OUR FAR-FLUNG CORRESPONDENTS

THE BLACK FELT HAT

ONE day in 1900, the biographer Eugenio Checchi reports, Giuseppe Verdi was asked by a friend which of his works he liked best. Verdi was eighty-seven at the time, and had a formidable array of compositions to his credit—the operas "Oberto," "Un Giorno di Regno," "Nabucco," "I Lombardi," "Ernani," "Giovanna d'Arco," "I Due Foscari," "Alzira," "Attila," "Macbeth," "I Masnadieri," "Jérusalem," "Il Corsaro," "La Battaglia di Legnano," "Luisa Miller," "Stiffelio," "Rigoletto," "Il Trovatore," "La Traviata," "Les Vêpres Siciliennes," "Simon Boccanegra," "Aroldo," "Un Ballo in Maschera," "La Forza del Destino," "Don Carlos," "Aïda," "Otello," and "Falstaff," as well as a Great Mass, three Tantum Ergos, a Stabat Mater, the Requiem, the four Sacred Pieces, the String Quartet in E Minor, several cantatas and hymns, and innumerable arias, serenades, duets, and ballads. In answer to his friend, however, Verdi didn't name any of these. "Of all my works, the one that is dearest to me is the Home I had built in Milan for old artists who were not favored by fortune and not endowed with the virtue of thrift," he said. "Poor, dear companions of my life! Believe me, friend, this Home is really my most beautiful opera."

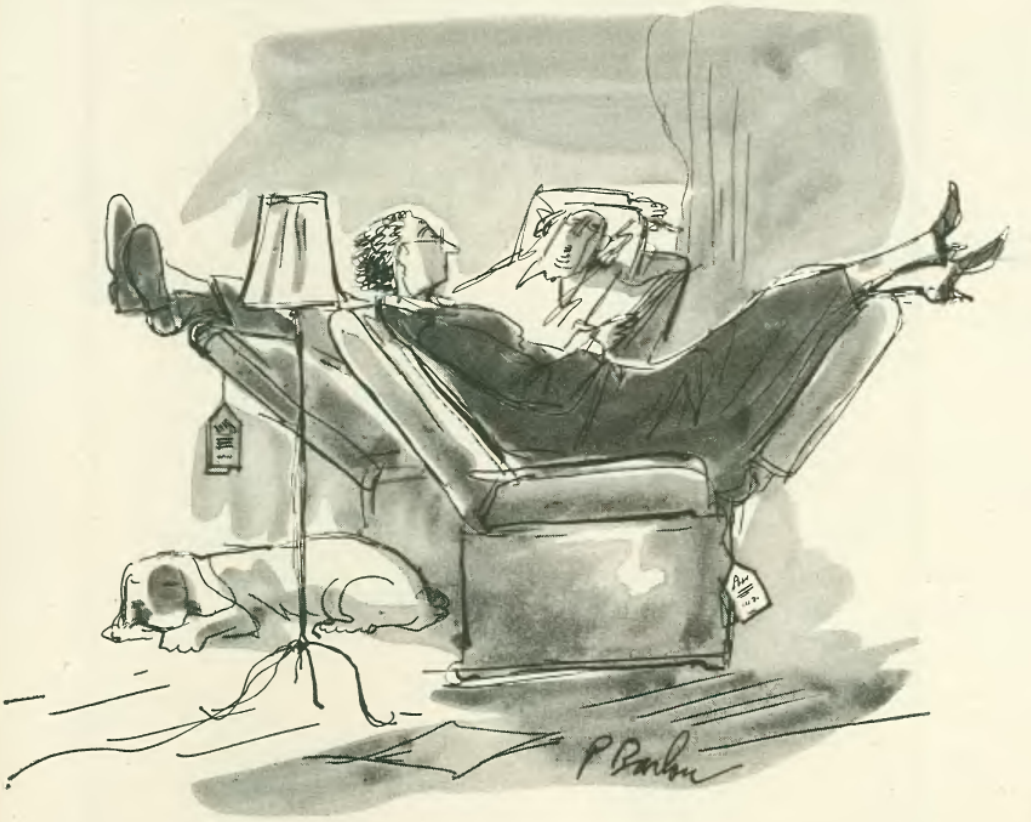
Verdi was referring to the Casa di Riposo per Musicisti, or House of Rest for Musicians, where more than five hundred men and women—all of them, in accordance with Verdi's instructions, "Italian citizens who have reached the age of sixty-five, have practiced the art of music professionally, and find themselves in a state of poverty"—have spent the last years of their lives in peace and without having to worry about money, thanks to the benevolence of Giuseppe Verdi, who paid for the project and is buried on its grounds. When I visited Milan not long ago, I hoped to listen to some of Verdi's magnificent music—the final passages of "La Traviata" or "Aïda," say, or the fourth act of "Don Carlos"—in La Scala, which was Verdi's favorite opera house and the scene of both his worst trials and his greatest triumphs, but, unfortunately, La Scala was closed, and by way of compensation I decided to pay a visit to what Verdi considered his "most beautiful opera."

The Casa Verdi, as it is called by the Milanese, is on the Piazza Michelangelo Buonarroti, in a quiet, out-of-the-way section of Milan, where the streets, in sharp contrast to the drab, hopelessly congested center of town, are wide, sunny, and lined with trees. The Piazza is a large and pleasant one, and it is dominated by the Casa—a fine three-story structure of red and gray stone, with a Romanesque-Lombard façade, such as one sees on many medieval *palazzi* and churches in northern Italy. As I approached the building, I noticed, to the left of the entrance, a marble plaque with an inscription, in Italian, that began:

ITALIANS LOOK
THE WHOLE WORLD
REVERENTLY LOOKS
AT THESE HONORED REMAINS
OF
GIUSEPPE VERDI

As I was reading this, two old men in dark suits came out of the building. They had on black felt hats with wide brims and crushed-down crowns, and these struck me as somehow familiar, although I couldn't recall where I had seen anything like them before. The two men started singing, as many Italians do when they step outdoors. They had booming bassos, the voices of professional singers, and they strode past me with long, exaggerated steps, as if they were walking across a stage; they might have been the conspirators in "Un Ballo in Maschera." But the song these superannuated bassos were singing was nothing from Verdi; it was "La Vie en Rose."

When I went inside, I found myself in a large entrance hall, and there I saw another marble plaque, on which was inscribed "FONDATORE GIUSEPPE VERDI" and, below this, a list of some fifty of the Casa's other benefactors, starting with Arrigo Boito, who was Verdi's most famous librettist, and including the Metropolitan Opera Company, Giulio Gatti-Casazza, Arturo Toscanini, Giacomo Lauri Volpi, Elisa Bruno, Beniamino Gigli, and Edward Johnson. At the rear of the hall there was an open door, and I went through it, coming out into a peaceful courtyard with a well-kept lawn, gravelled paths, and rosebushes. The court was completely enclosed, on three sides by the walls of the building and in



"Take your time about deciding. They're on fifteen-day trial."

the back by a small structure that looked like a chapel.

Two shrivelled old ladies in deep black, who carried themselves with the stateliness of prima donnas, were walking among the rosebushes, discussing the merits of a Western movie they had seen the night before. They thought very highly of it. I waited for a lull in the conversation, but there was none, so I broke in to ask if they could tell me where Verdi's grave was. The one who wasn't talking at the moment pointed grandly to a stairway off to one side. This, I soon discovered, led not to Verdi's grave but to a musty-smelling office, where a sad-looking elderly man was standing behind an old-fashioned high desk, making careful entries in a large ledger. He wore a high, starched collar and he had black cloth sleeves on over the sleeves of his jacket. Before I had a chance to speak, he looked up and announced that he was the Casa's secretary and bookkeeper, and was not authorized to talk to visitors. He asked me to wait for the manager, who would arrive in a *momentino*.

Knowing that in Italy a *momentino* may stretch into a whole morning, I asked if I might look for the manager in his office. The bookkeeper said no, the manager wasn't there *adesso* (now) but would be *subito* (right away). In the meantime, if I cared to visit the crypt . . . Without waiting for me to answer, he rang a bell. A white-haired man in a blue uniform, who turned out to be the caretaker, appeared promptly, and the bookkeeper told him to show me the crypt. The caretaker looked me over glumly, and then escorted me down the stairs and back across the courtyard, where the ladies in black were now talking to a bearded old fellow wearing a black felt hat like the ones I had seen earlier. The caretaker led me to the small building at the back, unlocked its door with a large key, and motioned to me to step in.

Entering, I found myself looking down over a balustrade at two marble slabs. On one was a simple plaque bearing the name "GIUSEPPE VERDI" in large gold letters. On the other, a similar plaque bore the name "GIUSEPPINA STREPPONI;" Signora Strepponi was the composer's second wife, and a celebrated soprano. Against a wall of the crypt was still another plaque, this one inscribed with the names of Verdi's first wife, Margherita Barezzi, and their two children, Icilio and Virginia. The three died, in quick succession, in 1838, 1839, and 1840, and this

was the great tragedy of Verdi's life.

The crypt was cold and dimly lit—a cheerless marble tomb—and it seemed hardly appropriate for Verdi, a man of great simplicity and warmth who disliked any sort of pomp. I would have preferred to find his grave out-of-doors, under the deep-blue sky of Italy, in a grove of pines, and among flowers. I turned and left. As the caretaker locked the door, I asked him why the crypt was kept locked, but he was plainly not inclined toward conversation. "It's a house rule," he said curtly, and shuffled away. The ladies in black were having a fine time telling the old man the plot of the Western in great detail, and I eavesdropped on them for a while. Then the caretaker returned to inform me that the manager had returned and would see me *subitissimo*. Ten minutes later I was ushered into his office.

Dottore Pierino Fracchia, the manager, was a tall, angular, harassed-looking man. He put aside a file of papers and invited me to sit down. What was it I wished, he asked when I had introduced myself. Nothing in particular, I said. I had just come by to see the Home that had been so dear to Verdi. As I spoke, I noticed a photograph of Verdi on the wall, and at once I realized why those black felt hats had seemed so familiar; they were modelled after the hat Verdi wore in most of his photographs—a style he adopted from the peasants in his native Parma. I mentioned the matter to the manager, and he told me that one of the Casa's house rules is that all the male pensioners must wear "Verdi hats."

The manager leaned back in his chair. "You may be interested to know that Verdi first thought of establishing something along the lines of this Home as early as 1888," he said. "He talked about it with Professor Camillo Boito—the brother of his librettist, Arrigo Boito—who was an architect, and with Emilio Seletti, his lawyer. Verdi was very thorough in his thinking about financial affairs. He knew that the Home had to have a sound financial basis. At the outset, his idea was to set up a hospital and convalescent home, but later he changed his mind in favor of an old people's home. In 1895, Camillo Boito showed him the first plans, and Verdi immediately put a hundred and fifty thousand lire—gold lire, mind you, worth about thirty thousand dollars—into a special account in the Banco Popolare for the Home. That was a great deal of money in those days. The house was started the following year and finished in 1899. But there was some

delay about getting it into operation, and Verdi died before it was officially opened, on October 10, 1902—the eighty-ninth anniversary of his birth. We haven't had an empty room here since. Verdi had the idea that the pensioners would want to share double rooms, to keep from getting lonely, but as it has turned out, they have all preferred to live alone. That has made it hard to fit everybody in, especially since the building originally consisted of only two stories. In 1937, we added the third floor. Now we have a hundred rooms, occupied by sixty men and forty women—the precise ratio that Verdi stipulated. He also set up an order of preference by which people were to be admitted—composers first, then singers, and then conductors, choir leaders, orchestra players, and so on. Regrettably, we always have a long waiting list."

The manager sighed, and went on, "In his will, Verdi left certain royalties to the Home *in perpetuum*. At first, this income was quite sufficient, but after a while, war, inflation, and currency devaluation began to raise havoc with our finances. Nowadays, it takes thirty million lire, or fifty thousand dollars, to cover our annual operating expenses, and Verdi's royalties simply don't amount to that. I don't know what we'd do without the help of private benefactors. One of the most generous is Arturo Toscanini. As you may know, he played the cello in the La Scala orchestra on the night of February 5, 1887—when 'Otello' was first performed. Anyway, Toscanini has given us over forty million lire and conducted many benefit concerts for us. We're dreading the arrival of 1957—the year when the copyrights on all of Verdi's works except 'Otello' and 'Falstaff' will expire. Fortunately, those two will be protected until 1974."

THERE was a sharp rap on the door, and an old man with white hair, a cherubic face, and twinkling eyes came in and greeted the manager effusively. The manager introduced him to me as Maestro Enrico Molinari, one of the pensioners, and added warmly, "Maestro Molinari was a great baritone in his day."

"That's high praise, coming from our manager," Molinari said, in a sonorous voice. He was carrying a Verdi hat and now he tossed it on a chair and flung out his arms majestically. "There's nothing wrong with my voice right now, even though I am seventy-two," he said. "My heart and my wind give me some trouble, but I still know how

to sing." He thereupon stepped to the middle of the room, made an elegant bow to a large invisible audience, and launched into the prologue to "Pagliacci"—"*Si può, si può . . .*" His voice had plenty of schmalz and timbre, and it carried so well that a vase of flowers on the manager's desk began to tremble.

The manager shook his head. "If you have to sing at all, you might at least sing something by Verdi," he said.

"What would you like to hear?" Molinari asked us. "The 'Stretta' from 'Rigoletto'? 'King Philip'? Iago's drinking song? Or the 'Credo'?" Before either of us could answer, the old man started booming, "*Credo in un Dio crudel che m'ha creato simile a sè!*"

The "Credo" sounded as if it might be too much for Maestro Molinari's heart, and I interrupted him to ask whether he had ever met Verdi.

"I certainly did," Molinari replied. "I must have been about eighteen at the time. I was standing at the stage door of La Scala when he came out. *Un gran maestro. Un grand' uomo.* He wrote some wonderful baritone arias. I sang the Father in 'La Traviata' at La Scala in 1924, under Toscanini. I sang in 'Lohengrin' and 'Andrea Chénier' under Gui, and in 'Aïda' under Panizza. I sang with Pertile, Dalla Rizza, Casazza, Menescaldi. We *sang* in those days, gentlemen. We didn't just make noises, as so many of them do now."

Molinari picked up his hat. He was off to play cards with some friends, he said. Some of the pensioners earn a little money by giving singing lessons, he told me, but he wouldn't be bothered with that sort of thing; there was too much else in life—not only cards but the radio and, above all, the movies. "I haven't missed one of Gina's films," he said proudly.

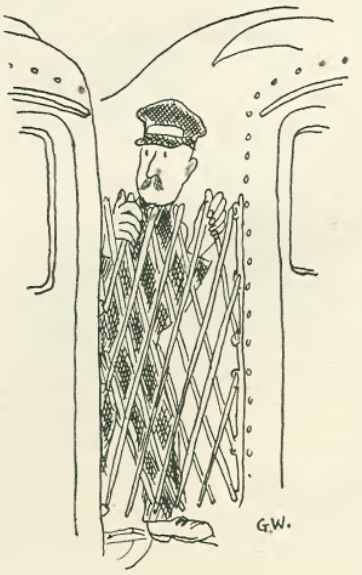
"He means the Lollobrigida," the manager remarked dryly. "They're all crazy about her." Molinari beamed, bowed to his invisible audience, and departed.

"He's a good man," said the manager. "They're all good people, even though they live in a world filled with memories of their own great pasts. Few of them have a very clear picture of how the Home came into being. Verdi means little more to them than any other composer. If you want to talk to someone who really knew Verdi, you must meet Maestro Carlo Gatti, the great Verdi biographer. I'll be glad to introduce you." I said I'd appreciate it very much, and the manager picked up the telephone and called Maestro Gatti. After

a brief conversation, he covered the mouthpiece with his hand and said to me, "He's going out to Parma tomorrow. Out to the Verdi country. He says he'd be delighted to have you go along."

I said it sounded like a fine idea, and offered to drive Gatti in my car. The manager made a date for me and hung up. When I left the office, a few minutes later, the two old ladies in black were still walking around the courtyard and chattering away as brightly as ever.

THE next morning, Maestro Gatti, a small, tranquil-looking man with a fine face, a high forehead, and an aquiline nose, received me in the living room of his apartment, in the Viale Bianca Maria—a museumlike place, crammed with statues, paintings, clocks, and old books. He is almost seventy-nine, I was told later, but his voice is full of resonance and his gestures are quick and forceful. When he talked about Verdi, which was most of the time, he frequently went into an outburst of enthusiasm, underscoring his points by shooting his right hand up in a spiral and by punctuating every sentence with an "Eh!" or a "Hah!" that sounded like a pistol shot. For more than half a century before his retirement, seven years ago, he was professor of harmony and counterpoint at the Milan Conservatory, where a chair of Studii Verdiane had been established expressly for him, and he is widely known as the author of the best biography of Verdi. When it was first published—in Italy, in 1931—it won critical acclaim but had no large sale. Since then, however, there has been a revival of interest in Verdi—in the opera houses



of Milan, Vienna, New York, and other great cities, Verdi's works are being performed more often than those of any other composer—and as Verdi has prospered, so has his biographer. Gatti's book has been reissued in a popular edition that is now selling briskly in Italy, and translations of it have been published in many countries, including the United States.

"Verdi is essentially a modern composer," Gatti said to me almost at once. "His heroes and villains wear costumes of the past, but their conflicts and emotions are modern and the melodies they sing are of timeless beauty. Let us go to my study and talk Verdi." Calling out to his housekeeper to prepare some coffee, he took me into the study. Its walls were decorated with photographs and drawings of Verdi, the bookshelves were crowded with books about Verdi, the tables were covered with souvenirs of Verdi. Gatti told me that he had known Verdi quite well. He would never forget the day he first saw him, he said. That was in 1892, when Verdi was seventy-nine and Gatti sixteen. "I was the leader of the boys' section of the chorus of the Milan Conservatory," he said. "We were going to take part in a performance of Rossini's oratorio 'Mosè in Egitto'—that year was the hundredth anniversary of his birth—and Verdi was to be the conductor. Well, in the very first rehearsal something went wrong with the boys' section. Verdi became very angry. And when Verdi was angry—" Gatti puffed out his cheeks and spiralled his right hand upward. "He called me front and center, and bawled me out. I was afraid he was going to throw his baton at me. Verdi was very understanding when it came to the problems of an orchestra, but he was not very patient with singers. He used to say that singers—especially the famous ones—made no effort to penetrate the spirit of his work."

Gatti stood up and dramatically raised his right arm. "Verdi was a wonderful-looking man," he said, and sat down again. "Frail and elegant, with wonderful bearing. He had a fine head, with long white hair, and a proud nose, and there was fire in his eyes, though his face was serene. His manner was never intimate. Even his close friends would never think of putting an arm around his shoulder—and you know how informal we Italians usually are. Verdi just wasn't that kind of man. He had the pride of a peasant from Parma, and he wanted to be one of those peasants. That is why he is so utterly different from Wagner. Wagner was a bour-

geois. Verdi was a peasant. Wagner wrote leitmotivs. Verdi wrote melody. Eh!"

The housekeeper came in with the coffee, and for a while Gatti and I sipped it in silence. Then Gatti said, "After the death of his second wife, in 1897, Verdi moved to the Grand Hotel Milan, because he couldn't stand the solitude in his house in Sant' Agata, and that's when I started seeing a lot of him. At the hotel, he lived in Apartment Number 107, on the second floor. He had a salon with a piano, and two bedrooms—one for himself and the other for his cousin, Maria Filomena Verdi, whom he had adopted. Great artists would gather in the apartment every afternoon, and sometimes I would go up to listen to them talk. Verdi was loved wherever he went. On the street, men would take off their hats when he walked by. Once when he was sick, the police had straw mats placed on the street outside the hotel, to mute the sound of the horses' hoofs. You would think that such signs of respect would have pleased the old man, but he wasn't happy. He was lonely."

Gatti sighed, and cast about for another approach to his favorite subject. "The blessed music came out of him as fresh water pours out of a mountain spring," he said presently. "Verdi was obliged to work fast. After the tremendous success of 'Nabucco,' in 1842, there was an enormous demand for his work. Every opera house in Italy wanted to present a new Verdi opera. There is a line in one of his contracts—'Four months prior to the première, the composer will receive the libretto.' Four months to finish an operatic score. Eh! Considering the physical effort alone, it is a staggering task." Gatti jumped up, riffled through a stack of papers on a table, and came up with a bulky document. It was a photostatic copy of one of Verdi's early drafts of "La Traviata," and he triumphantly showed me Violetta's aria at the end of the first act. After jotting down the first bars of the Allegro Brillante—"*Sempre libera degg'io folleggiare di gioja in gioja*"—Verdi hadn't bothered to write the rest of the melody; he had merely noted, in his fine, precise hand, "*Alla fine et cetera.*"

"Here is one of the greatest melodies ever composed, and Verdi just writes, 'To the end, et cetera,' as if everyone knew it already!" Gatti exclaimed, roaring with laughter. "Et cetera for *whom*, I ask you! Eh! Not for you and not for me and not for anyone else except a genius like Verdi. Happily, in a

later draft he took time to write out the entire melody."

Gatti put the score back on the table, and said, "As often as I can, I make a pilgrimage to the land he loved so much. One can't understand Verdi without understanding Parma. Let's be off!"

TWO hours later, we were in the flat, fertile farmland of Parma, with its quiet brooks, and its olive groves, fruit trees, and clean fields bordered by wooden fences. It was a Sunday, and the church bells were ringing in the villages we drove through. All the male inhabitants of each of them seemed to have gathered in the market square, where they stood about in small groups and carried on spirited arguments, while the young girls strolled past in threes and fours, their arms interlocked behind their backs. Sometimes we would meet a two-wheeled cart drawn slowly by a lazy mule, with a sleepy peasant sitting on top of a load of maize. These peasants all wore battered felt hats pressed into the shape that I now knew so well. As we drove along, Gatti told me that we would stop first in Sant' Agata to have a look at the house that Verdi bought in 1848 and spent the fifty best years of his life in. Verdi left the house to his adopted cousin, who married a man named Alberto Carrara, Gatti said, and its present owner is a son of the Carraras—Angiolo Carrara Verdi. (He uses both surnames, as his mother did.) He is the notary of the nearby town of Busseto, and claims to be the composer's only living relative. The people of Sant' Agata call the house "the palace," Gatti told me. Verdi called it "the hut."

Some fifty miles from Milan, we came to a small road sign reading, "S. AGATA—VILLA VERDI—1 KM."

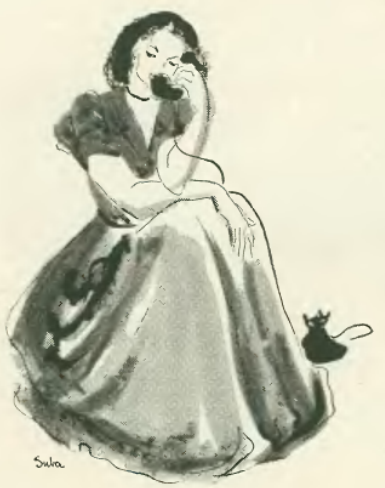
"We turn off to the right here," said Gatti.

The turn put us on a dirt lane leading past dilapidated farmhouses and small vegetable gardens. Sant' Agata turned out to consist of only a dozen houses, a small school, and a tiny church with a tall steeple. Ten or twelve little boys were playing in the dust in the middle of the road. A little farther on, we drew up in front of a small door in a high stone wall. Gatti walked up to the door and pulled a bell cord hanging beside it. After a while, the door was opened by the caretaker, a slight, graying man, who shook hands warmly with Gatti and informed him that Signor Carrara Verdi was in a hospital in Turin, recuperating from an operation. But we

were welcome of course; Maestro Gatti was welcome any time. Inside the wall, surrounded by the neglected remains of a private park, was an austere, heavy, square building of gray stone, three stories high, its walls discolored by a century of weather. Moss was growing on the stone benches in the park, and ivy was entwined around the trunks of the old trees. Verdi loved those trees, Gatti said; every time he finished an opera, he planted another tree by way of celebration. Gatti, who seemed completely at home, showed me the plane tree that Verdi had planted after the première of "Rigoletto," the oak that commemorated "Il Trovatore," the willow for "La Traviata," and so on. At one end of the park was an avenue, formed by two rows of tall poplars, down which Verdi, accompanied by his hunting dog, used to walk on his way to his fields, where he might shoot a hare or woodcock.

"Verdi adored this place," Gatti said. "In his will, he requested that nothing be changed either in the house or in the grounds. He knew a lot about farming, and kept putting money into his property. He had irrigation canals built, bought threshing machines, bred horses, and started a dairy farm. In those days, people were emigrating from Italy by the millions, in search of jobs. Verdi was proud that no one left Sant' Agata. There was no need to. He provided jobs for all. Hah!"

We had walked around to the rear of the house, and now the caretaker opened the back door and led us through a hall to Verdi's bedroom. It was spacious and high-ceilinged, and the heavy lace curtains at its windows gave it the peculiar half dimness that Franz Werfel, a great Verdi enthusiast, once called "sunny darkness." Verdi's bed stood off to one side, under a lace canopy, and across the room from it was



a large black piano. "This is where Verdi created almost all his works," Gatti said in a low, reverent voice. "It was on this piano that he played for the first time the wonderful melodies of 'Trovatore,' 'Traviata,' 'La Forza del Destino,' 'Aïda,' and 'Otello.' "

WE thanked the caretaker, Gatti said he hoped Signor Carrara Verdi would soon be well again, and we left. Now, Gatti told me, we would go to the house Verdi was born in. We went through Busseto, where Verdi went to school—a small town of old stone houses—and as we drove through the dull, flat countryside beyond, Gatti began to reminisce again. "I remember Verdi's funeral very well," he said. "It was in the Milan city cemetery. He had left instructions that there must be neither music nor singing. He wanted it all very simple, with only a small cross for a marker. The day was dark and damp and foggy. Half the people of Milan were there. No one was permitted to approach the grave, and we all stood at a distance, silently crying. Verdi had decreed that there should be no music, but he couldn't decree that there should be no weeping. Then, suddenly, there rose from among the crowd a chorale—soft at first, then louder and louder as it swept through the throng. It was the 'Va, pensiero'—the heart-stirring chorus of the Jews from 'Nabucco,' which had given hope to the people of Italy in their fight against Austria and made Verdi a national symbol." Gatti cleared his throat. "Well, we had to obey his will," he went on. "But a month later, on February 28, 1901, the coffin was taken out of its modest grave and buried in the crypt of the Casa Verdi, and the second funeral was an impressive demonstration of Italy's devotion to its dead Master. Toscanini conducted nine hundred voices in the 'Va, pensiero' while the bodies of Verdi and Giuseppina Strepponi were carried from the cemetery to the Casa. The people of Italy had done as Verdi wished, but now they did what they felt they had to do."

Four miles from Busseto, we came upon a faded road sign: "CASA NATALE DI G. VERDI." Turning off the highway, we followed a rough and dusty dirt road a short distance to the village of Le Roncole. It was much like Sant' Agata—a huddle of a few farmhouses, a church, a parish school, and a post office. Verdi's birthplace was originally a combination barn and house, with two attic rooms under its high, gabled roof to provide quarters for its human occu-

pants; since Verdi's time, some additional rooms have been added to one side of the structure, and these and the barn proper are now owned by a peasant family, but the two attic rooms have been taken over by the government, and so have the grounds around the building—a yard with trees and flowers and gravelled paths, surrounded by a carefully trimmed hedge. As Gatti and I walked to the barn, we heard a radio blaring; a sports announcer with a high-pitched voice was describing a soccer game. Above the entrance to a crude stone stairway leading up to the attic was the inevitable marble plaque; the inscription on this one began, "In this house, the musical genius Verdi drew his first breath."

At the head of the stairs there was a small room, and directly behind it was a larger room in which a half-dozen visitors were engaged in a hot debate, shouting, gesticulating, and trampling on the very spot where, according to a sign, Verdi was born. One man was contending that Signor Carrara Verdi had no right to call himself Verdi's only living relative; his (the man's) wife's second cousin was related just as closely to the composer. Another man said that this was nonsense. I glanced at Gatti, the expert, but he merely shrugged. In the larger room was a table on which picture postcards and souvenirs were laid out for sale. A woman in a black uniform stood behind it, and she kept calling vainly for quiet and asking the embattled sightseers to sign their names in the visitors' book. Presently, the argument came to an abrupt end, as arguments often do in Italy, and everybody began to laugh. The visitors signed the book and left without a single glance at the spot where Verdi was born.

When we were alone with the woman in black, she sighed deeply. Gatti shook hands with her, and asked whether she had had many visitors that day. "Just a few," she said. "People no longer remember Verdi. They're too busy listening to soccer games." The radio downstairs was still going full-blast, and she put her hands to her ears for an instant. "There are plenty of hard-surfaced highways all around Parma," she went on. "But do you think the government would improve the dirt road that goes through Le Roncole and past Verdi's house? No! The rich country of Italy can't afford to build a half kilometre of road to the house of one of its greatest sons. And they call this a national monument!"

"Hah!" said Gatti bitterly, and

turned to look at a picture of Verdi on the wall.

"Last week, a diplomat from Uruguay was here," the woman continued. "He was shocked at such a state of affairs. Heaven knows, I can't do more than I'm doing already. I keep the trees trimmed and the flowers watered, and I look after the hedge and the paths, but do they expect me to build a road with my own hands?" She paused for a moment, and then she said softly, "Tell me, Maestro Gatti, have the people forgotten about Verdi?"

Gatti continued to gaze worshipfully at the picture on the wall. "No, they haven't forgotten him," he said. "People love Verdi. To me, this has always seemed to be the difference between Verdi and Wagner. People admire Wagner. People love Verdi."

We signed our names in the book and left. The radio in the barn was now playing jazz. Gatti lifted both arms in a gesture of frustration—the spiralling mood had deserted him—and opened his mouth as if to say something, but then he apparently thought better of it. We walked back to the car in silence.

—Joseph Wechsberg

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THE GOOD OLD DAYS

[*From "The Lincoln Reader"*]

His [Lincoln's] campaigns were carried on almost entirely without expense. Joshua Speed told the writers that on one occasion some of the Whigs contributed a purse of two hundred dollars which Speed handed to Lincoln to pay his personal expenses in the canvass. After the election was over, the successful candidate handed Speed $199.25, with the request that he return it to the subscribers. "I did not need the money," he said. "I made the canvass on my own horse; my entertainment, being at the houses of friends, cost me nothing; and my only outlay was seventy-five cents for a barrel of cider, which some farm hands insisted I should treat them to."

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Their Outboard Cruisers are built in two models. Truly a luxury liner is the 21 ft. Cruiser, offering the utmost in comfort and convenience. The spacious cabin with big picture windows in sides, glass screened front window that opens, sliding door in cabin with glass and screen, flying bridge, driver and companion seats, full stern cross seat with backrest, are all standard equipment. Extras—such as mattresses for bunks, steering equipment, convertible top, mooring cover, lights and deck hardware, can be purchased and installed when ordered.—*Hunting & Fishing in Canada.*

Who wants to steer, for heaven's sake?