facing the sea, with a terrace on its roof from which can be seen the whole circle of hills around the city; they asked to visit this house of mine and look at the landscape where the Garibaldini were said to be operating, as they could get no clear idea of it from their ships. In fact Garibaldi was already at Gibilrossa.

They came to my house, I accompanied them up on to the roof; they were simple youths, in spite of their reddish whiskers. They were ecstatic about the view, the light; they confessed, though, that they had been horrified at the squalor and filth of the streets around. I didn't explain to them that one thing was derived from the other, as I have tried to with you. Then one of them asked me what those Italian volunteers were really coming to do in Sicily. *'They are coming to teach us good manners,'* I replied in English. *'But they won't succeed, because we think we are gods.'*

"I don't think they understood, but they laughed and went off. That is my answer to you too, my dear Chevalley: the Sicilians never want to improve for the simple reason that they think themselves perfect; their vanity is stronger than their misery; every invasion by outsiders, whether so by origin or, if Sicilian, by independence of spirit, upsets their illusion of achieved perfection, risks disturbing their satisfied waiting for nothing; having been trampled on by a dozen different peoples, they consider they have an imperial past which gives them a right to a grand funeral. Do you really think, Chevalley, that you are the first who has hoped to canalize Sicily into the flow of universal history? I wonder how many Moslem imams, how many of King Roger's knights, how many Swabian scribes, how many Angevin barons, how many jurists of the Most Catholic King have conceived the same fine folly; and how many Spanish viceroys too, how many of Charles III's reforming functionaries! And who knows now what happened to them all! Sicily wanted to sleep in spite of their invoca-

tions; for why should she listen to them if she herself is rich, if she's wise, if she's civilized, if she's honest, if she's admired and envied by all, if, in a word, she is perfect?

"Now even people here are repeating what was written by Proudhon and some German Jew whose name I can't remember, that the bad state of things, here and elsewhere, is all due to feudalism; that is, my fault, as it were. Maybe. But there's been feudalism everywhere, and foreign invasions too. I don't believe that your ancestors, Chevalley, or the English squires or the French seigneurs governed Sicily any better than did the Salinas. The results were different. The reason for the difference must lie in this sense of superiority that dazzles every Sicilian eye, and which we ourselves call pride while in reality it is blindness. For the moment, for a long time yet, there's nothing to be done. I am sorry; but I cannot lift a finger in politics. It would only get bitten. These are things one can't say to a Sicilian; and if you'd said them yourself, I too would have objected.

"It's late, Chevalley; we must go and dress for dinner. For a few hours I have to act the part of a civilized man."

Chevalley left early next morning, and Don Fabrizio, who had arranged to go out shooting, was able to accompany him to the post station. With them was Don Ciccio Tumeo, carrying on his shoulders the double weight of two shotguns, his and Don Fabrizio's, and within himself the bile of his own trampled virtue.

In the livid light of five-thirty in the morning Donna-