

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

In: The Message. 7.10.1943.

Cities in the News. Naples.

Mann, Klaus

1943-10-07

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CITIES IN THE NEWS NAPLES

By T/3 KLAUS MANN.

When I was a child one of my most treasured possessions was a book called "Our Beautiful World"—a kind of pictorial survey of our planet's outstanding sceneries. Never shall I forget the impressive views of the Kongo river, the Norwegian Fjords, the cherry blossom in Japan and the Roman Colosseum. There were pictures of a Brazilian sugar plantation, a Swiss glacier and a bull fight in Valencia. Everything was very neatly presented and most glaringly colored. Some pictures—like that of the once-fashionable spa Baden-Baden—conveyed a cozy and idyllic atmosphere, whereas others—like the one of the American prairie teeming with truculent Indians and sturdy pioneers—were rather on the dramatic side.

But my favorite panorama was the Gulf of Naples—showing, in sweet and appealing tints, the famous Italian seaport and Mount Vesuvius, along with a bit of blue Mediterranean water and some elegantly shaped sail boats. City, mountain and sky appeared bathed in a silvery-bluish haze, which added an engagingly mysterious note to the whole set-up and made it all the more attractive to me. The most fascinating feature, however, was the faint crown of smoke which hovered over the peak of Mount Vesuvius. Thanks to this fluffy halo, the mountain assumed, in my eyes, an almost saintly appearance.

I had been told—and loved to remember it, not without a secret little shudder—that this delicate glory of curly smoke had its definite and rather ominous significance. The mountain's peak was really an open crater—abysmally deep; full of fiery, dangerous stuff. At times it pleased Vesuvius to pour out this glowing matter, called lava, with terrific violence. The ancient town of Pompeii had been devastated by one of these eruptions—79 years before the birth of Christ. This appalling incident—however remote in time—never ceased to intrigue my childish fantasy. What if Vesuvius got the idea to produce another disaster? The uncanny giant—seemingly so peaceful and innocuous, with his saintly halo—might amuse himself

by destroying beautiful, hazy Naples. What a distressing idea, to imagine the picturesque port, with all its palm trees, vessels and monuments, buried under a mass of molten earth and rocks. I was seriously worried and felt like warning the endangered community: Beware of volcanos! But the people of Naples—the tiny ladies and gentlemen populating the foreground of the picture in "Our Beautiful World"—paid no attention to me. The gulf and the harbor remained motionless—lovely and complacent; frozen, as it were, under the spell of the smoke-crowned mountain.

My first actual visit to Naples was an anticlimax. I stopped there, coming from North Africa—altogether under the Arabian charm. In Palermo, I was hankering for Tunis; in Naples, for Sicily whose colors still had a somewhat African tinge. But Naples was classic ground—nothing Moorish about it. I remembered what I had learned in school about the ancient seaport: founded by the Greeks, many centuries before Christ; developed by the Romans; then, during the Middle Ages, successively under the sway of German emperors and French or Spanish kings. Later it became the capital of an independent kingdom which fell to Napoleon, who handed it over, first to his brother Joseph, then to his brother-in-law, Prince Murat. In 1860 Naples was incorporated into the newly united kingdom of Italy.

A magnificent place, no doubt; it was hardly surprising that so many monarchs and conquerors had rivaled for its possession. Even as an industrialized, modern city (population: 875,000) it offered a splendid sight—spread out along the semi-circular coastline of the famous bay; impressively divided into two unequal parts by a steep ridge. The largest and oldest part of Naples lies to the east of these heights; the western, more modern district, with the fashionable Corso Vittorio Emanuele, has a superior situation and commands glorious views.

Certainly, I enjoyed watching the bustling, gesticulating crowds in the narrow streets, lanes and alleys, and I visited, dutifully, the medieval castles and cathedrals, the much-vaunted marine aquarium, the Museo Nazionale, and the ancient university. But all these historic monuments and natural beauties somehow failed to seize my imagination. Disappointed by Naples, I ever renounced the usual excursions to the isle of Capri and the antique ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

To me a mysterious blight tainted and tarnished the splendors of Italy. It was the blight of Fascism. The dreary grimace of the Duce disfigured the most graceful facades. The finest palazzos were cheapened by the cocky blackshirts who guarded them. I sensed Fascism everywhere. Its omni-

present flavor irritated, depressed me. I didn't stay long in Mussolini's Italy, and just a few days in Naples.

Today I regret having been in such a dull, unresponsive frame of mind during my stay in Naples. I thus missed my last chance to admire treasures now irretrievably lost. The illustrious city has been visited by the Vandals since. The invaders did a dreadfully thorough job. They ravaged and wrecked, scared and blackened the place. Many historic buildings, including the Royal Palace and the University, were wantonly burned down. These fiendish, systematic demolitions had the purpose, not only of denying anything of military value to the onrushing liberators, but also of inflicting vengeance on the Italians for their unconditional surrender. Nine-tenths of the population fled to the hills to escape from the reign of terror. Those forced to stay lived under the double threat of Nazi firing squads and Allied high explosives. Bombed by Allied planes, shelled by Allied warships; shaken and swept by the explosions and fires set by German demolition crews—how much of the martyred city may have been spared destruction?

"The city looked as dead as near-by Pompeii," reported the crew of a Mitchell medium bomber after a flight over Mount Vesuvius and the ruined seaport. "The streets lay like white ribbons winding through a brownish mass of houses. There was no sign of any motor traffic or life. Factory chimneys stuck up into the air like gaunt fingers. No smoke came from them..."

So there it is again—cruelly materialized—the nightmarish vision that haunted my childish mind. There is Naples—the gorgeous panorama of "Our Beautiful World"—seared and paralyzed by the mortal blight; reduced to debris and ashes; frozen in an eerie kind of stillness—the sinister peace of a deserted battlefield or of a cemetery.

But this time it is not Vesuvius that caused the catastrophe. The devastating eruption is due to other sources—no less volcanic than the depth of the fiery mountain. Man has produced this disaster. He destroyed his own work—the melon fruit of so much diligence and ingenuity. It will cost him a good deal of blood, sweat and tears to atone for his outrage. It will take him long to recover from his self-made apocalypse. He will have to be patient and vigilant during the years of reconstruction to come—guarding himself against the irrational, destructive elements of his own nature. Beware of volcanos!

Army's Crime Rate Is The Lowest in History

Maj. Gen. Myron C. Cramer, judge advocate general of the Army, described the Army's crime rate as "the lowest in history and much better than in the last war." At a press conference Gen. Cramer said the Army's crime rate "compares favorably with that of any well-behaved civilian community in the country."

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