

# Simkins Goes to a Tea Party



SO this is Christchurch, said Simkins to himself, looking at the buildings on the opposite side of the street because, after all, it was all you could see unless you climbed a high building or went up in a plane. A flock of bicycles went past and Herbert quite enjoyed watching them, especially as there was the usual nor' wester blowing. From sheer force of habit he looked for a gharry but there wasn't any, and so he set off up the strada, bound for the piazza or the Square as the natives called it.

Not a bad dump, thought Herbert as he bumped and pushed his way through the pedestrians. Reminded him of Bari, although there was not the same smell and there were not the Yanks about. He wondered where he would stay the night. Pity there wasn't a New Zealand Club. He looked hard at some of the bints but they showed little interest in him. Of course, if it was the same as in Italy a lot would still be sleeping. He didn't want to go to any of the posh hotels, not after his experiences in Wellington. He didn't like their soft, springy beds and sheets and things. He liked the warmth and the tickle of blankets next to him. And he didn't like their fussy waiters and all the implements spread out on a white cloth. Give him a spoon and a dixie, some good army munga, and a bed-roll on the floor and he would be happy. He looked round for a *pensione*, even if it did cost him a few cigarettes or a couple of tins of bully. He could hunt up his old Div. friends *dòmani*.

In the meantime he was hungry and there was a *trattoria* right ahead. He pushed his way inside, kit-bag, bed-roll and all.

"Eggs and chips, Momma?" he asked the middle-aged woman behind the counter. She gave him a withering look and then relented when she saw his pretty service ribbons.

"Just sit down over there, soldier, and order what you want," she said. "And if you like you can leave your baggage in here."

Herbert looked at her speculatively. "They're worth *molte lire*," he said doubtfully. "You won't hock them, will you?" he added with what he hoped was a disarming smile. The woman assured him rather sharply that she wouldn't touch them, and so he left them but he kept his eye on them all the time he ate. The meal didn't cost him such a packet of lire after all, and he began to trust the old girl at the counter. Perhaps he could leave his gear with her while he went in search of an *osteria*. He put it to her and she agreed after he had slipped her a couple of clothing coupons. He didn't want them anyway. He had enough army clothes to keep him going on the farm for some time to come anyhow.