

I T A L Y T R I P

July 14th to 30th 1973

14th-15th July

First Day

Forest Row - Basel - Domaso
(Lake Como)

Having left approximately on time, we bumped along to Folkestone. It reminded me very much of our trip to Switzerland in class VIII; and had a similar atmosphere of something exciting and new.

The crossing on the ferry to Calais went without incident, and we were soon sorting ourselves out in the night train to Basel.

We arrived in time for breakfast (about 8.00) at a restaurant serving delicious black coffee.

Herr Neu, our driver, met us with a really nice coach, complete with air conditioning and the very necessary tip-back seats.

There wasn't much to talk about, nor the energy, as quite a few of us had spent a night without sleep, so most of us slept, and some simply looked at the Swiss landscape.

It was so hard to believe after all that time we had been thinking about the trip that we were actually going, and it took me a long time to get accustomed to the fact.

We had a very good picnic lunch by the side of a very fierce river (the Rhine), and due to good organization, were soon on our way. The countryside was becoming more and more beautiful, and it was a marvellous experience to be travelling along the shores of huge lakes, and below fantastically high and lovely mountains.

Soon we left the motorway, and turned off into a twisty road which was to take us over the Julier and Maloja passes into Italy. The turns and corners in the road were incredibly twisty, but, as we climbed higher and higher, people forgot to hold their breath as we went round the hairpin bends and looked, instead, at the hills. These became bare and more desolate, and I was reminded of Scotland, except for the fact that instead of highland cattle, here there were white cows with their inevitable bells.

The border proved no problem, and everyone was soon sampling their first cappuccino, and experiencing their first problems with the Italian money.

As soon as we had passed through the border village, we saw row upon row of grape vines. The road eventually brought us lower, till with the unpleasant company of torrents of rain, we arrived in Domaso by the side of Lake Como. It was very misty and very, very wet. Having taken off our shoes and socks and paddling through puddles, we arrived at the hostel.

Supper was ready, and we ate on a balcony which was partially covered. We had spaghetti bolognese, meat, salad and potato chips. Some of us accompanied this with vino, which acted, apart from anything else, as a nice heater.

We slept in chalets, and some in a main building which was rather damp and forbidding, but it was out of the rain and very cosy.

Some of the others had a swim in the rain, which must have been rather cold. We were soon in bed and asleep.

Susan Judson

16th July

Second Day

Domaso - Ravenna
(Como)

I may not know much, but one thing I do know is that it is extremely hot, sweaty and still. It is as far away from raining as imaginable: a thought which was inconceivable this morning. I'm lying on a narrow bed in a large, dimly lit, high-ceilinged room. Again, although after much shuffling around, the same five are sleeping together. I received quite a shock when I pulled back the bedspread to find a bare mattress, but it is far too hot to have anything more than a sheet sleeping bag. Last night Nicola and I both slept so well, that we still feel rather guilty about it. We had our own beds, whereas Danae, Dede and Tessa fought the night out trying to sleep crosswise on two beds. It was a relief to wake up this morning to find that the brown cellotape holding our hut together had not dissolved, but it was still raining. We ran barefoot, splashing through the puddles, barely making it in time for breakfast. We washed afterwards, and the loos were not nearly as terrifying as we had anticipated.

We were soon back in the coach saying goodbye to the rain and mist of Lake Como, which was all I saw of this scenic area.

On the way to Padua, we stopped at a small round baptistry. It rose out of the chaos of farmyards, chickens, children, and fierce Alsations! We walked round the church on the outside so we could get a feeling of its size. It was exactly seventy-two and a half of my paces. We sat on a log, while Mr. Mann described the baptistry's history. It was built in the eleventh century, of Celtic origins, by the Lombards. The architecture had strong upward and circular movements. The little figures on the doorway had lots of personality. My first impulse, as I walked in, was to look upwards. I couldn't help it. It was amazingly big inside. Most people climbed up a steep, dark, curved stairway to an upper gallery. The stone on the floor was rough and worn away. It felt so old and used. Downstairs again, we stood in the middle and sang "Ave Maria". As usual, I couldn't get the note, and I think poor Simon was exasperated with our feeble singing, but Mr. Mann luckily came to the rescue.

Back in the coach, we finished up the season's bread, which Richard handed round in a huge cardboard box, whilst Herr Neu drove down the motorway. The mineral water was an absolute necessity.

At Padua we saw the Giotto's, which were very early renaissance. They were beautiful, soft coloured frescoes, portraying scenes from the New Testament. I didn't realize that every space inside the church would be covered up with art. The church was high and rectangular. I like the idea of painting the ceiling with stars. The space inside the church does not end at the ceiling, but, instead, goes on forever. For me, much of the feeling of the church was lost due to the noisy tourists, and the postcards for sale along one side. We did not sing. It was here I first experienced the Italian heat. They were lucky they did not have to fetch a squeezy-mop in order to clear me off the floor.

The landscape to Ravenna was very flat. Although the river Po was very full, it had not risen above its raised banks, which would have prevented our driving down along the coast. Over the loud-speaker, and to the few that were sitting near him, Richard pointed out large plantations of umbrella pines, explaining their use, when used, etc., etc. He also pointed out fields of maize, sweet corn, corn, and corn, and corn... I knew how and when it is harvested, what it is used for, and how to identify the various species. Yes, the Italy trip was an all round education. Jeff, unsuccessfully, tried to take over Richard's good work as we entered Ravenna, telling us all to look at the football stadium on the left. Herr Neu, perking up to this bit of information, quickly swung left, much to Mr. Mann's horror: a disappointment to all.

The football stadium proved merely to be the flood-lights of the dock-side, and Herr Neu was compelled to drive the long way round to our hotel. I liked the billboards along the roadside. I find that human touch of ugliness gives a boring "soft shoulder" character.

Mr. Mann was given an enormous bear-hug and kiss by the proprietor of this hotel. The boys were packed off to spend the night in a monastery, but, just as we thought we had seen the last of them and said our fond farewells, they came back for supper! I really thought that the spaghetti was going to be the whole meal. The rolls would make excellent paper-weights if they were varnished. I've kept mine.

In the evening, most people stood outside in the small, yet beautiful garden, which was hung with lanterns. Paul bought me an ice-cream, and Christian bit its end off.

Feeling tired, I went upstairs and had a great bird's eye view of everyone from our bedroom window. The shutter was decked with the drying clothes of those energetic people who had already done some washing.

Dede is jumping around in her sheet sleeping bag....The ghost had just paid me a very painful visit. Tessa lost her sister's best nail scissors down the basin.

Caroline Brown

17th July

Third Day

Ravenna - Rimini

Those in the monastery awoke to a fine day; some of us having had the worst of the mosquitoes during the night. We left the monastery (the last clean hostelry till we reached Perugia) singing very British songs, such as "Rule Britannia", to the consternation of the locals who stopped their morning business to watch us.

Reaching the hotel to find that the girls had had the best of the breakfast, we started on the large quantity of the perennial steamed rolls, which were the only remainder for us.

Before departing, we all sang for the old man proprietor in an upper room. and then took our leave.

Leaving the bus in a car park, we went straight into the Museo Nazionale in the cloisters of San Vitale. There we saw a fifth century sarcophagus, depicting, if I remember correctly, Old and New Testament initiations.

Curtis then talked to us, and led us into the church of San Vitale in a procession through the arches, and so to the mosaics in the apse.

Ian was obviously not feeling too good, and was having trouble with his stomach in the early hours of the morning, and he deserved much sympathy.

After spending some time looking at the mosaics, we moved on to the Mausoleo di Galla Placida, outside which the official tried to get us to dance to his transistor. Inside, on the ceiling, were more beautiful mosaics lit by alabaster windows - until one turned on the electricity system. Here Mr. Mann talked about the mosaics.

Then came a coffee break, in which everyone quickly dispersed, but managed to find the Battistero degli Ariani in time to hear Mr. Mann speaking about the mosaic depicting Christ.

After this, a group, under the guidance of Richard, moved off to the market in order to do the shopping for our lunch. Here in the market, with many false excursions, much bargaining, tasting of the produce, and much dexterity on the part of Richard, Dede and others, the rudiments of a meal were assembled. Putting the food into a large, new basket, Paul and I carried it to the coach. Richard, Caroline and Nicola led the party astray, but we found our way and luckily reached the coach on time. Lunch went well, and, as always, the group's thanks were due to Richard, forever (on the trip) an organizer smoothing away our problems.

After the lunch of standard bread, salami, cheese, water and fruit, and after a quick run around the extensive car park, we left for the coast.

Parking under the trees off the road by driving straight in, in true Herr Neu style, we went to change in little boxes of five.

The Adriatic sea was dirty and unpalatable, but swimming in it was great fun. Jeff and Mark succeeded in swimming very far out, staying out for an hour, and swimming back with cramp, accompanied by a crampless Jim, who didn't know quite what to do. Curtis and Gabriel built sand pyramids in good Egyptian style. Everyone enjoyed themselves, and Mr. Mann lay happily in a deck-chair, admiring his party. The Tea-house provided refreshment and, fortunately, there was a shower for washing the sea from one's person.

We set off back to Ravenna. Of special interest on the journey were the port installations, putting yellow fumes into the air, and the raw sewerage pipe, which discharged into the sea only slightly north of the point at which we were bathing.

Having parked near the church, we went to S. Apollinare Nuovo, where Mr. Mann discussed, at length, the thirteen little mosaics on either side at the top of the walls, depicting scenes from the New Testament. Of particular significance were the middle pictures of the thirteen. The northern one is the raising of Lazarus which faces the denial by Peter.

Of significance was the difference between the North and South walls; one getting the light, and the other not, thus affecting the subjects in the pictures. We sang very successfully in this church.

The next visit was to the Mausoleo di Teodorico, a structure built to last, with fully interlocking stones, and a dome made from one piece of Istrian limestone. On the first floor Tim, leading with ideas from Richard, tried to get harmonics by singing into the bath tub which dominated the centre of the floor.

The afternoon had passed and we had to leave Ravenna. Passing the old Roman walls and the fort, we drove to Rimini, pausing on the way to look into a church for more mosaics; they were, however, covered with scaffolding. By the road were the famous umbrella pines that had seen the history of Ravenna; its political and cultural struggles, right up to World War II.

The Rimini hostel, we were forewarned, was a bad place, because of the airport and main road which ran past the front door, and the fairground that went round outside the back door. However, it was not these hazards, but the sanitation which bothered most people. Unflushable toilets and dirty wash rooms were the worst encountered on the trip. After supper, the announcement that we were to sing to the hostel at eleven o'clock had an unfavourable reception, as it allowed only two hours at the fairground.

The race track was the first attraction, and notable successes at the wheel included Nicola, who drove with skill, and forced many of the Italian men to crash or give way. Another notable success was Jim, who succeeded in writing off a car in a spectacular crash. Let it be remembered that the Italians were appealing to Nicola over the P.A. system to drive with due care and consideration for life and limb. It was altogether a successful day for British racing. People progressed from here to the big dipper, a big wheel, a house of glass, the ghost train, and other attractions.

So, after a hot day in the sun and the fun in the fair, the singing was not all it could have been.

We slept for one of the few times with foreigners in the room, and it was interesting to observe their reactions, to Jim noticeably, who nearly got mutilated by an irate Swede.

Orion Twentyman

18th July

Fourth Day

Rimini - Perugia

Early on that day we started off from Rimini, now an industrialized town, but also full of relics from pre-renaissance times, such as an old Roman bridge.

As we left the town, the landscape began to change from a relatively flat area to a very beautiful, hilly one, the character of which was almost magical in quality. The farm-houses on the hill sides were made of mud-bricks, all getting old and beautiful. The fields were not cut off into rectangular sections, but were left in all kinds of shapes, giving me the feeling of a happy efficient dis-

orderliness, full of character and little beautiful spots, eager to shelter one for a little moment of thought. The area gave me the feeling of well-being, and I am sure that it is reflected in the minds of those who live there.

The time of year helps my opinion too, I suppose; the fields being ripe and golden, with the hay ready for reaping, and all the green vines still growing.

As we approached Urbino, one could see the town, perched at the top of a hill, looking down over numerous valleys in the surrounding country-side. It must have been truly rewarding and inspiring to live in a town like that in those days.

From where we left the coach, we could see the Palazzo Ducale, in repair, with all its arches in rows along the immense facade of the wall.

The Palazzo Ducale used to belong to a wise duke, who was a very moral and righteous man. He was a self-made man, with many gifts which he could use with great dexterity. Urbino used to be a centre where all the sons of influential people were sent for their education. Here they were introduced to all the virtues of life in those days (i.e. gentlemanliness, horsemanship, courage, philosophy, mathematics etc.). Urbino was Raphael's birth-place.

We walked up a narrow street, through the town gate to the square, then on up to the Palazzo Ducale. From there we entered into the magnificently spacious old building. First, we went up to the great throne room, where we saw large tapestries designed by Raphael. In the same building, we also saw paintings by Piero della Francesca, as well as many rooms dedicated to the restoration work being done on the Palace. From there, we went on to Raphael's home; being shut, however, we went on to the baptistry where he was baptized; a tiny little place along some narrow, cobble-stone side-streets. The view, over the roof tops, from the baptistry was very beautiful, with a definite familiarity about it. The baptistry was smothered by a monstrosity of an altar, made of brown-green marble, in all its intended grandeur, though it did not suit the simplicity and restrained beauty of the interior of the baptistry. We talked about Raphael, and his purpose. The walls were decorated with beautiful frescoes.

From there, we went on to visit Raphael's home, back up the little streets, a little further up the hill, which was open by now.

It was small, with a large wooden door, though it was rather beautifully arranged with a small courtyard at the back where there was a dry well, pillars and some stairs leading up to a higher level beyond the main part of the house. There were many relics in the house: old paintings, as well as a skull, said to be Raphael's. There was an exhibition of modern graphic painters on the left as we entered the house.

Then we went back to the coach in order to get some lunch. We found a place by the side of a hill. After lunch, many of us

climbed the side of a hill, in order to see the fantastic view, over the other side, of the surroundings of Urbino. There I remained for some time.

From there we went on to Perugia...

William Cass

19th July

Fifth Day

Journey to Assisi

I awoke that morning after a good night's sleep, to find myself in the Etruscan tower. Like every other morning on the Italy trip, one had to make sure that there was plenty of time to do the menial tasks of washing, packing, and filling one's stomach with a continental breakfast. By the time I had finished the first two tasks I found the other group who had stayed at the other hostel already seated on the balcony. The balcony of the tower gave us the most splendid experience of the rising sun over the hilltop city of Perugia.

After breakfast we were delayed somewhat when the boys who had stayed in the tower overslept. Even so the ones who had already breakfasted made their way to the city centre, where we were to meet the coach, and waited at the cathedral. There were to be further delays when a few girls were sent back to change their clothing, which, through their inappropriateness would cause them to be banned from the church in Assisi.

The journey by coach wasn't too long and we stopped on the way to obtain our daily provisions for the picnic. Outside the actual town of Assisi we made camp and prepared our lunch. After the meal Mr. Mann talked to us about the life of St. Francis, planting many interesting seeds which blossomed into flowering thoughts, for me at any rate. We arrived in the city in the early afternoon and proceeded to amble up the dark narrow streets to the church. As it happened we saw many sparsely dressed ladies in short skirts and brief rather revealing blouses who were given entrance to the church. This rather annoyed me, since I was sweating rather profusely in my dark trousers and shirt.

There was a lot to see in the church, which was built on split level. In the lower parts there were frescoes by Giotto and Cimabue, some of which had been recently renovated to our good fortune. Below this level, in the crypt, was the tomb of St. Francis. On the highest level there were more frescoes depicting the life of St. Francis, also by Giotto. Mr. Mann felt ill at this point so Curtis took over quite successfully considering the heat and exhaustion. From this church we made our way up to another church, stopping on the way for some refreshment. This church was at the top of the town and was of special interest to us for its facade. After that we proceeded to the church of St. Clare. Here we were able to see the Crucifix in front of which St. Francis had his first vision, and also the clothing of the holy monk and his colleague, St. Clare. At this point we made

our way back to the coach. On our arrival we were informed that during our visit to Assisi we had misplaced Mrs. Querido and two others but it all turned out alright as they had reappeared by that time. Our next stop was to be at a church outside Assisi, which enveloped the beautiful chapel which once stood in a wood outside Assisi and was the favourite church of St. Francis. The inside was covered in gaudy baroque-type decoration. Its size and grand appearance was well contrasted to the tiny, simple chapel. We did not spend much time there, but travelled back to Perugia.

We arrived quite a distance from the tower and Mr. Mann gave the girls strict orders not to go around with less than three girls as the streets were full of over-friendly Italian men. Even so Nicola and I decided that we wanted to get a pizza so we walked down the street by ourselves always making sure that at least one boy from our class was in range. Nicola and I found a gorgeous little restaurant where one could get pizzas to take away. We felt quite proud to have been able to explain in our basic Italian what we wanted. We waited till we had reached the square from which we had departed that morning and then began our meal. The pizza was incredibly delicious, a very good example of Italian cooking. After we finished our self-indulgent meal we met the others at the hostel to have dinner. We decided after dinner to go out and paint the town red. This is where my memory is rather hazy. I can remember the town was very alive, perhaps more alive than in the day time. We walked in a group of about twenty 'odd' people down the main street. As we progressed down the street we came across a little roadside cafe. Here we dropped our weary bodies and decided after much argument that we would sample some of the local Umbrian wine. At this point I feel I must give mention to the great command of language and leadership of Jefferson Eliot. He handled the situation extremely well considering he had to deal with twenty riotous English (and others) hooligans, who couldn't wait to get hold of the desirable nectar of ancient times. By this time the other party had arrived. They sat apart from us and rather anti-social that is until they were forced to communicate when Justin was quite sure that he had been cheated by the Italian waiter and called on Jeff to aid him in recovering his money. Jeff took advantage of the situation and had a lot of fun practising his Italian. This arguing backwards and forwards went on all evening and the victory went to the Italian team after they had gone through the whole day's takings and reached the conclusion that no mistake had been made on their part.

The night went on and everyone became more and more happy. At that point I decided it was time for me to go, so Susan, Paul and I made our way back to the hostel stopping on the way for an ice-cream. I went back to our overcrowded room and waited for the rest to come back. As usual it took us a long time to go to sleep because of rather rowdy people making stupid jokes. Sleep came, and the memories of the day became a fantasy of our dreams.

Dede Liss

20th July

Sixth Day

Perugia - Florence

As someone later remarked to me: "It wasn't a spiritual experience, but...well..."

Many of us had woken up in the ancient Etruscan tower to the sound of the little Fiats grinding their way up the steep, cobblestone streets below. The beds were comparatively luxurious, and the old tower gave one a sense of solidity and security so lacking in the more modern youth hostels.

And then to step out onto the balcony, built directly on the old tower, to see the brilliant clear Italian sun illuminating the tiny-village-dotted undulating landscape: "but...well..." It was heart-gladdening. The whole group was there, munching meagre Italian breakfasts, washed down with real weak coffee. For once, however, nobody complained. The old town of Perugia stretched behind us on the hilltop, and before us was a steep drop to the fertile valley separating Assisi from Perugia. That valley had seen many bloody battles between the two towns. Now it lay quiet and beautiful.

We got off to an early start, and Herr Neu received a well-earned applause when he extricated us from the motorists' maze that was Perugia. He was then misdirected onto a road which promised little on the map, but which turned out to be far superior, according to Mr. Mann, to the old and previously used route.

The coach rolled along the winding road, up one hill, around the next, along a ridge, and down one valley after another. We passed charcoal burners, and farmers ploughing the rough soil with oxen, and as we rounded the crest of the hill, we caught a fine glimpse of the old town of Orvieto perched firmly on its own high hill.

We had been told, but I suppose not quite convinced, of the beauty of Lake Bolzano. Coming into full view of it from high on a ridge, seeing the sun glinting over its whole huge, round expanse - it was splendid.

Down by its shore, we swam out through thick writhing weeds to the clear, cool water beyond. After a short sunbathe and another, longer swim, I returned with my fellow bathers to find that a group of honourable members of the party had strangely (but voluntarily) forgone the swimming to prepare the picnic lunch. After some rushing around, but even more straggling (much to the worry of the one man of our party, who knew that if we did not get into the Florence 'Ostello della Gioventu' in time, we might not get in at all), we finally set off; this time for the famous cathedral of Orvieto.

For me, and I know for others, this was one of the highlights of the trip.

Before entering, we had a short time to admire and discuss the remarkably ornate facade. The interior was astounding, if only for its simplicity. I think we had all become accustomed to seeing cathedrals that were beautiful when seen from without, but whose interiors were plastered with the excesses of Baroque 'Art'. In Orvieto it was different: although the horizontal stripes of alter-

nating black and white marble were an aesthetic worry to some, to others they gave the huge building a certain movement.

Mr. Mann led us into an apse to show and talk to us about the frescoes of the Antichrist by Signorelli. As usual, Mr. Mann's talk dealt with the knowledge and wisdom behind the paintings. The frescoes were beautifully clear and unfaded, complex and vivid portrayals of the coming of the Antichrist. While Richard dashed repeatedly round the corner to feed the insatiable light-meter, we, when there was light, listened with one ear to Mr. Mann and with the other to the messages that the images gave us directly. I hope I speak for most when I say that, to use a well-worn expression, those paintings spoke to us; to each in his or her individual way. Thank you, Mr. Mann, for the depth and openness of your talk there: it was as unforgettable as it is unrecountable.

Simon, our trusty conductor, arranged us before the altar steps for "Ave Maria". As we sang, the scowl of a certain tourist guide intensified until, half way through, he answered our "Dominus te cum" by letting verbal protestations come out of his face. Meanwhile, however, a delicate swallow was winging swiftly through the vast still spaces above the polished marble floor. "Gratia plena" we sang, and the swallow spiralled upwards to the rafters.

Outside, seeing the darkening sky and the clock hands turning, we made a dignified scramble to the coach.

On up the Autostrada, on the outskirts of Florence, Mr. Mann stopped the coach to deliver one of his more famous speeches. O my classmates, will you forget how we listened with alcohol-stained consciences while Mr. Mann expounded on the relationship between drink and ego-damage? No-one really misunderstood: nonetheless, from that day, the common idiom for: "I want an alcoholic beverage" became "I want an ego-smasher".

As the lights of Florence blinked on, we wound down into the Arno Valley. Inching through the narrow gates and up a winding drive, we arrived at the Youth Hostel: a rambling old villa haunted by the ghosts of past grandeur. Mussolini, reputedly, used to have fun there.

Jefferson Eliot

21st July

Seventh Day

Florence 1.

Unbeknown to us, asleep in our youth hostel beds, the sun rose and licked the top of the Duomo, before being saturated with moisture and so smothering Florence with its clammy heat. Another romantic day in an old, romantic city had begun in the usual romantic way; and its art - well, just a bit more faded than the day before.

Our room was asleep, and the silence was only broken by the monotonous snores, and the occasional grunt from Herr Neu as he unconsciously suffered the strain of the day before, and consciously dreamed of his wife, his son, and glasses of wine. His coach slept

too; waiting for the starter to be pressed, and its bed springs to be flattened by an influx of foreign bodies.

Suddenly, the room came to life: clothes were put on; faces were washed; teeth were brushed; voices were sounded; the stairs came into use; the queue was waited on; breakfast was eaten, and the coach was driven, with its contents, to the San Marco in Florence.

The San Marco, a monastery on whose walls artist extraordinaire, Fra Angelico, brushed his deep understanding of Biblical scenes, was, to some of us, the highlight of Florence, and, indeed, the whole trip. Some of the special things which struck us were the simplicity, clarity and the purity of form and colour of Fra Angelico's work. The most important point about these works of art is they are in their proper places and were painted there for a purpose.

After visiting the San Marco, we returned to the Y.H. for lunch - or was it a repetition of last night's supper - well, let's just say a bit of both.

Our aim for the afternoon, was to visit the baptistry, and the architectural masterpiece, the Duomo; both of which were interesting and impressive.

When the afternoon's activities were over, we relaxed in the coach and were driven to Fiesole. After finding a pleasurable picnic spot, salami sandwiches were enjoyed, as we sat in the olive grove, and watched the sun sinking and slowly vanishing over the brink of the horizon.

Yes, this was also the evening in which Mr. Mann told us that if we stand and look to our Zeniths, and turn our heads backwards and forwards, we should see two golden semi-circles. He could see them, but for us it was just another crick in the neck.

So we returned, disillusioned, to the Youth Hostel for a song - no, not "Ave Maria" - a glass of 'ego smasher', and so went to bed.

Timothy Phillips

22nd July

Eighth Day

Florence 2.

We left early so as to get to the Palazzo degli Uffizi before the crowds, as Sunday is a day of free admission. After waiting for a while, we entered the Galleria Uffizi, which houses one of the world's great art collections. It was absolutely marvellous! On entering, one of the rooms, my heart sank, my eyes opened, and I was bestowed by a sinking feeling, a feeling you can get on seeing an extremely familiar work of art. There in front of us was not only Botticelli's "Spring", but also his "Birth of Venus" being wafted to land by the winds and zephyrs. We passed on to Leonardo's "Annunciation", Perugino's (teacher to Raphael) Pieta, where we noted the importance of the colours, with Curtis's help, and the similarity in style to Raphael.

Now, what follows I shudder to mention, but because of pressure from various quarters, I feel forced to mention the ensuing episode, generally known as 'The Curtis affair', or 'The Wheeler-guide scandal'.

We were studying Leonardo's unfinished "Adoration of the Magi", noting the contrast of the dark and light browns and their shades, and how they corresponded to the loud and soft notes in music. Next to us was an unruly group of tourists. Mostly female, large, conspicuous, with clashing costumes: bright greens, oranges and purples.

Their guide epitomized them all. She wore large, orange-rimmed sun-glasses, and a motley, loud dress, and had recently been tanning herself, probably subjecting herself to ultra-violet rays or a light bulb. And, of course, she had masses of bleached hair piled up on her head.

"Will you move over, give me room, you're not the only ones," she cried.

As for us, we were amused and taken aback by her ignorant outburst. Curtis, in his New Yorkian cum Emersonian manner, curtly replied that he was sorry, but he was giving a talk. Again our guide friend perked up with another shocking insinuation:

"I am a guide here," she said abruptly.

"So am I," Mr. Wheeler replied. And yet, yet again we were to hear her voice,

"But you're not Italian!" But alas for her, our Curtis was still prepared to answer the foreign friend,

"As an American, I would take off my sun-glasses to look at a painting." To top all this, another guide stuck out her fleshy, muscular organ from her mouth at our mentor and teacher. But still we persevered and continued on to see Botticelli's "Adoration of Mary", Raphael's "Madonna of the Goldfinch", and a Michelangelo. We were given time to wander through the Gallery at leisure before leaving.

Outside the Palazzo Vecchio, we saw the spot where Savonarola was burnt, in the square, after being tortured and hanged (as if that wasn't enough) in 1498, because of his enmity with Pope Alexander VI. He was an Italian reformer, who denounced in vehement sermons the corruption of secular life, licentiousness of the ruling class, and worldliness of the clergy, or, in simple terms, power and immorality.

Suppose you were standing on that spot, which, I take it, you remember, and facing the Palazzo Vecchio, turn to your left, look up and you will see the window whence the Archbishop of Pisa was hanged.

To cut a long story short, a cardinal from Rome (closely connected with the Pope) planned to visit Florence. At the mass, virtually the whole town would turn out. The Archbishop of Pisa, whose religious followers were a retinue of armed men, would storm the Palazzo Vecchio, and take control of the town. Medici would be assassinated. However, the plan was foiled, and the Archbishop hanged.