LUROPA

ROBERT BRIFFAULT

Europa

THE DAYS OF IGNORANCE

By

ROBERT BRIFFAULT



Charles Scribner's Sons

HE old fellow who was cadging drinks from me the other night at the Café Royal told me he had known Julian Bern's people in the old days at Rome. I had dropped in after a show and, over the mushrooms-on-toast and a double, was jotting down notes for my article in the Survey. The after-theatre crowd, in various stages of alcoholic and erotic stimulation, was making the usual din in the smokeladen glare of the mirrored Pompadour room. Silk-sheathed women with plucked eyebrows brushed past the marble-topped table, nearly sweeping off the cloth and my supper with their hips, trailing the fringes of Spanish shawls and mingled perfumes of Coty and femininity, or lolled, smoking, on the red plush seats. An American countess, once a Broadway star, sororised with an artist's model in citron and red, and fraternised with a group of young men whose sartorial and tonsorial eccentricities proclaimed their dedication to art. A few outsiders intent upon viewing the lions were distinguished by their relative silence and that perfection of the men's evening attire to be seen in a limited section only of English society. In a far corner Arnold Bennett smoked a cigar, and occasionally burst into boyish laughter over some story which Harold Nicolson was telling a group of journalists.

I had not at first noticed the old chap sitting beside me, with bolt upright dignity, looking, with his podgy face and bulbous nose set in a tousle of yellowish white hair and beard, for all the world like some ancient Silenus dug out of a temple of Bacchus. He was distinctly squiffy. Inarticulate mutterings, vaguely depreciative of the scene and of things in general, issued from his fleshy lips. I cast a side glance at the strange figure, intending to ward off conversational advances. I knew him by sight. It was Peugh, the sculptor, Aloisius Peugh, a name which had at one time possessed a certain academic distinction. He had "done" half the royalties in Europe, the Queen Dowager of Italy, Queen Nathalie of Serbia, the Infanta Maria de la Paz, the King and Queen of Saxony, and I know not how many more people out of Gotha. His "Europa," once a Burlington House exhibit, is commonly to be seen in biscuit reproductions among the clutter of Victorian bric-a-brac on the baize of mantel-shelves in decayed homes and seedy boarding houses. The beautiful Princess Daria Nevidof had sat to him, in the nude, for the flower-crowned divinity who elegantly rides the amorous bull. It had been the thing, in the most exalted circles, to have a bust done by Peugh. He had been commanded to Sandringham, as he lost no opportunity of informing one, to do a medallion of the Prince of Wales. Then, suddenly, Peugh had gone out of fashion. Royalty had adopted a democratic attitude. It had ceased to be portrayed before Corinthian porticoes and red velvet curtains by Winterhalter, and had shed that Olympian serenity of Greek gods and goddesses with which Peugh had been adept at endowing its lineaments in the diaphanous smoothness of Carrara marble. It had become the mode for the anointed to lay stress upon their common humanity, their mortal clay. Poor old Peugh's visit to Sandringham had been almost his last artistic contact with the denizens of the Empyrean. He had taken to drink.

It was a pathetic ruin, not without discernible traces of faded nobility and former glory, that sat beside me that evening among the hubbub of the jazz-age crowd. His mumbled soliloquising assumed gradually the form of articulate claims to acquaintance more intimate in degree than the casual exchange of a remark on some former occasion appeared to warrant. Though I felt in an unsocial mood, I had not the heart to snub the old fellow.

"Anything good in Town?" he asked with a side glance at the program on which I was pencilling some notes. "Nothing much," I replied, "a very undernourished Ibsen revival." The old boy made a sound like a contemptuous titter. "Do you know, my boy, what the divine Eleanor used to tell me?" he said; "that one might as well try out Ibsen in Kamchatka as in England!" "You knew Duse!" I said with some interest. He shrugged his shoulders as if to indicate the naïveté of the supposition that I could have named anyone whom he had not known. "Used to meet her at the Berns, in Rome." At the name of the old friend who, somehow, had always so interested me, my attention was thoroughly aroused. "And Bern, you knew Bern?" I said, turning half round. "Knew Bern! I knew him . . ."-he was, I think, about to say "as I know you," but feeling the inadequacy of the comparison, merely tossed his head, striking his empty tumbler on the table. "You'll have another, won't you?" I said, and catching the eye of Adolphe as he edged past with a tray, I ordered two more doubles.

Despite the renewed refreshment the blowsy old Silenus appeared to sober down marvellously, and to become indeed transformed into a semblance of his former self, as the opportunity offered to retrospect in that world where, so far as he existed at all, he might have been said

to live. For him the world had come to an end about the year 1900. Any allusion to more recent occurrences failed to arouse his interest, and called forth a tolerant smile, as though the matter had been somewhat frivolous and undeserving of serious adult attention. When, for instance, I mentioned that my brother, who had married a Miss Bern, had died in the war, he understood me to be referring to the Boer War. "Those fellows at Stellenbosch should have been court-martialled," he asseverated. "A young nephew of mine, a most promising young fellow, was sent to his death, sent to certain death, sir, on the Modder River." On my remarking that my brother had been killed in France, before La Bassée, Peugh was disappointed. "Oh, that war!" he said, expressing by his manner and tone the relative insignificance of the all-too-recent incident.

"Bern, now," the old fellow affirmed, "was, for any faults he might have, a man carved in the grand manner. Lord Caversham, Her Majesty's representative at the Quirinal, had, I grant you, also the grand manner. Everybody, except Lady Caversham, was in awe of him. But you should have seen Caversham shrivel into insignificance when Bern, at some function at the Villa Torlonia, graciously appeared, as if stepping from the throne of Capitoline Jove. When the ambassador advanced to greet him, and Jupiter Bern bowed low with grave formality, it was obvious to every one that the parts should have been reversed."

I perceived that we were not speaking of the same person, and that the Bern to whom Peugh was referring would be the father of Julian. "Oh, the little lad?" he said, leaning perilously over, while he steadied himself with one hand on the table, to indicate with the other the diminutive stature of my friend, as he recalled him.

I laughed, not without a little bitterness, as I thought how aged poor Julian had looked, thoroughly grey at the temples, when last I had seen him in New York.

"What if he's a nigger, anyhow?" the young woman in citron cried out. "Niggers is all right. They've taught us to dance. They're teaching you to sculp——"

"Negroid, that's what we're becoming. Women fawn upon them because they're not castrated by religion and sexology, and the French fawn upon them because their main hope of combining military power with contraception lies in fifteen million potential black soldiers."

"Confound the noise those youngsters make!" Peugh cried as his

words were drowned by the shrill voices. "I could never quite make out how it was that Bern missed promotion. He was, you know, for many years consul at Civitavecchia. Of all God-forsaken places! Yet he did not lack influence. His father, Sir Philip Bern, who was undersecretary at the Foreign Office under Lord Palmerston, was, everybody thought, marked out for the highest place in the Cabinet. Made a brilliant marriage, a Lady Emily Trent. Then there was some scandal. something about one of his wife's maids. There was a divorce, and Sir Philip later married his housekeeper. Still he managed, by sheer brilliancy, to recover a good deal of his influence when he went over to the liberals at the time that they were all excited over Mazzini and Garibaldi. Bernard Bern was at the Foreign Office under Lord Aberdeen. Was attaché at Constantinople. Had, I believe, a violent guarrel with Gladstone over the Turks, and that was the end. Still there was his sister, Lady Penmore. And Bernard knew almost every one, both in the government and the opposition. He was on the closest terms with the Prince of Wales. When I was at Sandringham-vou know. I was commanded to Sandringham-

"Yes, yes," I put in hastily, not wishing to hear the story.

"Well, it was on Bern's recommendation that the prince had wished me to do his medallion. His Royal Highness spoke to me of Bern in terms of profound esteem."

"Have you seen Archipenko's 'Inspirational Portrait' in twisted wire? Wire surpasses all the old-fashioned media of glyptic expression in the dynamic possibilities it offers for abstractionist intuitionism."

"Oh, I'm bored with all your high-brow gassing. Tell the waiter to

bring some more side cars, will you, honey?"

"Yet there was Bern, who should clearly have been at the embassy, if not in the Cabinet, vegetating on some piddling pension. Of course he was a bit queer. Not a real politician. Had curious notions far too original for the fellows in Downing Street. He had an idea that England ought to compel Europe to disarm and federate. Said she could have done it without striking a blow, that, had she insisted, no power on earth could have withstood. He actually went up to Lord Salisbury with a plan—to revive the Roman Empire, as he put it—a united Europe with its capital in Rome. Said it was the only thing that could have permanently saved England. For when England was at the climax of power he maintained that she was in danger, doomed, in fact,

unless something were done. Lord Salisbury had glanced at the door, uncertain whether he was quite safe closeted with a madman. 'What of Prince Bismarck and the German Empire?' he had asked, to put him off. 'Were England to declare her intention of standing by the side of France, Germany would be reduced to impotence,' Bern had declared. 'England ally herself with France! My dear sir, that is not within the realm of practical politics. This country will never fight on the side of the French,' the marquis, who disliked the French, had said. Bern alleged that the United States of America could have been induced to back a demand for a League of Nations. 'The United States,' Lord Salisbury had said, 'are not a Power.'

"I suppose Bern was a little mad. Who knows? After all, the idea may not have been as mad as Salisbury thought. It made a strong impression on the Prince of Wales, who seemed to adopt some of Bern's notions. Anyhow, after that interview in Downing Street, Bern went back for good to his coins and potteries. He was, you know, an authority on numismatics. Wrote a book about the coinage of the Roman Republic. People from all over the world used to call on him, when passing through Rome, to consult him on their specialties. We artists and idlers used to look in on Wednesday afternoons, when usually

he held his court, and met all sorts of people."

Peugh had a fluency more commonly cultivated in the nineties than at the present day. I imagine that, leading a solitary enough existence, he seldom got the opportunity to indulge it. He enjoyed the chance of reminiscing, and I, on my part, dovetailed what he had to tell with what I had heard from Julian himself, from my brother Harry, from Viola and Lady Penmore. As the old fellow rambled on, talking of a world that seemed so strangely, almost archæologically, remote, yet one in which my own people had moved, I was overcome with an uncanny feeling, a feeling of time melting away, dissolving, rushing and sweeping by, ruinous and terrifying. Old Silenus seemed indeed like an antique figure come to life out of an old statue, yellow with patina. Had he, instead of talking of people I had known, or almost known, and of that cosmopolitan Rome of the nineties about which I happened to have heard a good deal-had he been talking of the Rome of Tiberius or Diocletian, and of people he had met at dinner at the Golden House or in the gardens of Lucullus, I should not have felt a greater sense of strangeness. Time, as a static, actual experience, became to me horribly unreal. The whiskey may have had something to do with it, but things began to go round, not in space, but in time. The people about me, the fragments of whose talk mingled with old Peugh's reminiscences, assumed a flitting, dissolving appearance. They were about to become obsolete, old-fashioned, memories, ghosts. The shimmering clothes of the women, the dernier cris of the mode, were ready to hang, faded and frowzy, in some rag shop, grown ridiculous. Did I say "the other night"? Why, it was, I must admit, some years ago. The abbreviated skirt was at its height. The place where we were sitting, so permanent an institution as it seemed, has already gone, and has been supplanted by a colorless barn. Adolphe is no longer there. The new age of ultra-modernity out of which I was somewhat condescendingly smiling at poor Peugh and his antique, demoded world, has itself grown demoded, and not far removed from the ghost-like archaism of his own. Those gibbering people, those advanced women and bright young cynics, were flitting on the only momentarily solid crust of a thin ice about to crack and engulf them. And not them alone, but their world, their latest ideas, leaving not a wrack behind. It was but a flash, to be succeeded by another flash—till the last flash in the pan of a dving world.

The Berns lived on the Aventine, not far from the Church of Santa Sabina. The street, called Croce Rossa, a steep, twisting, cobbled lane, almost impassable to a civilised vehicle, has long since disappeared, absorbed by modern constructions. The place was an old mediæval tower, incorporated and disguised amid the later structures in which it was imbedded. One could see in places, under the limewash, the curling of acanthus leaves, the flutings of columns, on the stones torn out of old temples by the bandits of barbarian days. There were emplacements for catapults, and arrangements for pouring boiling oil down on assailants. The name of the street was a corruption; there was nothing red about it. It was really "Croce Orsa," after the Orsini, one of whose lairs it had been. There was a cross near by with a bear on it, roughly carved, where some of the rascals had been killed, I suppose, in one of their perpetual battles with rival gangs. The elder Bern used jestingly to point out that his own name, derived from the Anglo-Saxon beom, the old Norse björn, meant "Bear" and that, as he told Prince Filippo Orsini, he might claim some affinity with the original owners of his Roman home.

The Berns occupied the two upper stories. The top of the tower had been converted into a covered loggia. The street door stood a little way off the street, on a sort of raised terrace where grew some oleanders.

One rang a bell, the handle of which came out a foot or more from the wall as one pulled it, and the door was opened by some rattling wire contrivance operated by someone upstairs. After groping up five stone flights one reached a landing, where a brass plate bore the name: Signor Bernardo Bern-like that, in Italian. A servant who was the living likeness of the Empress Galla Placidia—heavy, almost purple black hair, and still blacker flaming eyes—opened the door. Fulvia, that was the woman's name, disdained to make any attempt at remembering or reproducing foreign names, and announced visitors by some peculiarity which she had decided was distinctive. Peugh, for instance, was "il signore colle scarpe di tela," "the gentleman with the canvas shoes," a style of footgear which he, somewhat of a dandy in those days, affected in summer. If the weather were still warm, one was shown through the large vaulted sittingroom, cluttered with cabinets of coins and busts on bases of cipollino marble, and with prints by Piranesi on the walls, into the large loggia, where, among a profusion of flowers set in antique urns and vessels. Mrs. Bern presided over the tea table, and the motley of marble and mellow brick, the piles of towers, domes, and columns, the detritus of all ages, Rome, lay spread out at one's feet.

They were putting up that blatant atrocity, the monument to Victor Emmanuel, that looks like the papier-mâché façade of an industrial exhibition, against the venerable slopes of the Capitol, and the horror, happily only visible in part from the Berns' loggia, hit you in the eye, like a leprous sore, scarring the face of Rome. The erection of the thing had been going on interminably for years, being periodically brought to a standstill by the bankrupt government's lack of funds or by a strike of the workmen. It served as a sort of barometer, supplying, as elsewhere the weather, a conversational opening. "They've stopped work again on the monument," or "They've resumed work on the monument," one would say, and the color of people's views was indicated by their pro-monumental or anti-monumental leanings. Mrs. Bern, whose conversational resources were somewhat limited, would greet the sculptor with, "Ah, Mr. Peugh, they've not resumed work yet." It was many months since from the loggia the click-click of the stone workers' chisels had been heard mounting in the golden air, and only the muffled murmur of the city droned its obligato to the conversation, that murmur which has flowed on without intermission while Europe has grown from savage infancy to disillusioned age. The workmen had, in fact, that morning put red flags and a huge placard on the ramshackle monument with "Long live the Social Revolution," in letters a foot high, which the police had, with difficulty and amid the jeers of the rabble, hauled down. But Mrs. Bern did not enter into those details. Being a devout Catholic, to whom the glorification of the usurper who had robbed the Holy Father of temporal power and reduced him to voluntary confinement in the Vatican was anothema, she was anti-monument, and considered that the artist's anti-monumental views, though resting on slightly different grounds, constituted a private bond of sympathy between them. She was an Irishwoman. Had been remarkably handsome in her young days-not that she was old, but a bad spell of Roman fever had left her rather thin and sallow. Her Irish eyes had the dilated look often seen in women excessively addicted to religion, and seemed, at those predominantly masculine Wednesday gatherings, to be in constant alarm lest something should occur calculated to endanger the Faith. She was Bern's second wife. He had met her at Interlaken, where she was having her first continental trip with a party of friends, and he had gone to climb the Jungfrau after his interview with Lord Salisbury. They were an entirely devoted couple, though one wondered what thread invisible to outsiders furnished the bonds of the somewhat incongruous union.

To anyone not so self-possessed and good-natured as Bernard Bern, she might have proved at times a little trying. She had, for instance, a way of throwing into the fire books of which she did not approve. It came out that she had lately burned his copies of some of Zola's novels. The novelist was gathering materials for his book on Rome, and was being fêted in fashionable and literary circles. Mrs. Bern brimmed with indignation.

"The King and Queen have actually granted an audience to the man,"

she protested.

"That was merely a political gesture, Madame," Count Spalda assured her. "In these times, when the political relations between Italy and France are so tense, it was advisable to use the opportunity of pouring oil on the troubled waters by honoring a great French writer." Count Spalda, young equerry to the Queen, looked picturesque in a blue military coat, and was one of the Italians who came to dip their moustaches in Mrs. Bern's tea with the appreciative curiosity of explorers sampling the exotic rites of a strange tribe. Among the young fops of Rome a pretence of familiarity with tea drinking was an affectation of elegant Anglomania. A young Roman poet, who was beginning to be internationally known, and was also an habitué of Bern's circle, lost no opportunity of airing his supposed taste for the beverage, having spent some months in England, and mystified his

admirers by talking of the Chinese Emperor Kien-Lung's formula for brewing tea.

"A great writer!" Mrs. Bern exclaimed. "Do you call a writer of

the most unmentionably vile filth a great writer?"

"But Madonna Elizabetta," said the poet, "M. Zola, with whom I dined yesterday, is a very inoffensive and modest man. The service which every artist renders is to make people see through his eyes what they had previously been unable to see. Zola is making people see what they have not wished to see. Any writer who does that has fulfilled his task."

"I certainly do not wish to see anything which M. Zola has to show," Mrs. Bern said. "How can you speak like that, you who are such a lover and artificer of beautiful things?"

"To create visions of beauty is not the artist's whole task, Madonna. Beauty is born out of the salt seas of reality. The emotions of horror which it may inspire in the artist are no less part of the gift which he has to offer than the creation of joy. The Greeks themselves, who gave us their sense of beauty, gave us also in their dithyrambic tragedy the dionysiac frenzy arising from the heroic confronting of horror, of life, of fate. These, like the head of Medusa, are at the same time sublime and petrifying in their awfulness."

"I don't know what the world is coming to," Mrs. Bern confessed, as she gave up the attempt to enlist support for her reprobation of the author of *Lourdes*, who was preparing an even more violent attack on

Holy Church.

Seated under a bust of Lucius Verus, Bernard Bern was listening to Mr. Otis G. Powell, an American, a great worshipper of Ruskin, to whom he habitually referred as "the Old Man," deeming the denotation sufficient among persons of culture. He was a great collector of Primitives. The old Roman families, elbowed out of their secular easy-going existence by the swarms of financial speculators, adventurers, jobbers, Austrian Jews, and fat Sicilians, who, instead of taking to highway brigandage, had discovered a more profitable form of banditry in the frenzied gambling and scramble for loot which had followed the march on Rome—the old Roman families were putting their heirlooms to auction, and Rome was the happy hunting ground of the art collector. Mr. Powell, who was engaged on a work on Roman churches of the fourth century, was discoursing on flower symbolism in early Christian art. The famous ivy and pine mosaics on the ceiling of Santa Costanza, on the Nomentan Way, were, he was explaining, symbols of immortality.

"Were not those evergreens also the symbols of Dionysus, to whom some think the shrine had belonged before it was converted to Christian use?" Bern asked.

"That's merely a legend," Mr. Powell said. "The place was built by the women of Constantine's household."

"Every old Roman church is set down to the egregious founder of official Christianity," retorted the Italian poet, resentful of the claims to connoisseurship of the American, who, alluding to his indexed files of authorities, the writers being Christian priests, said no mention of Dionysus was to be found before the eleventh century.

"In any case," the poet asked, "can you point to any differences in the themes of the decorations that would distinguish the legends of

Dionysus from those of Christ?"

While Mr. Powell was glancing uneasily over his spectacles at Mrs. Bern, the host tactfully turned the conversation by commiserating with Peugh over his difficulties in obtaining marble. The sculptor's antimonumental views were purely æsthetic, for although he had not been invited to contribute to the decorations, he was himself a sufferer in consequence of the anarchy prevalent among the working classes, which was the main cause that held up the progress of construction. The quarries of Carrara were one of the chief hotbeds of unrest, which had spread from the wholesale uprisings in Sicily to every part of Italy. The Fasci, or trades-unions, of the quarrymen at Carrara were exercising a reign of terror over the surrounding country, driving out the owners and the civil authorities, fighting pitched battles against the carabinieri and the troops. "Scarcely a chip of marble has been obtainable for months," Peugh complained. "I have had to pay a perfectly fabulous price for a small block for the bust I am doing of the Princess Charlotte of Saxe-Altenburg."

"I have had the same kind of trouble in Mexico," said Mr. Powell. "The Latin races do not seem to know how to deal with labor. No proper management, no organisation such as we have, for example, in Kentucky."

"Ah! Cantucchi, Cantucchi!" exclaimed Count Spalda with canorous Latin lilt. "What a marvellous country is America; what a marvellous country! You are civilised, you Americans, Signor Powell. We are not civilised. We are poor. We are ruined. Two hundred millions deficit! All our banks going smash. Half our rascals of politicians on their trial for embezzlement and corruption. The country is being looted by gangs of swindlers. It's a pity that the bomb which the anarchists let off the

other day before the chamber at Montecitorio burst a few minutes too late and did not explode in the midst of the scoundrels of politicians. The workmen's fasci are out of hand, and little wonder. As I was passing Porta Vecchia the other day they were waving red flags draped in mourning for the 'martyrs' shot down in Sicily, and were yelling 'Death to the bourgeois! Down with taxes! We want bread!' What hope is there for us? But your great country, Signor Powell, it is the regained Paradise of the human race, is it not? You will teach us to become civilised like Cantucchi, will you not?"

At which the poet jumped in his seat so violently that he upset his cup, and vented his pent-up indignation amid floods of eloquence and tea. "You, too, O impious Latin, wouldst call in the barbarian to stamp his hoof on the glory of our Roman earth? What of civilisation, as it is called, is there on the world's orb, what pulse of creative power, but derives from the culture of the heroic breed whose hearts were nurtured amid these hills of the Urbs, from the mother of empires at whose mighty breasts all barbarian broods that today trample distant strands have been suckled? At this hour, no less than when the mewing eagles of the legions stirred wild echoes from the cliffs of the Rhine and the lochs of Caledonia, and the triremes dipped their rhythmic oars in the grey waters of the Thames, bearing their freight of civilisation to the marshes of Londinium, that civilisation is the gift of Latin Rome to the barbarian."

"I hope your clothes are not spoiled, Signor D'Annunzio. Will you

have another cup?" Mrs. Bern put in.

Bern and the poet were drawn to one another by the views they shared on Rome's relation to our history. As the bells of Santa Sabina and Santa Prisca rang the Ave Maria, Bern would look down upon the rectangular pile of ruins of the imperial palaces, where the cypresses of the Villa Mills, stained a burning red, cast their blue shadows. There was moisture in his eyes. The sky, laden with gold over the Alban hills, darkened overhead to an amethyst purple seldom seen elsewhere. "See," Bern would say, "Rome despite everything, still wears her imperial mantle."

"Most of us barbarians," he said, "lack the historical, and therefore the political sense, which is strangled by the fierce superstitions of nationalism. We speak of 'antiquity,' imagining in our ignorance that we Europeans, or for that matter, you Americans, Mr. Powell, have fundamentally outgrown our cultural heritage. Whereas the variety of the human race, European man, derives its mental con-

figuration exclusively from the first European civilisation. Our thoughts, like our language, are corrupt Latin. What we have done, we barbarians, in politics, in literature, art, science, has been fashioned according to the pattern handed down to us by Rome. Just as that atrocity over there, of which we were talking, that vulgar set of colonnades and architraves which—excuse my putting it so, Mr. Powell—might as well be Chicago as Rome, is like all our architectural tradition but a vulgar reproduction of the Roman pattern, so, in the same manner and to the same extent, the European mind's architecture is laid out according to the scheme of Roman values and standards."

"That's just what the Old Man says about architecture," Mr. Powell put in. "'It reproduces the pattern of the mind, and cannot depart from

+ , ,,

"Many fantastic prognostications are heard in these days of what men may do in the twentieth century, wild talk of air ships, flying machines, under-sea boats, mechanical vehicles, of speaking across continents. Some wag was talking the other day about bottling up music for reproduction when desired, and of photographic pictures animated with lifelike motion. But all those things, even supposing the fancies of our *fin de siècle* dreamers to come true, do not alter the fundamental values of culture, the general configuration of life and of the mind. These are cast in the old mould handed down by Rome, a mould which has never been broken, whatever new materials have been poured into it."

The mould was only just then, in those fin de siècle nineties, beginning to crack. The rifts which were then beginning to appear have become gaping fissures. But with the cracking of the mould, Western civilisation itself is cracking. Further growth of it in that mould is not possible. What old Bern overlooked is that it was not the Rome of hardy Latin hillmen, nor the Rome of Scipio or Cæsar, freshly enriched with the newly garnered culture of Greece, which had handed down to the modern world the mould of its mind, but the decrepit Rome sold by Constantine to the Christian priests. It was the Rome upon which one looked down from the loggia of the Berns, the Rome in which black crosses rose on the pediments of the old temples, saints and apostles had taken the places of emperors on the triumphal columns, and the forum lay in ruins, torn down to build innumerable churches, prisons for the human mind.

Peugh told me of a strange German professor he had met several years earlier at the Berns, and whom Julian dimly recalled, a gaunt man

who, placing his hand upon the child's head, had looked into his eves. and had uttered the strange words: "Thou mightest be He." Bernard Bern had picked him up at Sorrento, and the professor, who was afflicted in his evesight and was led about by his sister, a rotund German Hausfrau, came to sit once or twice in a corner of the loggia. shading his eyes with his hand, and talking in a laughing cadenced voice. "The old Roman virtus," he would say, "became translated by the Christian rabble into virtue, the morality of the feeble, of the poor in spirit, the envious, herded by the priest who slunk into the mantle of the Roman imperator. The disaster, which reduced Europe to a stupefied continent, similar to the stupefied countries of Catholic peasants of today, such as Bavaria, Sicily, Spain, Ireland, was renewed by the fatal monk, Luther, who not only restored the Roman Church, but what was a thousand times worse, restored Christianity at the very moment that it was lying prostrate. Europe has thus been robbed of all intelligence and meaning. Its thinkers, among whom our German philosophers, Schelling, Fichte, Hegel, were turned into mere swindlers by the impress on their mollified brains of the rump of Rome heavily seated upon them. Crazed by the neurosis called Nationalism and the paltry politics that go with it, European man has before him the gigantic task of transvaluating the values handed over to him by degenerate, Christianised Rome. Not until that task shall have been accomplished will he be able to begin to be civilised, to surpass himself. Europe, as a political configuration, may have, incidentally, to be suppressed and destroyed in the process."

He called himself a good European and an immoralist, repudiating that nationalism and those virtues which seemed in their effects to bear so close a resemblance to crime. "Thou mightest be He': What was it that the blind Tiresias had meant?" Julian Bern once asked me. "Was it that I should share his fatal privilege, of seeing in the midst of a world of blind men?"

In those fin de siècle nineties, as today, men were beginning to doubt and to fear. A sense of impending disaster, of recoil before the unknown toward which they were drifting, mingled with the overshrill pæans of the march of progress, and the forecasts of the wonders which would transform Europe in the new age that was about to dawn. The spectre of war haunted men's minds like a nightmare. The burdens of armaments piled up ever higher, could not but bring the inevitable crash. The greater the efforts to seek safety in armaments, the greater became the strain of social and political insecurity. Every gov-

ernment was nervously looking round for the shelter of alliances. The Triple Alliance to which the Prime Minister, Signor Crispi, a renegade Garibaldian, was chaining the new ambitious and bankrupt Italy, inspired no sort of enthusiasm.

"Poor Don Ciccio," the Danish attaché, Count Jennisen, remarked to Bern, "is always being placed in the most embarrassing situations. His grandiloquent advocacies of the Triple Alliance never fail to raise a smile, it being well known that the old reprobate has three wedded wives. Did you see his last speech? They say it is the first time since he became Prime Minister that he has made a reference to God. He was, you know, a notorious militant atheist. Of course, since the Vatican's advances in the direction of patching up the Banco di Roma with the help of the Vienna Jews, the government is compelled to make some friendly gesture toward God. Ciccio's old Garibaldian friends are furious. The hollow pillar in Saint Peter's, the one with the spiral staircase of Bernini, is being guarded day and night lest someone should

put a charge of dynamite in it."

"All political action, which consists solely of compromises," said Bernard Bern, "can have the effect only of putting off answers to facts. The only aim of Europe today is to obtain a moratorium. England. France. Germany are doing their best to put off war; they make no attempt to abolish the danger of it. They do their best to put off social reform; they make no attempt to solve the problems of its necessity. The anarchists whom General Morra has been shooting down in Sicily, are now boarding emigrant ships, in tens of thousands, only too glad to avail themselves of the offers of American agents who are scouring the country for cheap labor for the Chicago factories. Instead of being amended, the incongruities of the European world are thus being redistributed and spread over the earth. It will perhaps need the Japanese, who are now engaged in annexing China, to arouse Europe to a sense of unity. What strange fate was it that was foreboded by the Corsican condottiere when he asserted that before the turn of a century Europe would be ruled either by America or by Moscow?"

In the Pompadour room, now more sparsely thronged, the waiters were clearing the unoccupied tables. The group of journalists had risen, and were leaving for their Fleet Street offices. One of them stopped to shake hands with me. "Mr. Peugh here was just telling me," I said by way of introducing him, "how the Italian

Fascists were driven in the 'nineties out of Italy and went over to America to take charge of Chicago, while the refugees from English oppression in Ireland went over likewise to America and founded Tammany Hall, taking charge of New York."

The newspaper man remarked that America had repaid the debt. "I was in Rome as correspondent in 1922. The plenipotentiaries of Wall Street carried out the negotiations to finance Mussolini and put him into power. The leader of the Chicago Fascists will, I suppose, be put into jail one of these days, while the leader of the Roman Fascists is at the Palazzo Chigi. Wall Street has made a specialty of financing every assassin in Europe—Pilsudski, Mannerheim, Horthy, Petlura, as well as Musso and the Russian émigrés."

"The Italian émigrés, after having made several attempts to blow up Signor Crispi, also repaid their debt," said Peugh. "They sent one of their bravos from Chicago to shoot the King of Italy at Monza."

"International relations which do not appear in the archives of the legations! It's a pretty dirty business, isn't it?" laughed the Fleet Street man. "I must hurry to my office, so that the public may be prevented from knowing contemporary history. Good night!"

Peugh seemed a little exhausted from the effort of talking and the excitement of evoked memories, and was disposed to relapse into a nodding, fuddled silence.

I was thinking of Julian Bern's romantic boyhood, as from many long talks with him I knew it-cradled in imaginative dreams of beauty passionately pursued, in the stimulating excitement of insatiable intellectual curiosity. I thought of the boy, with his keen, sensitive interests, nurtured in the mellow richness of a world in which he seemed to move, through the formative years, surrounded by the sources of art, the pageantry of ages, the visions of all human dreams, joys, desires, life seeming to open and expand before him as a gorgeous flower to be enjoyed ever more perfectly and expertly. And I thought how completely removed that world was, in spite of the keenness of his intelligence, from all the actual realities among which, in truth, he moved unseeing, unknowing, and which nevertheless carried him unconscious on their troubled stream, and were to shape his destinies. And the grey-headed men and women were as unseeing, as unknowing as the child. They too lived, despite the activity of their intelligence, in a world which had scarcely any contact with the realities which were shaping the course of the actual world. The cultural interests, the arts, the very politics of which they talked were a veil