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NOT ONE LIRA FOR GENOA'S GREATEST SON

P until a month or so ago, practically all I knew about Genoa was that it is the largest port in Italy; that Christopher Columbus was born there about five hundred years ago, probably on October 12, 1451; that it was the home town of Nicolò Paganini, the violinist who for me surpasses all others in interest; and that an American friend of mine was working there for the United States Information Service. I was vacationing in Monaco at the time, and it would never have occurred to me to add to my knowledge of Genoa if it hadn't been for two things: an article I happened to read in a Genoese paper extolling the celebrations that had been and were being held in the city to mark the fifth centennial of Columbus's birth, and the fact that Genoa is only three hours from Monaco by car. The centennial festivities, the article said, had started on October 12th of last year and were to continue for twelve months. The program included parades, an International Congress of Columbian Studies, a Sports Columbiad, a music festival, a ballet contest, a performance of Alberto Franchetti's opera "Christopher Columbus," a national seamen's rally, an international fireworks festival, and a year-long Christopher Columbus Exhibition at the Palazzo San Giorgio, which featured a silver urn allegedly containing the remains of the great discoverer. In my boyhood, the Grand Admiral of the Ocean Sea was as much of a hero to me as Paganini was in later years, when I was studying violin. I decided to drive over to Genoa for a day to soak up a little Paganini lore and visit the house where Columbus spent his youth, which I had heard was still standing. Now, having been to Genoa, I can report that only one of my projects was well advised. The Genoese I met were delighted to produce lore about Paganini, but Columbus's house was something else again. I had a very hard time visiting Columbus's house.

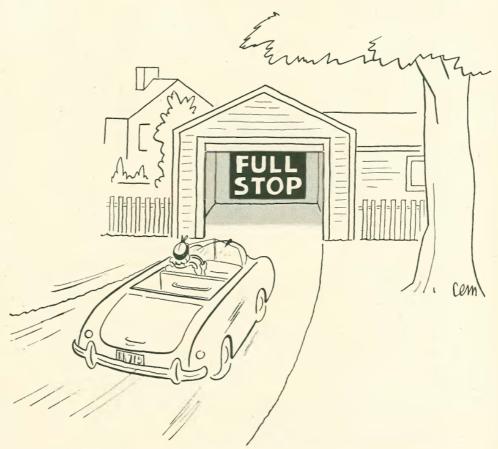
The morning after I made up my mind to go, I called my friend in Genoa, told him of my plan, and asked if he could show me the town that afternoon. He said that unfortunately he couldn't; he had a business appointment that would take up most of the latter part of the day. "But I know just the man who can," he went on. "He's a marchese and a real old-fashioned home-town booster. As a matter of fact, they're all hometown boosters here." I said that sounded fine to me, and we made arrangements

for him to introduce me to the *marchese* at the Columbus Exhibition early that afternoon.

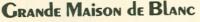
The three of us met shortly after lunch, in front of the silver urn purportedly containing Columbus's remains. The marchese was a medium-sized, intense man. He was in his late fifties, I subsequently learned, but the wine and sunshine of Italy, and perhaps the noble blood of his forebears, made him look much younger. In Genoa, as elsewhere, titles have often been acquired merely by accumulating money or giving it away, but the rank of marchese still seems to carry some social weight there. "My title was created in the sixteenth century by Charles the Fifth, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain," the marchese told me. "Charles came to Genoa, ordered the elders of the city to assemble, and said to them, 'Estote omnes marchiones'-'You shall all be marcheses." At that, my American friend laughed irreverently and said that the way he had heard it, Charles had said, "Estote omnes miniones"-"You shall all be flunkies." The marchese retorted that this was typical low-class Communist propaganda and not funny at all, especially coming from an American.

He then informed me that, having lost his fortune, like so many other nobles, he was now employed as a newspaperman by a pro-Western, anti-Communist paper. However, his true vocation, he said, was patriotism. (I soon gathered that patriotism in Genoa is a purely local commodity and has nothing to do with the rest of Italy.) Was it not from Genoa, the marchese asked rhetorically, that on May 5, 1860, Giuseppe Garibaldi started out for his glorious conquest of Sicily? Genoa, he added, has germinated more revolutionary movements than any other city in Italy. Indeed, he said, he had gone into journalism only because it gave him a chance to meet a lot of influential people and spread the spirit of patriotism.

My friend chuckled and shook his head, as if this were exactly what he had been expecting, and took his leave. The marchese hardly noticed his departure—or my presence, for that matter—for he was again talking of his native heath. "Genoa," he said, waving his arms in all-embracing flourishes, "is known as La Superba by the Italians. I challenge you to find a better name for what Petrarch called 'a city in the act of ruling, seated on rough hillsides, superb over men and walls.' Genoa gave the world Columbus, Mazzini, Andrea Doria, Nicolò Paganini—" The mar-







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chese broke off; he had grazed the silver repository of Columbus with one outflung arm. He bowed apologetically to the remains of the Grand Admiral and then looked at me abstractedly, having evidently lost his train of thought.

"Ah, Paganini," I said. "One of the reasons I came to Genoa today was to—"

"Genoa's origins go back to mythology," the marchese said. He was back on the track. "When they started digging up the ancient Greek cemetery near the Piazza de Ferrari, which is now the center of the city, they discovered that there must have been a thriving town here five hundred years before Christ. Genoa was destroyed many times, first by the Carthaginians and then by the Saracens. The last time was by Allied bombs, in the Second World War. But we Genoese are a sturdy race. Yes, amico, it takes more than a world war to break the spirit of Genoa. We have a genius for turning disaster into prosperity. Why, our forefathers even took advantage of the Crusades to expand their trade with the Near East. Did you know that this very building, the Palazzo San Giorgio, until 1797 housed the oldest bank in the world, the Banco San Giorgio, which was founded in the twelfth century?"

I said no, I hadn't known that.

"Five hundred years ago, the Banco San Giorgio was the banker of the world, the Wall Street of its era," the marchese said. "It owned immense properties in Corsica and along the eastern Riviera. It dominated the City and Republic of Genoa. It had the right to enact laws, to impose the death penalty for financial malfeasances, to declare void the passports of people who owed money to the bank. It lent money to all the princes and kings of Western Europe. Genoa had its Genoa Plan five hundred years before America had its Marshall Plan. Those chauvinists in Venice, Florence, and Rome are always making such a fuss about their paintings and sculptures," the marchese went on, with a disdainful wave of his hand. "But it was right here in Genoa that double-entry bookkeeping was first used. I ask you, which has more deeply affected the course of civilization—the art of painting or the art of double-entry bookkeeping?"

He stared at me dramatically, I took advantage of the break to get a word in.

"The other reason I came to Genoa was to see Columbus's house," I said.

The *marchese* ignored my remark entirely. "I tell you, *signore*, you cannot trust those other cities. What claims they



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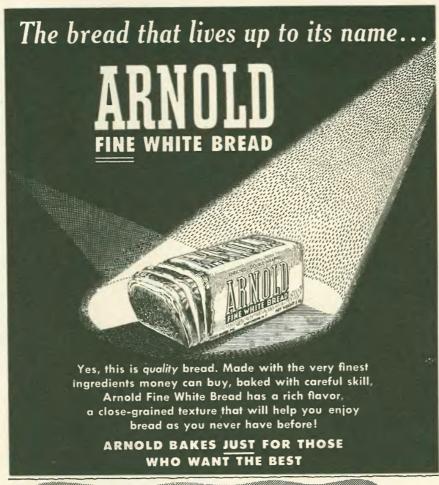


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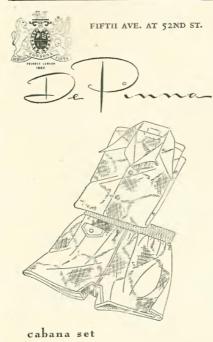
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make! Look at that, for instance!" He pointed to an urn next to the one containing the remains of Columbus. According to its inscription, it, too, held the remains of the Grand Admiral, and had been lent to the exhibition by the city of Pavia, where Columbus had studied astronomy, geometry, and cosmography. "It's like all the supposedly true and genuine arms and legs of Saint George," the marchese said. "If they really did belong to the venerable Saint, he must have been a centipede. We have assembled proof from ten countries that our remains are the genuine ones. We got our urn seventy-five years ago from Santo Domingo." (I have since learned that apparently the only undisputed facts about Columbus's death and posthumous journeyings are that he died in Valladolid, Spain, on May 20, 1506; that he was buried there; and that his remains were exhumed in 1542 and taken to the Cathedral of Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic. The Spanish claim that the ashes were reexhumed in 1795 and reburied, first in the Cathedral of Havana, and later in the Cathedral of Seville.)

The marchese led me from the offensive Pavian urn to another prominent exhibit, the anchor of the Santa Maria. It had been lent to the exhibition by the Haitian National Museum, in Port-au-Prince. Next to the anchor was a row of glass cases containing relics and documents from all over Italy, and from Spain, France, Ireland, Austria, Mexico, and Guatemala. There were bills from the Spanish merchants who had supplied food for the expedition, and a plaster model of the monument to Columbus being constructed in Ciudad Trujillo, "with the aid of contributions from all American nations and some European ones, among them Italy." In the case at the far end of the row were four letters in Columbus's own hand, written in March and April, 1502, and in December, 1504. Three of them were addressed to Nicolò Oderigo, Ambassador of the Republic of Genoa at the Court of Spain, and the other to the Banco San Giorgio. In this last one, Columbus donated one-tenth of his income to the bank to ease the people's tax debt. All the letters were signed "Xpoferens" ("Christopherens"), the signatures being preceded by the inscription

> .S. A .S. X M Y,

which stands, according to some, for "Su Seguro Atento Servidor Xristus, Maria, Yosephus" ("Your obedient,



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faithful servant, in the name of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph").

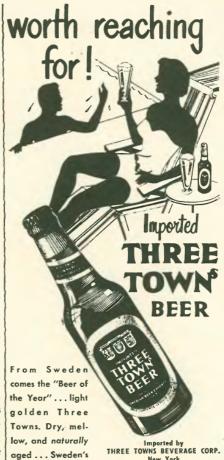
"This letter to the bank proves bevond all doubt that Columbus was a native of Genoa," the marchese said. "In those days, a Genoese who had got rich and wanted to show his patriotic spirit would donate part of his income to the bank to reduce the public debt. No foreigner would think of giving away his money for such a purpose."

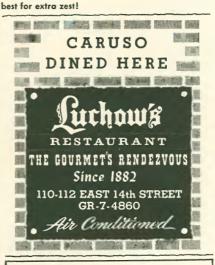
I could see that this was certainly not the time to mention the old debate about whether it was indeed Columbus who discovered America (in Florence, I knew, some local patriots still fiercely insist that it was Amerigo Vespucci, a local citizen) and about whether Columbus was born in 1451, which the Encyclopedia Americana says is "probably" correct, or in 1446, which is listed as a possibility by the Encyclopædia Britannica. Almost everything about Columbus that has been categorically stated by one authority has been categorically denied by another.

There was a commotion at the main entrance, the exhibition attendants snapped to attention, and a tall, affablelooking man wearing a sports coat and flannel trousers came in. The marchese greeted him with deference and introduced him to me. He was the General Secretary of Genoa, the highest permanent official of the city administration. He pressed my hand warmly and assured me that he was absolutely delighted to see me. He had been on his way to his office, he said, when he was overcome by the urge to step into the Palazzo for a moment to immerse himself in Genoa's glorious past. The marchese nodded understandingly, as if immersion in the city's past were a popular Genoese diversion. "The General Secretary is a patriot," he said. The General Secretary bowed his thanks to the marchese. Turning to me, he said he hoped that my stay in Genoa would be a long and pleasant one.

"I'm only here for the day," I said. Both men recoiled from me. "For the day?" the General Secretary exclaimed. "Ah, this terrible, terrible haste, the curse of modern civilization! What can a man see here in one day? We ought to have a city ordinance against visitors' staying for only one day.

"No doubt about it," said the marchese. "You must visit our theatres and bars, meet our people, eat in our restaurants. You like to eat, don't you?" He stared at me anxiously. When I nodded, his face brightened. "Ah, who doesn't!" he exclaimed. "Did you know





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that Genoa is the birthplace of ravioli? Yes, amico. Many an Italian city claims the distinction of having invented that supreme pleasure of the palate, but it was our Ligurian housewives who were the first to make it. I understand that ravioli is very popular in America. I have always hoped that someday a proper monument will be erected to honor the unknown creator of this unique cultural achievement. We are too poor here. Do you think a committee might be organized for that purpose in your country?"

I replied, cautiously but truthfully, that a great many committees have been organized in America, a lot of them for more obscure purposes than the glorification of ravioli.

"You must be sure to have some of our Genoese ravioli on your one day here," the General Secretary said. "And what else would you like to do?"

I explained that I had come over from Monaco to visit the house of the discoverer of America. I was about to go on when I noticed that the General Secretary's manner had chilled. He no longer seemed absolutely delighted to see me. He glanced questioningly at the marchese, who shrugged resignedly, as if he had tried his best to change my mind and hadn't succeeded.

"A lot of famous people have lived in Genoa," the General Secretary said. "Balzac lived at the Villa Rosazza, Dickens at the Villa Bagnarella, Napoleon at the Palazzo del Principe, Verdi on the Via San Giacomo, Byron in Albaro. Naturally, you must visit all these places."

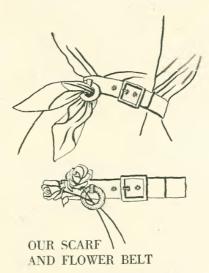
"But Columbus did live here, didn't he?" I asked.

The marchese looked at the General Secretary, and the General Secretary looked at the ceiling. "Well, yes, he did," the latter said, finally. I waited for him to continue, but he was clearly going to say no more.

In the face of such obscure resistance, I decided to switch to my other interest in Genoa. "And Paganini, too," I said.

The General Secretary instantly came out from under his cloud. "Ah, Paganini!" he said. "My dear sir, I insist that you come to the Town Hall with me to see his famous violin. Right now, in fact. It just happens that Professor Codignola is expected at my office. He is the greatest Paganini authority in Genoa and can tell you everything about our illustrious virtuoso."

HE three of us left the exhibition and walked to the Town Hallthe Palazzo Doria Tursi, a dozen blocks



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away. As we drew near it, the General Secretary excused himself, saying he had to hurry on ahead to make a phone call; he would leave me in the care of the marchese and would see us again later in his office. The marchese led me around the Palazzo's sixteenth-century porticoed courtyard and loggia, and showed me a bronze tablet put up by the Romans in 117 B.C. to mark the boundary between the Genoese and the Viturians. After a few minutes, we presented ourselves at the red-and-gold office of the General Secretary. He had with him a scholarly-looking old gentleman, who was introduced to me as Professor Arturo Codignola. The Professor was somewhat out of breath, as though, perhaps, he had just been routed out of his rooms by an urgent summons to the Town Hall. The General Secretary informed me that the Professor was the author of "Paganini Intimo," an excellent biography that contains many of the violinist's letters, and was also the director of the Mazzini Institute, which collects material on Giuseppe Mazzini and the Risorgimento. I bowed politely to the Professor. The General Secretary then informed Professor Codignola that I had come "all the way from America to study up on Paganini." The Professor bowed politely to me. "Indeed, why not?" he said. "Of all the great native sons of Genoa, none is more fascinating than Nicolò Paganini, at once demon, devil, and god."

"Well," I said, "after all, there is

C01—

"Shall we go and look at the violin?" asked the General Secretary.

We walked through a magnificent hall hung with portraits of Columbus and Marco Polo-gifts to Genoa from her traditional enemy and competitor, the Republic of Venice—and entered a high-ceilinged room in which stood a long, massive table surrounded by chairs. The walls were decorated with Brussels tapestries depicting episodes from the life of Alexander the Great. This room was used for the meetings of the city council, the General Secretary said. He stepped to a wall and pulled open a vault door, disclosing a safe with two shelves. On the upper shelf, under a large glass bell, was Paganini's violin, propped up on a disc that could be rotated from the outside by a small crank. Visitors thus could inspect the violin from every angle without touching it. On the lower shelf was Paganini's violin case, lying open with a bow in it, and a second violin and bow, which had belonged to his favorite pupil, Camillo Sivori. Paga-

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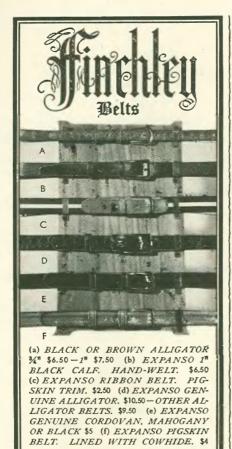


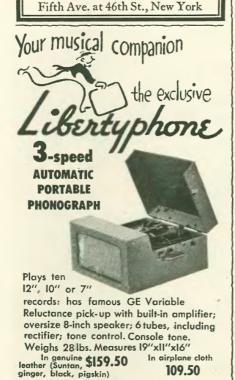
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nini's violin is a dark, sturdy, beautiful instrument, in good condition. It was made in 1742 by Giuseppe Guarnerius del Gesù, one of Cremona's three foremost violin makers, and was given to Paganini by a French merchant named Livron, who was his friend. "Paganini always considered it his greatest treasure," said Professor Codignola, with the appreciative glance of the expert. "It's a fine fiddle."

"It has a strong, sweet tone," said the General Secretary. He seemed entranced by it, which surprised me, since he must have had to show it to visitors almost every day. "People have made us tremendous offers for it, but the city will never sell. Sometimes we lend it to an artist for a performance, but that's as far as we go." Beside the glass bell was a list of the artists who had been permitted to play Paganini's violin-Camillo Sivori, Emanuele Preve, Giuseppe Bacigalupo, Carlo Moresco, Leandro Campanari, Enrico La Rosa, Jaroslav Kocian, and Bronislaw Hubermann. Behind the violin were a thermometer and a hygrometer, two small gold medals, and a small picture of Paganini.

I could hardly turn my eyes from the violin. I found myself wishing I had lived a hundred and thirty years earlier, so that I could have heard Paganini play this very instrument, Professor Codignola smiled and nodded slightly, as if he were reading my thoughts. "There have been great violinists since Paganini, but there has never been another like him," he said. "You know how unemotional the British can be. But when Paganini played in London, in June, 1831, the Times threw reserve to the winds and wrote, 'The arrival of this magician is quite enough to make the greater part of the fiddling tribe commit suicide.' And his fantastic appearance!" The Professor sketched an outline in the air with his hand. "He was tall and thin, with dark, burning eyes and a long nose. His black hair fell over his shoulders. He had long hands and long legs. It's too bad we have so few good pictures of him. The only painter who ever did him justice was a half-insane artist named Lyser, and he never heard him play."

"Maledetto!" murmured the mar-

"Heinrich Heine said that he couldn't sleep after hearing Paganini for the first time," the Professor went on. "And many listeners swore that Paganini's appearance changed with every piece he played. People compared him to a monk, a saint, a demon, a prisoner, a devil, a



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child. Nothing surprising, of course; today we'd call it mass hypnosis. There's no sense speculating whether he played better than today's best violinists. We'll never know. What we do know-from his own compositions—is that he performed double stops, arpeggios, and lefthanded pizzicati that no one had ever done before. He played double notes and passages in harmonics that made the most skilled violinists of his day gasp. Yet it wasn't his playing that gave rise to the legends and stories that surrounded him wherever he went. It was his weird, demoniacal appearance. It's a good thing Paganini didn't live a hundred years earlier; he would have been burned for witchcraft. It was whispered that he'd killed a mistress, murdered a rival, robbed a priest, and done God knows what else. Even responsible biographers, confronted with a mysterious three-year blank in his early life, have kept up the myth that he spent those three years in prison here, where he learned his fantastic violin technique. Actually, I'm quite sure he wasn't in prison. But he was in trouble all the time. Gambling, spending more money than he made, investing in disastrous ventures, and, above all, women. You can imagine how they ran after him."

The General Secretary and the marchese nodded knowingly. "Ah, the wonderful, bewitching, seductive women of Genoa!" the marchese said.

"Not only the women of Genoa," said the Professor. "Also the women of London, Paris, Vienna, Parma, Frankfurt, Naples, Rome, Florence."

"Surely none of them could compete with the women of Genoa, Professor," said the *marchese*, with some asperity.

"I wouldn't know," the Professor said.

"Do you imply that foreign women are more beautiful than the women of Genoa?" demanded the *marchese*.

"I don't imply anything," the Professor said. "I'm a historian, not a beauty-contest judge. I'm concerned with the facts of the life of Nicolò Paganini. One of those facts, and one that I'm sure is not pleasing to you, my dear marchese, is that the Genoese didn't treat Paganini very well when he was in financial trouble, which was most of the time. Our bankers were pretty hard on him. Frankly, I've always wondered why he bequeathed his violin to a city that treated him so shabbily. A noble gesture toward a bunch of narrowminded, money-grubbing Philistines—"

"Did it ever occur to you, Professor, that he might have done it because he

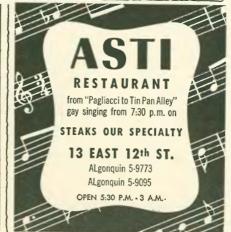


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loved Genoa?" the marchese broke in, in the tone of one addressing an unruly child.

The Professor shrugged. "Possibly. But Genoa certainly didn't love him, he said. "The Emperor of Austria named Paganini his court virtuoso. The King of Prussia made him Conzertmeister. In Westphalia, he was given the hereditary title of baron and made a Commander of Westphalia. What did the Genoese do? They gave him one of those tiny gold medals there. I suppose he wasn't important enough to rate a monument. Isn't that true?" he asked the General Secretary.

The General Secretary mumbled something about budgetary considerations, looked at his watch, and said, rather abruptly, that he had to leave right away-an important meeting, the pressure of business. He closed the vault, shook hands with us, wished me a pleasant stay, and went off. There was an uncomfortable silence. The marchese seemed depressed. The Professor said he hoped I would come to his office any time I wanted to talk about Paganini, and departed.

HE marchese suggested that I accompany him to the Genoa Press Club, a few blocks away. At the bar there, he shook hands with a number of confreres and asked the bartender for coffee-strong coffee. "Put in two pistole, Enrico," he said. "I am very hurt. I need strong coffee." The coffee was delicious, but the marchese was evidently so hurt that he was in no mood

"The worst part of it is that the Professor is right," he said at last. "Genoa is not a good town for music, letters, and the other arts." He lowered his voice to a whisper. "Most Italian cities whose opera houses were damaged during the war rebuilt them long ago. It is well known that we Italians always rebuild our opera houses first. But here they rebuilt their banks and business offices and insurance buildings, and they're still trying to collect a billion lire for the opera house. They don't give a damn about opera. All they care about is money, although the people who have it don't show off. Not many women here wear mink coats, but those who do could afford half a dozen of them. In Milan, an important executive has a handsome office with an anteroom and a pretty secretary. Here he hasn't even got a phone. The biggest business deals are closed on the basis of mutual confidence, just as they were hundreds of years ago.

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If two Genoese want to bind a contract, they simply shake hands on it. Naturally, they wouldn't trust a foreigner, and by foreigner I mean anybody who lives outside the city limits. Business is our tradition in Genoa. So what do the city fathers do? They name the largest square in town after the banker de Ferrari, not after Paganini or Columbus. After all, what claim to fame does Columbus have? He merely discovered a new world. Sometimes it's hard to understand this town. The Communists recently draped a red sash around the statue of Garibaldi in the Piazza de Ferrari. They're maintaining now that he was one of their earliest Comrades. They parade past the American Consulate and sing an old Garibaldi song, 'Get Out, Foreigner!,' which was written about the Austrians a hundred years ago. Politics is a crazy game here. In the last elections, the Anarchists voted for the Christian Democrats because they didn't want to vote for the Communists."

O cheer the marchese up, I suggested a drink of something stronger than coffee, and we ordered a Cinzano. This seemed to do the trick, for he soon regained his ebullience. We left the bar and went outside, where the shadows were deepening and the street lights had been turned on. Their bluish light fell on the medieval churches and the sixteenth-century palaces with their horizontally striped façades of black and white marble that we passed as we strolled along. Presently, the marchese announced that he was hungry. "This is just the right moment for raviolithe true Genoese ravioli," he said. I again mentioned Columbus's house and reaffirmed my urgent desire to see it,





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but he waved my remarks aside. know exactly the place," he said. "Follow me." We walked toward the harbor and wound up at a small restaurant on the waterfront. The street it was on had the fresh, strong smell of an ocean beach at low tide. We descended a few steps into a brightly lit cellar, whose ceiling was so low that I had to duck my head. The food was cooked on a large stove in the middle of the room, in plain view of the patrons. The marchese said this was the kind of place that was known only to a small group of connoisseurs. There seemed to be quite a lot of connoisseurs on hand, waving to each other, drinking wine, and singing. As we sat down, the marchese took a booklet out of his pocket and handed it to me. It was in English and was called, "How to Eat in Genoa: A Gastronomical Itinerary." The marchese informed me that it had been written by two friends of his-"extremely well-informed, patriotic gourmets." He ordered ravioli, and while we were waiting for it to arrive and drinking Coronata, a local dry white wine, I looked through the guide. The introduction explained that "the Genoese people, besides of hard worker, are good eater too, and even 'gourmand,' of that honest gourmandise which will not drive a man to hell but which is, after all, one of the few pleasures that mankind can enjoy in this often sorrowful world." The authors emphasized that Genoese dishes should be eaten in Genoa or not at all. "You can export all the ingredients," they had written, "and even the cook, but you cannot seal in a can the shining of the sun or the blue of the sky and the sea, and pour it into a saucepan."

A motherly-looking woman in a white apron served the ravioli. The marchese started a discourse on the proper manufacture of ravioli, but the cheerful racket of the connoisseurs in the tiny cellar was so distracting, and so many friends of the marchese's came over to say hello to him and be introduced to me (all of them were identified as patriotic gourmets), that I had a hard time following the thread of the story. It didn't matter, though. The ravioli, however it had been prepared, was indeed remarkable, and the marchese's friends, whatever they happened to be besides patriotic gourmets, were delightful. The motherly-looking woman brought another bottle of white wine, and then we had burida, the Genoese version of bouillabaisse. I am sure there were more dishes afterward, but I sort of lost track; more friends and patriots



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came over with their glasses to shake hands, and the babble, laughter, and singing increased. By the time the marchese and I had finished dinner and had said goodbye to everybody and were on the street again, the strong smell of the low tide seemed to have evaporated; the air had the scent of a Ligurian wine cellar. I could hear music coming from somewhere along the street. I said to the marchese that Genoa was admittedly a hard city to leave but that I had to be back in Monte Carlo that night. I had left my car near the Palazzo San Giorgio, and could he lead me to it? He said he certainly could; in fact, he knew a short cut. Taking me by the arm, he started off through a winding maze of slum alleys that, he said, had been built in that pattern many centuries ago, as a defense against invaders from the sea.

HERE was the exuberant feeling in the air that always seems to hover over the filthy, picturesque back streets of Italy, with their crowds of children, dogs, cats, and peddlersstreets that are wonderful to walk through but wouldn't be a bit wonderful to live in. Cobblers, tailors, dentists, candlemakers, merchants were working under bright lights in minute caves in the building walls. The noise was strange and exhilarating. In one narrow passage, I noticed a peculiar house, seven stories high, and very old and bent, like an antiquated crone. The paint had peeled off the façade, the doors were askew, and from the upper window sills hung a colorful assortment of stockings, salami, flowers, and diapers. The wall at street level was plastered with Communist slogans. One was addressed to Mario Scelba, the Italian Minister of the Interior, who is a kind of national chief of police: "Scelba, non temiamo il tuo piombo!" ("Scelba, we do not fear your bullets!") Below this was a poster that read, "Citizens of Genoa, remember that a society unable to provide work for all is a damned society!" Inside the house, a radio was blaring "La Vie en Rose." A man came out the front door, spat in the gutter, and shouted up to an old woman resting her elbows on a topfloor window sill to tell her that he had forgotten his handkerchief. A moment later, the woman lowered a small basket on a string. In the basket was a soiled handkerchief. The man took it, spat again, blew his nose, and walked away. The woman caught sight of the marchese and me and yelled at us to clear

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cursed us in the beautiful language of Dante.

We went on and on through the labyrinth. I, of course, hadn't any idea where we were, and I began to suspect that the marchese hadn't, either. Suddenly we emerged from the cramped, crooked medieval maze into what must surely be the most American-looking square in Italy, and possibly in Europe. Around most of its perimeter were solid, unimaginative banks and office buildings, among them two skyscrapers of respectable height and neoclassic design. In the middle of the square was a busy, dazzlingly illuminated Mobilgas service station. The air smelled neither of a beach nor of a wine cellar but of nonvintage gasoline. An incongruous note in this angular, cold, traffic-ridden twentieth-century setting was a ruined twelfth-century cloister, on the near side of the square, its broken-off Roman columns enclosed by an iron fence. The marchese said that now he knew where he was, and quickened his steps as we passed the cloister. Near the end of the enclosure was an ancient, crazy, battered two-story shack. It had a curious tetragonal shape, the front being slightly larger than the rear. Its roof was sagging dangerously, and it was so dilapidated that I could not understand why it had been allowed to remain standing, an eyesore in the midst of the graceful decay of the cloister and the glitter of the modern, functional office buildings and banks. On its doorstep, in front of a rusty iron door that looked as though it hadn't been opened in two hundred years, two old women sat talking and knitting, oblivious of the clamorous, gasoline-drenched world around them. The marchese was hurrying on, and I was about to join him when I noticed a stained marble plaque above the second-floor windows. I couldn't quite make out what it said, and as I was peering and squinting at it, one of the old women spoke up. "Yes, you are right," she said. "It is the house of Columbus." I couldn't believe her. But as I went nearer, I was able to make out the legend on the plaque.

Nulla domus titulo dignior. Heic Paternis in aedibus Christophorus Golumbus Pueritiam primamque iuventam transecit.

(No house deserves greater honor.

Here,
In the paternal house,
Christopher Columbus

Spent his boyhood and first youth.)

I don't know how long I stood in front of the house. The noise of the





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square and the monotonous chattering of the old women receded from my consciousness, and so did the contours of the skyscrapers, the neon lights, and the smell of the gas station. For the moment, I was back in the white-painted room of my boyhood, where I had first read the story of Christopher Columbus. All the books about him I

had read later and all the movies about him I had seen hadn't matched that first thrill. And now I looked at this ugly shack and was almost sorry I had found it.

I felt a hand on my arm. It was the marchese. "I guess you understand now why the General Secretary and I tried so hard to discourage you from coming here," he said. "Maledet-to, what's the use? You found the place anyway. They all find it." He fell silent. After a while, he said, "Many local patriots have raised their voices against this outrage. We've written to the papers about the disgrace this is to Genoa. The house should be preserved. It should be turned into a memorial and kept up. As it is, the street-cleaners store their shovels and brooms in it. Actually, it isn't quite certain whether Columbus was born here or on the Via Bosco, near the Porta dell'Olivello, where the Pammatone Hospital is now. You would never find that place; there isn't even a plaque to mark it. It is very sad." He turned around and waved his arm toward the square. "Look at those skyscrapers," he said. "Banks, insurance companies, shipping lines. Money, money, money, but not one lira for Genoa's greatest son. The city council

has made vague plans to build a memorial, but no one really cares."

We continued on our way. "I suppose the Genoese never liked Columbus," the marchese said a little later. "When he

asked them to finance his expedition, they turned him down. He had to go to Spain to get the money. No wonder trouble and worry turned his hair white when he was only thirty. People never forgive you for breaking the rules, and Columbus broke them all. Instead of sitting here and watching the money pile up, like all the rest of them, he left Genoa and discovered a new world. He was an adventurer, and though he was a successful adventurer, they didn't like him. His whole life was a slap in the face for those narrowminded, money-grubbing Philistines. They never forgave him for it."

—Joseph Wechsberg



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Oh, for the palace aloft!
Ah, for the nightclub below!
Many a season how oft
When the silken hours seem slow,
When pleasures palatial drag drearily
(Royalty bores—there's the rub!),
We lower our carcasses wearily,
Wearily down to the club.

There the lights blaze softly. The melodies are sweet.

The spits are laden juicily with fifty pounds of meat.

The atmosphere Floridian is giddy, and our eyes

Are dazzled by the fittings—they're the century's surprise!

We drink and dance and dine and drink and dance and dine and drink;

I mumble, "Just where are we, dear?" My wife says, "Home, I think."

If gaiety palls down below,
We ascend to the palace, and then
If we find things are getting too slow,
It's back to the nightclub again.

-John Standish Williams



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