

(John Chetwode Eustace (1762-1815) was an English Catholic priest, an antiquary, and a friend of Edmund Burke.)

To almost every hospital is attached one and sometimes more confraternities or pious associations, formed for the purpose of relieving some particular species of distress, or averting or remedying some evil. These confraternities though founded upon the basis of equality, and of course open to all ranks, generally contain a very considerable proportion of noble persons, who make it a point to fulfill the duties of the association with an exactness as honourable to themselves, as it is exemplary and beneficial to the public. These persons visit the respective hospitals almost daily, inquire into the situation and circumstances of every patient, and oftentimes attend on them personally, and render them the most humble services. They perform these duties in disguise, and generally in the dress or uniform worn by the confraternity . . .

Of charitable foundations in Naples, the number is above sixty. Of these seven are hospitals properly so called; thirty at least are conservatories or receptacles for helpless orphans, foundlings etc.; five are banks for the relief of such industrious poor as are distressed by the occasional want of small sums of money: the others are either schools or confraternities . . . The two principal hospitals are that called *Degli Incurabili*, which notwithstanding its title is open to sick persons of all descriptions, and constantly relieves more than eighteen hundred; and that of *Della Santissima Annunziata*, which is immensely rich, and destined to receive foundlings, penitent females etc. and is said sometimes to harbour two thousand. To each belong in the first place a villa, and in the second a cemetery . . . When a patient has recovered his health and strength and is about to return to his usual occupations, he receives from the establishment a sum of money sufficient to compensate for the loss of time and labour unavoidable during his illness . . .

Of the numberless confraternities I shall only specify such as have some unusual and very singular object: such as that whose motto is *Succurre Miseris*, the members of which make it their duty to visit condemned criminals, prepare them for death, accompany them to execution, and give them a decent burial. They carry their charitable attentions still further, and provide for the widows and children of these unhappy wretches . . .

The congregation *De S. Ivone* consists of lawyers, who undertake to plead the causes of the poor gratis, and furnish all the expenses necessary to carry their suits through the courts with effect. To be entitled to the assistance and support of this association, no recommendation or introduction is required; the person applying has only to prove his poverty, and give in a full and fair statement of his case.

*Congregazione della Croce*, composed principally of nobility, to relieve the poor and imprisoned, and particularly to bury the bodies of such distressed and forsaken persons when dead . . .

The Congregation of Nobles for the Relief of the Bashful Poor. The object of this association is to discover and relieve such industrious persons as are reduced to poverty by misfortune, and have too much spirit, or too much modesty, to solicit public assistance . . .

All these confraternities have halls, churches and hospitals.

[144] The *lazzaroni*, poorest of the poor, in 1820; from *Italy* by Lady Morgan.

Their poverty scarcely leaves them a home to shelter in; and their climate renders a domicile rather a luxury, than a necessity. The roof that screens them from the inclemency of the night, is the only roof they seek or know. The refuse of the people, with their common name of Lazzaroni, require not even this: - a bench, or a boat, pillows their slumbers, and the sky is their canopy, except in those transient and violent gusts of bad weather to which Naples is subject; when the portico of a palace, or the colonnade of a church, affords them all the temporary shelter they require.

The weather was occasionally very severe while we were at Naples; and it frequently happened, that on returning late from the opera, or from *Soirées*, we found the filthy portico of our old palace strewn with Lazzaroni. Some lay upon the earth, others were flung over a cask, or gathered round a brazier of hot embers, just sufficiently bright to glare upon their marked and grotesque features. Nothing could be more courteous or cordial than their manner: they all jumped up to make way for us, welcomed us home, wished us a good night's rest; and one or two of them, who had got up some English phrases, applied them at

random, by way of being particularly polite . . .

The Mola on these occasions [Sundays] generally presented several circles, each two or three deep; they were composed of the lowest orders and the Lazzaroni; sometimes seated on wooden benches, sometimes on the ground, according to the price paid to some peripatetic philosopher, or READER, who occupied the centre, and who read aloud – Tasso or Mastrillo, stories from 'La Bibbia', or legends of much less edifying character. The image of one of these *academicians* will not readily escape my memory, as it never failed, during the Sundays of successive weeks, to fix my eye: he was a short square grotesque figure, with a face moulded on the model of the French polichinel – all nose, chin, and bushy eyebrows; he wore an immense wig, a large but torn cocked hat, the jacket, or the fragments of a jacket, of an Italian courier, and a pair of bright yellow buckskin small-clothes, from the cast-off wardrobe of some English groom. He was without shoes or stockings; his spectacles were immense; and he held a filthy tattered Tasso in one hand, and a stick or wand in the other, which he moved with great dignity and variety of gesture. For every line he recited he gave a commentary of his own, that might fill a page: sometimes pathetic, sometimes humorous, and always with an air so proudly oracular, as to excite the strongest disposition to laughter. Such however was not the effect produced on his auditors: never were countenances more concentrated, or more intensely expressive of the deepest interest – eyebrows were knit, lips distended, cheeks glowed, and heads shook, at the feats and fêtes of the 'Goffredo' and the 'Rinaldo', against whom, in vain,

*'S'armò d'Asia e di Libia il popol misto.'*

Some half-rose in their emotion – others uttered a deep ejaculation; and the murmured 'Bravo!' circulated with all the restrained emotion of those who feared to interrupt, by their applause, strains that commanded the most enthusiastic admiration! . . .

The two '*grani*' that purchased their daily ration of macaroni, the two more that went for ice-water and a puppet-show, were surely and easily earned; and a little surplus of ingenuity and industry procured a few yards of canvass, which made up

their whole wardrobe (a shirt and trowsers), allowing even something for the superfluity of their red-worsted sash and cap. These wants supplied, nothing remained but the delicious *far niente* – the lounge in the sun or the shade – the laugh raised indiscriminately at friend or foe – a prayer offered at a shrine – or curses given to the *scrivano* [police magistrate], who mulcts some crime which poverty cannot redeem by a bribe . . .

[145] The high spirits of the Neapolitan working-classes in 1823; from the Countess of Blessington's *The Idler in Italy*.

The more I see of the Neapolitans, the better I like them. I have not detected among the individuals of the lower class that have fallen in my way, a single instance of the rapaciousness so generally, and I am inclined to think so unjustly, attributed to them by strangers. Their politeness has nothing in it of servility; and their good humour is neither coarse nor boisterous. The gardeners, and their wives and families, appertaining to the Palazzo Belvedere, seem actuated by an unceasing desire to please us. Fresh flowers are sent in by them, every morning, for the apartments; the finest figs, and grapes, are offered for our acceptance; and smiling faces and courteous enquiries about the health of every individual of the family meet us, whenever we encounter any of them. They sing, and not inharmoniously, while at work in the garden; occasionally duos and trios, and at other times, one begins a song descriptive of rural occupations, and his companions answer it. There is something inexpressibly charming to me, in these wild airs; but perhaps they owe much of the attraction to the delicious atmosphere in which I hear them, which disposes the mind to be pleased. No night passes in which these good people, joined by the *custode* and his family, do not dance the *tarantella* in the court yard, to the music of their own voices, accompanied by the *tambour de basque*. Old and young all join in this national dance, with a gaiety it is quite exhilarating to witness . . .

The streets of Naples present daily the appearance of a fête. The animation and gay dresses of the lower classes of the people, and the crowds who flock about, convey this impression. Nowhere does the stream of life seem to flow so rapidly as here;

not like the dense and turbid flood that rushes along Fleet Street and the Strand in London; but a current that sparkles while hurrying on. The lower classes of Naples observe no medium between the slumber of exhaustion and the fever of excitement; and, to my thinking, expend more of vitality in one day than the same class in our colder regions do in three. They are never calm or quiet. Their conversation, no matter on what topic, is carried on with an animation and gesticulation unknown to us. Their friendly salutations might, by a stranger, be mistaken for the commencement of a quarrel, so vehement and loud are their exclamations, and their disagreements are conducted with a fiery wrath which reminds one that they belong to a land in whose volcanic nature they strongly participate. Quickly excited to anger, they are as quickly propitiated; and are not prone to indulge rancorous feelings.

It is fortunate that this sensitive people are not, like ours, disposed to habits of intoxication. Lemonade here is sought with the same avidity that ardent spirits are in England; and this cooling beverage, joined to the universal use of macaroni, is happily calculated to allay the fire of their temperaments.

[146] Carnival in Naples; from *The Idler in Italy* by the Countess of Blessington.

The Neapolitans, high and low, rich and poor, enter into the spirit of the carnival, with a reckless love of pleasure and zest, that appertains only to children in other countries. Even the old seem to enjoy the general hilarity produced by the heterogeneous *mélange* of Neptunes, Hercules, Cupids, shepherdesses, sailors, Spanish grandees, and a hundred other absurd masks. Innumerable carriages, filled with these votaries of pleasure, pass and repass in the Strada Toledo, playing their antics, and hurling at the persons they encounter, showers of bon-bons and bouquets of flowers. The dress of English sailors seems to be a favourite one with the maskers at the carnival, for we saw several worn by persons whose equipages indicated that they were of the aristocracy. The lower class substitute a composition of plaster of Paris for bon-bons, and often throw them with a violence that occasions accidents. Large are the sums expended by the gay

Neapolitan gallants, in the purchase of the most delicate bon-bons and fragrant bouquets, which they throw into the carriages or windows, where they recognize their female acquaintances. A party of the *noblesse* a year ago, during the carnival, passed through the Strada Toledo, in a ship, placed on wheels, and fired from the guns at each side, volleys of bon-bons. Never were broadsides so amicably received, or so agreeably remembered, for they still form the topic of conversation, whenever a carnival is mentioned.

[147] The King of Thieves; from *The Story of my Life* by Augustus Hare.

While we were at Naples [in 1858] my mother lost her gold watch. We believed it to have been stolen as we were entering the Museo Borbonico, and gave notice to the police. They said they could do nothing unless we went to the King of the Thieves, who could easily get it back for us: it would be necessary to make terms with him. So a *ragazaccio* (or young rascal) was sent to guide us through one of the labyrinthian alleys on the hill of St Elmo to a house where we were presented to the King of Thieves. He mentioned his terms, which we agreed to, and he then said, 'If the watch has been stolen anywhere within twelve miles round Naples, you shall have it in twenty-hour hours.' Meanwhile the watch was found by one of the custodes of the Museo at the bottom of that bronze vase in which you are supposed to hear the roaring of the sea; my mother had been stooping down to listen, and the watch had fallen in.

[148] Neapolitan life before 1860; from *Naples: a Palimpsest* by Peter Gunn.

(Peter Gunn was born in Melbourne in 1914. *Naples: a Palimpsest*, published in 1961, is probably the best general study of the city – an Italian translation appeared in 1971.)

These were the last great days of Neapolitan society; members of the diplomatic corps and distinguished foreign visitors and