



## Naples

Italian Journey (1786-1788)

J. W. von Goethe

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## NAPLES

Velletri, 22 February

**WE** made good time getting here. Two days ago the sky grew overcast, but there were some signs in the atmosphere which promised the return of good weather, and so it was. The clouds gradually dispersed, patches of blue sky appeared from time to time and, finally, the sun shone upon our course. We passed through Albano, and, before reaching Genzano, made a stop at the gates of a park which the owner, Prince Chigi, might be said to retain but not to maintain. Perhaps that is why he does not want anyone to look at it. It has turned into a complete wilderness - trees, shrubs, weeds, creepers grow as they like, wither, tumble down and rot. The valley of the park is enclosed by a high wall, but there is a little lattice gate through which one can peer into it, and see the hill slope beyond and the castle on its crown. It would make a fine subject for a good painter.

Enough of description. Let me merely add that, from this high ground, we could see the mountains of Sezze, the Pontine Marshes, the sea and the islands. A heavy shower was moving seaward over the marshes, and ever-changing patterns of light and shade played over the level waste. Some columns of smoke rising from scattered and barely visible huts gave an added beautiful effect as the sunlight struck them.

Velletri stands on a volcanic hill which is joined to other hills only on its northern side and commands a wide view in the other three directions.

We paid a visit to the museum of the Cavaliere Borgia, who, thanks to his connexions with the Cardinal and the Propaganda, has been able to collect some remarkable antiques - Egyptian idols, carved in the hardest kind of stone, metal figurines from earlier and later periods, and terracotta bas-reliefs which were dug up in this region. These last lead one to conclude that the ancient Volsci had a style of their own.

Among the many other rare objects in this museum, I particularly noticed two small paint-boxes of Chinese origin. On one the whole process of raising silkworms was portrayed, on the other the cultivation of rice, both very naively imagined and elaborately executed.

It is disgraceful, I know, that one does not come more often to look at these treasures, seeing how near to Rome they are. One's only excuse is the discomfort of any excursion into these parts and the binding spell of the Roman magic circle. As we were walking towards our inn, we passed some women sitting in front of their houses who called out to us and asked if we would like to buy some antiques. When we showed an eager interest, they brought out old kettles, fire-tongs and other worthless household utensils, and split their sides with laughter at having made fools of us. At first we were furious, but our guide set matters right when he assured us that this trick was an old custom here and every foreign visitor must submit to it with good grace.

I am writing this in a miserable inn and am too tired and uncomfortable to write any more. So - a very, very good night I

*Fondi, 23 February*

As early as three in the morning we were again on our way. Day-break found us in the Pontine Marshes, which do not actually look as dreary as people in Rome usually describe them.

From one cross-journey, one cannot, of course, really judge such a vast and ambitious project as the drainage operations which have been undertaken at the Pope's orders, but it looks to me as though they are going to be largely successful.

Imagine a wide valley running from north to south with hardly any fall, but dipping towards the mountains in the east and rising towards the sea in the west. Down its whole length runs the straight line of the restored Via Appia, flanked on its right by the main canal which drains all the land on the seaward side, so that this has now been reclaimed for agriculture. Except for a few patches which lie too low, it is in cultivation as far as the eye can see, or would be if the farmers could be found to lease it.

The land on the mountain side of the road presents a more difficult problem. Cross-channels emptying into the main canal have been dug through the embankment of the road, but these cannot drain off the water. I am told there is a plan for digging a second drainage canal along the base of the mountains. Over large areas, especially around Terracina, willows and poplars have been accidentally sown by the wind.

Each posting station is merely a long shed with a thatched roof. Tischbein drew one and was rewarded by a sight such as only he can fully enjoy. A white horse had broken loose on the drained land and was rejoicing in its freedom, galloping over the brown earth like a flash of light. It looked superb, and Tischbein's rapture gave it added significance.

On the site of the former village of Mesa, at the very centre of the area, the Pope has erected a beautiful great building to inspire hope and confidence in the whole undertaking. So on we rolled in animated conversation but remembering the warning not to fall asleep on this road. If we had forgotten, the blue exhalation which, even at this time of year, hangs above the ground at a certain height would have reminded us of the dangerous miasma. It made the rocky perch of Terracina all the more desirable, and presently we saw the sea before us. The other side of that rock city offered us a view of a vegetation which was entirely unfamiliar. Indian figs forced their large, fleshy leaves between humble grey-green myrtles, yellow-green pomegranates and pale-green olive branches. Beside the road grew flowers we had never seen before. The meadows were full of narcissus and adonis. We had the sea on our right for a time, but the limestone hills close on our left remained unbroken. They are a continuation of the Apennines and run down from Tivoli till they reach the sea from which they have been separated, first by the Campagna di Roma, then by the extinct volcanoes of Frascati, Albano and Velletri, and finally by the Pontine Marshes. Monte Circello, the promontory which faces Terracina and marks the end of the Pontine Marshes, is probably limestone as well.

We now turned away from the sea and soon reached the plain of Fondi. This small area of fertile soil enclosed by not too rugged mountains welcomes every traveller with a smile. Most of

the oranges are still hanging on the trees, the young crops - chiefly wheat - are showing green in the fields and there, below us, lay the little town. A solkary palm tree stood out, and we gave it a greeting. So much for tonight. Forgive my hasty pen. The objects of interest are too many and our quarters too miserable. But I could not resist my desire to get something down on paper. We arrived here at sunset and now it is time for bed.

*Sant'Agata, 24 February*

The room is cold, but I must give you some account of a perfect day. Dawn had just broken when we drove out of Fondi, and we were immediately greeted by oranges hanging over the walls on either side of the road. The trees are so loaded with fruit, I could hardly believe my eyes. On top, the young foliage is yellowish, but below, a very lush green. Mignon\* was quite right to yearn for this country.

Then we came to well-tilled wheat fields planted with properly spaced olive trees. When the wind stirred, they turned the silvery undersides of their leaves to the light while the branches swayed gracefully. It was a grey morning, but a strong north wind promised to disperse the clouds.

Presently the road ran along a valley between fields which were full of stones but well cultivated, their young crops of the freshest green. In several places we saw large, circular, paved threshing floors enclosed in low walls. They do not bring the com home in sheaves, but thresh it on the spot. The valley narrowed, the road climbed steadily, sheer limestone crags rose on either side, the storm blew violently at our backs, and sleet fell which melted very slowly.

Our curiosity was aroused by the walls of some old buildings which were laid out in a network pattern. The high ground was rocky but planted with olive trees wherever there was the smallest patch of soil for them to grow in. Next we crossed a plain covered with olive groves and came to a small town. There

\*The poem Mignon (*Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt...*) was written in 1785.

we noticed, built into garden walls, ancient tombstones and all sorts of fragments, and the well-constructed floors of ancient villas, now filled up with earth and overgrown with thickets of olives. And then ... then, there was Vesuvius, capped with a cloud of smoke.

When we reached Mola di Gaeta, we were again greeted by orange trees in profusion. We stayed there a few hours. The bay in front of the little town commands a beautiful vista of sea and shore. The coast is the shape of a crescent moon. The tip of the right horn, the rock on which stands the fortress of Gaeta, is not far away, but its left horn extends much further. Following it with the eye, one sees first a chain of mountains and then Vesuvius and the islands beyond. Facing the crescent and almost at its centre lies the island of Ischia.

On the beach I found my first starfish and sea urchins, which had been washed ashore. I also picked up a lovely green leaf, as thin as the finest vellum, and some curious pebbles. Limestone pebbles were the most common, but serpentine, jasper, quartz, granite, porphyry, various kinds of marble and green-blue glass were also to be seen. These last can hardly come from this region and are most probably fragments from ancient buildings. Thus one can watch the waves playing before one's eyes with the splendour of an earlier world. We tarried with pleasure and were much amused by the nature of the people, whose behaviour was rather like that of some primitive tribe. After leaving Mola behind us, we had beautiful views all the way, even after the sea left us. The last we saw of it was a lovely cove, which we sketched. A good fruit country followed, fenced in by hedges of aloes. We also saw an aqueduct which ran from the mountains towards some unrecognizable jumble of ruins.

After crossing the river Garigliano, the road ran in the direction of a mountain range through a fairly fertile but uninteresting region. At last, the first hill of volcanic ash. From then on we entered a vast system of hills and valleys with snow-capped mountains rising in the background. A straggling town on a nearby hill caught my eye. In the valley lay Sant'Agata, where a respectable inn welcomed us with a cheerful fire burning in a fireplace built like a cabinet. Our room, however, is icy

cold and has no windows, only shutters - so I must hurry to finish this.

*Naples, 25 February*

We have arrived safely at last and the omens are favourable. I haven't much to report about the last day of our journey. We left Sant'Agata at sunrise. All day a north-east wind blew fiercely at our backs without slackening, but it was afternoon before it succeeded in dispersing the clouds, and we suffered acutely from the cold.

Our road led us again between and over volcanic hills, among which, so far as I could tell, limestone formations occurred much less frequently. At last we came to the plain of Capua and soon afterwards to the town itself, where we made our midday halt. In the afternoon a beautiful, flat expanse lay before us. The broad high road ran between fields of green wheat; this is already a span high and spread out before our eyes like a carpet. Rows of poplars are planted in the fields and vines trained between their widespreading branches. It was like this all the way to Naples. The soil is loose, free from stones and well cultivated. The stems of the vines are unusually strong and tall and the tendrils sway like nets from one poplar to another.

Vesuvius was on our left all the time, emitting copious clouds of smoke, and my heart rejoiced at seeing this remarkable phenomenon with my own eyes at last. The sky grew steadily clearer and, finally, the sun beat down on our cramped and jogging quarters. By the time we reached the outskirts of Naples the sky was completely cloudless, and now we are really in another country. The houses with their flat roofs indicate another climate, though I dare say they are not so comfortable inside. Everybody is out in the streets and sitting in the sun as long as it is willing to shine. The Neapolitan firmly believes that he lives in Paradise and takes a very dismal view of northern countries. *Sempre neve, case di legno. gran ignoranza, ma denari assai* - that is how he pictures our lives. For the edification of all northerners, this means: 'Snow all the year round, wooden houses, great ignorance, but lots of money.'

Naples proclaims herself from the first as gay, free and alive. A numberless host is running hither and thither in all directions, the King is away hunting, the Queen is pregnant and all is right with the world.

*26 February*

Alia Locanda de Sgr Moriconi al Largo del Castello - at this jolly, high-sounding address, letters from all four quarters of the globe can reach us from now on.

In the vicinity of the great citadel by the sea there is a vast space which, though it is surrounded on all sides by houses, is not called piazza but largo - the Broad Place, a name which probably dates from a time long ago when it was still open country. At one corner stands a large house in which we have taken a spacious corner room so that we can enjoy an uninterrupted view of the ever-lively square. An iron balcony runs along the outside past many windows and even round the corner. One would never leave it if the nipping wind did not chill one to the bones. Our room is gaily decorated, especially the elaborately coffered ceiling, where hundreds of arabesques announce that we are not far from Pompeii and Herculaneum. All this would be very fine, but there is neither fireplace nor stove, and, since February exercises its rights even here, I was longing for some means of keeping warm.

They brought me a tripod, high enough to hold one's hands over without stooping. To this is fastened a shallow pan filled with very fine live charcoal which is covered by an even layer of ashes. As we learned in Rome, it has to be used very economically. From time to time the overlying ashes must be carefully pushed aside with the head of a key, in order to let a little air reach the coals. If one gets impatient and stirs up the glowing embers, one may feel warmer for the moment, but very soon they burn themselves out, and then one must pay something to get the brazier refilled.

I was not feeling very well, so, naturally, I wanted more comfort. A rush mat protected me against the worst consequences of the cold stone floor. Since furs are unknown here, I decided to



put on a pea-jacket which we had brought with us as a joke. This served me in good stead, especially after I fastened it round my waist with a cord from my valise. I must have looked a comic sight, something between a sailor and a Capuchin friar. When Tischbein returned from visiting some friends, he could not stop laughing.

*27 February*

Yesterday I spent indoors reading, waiting for my slight indisposition to pass. We spent today in ecstasies over the most astonishing sights. One may write or paint as much as one likes, but this place, the shore, the gulf, Vesuvius, the citadels, the villas, everything, defies description. In the evening we went to the Grotta di Posillipo and reached it just at the moment when the rays of the setting sun were shining directly into the entrance. Now I can forgive anyone for going off his head about Naples, and think with great affection of my father, who received such lasting impressions from the very same objects as I saw today. They say that someone who has once seen a ghost will never be happy again; vice versa, one might say of my father that he could never be really unhappy because his thoughts could always return to Naples. In my own way, I can now keep perfectly calm and it is only occasionally, when everything becomes too overwhelming, that my eyes pop out of my head.

*28 February*

Today we paid a visit to Philipp Hackert, the famous landscape painter, who enjoys the special confidence and favour of the King and Queen. One wing of the Palazzo Francavilla has been reserved for his use. He has furnished this with the taste of an artist and lives very contentedly. He is a man of great determination and intelligence who, though an inveterate hard worker, knows how to enjoy life.

Afterwards we went to the seashore and saw all kinds of fish and the weirdest-shaped creatures being hauled in out of the waves. The day was lovely, the tramontana bearable.

1 March

In Rome I had already been obliged, more often than I liked, to abandon my obstinate hermit existence and take some part in social life. It does seem rather odd, I must admit, to go into the world with the intention of remaining alone. I was unable, for instance, to resist Prince Waldeck's kind invitations, and, thanks to his rank and influence, I was able to see many good things in his company.

For some time now, he has been staying in Naples, and we had hardly arrived before he sent us an invitation to take a drive with him out to Pozzuoli and the neighbouring countryside. I had been thinking of a trip to Vesuvius today, but Tischbein persuaded me to accept, saying that, in this perfect weather and the company of such a cultured prince, the other excursion promised to be as profitable as it certainly would be pleasant. While in Rome we made the acquaintance of a beautiful lady and her husband who are both inseparable friends of the Prince's, She is to be one of the party, so we are counting on having a delightful time.

I was already well known in this high circle from an earlier occasion. At our first meeting, the Prince had asked me what I was working on, and I was so preoccupied with my *Iphigenie* that one evening I told them the whole story in considerable detail. There was some discussion afterwards, but I got the impression they had been expecting something livelier and more violent.

1 March.Evening

Who has not had the experience of being swept off his feet and perhaps decisively influenced for life by a cursory reading of a book which, when he read it again and thought about it, had hardly anything more to say to him? (This happened once to me with *Sakuntala*.\*) And does not much the same thing happen to us in our encounters with eminent persons?

•*Sakuntala*, dramatic poem by the sixth-century Indian poet Kalidasa. Since it was not translated into German until 1791, the view of most commentators is that Goethe only wrote *S*— and probably meant Spinoza.

How shall I describe a day like today? - a boat trip; some short drives in a carriage; walks on foot through the most astonishing landscape in the world; treacherous ground under a pure sky; ruins of unimaginable luxury, abominable and sad; seething waters; caves exhaling sulphur fumes; slag hills forbidding all living growth; barren and repulsive areas; but then, luxuriant vegetation, taking root wherever it can, soars up out of all the dead matter, encircles lakes and brooks, and extends its conquest even to the walls of an old crater by establishing there a forest of noble oaks.

Thus one is tossed about between the acts of nature and the acts of men. One would like to think, but feels too incompetent. Meanwhile the living merrily go on living. We, of course, did not fail to do the same, but people of culture, who belong to the world and know its ways, and are also warned by grave events, are inclined to reflections. As I was lost in contemplation of an unlimited view over earth, sea and sky, I was called back to myself by the presence of an amiable young lady who is accustomed to receive attentions and is not indifferent to them.

But even in my transports, I did not forget to take some notes. For a future redaction, the map I made on the spot for our use and a quick sketch of Tischbein's will be of great help. Today I am incapable of adding another word.

## *2 March*

Today I climbed Vesuvius, although the sky was overcast and the summit hidden in clouds. I took a carriage to Resina, where I mounted a mule and rode up the mountain through vineyards. Then I walked across the lava flow of 1771 which was already covered with a fine but tenacious moss, and then upward along its edge. High up on my left I could see the hermit's hut. Climbing the ash cone, which was two-thirds hidden in clouds, was not easy. At last I reached the old crater, now blocked, and came to the fresh lava flows, one two months, one two weeks, and one only five days old. This last had been feeble and had already cooled. I crossed it and climbed a hill of ashes which had been recently thrown up and was emitting fumes everywhere. As the

smoke was drifting away from me, I decided to try and reach the crater. I had only taken fifty steps when the smoke became so dense that I could hardly see my shoes. The handkerchief I pressed over my mouth was no help. In addition, my guide had disappeared and my steps on the little lava chunks which the eruption had discharged became more and more unsteady. I thought it better, therefore, to turn back and wait for a day with less cloud and less smoke. At least I now know how difficult it is to breathe in such an atmosphere.

Otherwise the mountain was perfectly calm, with none of the flames, rumbling or showers of stone there had been during the weeks before we arrived. Well, I have now made a reconnoitre, so that I can make my regular attack as soon as the weather clears.

Most of the types of lava I found were already known to me, but I discovered one phenomenon which struck me as unusual and which I intend to investigate more closely after I have consulted experts and collectors. This was the lining of a volcanic chimney which had once been plugged up, but then burst open and now juts out from the old filled-up crater. This hard, greyish, stalactitic mass seems to me to have been produced simply by the condensation of the finest volcanic vapours, unassisted by moisture or chemical action. This gives matter for further thought.

### 3 March

Today the sky is overcast and a sirocco is blowing - just the weather for writing letters.

Besides, I have seen quite enough people (and a mixed bag they are), beautiful horses and extraordinary fish.

I won't say another word about the beauties of the city and its situation, which have been described and praised so often. As they say here, 'Vedi Napoli e poi *muori!* - See Naples and die!' One can't blame the Neapolitan for never wanting to leave his city, nor its poets for singing the praises of its situation in lofty hyperboles: it would still be wonderful even if a few more Vesuviuses were to rise in the neighbourhood.

I don't want even to think about Rome. By comparison with

Naples's free and open situation, the capital of the world on the Tiber flats is like an old wretchedly placed monastery.

The sea and shipping make one aware of new possibilities. Yesterday the frigate for Palermo sailed before a strong tramontana, and her passage cannot have taken more than thirty-six hours.

With longing, I watched her spread sails as she passed between Capri and Cape Minerva and finally disappeared. If I were to watch a person I loved sail away in this fashion, I should pine away and die. Today a sirocco is blowing; if the wind increases, the waves near the harbour wall should be a merry sight. It being a Friday, the great coach drive of the nobility took place, when they show off their carriages and even more their horses. Nothing could be more graceful than these creatures. For the first time in my life, my heart went out to them.

### *3 March*

I am sending you some pages, summarizing my first days in this new world, and enclose with them the envelope of your last letter, scorched in one corner, as evidence that it has been with me on Vesuvius.

You mustn't, either in your dreams or your waking hours, think of me as surrounded by dangers; where I go, I can assure you, I am in no greater peril than I would be on the high road to Belvedere.\* I can aptly quote the Psalmist: 'The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it.' I don't seek adventure out of idle curiosity or eccentricity, but, since I have a clear mind which quickly grasps the essential nature of an object, I can do more and risk more than others. The voyage to Sicily is perfectly safe, and Sicily itself is by no means as dangerous as people who have never come within miles of it like to make out.

No earthquakes have been felt in southern Italy recently; only Rimini and neighbouring places in the north have suffered any damage. Earthquakes have moods of their own; here people talk of them as they talk of the weather or as, in Thuringia, they talk of forest fires.

\*The summer residence of the Dukes of Weimar.

I am glad you have now taken kindly to the new version of *Iphigenie*; I should be still happier if you were more aware of how much it differs from the first. I know what I have done to it and am entitled, therefore, to talk about it. I could have gone much further. If what is good gives one joy, what is better gives one even more, and, in art, only the best is good enough.

### 5 March

We have spent the second Sunday in Lent wandering from one church to another. What is treated in Rome with the utmost solemnity is treated here with a lighthearted gaiety. The Neapolitan school of painting, too, can only be properly understood in Naples.

We were amazed to see the whole west front of a church painted from top to bottom. Over the portal, Christ was driving the money-changers out of the temple; on both sides, the latter were falling gracefully down a flight of stairs with a startled look on their faces.

In the interior of another church the span above the entrance is copiously decorated with a fresco depicting the expulsion of Heliodorus. No wonder Luca Giordano had to be quick, having such vast spans to fill. Even the pulpit is not always, as it is elsewhere, a cathedra, a chair for a single preacher. One I saw was a gallery up and down which walked a Capuchin, scolding the congregation for their sins, now from one end, now from the other.

I can't begin to tell you of the glory of a night by full moon when we strolled through the streets and squares to the endless promenade of the Chiaia, and then walked up and down the seashore. I was quite overwhelmed by a feeling of infinite space. To be able to dream like this is certainly worth the trouble it took to get here.

During the last few days I have made the acquaintance of a remarkable man, the Cavaliere Filangieri, who is well known for his work *Science of Legislation*. He is one of those noble-hearted young men to whom the happiness and freedom of mankind is a goal they never lose sight of. His manners are those

of a gentleman and a man of the world, but they are tempered by a delicate moral sense which pervades his whole personality and radiates charmingly from his speech and behaviour. He is devoted to his King and the present monarchy, even though he does not approve of everything that is going on. He is also oppressed by his fears of Joseph II. The thought of a despot, even as a phantom possibility, is horrible to noble minds. He told me quite frankly what Naples might expect from this man. He likes to talk about Montesquieu, Beccaria and his own writings - all in the same spirit of good will and of a sincere youthful desire to do good. He must still be in his thirties.

Soon after we met, he introduced me to the work of an older writer, whose profound wisdom is so refreshing and edifying to all Italians of this generation who are friends of justice. His name is Giambattista Vico, and they rank him above Montesquieu. From a cursory reading of the book, which was presented to me as if it were sacred writ, it seems to me to contain sibylline visions of the Good and the Just which will or should come true in the future, prophecies based on a profound study of life and tradition. It is wonderful for a people to have such a spiritual patriarch : one day *Hamann* will be a similar bible for the Germans.

### 6 March

Reluctantly, but out of loyal comradeship, Tischbein accompanied me today on my ascent of Vesuvius. To a cultured artist like him, who occupies himself only with the most beautiful human and animal forms and even humanizes the formless - rocks and landscapes - with feeling and taste, such a formidable, shapeless heap as Vesuvius, which again and again destroys itself and declares war on any sense of beauty, must appear loathsome.

We took two cabriolets, since we didn't trust ourselves to find our own way through the turmoil of the city. The driver shouted incessantly, 'Make way! Make way!' as a warning to donkeys, burdened with wood or refuse, carriages going in the opposite direction, people walking bent down under their loads or just strolling, children and aged persons, to move aside so that he could keep up a sharp trot.

The outer suburbs and gardens already gave sign that we had entered the realm of Pluto. Since it had not rained for a long time, the leaves of the evergreens were coated with a thick layer of ash-grey dust; roofs, fascias and every flat surface were equally grey; only the beautiful blue sky and the powerful sun overhead gave witness that we were still among the living.

At the foot of the steep slope we were met by two guides, one elderly, one youngish, but both competent men. The first took me in charge, the second Tischbein, and they hauled us up the mountain. I say 'hauled', because each guide wears a stout leather thong around his waist; the traveller grabs on to this and is hauled up, at the same time guiding his own feet with the help of a stick.

In this manner we reached the flat base from which the cone rises. Facing us in the north was the debris of the Somma. One glance westward over the landscape was like a refreshing bath, and the physical pains and fatigue of our climb were forgotten. We then walked round the cone, which was still smoking and ejecting stones and ashes. So long as there was space enough to remain at a safe distance, it was a grand, uplifting spectacle. After a tremendous, thundering roar which came out of the depth of the cauldron, thousands of stones, large and small, and enveloped in clouds of dust, were hurled into the air. Most of them fell back into the abyss, but the others made an extraordinary noise as they hit the outer wall of the cone. First came the heavier ones, struck with a dull thud and hopped down the slope, then the lighter rattled down after them and, last, a rain of ash descended. This all took place at regular intervals, which we could calculate exactly by counting slowly.

However, the space between the cone and the Somma gradually narrowed till we were surrounded by fallen stones which made walking uncomfortable. Tischbein grew more depressed than ever when he saw that the monster, not content with being ugly, was now threatening to become dangerous as well.

But there is something about an imminent danger which challenges Man's spirit of contradiction to defy it, so I thought to myself that it might be possible to climb the cone, reach the mouth of the crater and return, all in the interval between two



eruptions. While we rested safely under the shelter of a projecting rock and refreshed ourselves with the provisions we had brought with us, I consulted our guides. The younger one felt confident that we could risk it; we lined our hats with linen and silk handkerchiefs, I grabbed his belt, and, sticks in hand, we set off.

The smaller stones were still clattering, the ashes still falling about us as the vigorous youth hauled me up the glowing scree. There we stood on the lip of the enormous mouth; a light breeze blew the smoke away from us but also veiled the interior of the crater; steam rose all around us from thousands of fissures; now and then we could glimpse the cracked rock walls. The sight was neither instructive nor pleasing, but this was only because we could not see anything, so we delayed in the hope of seeing more. We had forgotten to keep our slow count and were standing on a sharp edge of the monstrous abyss when, all of a sudden, thunder shook the mountain and a terrific charge flew past us. We ducked instinctively, as if that would save us when the shower of stones began. The smaller stones had already finished clattering down when, having forgotten that another interval had begun and happy to have survived, we reached the foot of the cone under a rain of ashes which thickly coated our hats and shoulders.

After an affectionate scolding from Tischbein and some refreshment, I was able to make a careful examination of both the older and the fresher lavas. The older guide could pick them out and give the exact year of each. The more ancient were already covered with ash and quite smooth; the more recent, especially those which had flowed more sluggishly, looked very peculiar.

When lava flows sluggishly, the surface cools into solid masses. From time to time some obstruction brings these to a standstill. The masses behind are borne forward on the molten stream beneath and forced over the stationary ones. This process is repeated again and again until finally the whole flow petrifies in jagged shapes. Something similar happens with ice floes on a river, but it looks odder in lava. Among the formless melted products there were some large chunks which, on fracture, showed a resemblance to a type of more primitive rock. The

guides maintained that they were old lavas from the lowest depths of the volcano which it expels from time to time.

On our way back to Naples I noticed some one-storey little houses constructed in a curious way without windows; the only light the rooms receive comes through the door opening on to the street. From early morning until late into the night, the occupants sit outside until it is time to retire into their caves.

This city, which, even in the evening, is in an uproar too, though one of a somewhat different kind, makes me wish I could stay here longer to make such sketches as I can of its animated scenes. But nothing so nice, I fear, is likely to happen,

### *7 March*

This week Tischbein has conscientiously taken me to see most of the art treasures in Naples and explained them to me. As a connoisseur and excellent painter of animals, he had already aroused my interest in the bronze head of a horse in the Palazzo Colubrano, and today we went to see it. This amazing fragment stands in a niche above the courtyard fountain, directly facing the front gates. What an effect it must have produced when it was seen in relation to the limbs and body as a whole.

The horse, as it was originally, must have been much larger than the horses on the Basilica of San Marco, and, even from the head alone, when examined closely and in detail, one gets an overwhelming impression of character and power. The magnificent frontal bone, the snorting nostrils, the pricked ears, the bristling mane! What a passionate, powerful creature!

When we turned round, we noticed a female statue standing in a niche over the gates. Winckelmann held that it represents a dancer, for he believed that it was the lively and ever-changing motions of such performers which the sculptors immortalized for us in the frozen marble forms of nymphs and goddesses. This one is very graceful and lovely; at some time or other her head must have come off, but it has been skilfully replaced; the rest is perfectly intact, and she really deserves a better place.

9 March

Today I received your dear letters of 16 February. Please go on writing. I have given precise orders about my mail while I am away and shall go on doing so if I should travel further. At such a distance, it seems strange to me to read that my friends do not come together more often, but of course, when people live so near each other, it is quite natural if they seldom meet.

The weather has become gloomier - a sign of change. Spring is near and we are going to have rain. The summit of Vesuvius has not been visible since I was up there. During the last few nights we sometimes saw flames, but now everything is quiet again. A more violent eruption is expected.

The storms of the last days have presented us with the picture of a magnificent sea and allowed me to study the motions and the forms of the waves. Nature is, indeed, the only book whose every page is filled with important content.

The theatre, on the other hand, no longer gives me any pleasure. Here, during Lent, they perform sacred operas. The only difference between them and profane operas is that they have no ballets between the acts; otherwise, they are as gay as possible. At the Teatro San Carlo they are giving *The Destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar*. To me the theatre is merely a peepshow on a larger scale. I seem to have lost my taste for such things.

Today we paid a visit to the Prince of Waldeck in the Palazzo Capodimonte, which houses a large collection of paintings, coins, etc., not too well displayed, but including some precious things. What I saw clarified and confirmed many traditional concepts for me.

In our northern countries we know such things, coins, carved gems, vases, even lemon trees, only from single specimens; seen here, where they belong, and in profusion, they look quite different. For where works of art are rare, rarity itself is a value; it is only where they are common, as they are here, that one can learn their intrinsic worth.

Large sums are currently being paid for Etruscan vases and,

to be sure, you can find some beautiful and exceptional pieces among them. Every foreigner wants to possess one. You grow less cautious with your money here than you would be at home. I am afraid that I myself will be tempted.

One agreeable aspect of travel is that even ordinary incidents, because they are novel and unexpected, have a touch of adventure about them. After returning from Capodimonte, I made still another visit in the evening to the Filangieri's. There, on the sofa with the lady of the house, sat a young person whose outward appearance did not seem to me to be quite in keeping with her free-and-easy behaviour. Dressed in a light little frock of striped silk, with her hair arranged in a capricious fashion, the pretty little creature looked like one of those modistes who spend so much time dressing other women that they can't be bothered to pay attention to their own appearance. Since they are accustomed to getting paid for their work, they cannot see why they should look after themselves for nothing. My entrance did not disturb her in the least, and on she chattered, telling a number of droll little stories about things which had happened to her during the last few days, or rather, things which her harum-scarum behaviour had caused to happen.

The lady of the house tried to help me to get a word in edgewise by talking about Capodimonte and its magnificent situation and art treasures, but all in vain. The lively little lady jumped up - when standing, she looked even prettier - took her leave, ran to the door and, as she passed me, said: "The Filangieri are coming to dine with me one of these days. I hope to see you too.' And off she went before I could open my mouth to accept. I was then told that she was the Princess -,\* and closely related to the family. The Filangieri are not rich and live in modest but decent style. I fancied that the little Princess must be in the same position, especially since I know that such high-sounding titles are not rare in Naples. I wrote down her name, the day and the hour, to be certain of turning up at the right place and the right time.

\* Filangieri's sister, Teresa, Princess Ravaschieri di Satriano.

## Part Two

*11 March*

Since my stay in Naples is not going to be a long one, I visit the more distant points of interest first; those nearby offer themselves of their own accord. As Tischbein and I drove to Pompeii, we saw on every hand many views which we knew well from drawings, but now they were all fitted together into one splendid landscape.

Pompeii surprises everyone by its compactness and its smallness of scale. The streets are narrow, though straight and provided with pavements, the houses small and windowless - their only light comes from their entrances and open arcades - and even the public buildings, the bench tomb at the town gate, the temple and a villa nearby look more like architectural models or dolls' houses than real buildings. But their rooms, passages and arcades are gaily painted. The walls have plain surfaces with richly detailed frescoes painted on them, most of which have now deteriorated. These frescoes are surrounded by amusing arabesques in admirable taste: from one, enchanting figures of children and nymphs evolve, in another, wild and tame animals emerge out of luxuriant floral wreaths. Though the city, first buried under a rain of ashes and stones and then looted by the excavators, is now completely destroyed, it still bears witness to an artistic instinct and a love of art shared by a whole people, which even the most ardent art lover today can neither feel nor understand and desire.

Considering the distance between Pompeii and Vesuvius, the volcanic debris which buried the city cannot have been driven here, either by the explosive force of the eruption or by a strong wind: my own conjecture is that the stones and ashes must have remained suspended in the air for some time, like clouds, before they descended upon the unfortunate city.

To picture more clearly what must have happened historically one should think of a mountain village buried in snow. The spaces between the buildings, and even the buildings themselves", crushed under the weight of the fallen material, were buried and invisible, with perhaps a wall sticking up here and there; sooner

or later, people took this mound over and planted vineyards and gardens on it. It was probably peasants digging on their allotments who made the first important treasure hauls.

The mummified city left us with a curious, rather disagreeable impression, but our spirits began to recover as we sat in the pergola of a modest inn looking out over the sea, and ate a frugal meal. The blue sky and the glittering sea enchanted us, and we left hoping that, on some future day, when this little arbour was covered with vine leaves, we would meet there again and enjoy ourselves.

As we approached Naples, the little houses struck me as being perfect copies of the houses in Pompeii. We asked permission to enter one and found it very clean and neatly furnished - nicely woven cane chairs and a chest which had been gilded all over and painted with brightly coloured flowers and then varnished. Despite the lapse of so many centuries and such countless changes, this region still imposes on its inhabitants the same habits, tastes, amusements and style of living.

### *12 March*

Today I rambled through the city in my usual fashion, noting many points which I hope to describe more fully later, for now, unfortunately, I have not the time.

Everything one sees and hears gives evidence that this is a happy country which amply satisfies all the basic needs and breeds a people who are happy by nature, people who can wait without concern for tomorrow to bring them what they had today and for that reason lead a happy-go-lucky existence, content with momentary satisfaction and moderate pleasures, and taking pain and sorrow as they come with cheerful resignation. Here is an amazing illustration of this.

The morning was cold and damp, for it had been raining a little. I came to a square where the large paving stones seemed to me to have been swept unusually clean, and was surprised to see a number of ragamuffins squatting in a circle with their hands pressed to the flat stones as if they were wanning them. At first I thought they were playing a game, but the serious

expression on their faces suggested some more practical purpose for their behaviour. I racked my brains trying to guess what they were up to, but found no satisfactory explanation, so I had to ask someone why these little monkeys formed this circle and took up such a peculiar posture.

I was told that a blacksmith in the neighbourhood had been putting a tyre on a cartwheel. This is done as follows: the iron band is laid on the ground, shavings are piled on it in a circle and set alight to make the iron sufficiently malleable. When the shavings have burnt themselves out, the tyre is fitted on to the wheel, and the ashes are carefully swept up. The little street arabs take advantage of the fact that the paving stones are still hot and stay there till they have absorbed the last bit of warmth from them.

I could give you countless other examples of this capacity to get the most out of the least and make careful use of what would otherwise be wasted. This people displays the most ingenious resource, not in getting rich, but in living free from care.

### *Evening*

In order to get to the whimsical little Princess on time, and not to miss the right house, I hired a servant, who conducted me to the gates of a large palazzo. Since I did not credit her with living in such a magnificent residence, I spelled out her name once more, letter by letter, but he assured me that this was the right place. I entered a spacious empty courtyard, enclosed by the main building and several annexes - all in the gay Neapolitan style of architecture - and faced an enormous portal and a wide though not very long staircase, on either side of which servants in splendid livery were lined up, who bowed deeply as I passed. I felt like the sultan in Wieland's Fairy Tale and, following his example, took my courage in both hands. At the head of the staircase, I was received by the upper servants, and, in due course, the grandest of them opened a door and I was confronted by a magnificent but perfectly empty salon. As I paced up and down I caught a glimpse of a side gallery where a table was laid for about forty persons on the same scale of splendour as everything

else. A secular priest entered: without asking who I was or where I came from, he took my presence for granted and made polite conversation.

Double doors were thrown open to admit an elderly man, and immediately closed behind him. The priest advanced to meet him, so I did the same. We greeted him with a few polite words to which he replied with some barking and stammering noises. For all that I could make of them, he might have been speaking Hottentot. When he had taken up a position by the fireplace, the priest stepped back and I followed his example. Now an imposing Benedictine entered, accompanied by a younger brother. He, too, greeted our host and, after being barked at, withdrew and joined us by the window. The members of religious orders, especially the more elegantly dressed ones, are at great advantage in society; their habit, though it indicates humility and renunciation, at the same time lends them a decided dignity. They can appear submissive without abasing themselves, and when they draw themselves up to their full height, they are invested with a certain self-complacency which would be intolerable in any other profession but becomes them rather well. The Benedictine was this kind of man. I asked him about Monte Cassino; he invited me to come there and promised me the warmest reception. In the meantime, officers, courtiers, secular priests, even some Capuchins had arrived, and the salon was full of people.

I looked in vain for a lady. At last, the double doors opened and closed again and a lady entered who looked even older than the master of the house. The presence of the lady of the house - for that is what I took her to be - convinced me that I was in the wrong palazzo and a total stranger to its owners.

Dinner was now announced and I stuck close to the ecclesiastics, hoping to sneak in with them into the paradise of the dining room. At this moment Filangieri and his wife entered hurriedly, apologizing for being late; and a moment later the little Princess came running into the salon, curtsying, bowing, and nodding to all the guests as she passed, and made straight for me. 'How nice of you to keep your promise!' she cried. 'Sit next to me at table, and you shall have all the titbits. But wait a moment! First I have to find my place. Then you must



immediately take the chair next to me.' Thus bidden, I followed her various gyrations and at last we reached our places. The Benedictines were seated opposite me and Filangieri on my right. 'The food is excellent,' said the Princess, 'everything Lenten fare but choice. I will tell you which dishes are the best. But first I must take our precious clerical friends down a peg. I can't abide them. They're all knaves. Every time they come to the house they make off with some food. What we have, we should eat with our friends.'

The soup had been served, and the Benedictine was eating it with decorum. 'Don't be shy, your Reverence!' she cried gaily. 'Is your spoon too small? Let me send for a bigger one! You gentlemen must be used to large mouthfuls.' The Father replied that, in this princely home, everything was so well ordered that even guests who were accustomed to far greater comforts than he would be perfectly satisfied.

When little tarts were offered, he took only one. Why, she cried, didn't he take half a dozen? Surely he must know that puff-paste is easy on the bowels. The sensible man took another one and thanked her for her kind attentions, as if he hadn't heard her indelicate joke.

A more substantial piece of pastry gave her a further opportunity for venting her malice. 'Take a third one, Father! You seem determined to lay a good foundation.' 'When such excellent materials are provided,' replied the priest, 'the builder has an easy time.' And so she went on and on, only pausing now and then to help me select the most delicious morsels. Meanwhile I talked with my neighbour on serious topics. As a matter of fact, I have never heard Filangieri say anything commonplace. In this respect, as in so many others, he resembles my friend Georg Schlosser,\* except that, being a Neapolitan and a man of the world, he has a softer nature and is more approachable.

Throughout the meal, the mischievous lady on my left did not leave the clergy in peace for a moment. During Lent the fish is served in forms which make it look like meat, and this gave her inexhaustible opportunities for making irreverent and un-

\*J. G. Schlosser, advocate and Goethe's brother-in-law.

seemly comments. She made great play with the expressions 'a liking for flesh' and 'a fleshly liking', saying that one ought at least to enjoy the form, even though *the* substance was forbidden. I heard her make more jokes of the same kind, but have not the courage to repeat them. Certain things may sound tolerable when spoken, especially on beautiful lips, but set down in black and white, they lose all charm for me. An impudent remark is peculiar in that it amuses at the moment because one is taken aback, but if repeated later, it sounds merely offensive.

Dessert was served, and I was afraid she would continue her banter, but, unexpectedly, she turned to me and said with good humour: The dear clergy shall swallow their Syracusan wine in peace. I have never yet succeeded in teasing one of them to death or even in spoiling his appetite. But now, let's talk sense. What were you and Filangieri talking about so seriously? That good man worries too much. As I keep telling him: if you make new laws, we shall have all the bother of devising ways and means to break them; we already know what to do about the old ones. Just think what a nice city Naples is, and how long people have lived here carefree and contented. From time to time, of course, someone gets hanged, but life goes on swimmingly for the rest.'

She then suggested that I go and stay on her large estate in Sorrento; her agent would serve me the finest fish and delicious *mungana*, the meat of suckling calves. The mountain air and heavenly view would soon cure me of all philosophy; later, she would come herself and then all my wrinkles - at my age I had no business to have any - would vanish without trace, and we would lead a very jolly life together.

13 March

Today I shall write a few more words and let one letter chase after another. I am well, but I see less than I should. This place encourages languor and an easygoing life. In spite of this, I am rounding out my picture of the city bit by bit

On Sunday we went to Pompeii again. There have been many disasters in this world, but few which have given so much delight to posterity, and I have seldom seen anything so interesting. The

city gate and the avenue of tombs are unusual. There is one tomb of a priestess, shaped like a semicircular bench and with an inscription carved in large letters on its stone back. As I looked over it, I saw the sun setting into the sea.

We met a company of lively Neapolitans, who were as natural and lighthearted as could be, and we all ate at the Torre dell'Annunziata. Our table was set close to the shore with a delightful view of Castellammare and Sorrento, which seemed very near. One of the Neapolitans declared that, without a view of the sea, life would not be worth living. Personally, it is enough for me that I now carry this picture in my memory and I shall quite happily return to the mountains, when the time comes.

We are lucky to have a very accurate landscape painter here, who captures the atmosphere of these rich and open surroundings in his drawings. He has already done some work for me.

I have now carefully studied my Vesuvian specimens; things look quite different when seen in relation to each other. If, as perhaps I should, I were to devote the rest of my life to observation, I might discover some things which would enlarge human knowledge.

Please tell Herder that my botanical insights are taking me further and further. My basic hypothesis remains the same, but to work everything out would take a lifetime. One day, perhaps, I shall be capable of giving a general outline.

I am now looking forward to seeing the Portici museum. For most people it is the place they visit first; for us it will be the last. I still don't know where I am going next; they all want me to be back in Rome for Easter. I shall wait and see.

Angelica is engaged in painting a scene from my *Iphigenie*. Her idea is a very happy one and she will carry it out admirably. She has chosen the turning point in the play, the moment when Orestes comes out of his swoon and finds himself in the presence of his sister and his friend. She has transformed the lines which the three characters speak one after another into simultaneous gestures. This shows both her delicate sensibility and her capacity to translate life into terms of her own medium.

Farewell and keep on loving me! Everyone here treats me kindly, even though they do not know what to make of me. They

find Tischbein more congenial. This evening, immediately after supper, he painted some life-size heads, and they reacted like Maoris at the sight of their first man-of-war. Tischbein has a great gift for sketching in pen and ink the figures of gods and heroes, large as life or larger. He dashes them off with a few strokes and then puts in the shadows with a broad brush, so that the head stands out in relief. The company were amazed at the ease with which he did this and expressed their enthusiastic delight. Then their fingers began itching to try it themselves. They picked up the brushes and started daubing beards on each other's faces.

This happened in a cultured circle and in the house of a man who is himself a sound painter and draughtsman. Is not such behaviour an expression of some primitive trait in the human race?

*Caserta, 14 March*

Saw Hackert at his apartment in the old castle where he lives very comfortably and has room enough to entertain his guests. The new castle is a palace worthy of a king, a huge quadrilateral building like the Escorial with a number of inner courtyards. Its location is extraordinarily beautiful - upon one of the most fertile plains in the world with a park extending to the feet of the mountains. From the latter an aqueduct carries a whole river to supply the castle and surrounding countryside with water. This can be released to hurl itself over some artificially arranged rocks in a stupendous cascade. The gardens are beautifully laid out and in perfect harmony with a region that is itself a garden.

The castle, though truly regal, seemed to lack life, and people like myself cannot feel at ease in its immense empty rooms. The King probably feels the same, for he has been provided with a lodge in the mountains, the scale of which is less out of proportion to a human being and better suited to hunting and other pleasures of this life.

*15 March*

Though Hackert is always busy drawing and painting, he remains sociable and has a gift for attracting people and making them become his pupils. He has completely won me over as well, since he is patient with my weaknesses and stresses to me the supreme importance of accuracy in drawing and of a confident and clearheaded approach. When he paints, he always has three shades of colour ready. Using them one after the other, he starts with the background and paints the foreground last, so that a picture appears, one doesn't know from where. If only it were as easy to do as it looks! With his usual frankness he said to me: 'You have talent but you don't know how to use it. Stay with me for eighteen months and then you will produce something which will give pleasure to yourself and others.' Is this not a text on which one should never stop preaching to all dilettantes? What fruit it is going to bear in me remains to be seen.

The fact that he is not only giving drawing lessons to the Princesses but is also called upon in the evening to give lectures on art and other related subjects is evidence of the special trust with which the Queen honours him. For his talks he uses Sulzer's dictionary as a textbook, selecting some passage or other which he likes or believes in.

I could not but approve, but, at the same time, I could not help smiling at myself. What a difference there is between a person who wishes to build his life from within and one who wishes to influence the world and instruct others for domestic uses. I have always hated Sulzer's theory because its basic principles are false, but I realize now that his book contains much which people need to know. The many pieces of information which it offers and the way of thinking which satisfied the worthy Sulzer make it good enough, surely, for society people.

We spent many interesting hours with Andres, the restorer of old paintings, who has been summoned from Rome and is also living in the old castle. The King takes a great interest in his

work. I shall not try to describe his unique craftsmanship because I would have to begin by enlarging upon the difficulty of the task and the immense labour required to arrive at a successful solution.

*16 March*

Your welcome letter of 19 February reached me today and shall be answered at once. I am always happy to be brought to my senses again by thinking of my friends.

Naples is a paradise; everyone lives in a state of intoxicated self-forgetfulness, myself included. I seem to be a completely different person whom I hardly recognize. Yesterday I thought to myself: Either you were mad before, or you are mad now.

From here I went to see the remains of the ancient town of Capua and its environs. Only in these regions can one understand what vegetation really is and what led man to invent the art of cultivation. The flax is already in bloom and the wheat a span and a half high. The country round Caserta is completely flat and the fields are worked on till they are as smooth and tidy as garden beds. All of them are planted with poplars on which vines are trained, yet in spite of the shadow they cast, the soil beneath them produces the most perfect crops. How will they look later, when spring is come in all its power? Till now, though we have had lovely sunshine, the wind has been cold and there is snow on the mountains.

During the next two weeks I must make up my mind whether to go to Sicily or not. I have never before been so torn by conflicting feelings as I am now when I contemplate this decision. One day something happens which makes me in favour of the trip, the next some circumstance turns me against it. Two spirits are fighting over me.

And now, for my friends of the gentler sex, in strict confidence - don't breathe a word to the men! I am quite aware that my Ipfiigenie has met with a strange reception. Everyone was used to the original version and, through hearing and reading it so often, knew some passages almost by heart. Now it all seems different, and I realize well enough that, at bottom, nobody appreciates

the endless pains I have taken over the play. A work of this kind is never really finished; one only calls it finished because one has done all that is possible in the time and the circumstances.

But this is not going to discourage me from trying to perform a similar operation on Tasso. Sometimes I feel like throwing it into the fire, but I shall stick to my resolution, and I intend, if things go as they should, to make it an unusual work. So I am rather glad that the printing of my writings is proceeding so slowly. On the other hand, it is always good for me to feel the distant threat of the compositor. Strangely enough, even the things I undertake purely for love benefit from some kind of external pressure.

In Rome I was glad to study: here I want only to live, forgetting myself and the world, and it is a strange experience for me to be in a society where everyone does nothing but enjoy himself. Sir William Hamilton, who is still living here as English ambassador, has now, after many years of devotion to the arts and the study of nature, found the acme of these delights in the person of an English girl of twenty with a beautiful face and a perfect figure. He has had a Greek costume made for her which becomes her extremely. Dressed in this, she lets down her hair and, with a few shawls, gives so much variety to her poses, gestures, expressions, etc., that the spectator can hardly believe his eyes. He sees what thousands of artists would have liked to express realized before him in movements and surprising transformations - standing, kneeling, sitting, reclining, serious, sad, playful, ecstatic, contrite, alluring, threatening, anxious, one pose follows another without a break. She knows how to arrange the folds of her veil to match each mood, and has a hundred ways of turning it into a head-dress. The old knight idolizes her and is enthusiastic about everything she does. In her, he has found all the antiquities, all the profiles of Sicilian coins, even the Apollo Belvedere. This much is certain: as a performance it's like nothing you ever saw before in your life. We have already enjoyed it on two evenings. This morning Tischbein is painting her portrait.

Everything I have been told (or learned for myself by putting two and two together) about the personages and conditions at

the Court must now be sorted out and checked. Today the King has gone wolf-hunting; they expect to kill at least five.

*Naples, 17 March*

Every time I wish to write words, visual images come up, images of the fruitful countryside, the open sea, the islands veiled in a haze, the smoking mountain, etc., and I lack the mental organ which could describe them.

Here the soil produces everything, and one can expect from three to five harvests a year. In a really good year, I am told, they can grow maize three times in the same fields.

I have seen much and thought even more. The world is opening itself to me more and more, and all that I have long known intellectually is now becoming part of me. What an early-to-know, late-to-practise creature man is!

It is only a pity that, at the moment, I have nobody with whom I can share my thoughts. Tischbein is with me, to be sure, but, both as a man and an artist, his mind is the shuttlecock of a thousand ideas, and hundreds of people have a claim on his time. His is a curious case: a man who cannot take an unforced interest in the existence of anyone else because he feels so frustrated in his own efforts.

Certainly the world is only a simple wheel and every point on its circumference is equidistant from its centre. It only looks so strange to us because we ourselves are revolving with it.

What I have always said has been confirmed: there are certain natural phenomena and certain confused ideas which can be understood and straightened out only in this country.

As for my voyage to Sicily - the gods still hold the scales in their hands. The little needle still oscillates back and forth.



Who can the friend be whose coming has been so mysteriously announced to me? I hope I shan't miss him because of my erratic excursions and my proposed trip to the island.

The frigate has returned from Palermo. In a week from today she will sail back. I still don't know whether I shall sail with her or return to Rome in time for Holy Week. Never in my life have I felt so undecided. A single moment, a trifle, may turn the scales.

I am beginning to get along better with other people. The important thing to remember is always to weigh them by the shopkeeper's scales and never by the goldsmith's, as friends, in hypochondriac or exacting moods, are only too apt to do with each other, alas.

Here people know nothing whatever about each other. Each runs hither and thither and hardly notices his neighbours. All day long they race back and forth in their paradise, without looking about them much, and when the mouth of hell nearby begins to roar, they have recourse to the blood of St Januarius. Well, in the rest of the world, too, in their fight with death and devil, people resort to blood, or would if they could.

To thread one's way through an immense and ever-moving crowd is a peculiar and salutary experience. All merge into one great stream, yet each manages to find his way to his own goal. In the midst of so many people and all their commotion, I feel peaceful and alone for the first time. The louder the uproar of the streets, the quieter I become.

I sometimes think of Rousseau and his hypochondriac outpourings of misery. I can quite understand how a mind as delicately organized as his could become deranged. If I didn't take such an interest in the things of nature, or see that there are ways of sorting out and comparing hundreds of observations despite their apparent confusion - as a surveyor checks many separate measurements with a single straight line - I should often think I was mad myself.

18 March

We could not put off any longer going to see Herculaneum and the Portici museum of objects excavated there. Herculaneum lay at the foot of Vesuvius and was completely buried under lava, to which subsequent eruptions added fresh layers, so that the ancient city is now sixty feet below ground level. It was discovered when, in the course of digging a well, some workmen came upon floors of paved marble. It is a thousand pities that the site was not excavated methodically by German miners, instead of being casually ransacked as if by brigands, for many noble works of antiquity must have been thereby lost or ruined.

We descended a flight of sixty steps to a vault, where we admired by torchlight the former open-air theatre, while the guard told us about the things which were found there and brought to the light of day.

We had good letters of recommendation to the museum and were well received, but we were not allowed to make any drawings. Perhaps this made us pay attention all the more closely to what we saw, so that we were all the more vividly transported into the past, when all these objects were part and parcel of their owners' daily life. They quite changed my picture of Pompeii. In my mind's eye its homes now looked both more cramped and more spacious - more cramped because I now saw them crowded with objects, and more spacious because these objects were not made merely for use but were decorated with such art and grace that they enlarged and refreshed the mind in a way that the physical space of even the largest room cannot do.

There was one beautiful jar, for example, with an exquisitely wrought rim which, on closer inspection, turned out to be two hinged semicircular handles, by which the vessel could be lifted and carried with ease. The lamps are decorated with as many masks and scrolls of foliage as they have wicks, so that each flame illuminates a different work of art. There were high, slender bronze pedestals, evidently intended as lamp stands. The lamps which were suspended from the ceiling were hung with

all sorts of cunningly wrought figures which surprise and delight the eye as they swing and dangle.

We followed the custodians from room to room, trying to enjoy and learn as much as possible in the little time we had. We hope to come back.

*19 March*

In the last few days I have entered into a new and intimate relationship. For four weeks Tischbein has been a loyal and useful partner in all my excursions into the realm of nature and art. When we were at Portici yesterday we had a talk and both of us came to the conclusion that his artistic career, his duties at court and in the city, which may lead to a permanent post in Naples, were incompatible with my plans and particular interests. Helpful as ever, he suggested as a possible companion a young man whom I have seen a lot of ever since we arrived, and not without interest and sympathy.

His name is Kniep. He lived for some time in Rome, then came to Naples, the ideal place for a landscape painter. In Rome I had already often heard that his draughtsmanship was admirable, though the same could not be said for his willingness to work. Now that I have got to know him pretty well, I think that this fault for which he is blamed is really a lack of self-confidence which can certainly be overcome if we spend some time together. In confirmation of this, he has made a good start already, and, if things go as I wish, we are going to be good travelling companions for quite some time.

*19 March*

One has only to walk the streets and keep one's eyes open to see the most inimitable pictures.

Yesterday, at the Molo, which is the noisiest corner of the city, I came across a wooden stage on which a Pulcinella was having a quarrel with a monkey. On a balcony overhead a pretty girl exposed her charms to all. Beside the stage with the monkey stood a quack offering his nostrums against all ailments to a

credulous crowd. Painted by Gerard Dow, such a scene would delight our contemporaries and posterity.

Today is the Feast of St Joseph, the patron saint of all *frittaruoli*, or pastry cooks, using the word 'pastry' in its crudest sense. Since, under the black, boiling oil they use for frying, there is a constant flare of flame, all fiery torments are assigned to their mystery. Last night they decorated their house fronts with appropriate paintings: Souls in Purgatory and Last Judgements were blazing on all sides. In front of their doors large frying pans stood on hastily erected stoves. One apprentice kneaded the dough, while a second shaped it into crullers and threw them into the boiling oil. A third stood beside the pan with a small skewer, picked out the crullers when they were cooked and put them on another skewer, held by a fourth apprentice, who then offered them to the bystanders. The third and fourth apprentices were young boys wearing blond, elaborately curled wigs, which are regarded as the attribute of angels. To complete the group, there were some persons who handed wine to the cooks, drank themselves and cried their wares. Angels, cooks, everybody shouted at the top of their voices. They drew a great crowd because, on this night, all pastry goods are sold at greatly reduced prices and even a portion of the profits is given to the poor.

One could go on for ever describing similar scenes, each crazier than the last, not to mention the infinite variety of costumes or the hordes of people you can see on the Toledo alone.

You can find many other original entertainments if you live among these people, who are so natural that one might even become natural oneself. As an example, take Pulcinella, the mask native to this country, as Harlequin is to Bergamo or Hanswurst to the Tirol. Pulcinella is the imperturbable servant, somewhat careless, almost lazy, but humorous. You can find waiters or house servants of this type everywhere. I got enormous fun today out of ours, though it was over nothing more than sending him to buy me paper and pens. Partial misunderstanding, procrastination, good will and a touch of roguery combined created a charming scene which would be successful on any stage.

20 March

The news that another emission of lava had just occurred, invisible to Naples since it was flowing towards Ottaiano, tempted me to make a third visit to Vesuvius. On reaching the foot of the mountain, I had hardly jumped down from my two-wheeled, one-horse vehicle before *the* two guides who had accompanied us the last time appeared on the scene and I hired them both.

When we reached the cone, the elder one stayed with our coats and provisions while the younger followed me. We bravely made our way towards the enormous cloud of steam which was issuing from a point halfway below the mouth of the cone. Having reached it, we descended carefully along its edge. The sky was clear and at last, through the turbulent clouds of steam, we saw the lava stream.

It was only about ten feet wide, but the manner in which it flowed down the very gentle slope was most surprising. The lava on both sides of the stream cools as it moves, forming a channel. The lava on its bottom also cools, so that this channel is constantly being raised. The stream keeps steadily throwing off to right and left the scoria floating on its surface. Gradually, two levels of considerable height are formed, between which the fiery stream continues to flow quietly like a mill brook. We walked along the foot of this embankment while the scoria kept steadily rolling down its sides. Occasionally there were gaps through which we could see the glowing mass from below. Further down, we were also able to observe it from above.

Because of the bright sunshine, the glow of the lava was dulled. Only a little smoke rose into the pure air. I felt a great desire to get near the place where the lava was issuing from the mountain. My guide assured me that this was safe, because the moment it comes forth, a flow forms a vaulted roof of cooled lava over itself, which he had often stood on. To have this experience, we again climbed up the mountain in order to approach the spot from the rear. Luckily, a gust of wind had cleared the air, though not entirely, for all around us puffs of hot vapour were emerging

from thousands of fissures. By now we were actually standing on the lava crust, which lay twisted in coils like a soft mush, but it projected so far out that we could not see the lava gushing forth.

We tried to go half a dozen steps further, but the ground under our feet became hotter and hotter and a whirl of dense fumes darkened the sun and almost suffocated us. The guide who was walking in front turned back, grabbed me, and we stole away from the hellish cauldron.

After refreshing our eyes with the view and our throats with wine, we wandered about observing other features of this peak of hell which towers up in the middle of paradise. I inspected some more volcanic flues and saw that they were lined up to the rim with pendent, tapering formations of some stalactitic matter. Thanks to the irregular shape of the flues, some of these deposits were in easy reach, and with the help of our sticks and some hooked appliances we managed to break off some pieces. At the lava dealer's I had already seen similar ones, listed as true lavas, so I felt happy at having made a discovery. They were a volcanic soot, precipitated from the hot vapours; the condensed minerals they contained were clearly visible.

A magnificent sunset and evening lent their delight to the return journey. However, I could feel how confusing such a tremendous contrast must be. The Terrible beside the Beautiful, the Beautiful beside the Terrible, cancel one another out and produce a feeling of indifference. The Neapolitan would certainly be a different creature if he did not feel himself wedged between God and the Devil.

## *22 March*

If my German temperament and my determination to study and practise rather than amuse myself did not drive me on, perhaps I might tarry a little longer in this school for easy, happy living and try to profit more from it. It is possible to live very comfortably in this city on only a small income. The situation and the climate are beyond praise; but they are all the resources the foreigner has. Of course, someone with leisure, money and

talent could settle down here and live most handsomely. This is what Sir William Hamilton has done in the evening of his days. The rooms in his villa, which he has furnished in the English taste, are charming and the view from the corner room may well be unique. The sea below, Capri opposite, Mount Posillipo to the right, near by the promenade of the Villa Reale, to the left an old building of the Jesuits, in the distance the coast line from Sorrento to Cape Minerva - probably nothing comparable could be found in the whole of Europe and certainly not in the middle of a great city.

But now the Sirens from beyond the sea are luring me away from this delight and a hundred others, and, if the wind is favourable, I shall be leaving at the same time as this letter - it will go north as I go south.

Man is headstrong in spirit, and at this moment I am in particular need of unconfined spaces. It is not perseverance I have to learn so much as quickness of perception. Once I can get hold of a matter by its fingertip, listening and thinking will enable me to grasp the whole hand.

Strangely enough, a friend recently spoke of *Wilhelm Meister* and begged me to go on with it. Under these skies, I doubt if it would be possible, but perhaps in the last books I shall manage to capture something of this heavenly air. I pray that my existence may develop further, the stem grow taller, the flowers blossom forth in greater abundance and beauty. If I cannot come back reborn, it would be much better not to come back at all.

Today I saw a painting by Correggio which is up for sale. Though not in perfect condition, it still retains an indelible charm. It depicts a Madonna and Child at the moment when the latter is hesitating between her breast and some pears offered Him by a cherub - in other words, The Weaning of Christ. It immediately reminded me of the Betrothal of St Catherine, and is also, I am convinced, from the hand of Correggio.

23 March

My relationship with Kniep has been put to a practical test and promises to give great satisfaction to us both. We made an excursion to Paestum together, and he proved himself a most hard-working draughtsman. The fruits of our journey are some superb sketches, and he is very happy because he finds that this exacting busy life stimulates his talent, which he had come to doubt. Drawing calls for resolution and it is just in this that his precise and tidy proficiency becomes evident. He never forgets to draw a square round the paper on which he is going to make a drawing, and sharpening and resharpening his excellent English pencils gives him almost as much pleasure as drawing. In consequence, his outlines leave nothing to be desired.

We have made the following bargain: from now on we shall live and travel together and all he will be expected to do is draw. All his drawings will become my property, but, in order that they may serve as a basis for further activity on our return, he is going to execute a number of subjects, selected by me, which I shall buy till I have spent a certain sum, after which, thanks to his skill and the importance of the views he has drawn, he will be able to sell the rest. I am very happy about this arrangement.

Now let me give a brief account of our excursion. Our carriage was a light two-wheeled affair, and our groom a rustic but good-natured boy. He stood behind us as, taking the reins in turn, we rolled through an enchanting countryside which Kniep greeted with a painter's eye. Soon we came to a mountain defile through which we sped on the smoothest of roads past picturesque groups of trees and rocks. Near La Cava we halted because Kniep could not resist making a drawing of a splendid mountain which stood out sharply against the sky. His neat and characteristic sketch took in the whole mountain from its summit to its base. The pleasure it gave us both seemed a good beginning to our friendship.

That same evening he made another drawing from the window of our inn in Salerno, which will make any description of this



lovely region superfluous. Who would not have felt inclined to study in this place when the university was in its heyday?

Very early next morning, we drove by rough and often muddy roads towards some beautifully shaped mountains. We crossed brooks and flooded places where we looked into the blood-red savage eyes of buffaloes. They looked like hippopotamuses.

The country grew more and more flat and desolate, the houses rarer, the cultivation sparser. In the distance appeared some huge quadrilateral masses, and when we finally reached them, we were at first uncertain whether we were driving through rocks or ruins. Then we recognized what they were, the remains of temples, monuments to a once glorious city. Kniep quickly chose a favourable spot from which to draw this very unpicturesque landscape, while I found a countryman to conduct me round the temples. At first sight they excited nothing but stupefaction. I found myself in a world which was completely strange to me. In their evolution from austerity to charm, the centuries have simultaneously shaped and even created a different man. Our eyes and, through them, our whole sensibility have become so conditioned to a more slender style of architecture that these crowded masses of stumpy conical columns appear offensive and even terrifying. But I pulled myself together, remembered the history of art, thought of the age with which this architecture was in harmony, called up images in my mind of the austere style of sculpture - and in less than an hour I found myself reconciled to them and even thanking my guardian angel for having allowed me to see these well-preserved remains with my own eyes. Reproductions give a false impression; architectural designs make them look more elegant and drawings in perspective more ponderous than they really are. It is only by walking through them and round them that one can attune one's life to theirs and experience the emotional effect which the architect intended. I spent the whole day doing this, while Kniep was busy making sketches. I felt happy to know that I had nothing to worry about on that score, but could be certain of obtaining faithful records to assist my memory. Unfortunately, there was no place nearby where we could stay the night, so we returned to Salerno and drove back to Naples early the next morning. This

time we saw Vesuvius from its other side. The country was fertile and the main road was lined with poplars, as colossal as pyramids. We made a brief halt to make this pleasing picture our own. Then we came to the top of a ridge and a grand panorama unfolded before us: Naples in all its glory, rows of houses for miles along the flat coast line of the Gulf, promontories, headlands, cliffs, then the islands and, beyond them, the sea. A breath-taking sight!

A horrible noise, more a screaming and howling for joy than a song, startled me out of my wits. It came from the boy who was standing behind me. I turned on him furiously. He was a good-natured lad, and this was the first time he had heard a harsh word from either of us.

For a while he neither moved nor spoke; then he tapped me on the shoulder, thrust his right arm between Kniep and myself, pointed with his forefinger and said: 'Signer, perdonate! Questa è la mia patria!' which means: 'Sir, forgive me. This is my native land!' And so I was startled for the second time. Poor northerner that I am - something like tears came into my eyes.

*25 March. Lady Day*

Although I felt Kniep was very glad to be accompanying me to Sicily, I could not help noticing that there was something he hated to leave. Thanks to his sincerity, it did not take me long to discover that this something was a sweetheart to whom he is deeply attached. His story of how they became acquainted was touching. The girl's conduct so far spoke highly in her favour: now he wanted me to see how pretty she was. A meeting place was arranged where I could, incidentally, enjoy one of the most beautiful views over Naples. He led me on to the flat roof of a house, directly overlooking the lower part of the city and facing towards the harbour mole, the Gulf and the coast of Sorrento. Everything that lies to the right takes on a peculiar perspective which cannot easily be seen from any other point.

While we were admiring this view, all of a sudden the pretty little head we had been expecting popped up out of the floor, for the only access to this kind of terrace is through a square

opening which can be closed by a trap door. When the little angel had emerged completely, it suddenly occurred to me that some old masters depict the Angel of the Annunciation as coming up a staircase. Our angel had a lovely figure, a charming little face and natural good manners. I was glad to see my new friend so happy under this wonderful sky and in view of the loveliest landscape in the world.

After the girl left us, he confessed to me that the reason why he had so far endured voluntary poverty was because it had enabled him to enjoy her love and learn to prize her simple and modest way of life. Now, however, he welcomed the prospect of improving his circumstances, mainly because this would enable him to make her life more comfortable as well as his own.

After this agreeable encounter, I took a walk along the seashore. I was feeling calm and happy. Suddenly I had a flash of insight concerning my botanical ideas. Please tell Herder I am very near discovering the secret of the Primal Plant. I am only afraid that no one will recognize in it the rest of the plant world. My famous theory about the cotyledons has now been so elaborated that it would be difficult to take it any further.

*26 March*

I shall send this letter off tomorrow. On Thursday the twenty-ninth I am due to sail for Palermo at last on the corvette which, in my ignorance of things nautical, I promoted in an earlier letter to the rank of a frigate.

During my stay here, my state of indecision - should I go or not? - made me restless and irritable at times; now I have made up my mind, I feel much better. Given my temperament, this trip is salutary and even necessary. To me Sicily implies Asia and Africa, and it will mean more than a little to me to stand at that miraculous centre upon which so many radii of world history converge.

In Naples I have lived like a Neapolitan. I have been anything but studious, and when I get back I must make up for a few of my omissions - but only a few, I'm afraid, since I have to be in Rome by 29 June. Having missed Holy Week, I want at least to

celebrate the Feast of St Peter. I must not let my Sicilian trip make me deviate too far from my original plan.

The day before yesterday there was a violent thunderstorm and torrents of rain; now it is clear again and a tramontana is blowing from the north. If it keeps up, we shall have a very swift passage.

Yesterday Kniep and I visited the corvette to take a look at our cabin. A sea voyage is something I still have to experience. This short crossing and perhaps a cruise along the coast will stimulate my imagination and enlarge my vision of the world. The captain is a likeable young man; the ship, built in America, is neat, elegant and sails well.

Here everything is beginning to turn green; in Sicily it will be even greener. By the time you get this letter, I shall already have left Trinacria\* behind me and be on my return voyage. There's man for you! For ever jumping backwards and forwards in his thoughts. I have not yet been there but already I am with you again. It is not my fault if this letter is confused. I am interrupted all the time, but I should at least like to finish this page.

I have just had a visit from the Marchese Berio, a young man who appears well informed. He wished to make the acquaintance of the author of *Werther*. By and large, the Neapolitans have a great desire for culture and a thirst for knowledge, but they are too happy-go-lucky to set about it in the right way. If I had more time, I would gladly give them more. Four weeks - what are they to set against the immensity of life?

And now, farewell! On this journey I shall certainly learn how to travel; whether I shall learn how to live, I don't know. The people I meet who possess this art are so different from me in their nature and habits that I doubt whether I have the talent.

Farewell, and think of me with the same love that I cherish for you in my heart.

28 March

What with packing, saying goodbye, shopping, paying bills,

\*Trinacria, the Three-Pointed, i.e., Sicily.

catching up with this and preparing that, these last days have been completely wasted.

My peace of mind has been disturbed at the last minute by the Prince of Waldeck. When I went to say good-bye to him, he would talk of nothing else but the arrangements I was to make after my return to accompany him to Greece and Dalmatia. Once one has stepped into die great world and accepted its ways, one has to be careful not to get trapped or even spirited away. I am too exhausted to write another word.

*29 March*

For some days the weather has been uncertain, but on this day of our departure, it is as beautiful as could be. A favourable tramontana, a sunny sky, just the day for wishing to go round the world. Once more, I sincerely bid farewell to all my friends in Weimar and Gotha. May your love accompany me; I shall certainly always need it. Last night I dreamed I was at home and again at my usual occupations. I know this much: I could never unload my boat of pheasants anywhere but on your shores. Let us hope that by then it will be laden with precious cargo.