

or twelve years that beer has begun to appeal to the Italian palate, and at no stage has it threatened the popularity of the native wines, even though the mellow *Peroni* product made in the breweries at Rome, Naples and Bari and the still lighter beers brewed at Venice, and the German *Gratz-Drehr* factory at Trieste have met an appreciable demand.

The Italian will grasp any pretext for wine-bibbing, but always with the same moderation. Good news invariably calls for celebration; so do Saints' days.

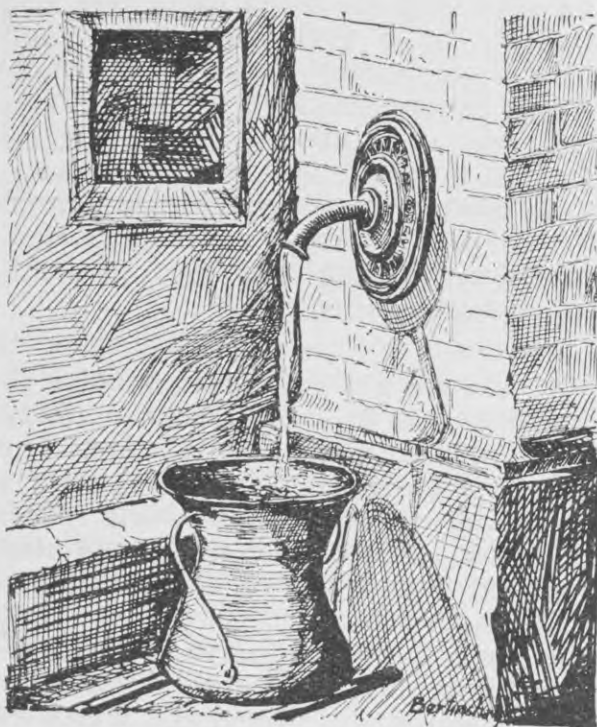
Birthdays, Christmas and New Year merit suitable attention, and wine also flows freely at wedding feasts.

Marriage customs in Italy vary little from those in other Roman Catholic countries, while there are all the trappings of the nuptials of the outside world—engagement and wedding rings, bridal trousseaus, orange blossoms and bouquets, confetti and rice, and, of course, a wedding breakfast, at which the only essential difference is the absence of a wedding cake, its place as the

central feature of the festive board being taken by dishes based mainly on macaroni. Engagements may be of long or short duration, but, while occasionally a swain makes his proposal of marriage direct to his inamorata, the common practice is for a suitor to approach the girl's parents, who, if they approve, convey the proposal to their daughter. On the wedding day the bridal conveyance carries the bride, groom, best man and bridesmaid (or matron-of-honour, since she is usually the wife of the best man) to the church, where the best man escorts the bride to the altar and the groom is accompanied by the matron-of-honour.

In a country where both sexes reach maturity early, it is not surprising to find that the marriage age is fairly low. Most women marry at ages between eighteen and twenty years and men between twenty and twenty-five, though the legal limit is as low as fourteen for females and eighteen for males. In accordance with their faith—only one in every two hundred Italians is not a Roman Catholic—divorce is unknown in Italy, and only in cases of extreme circumstances, such as adultery, desertion or violence, can marriages be broken by court separation orders, which do not, however, permit either party to re-marry during the lifetime of the other.

The pageantry and flourish so dear to the heart of the average Italian accompany him to the very grave. Elaborate funerals, with long processions, are the rule rather than the exception, though the degree of ostentation is naturally governed by the financial circumstances of the bereaved family. In most towns three types of hearse are available: one a small, white conveyance for infants and children up to the age of about twelve years, the second an ornate vehicle for people of means, and the third, rather less pretentious, for those of lower station. The leader of the procession is the *Crocifero*, bearing the cross, who is followed in long files by the hooded members of



A typical village water well.