

THE ROAD TO ROME

A KORERO Report

OUR TROOPS who disembarked near Anzio and Nettuno landed in a region of the utmost interest and importance. This is not the first time in recent history that Anzio has appeared in combined operations. Twenty years ago this lovely bay was the scene of a thrilling naval drama. The film was "Ben Hur," and the director was, naturally, Cecil B. de Mille. The battle at sea went off without a hitch. But, alas! the same could not be said for land operations. For a hungry lion took a fancy to an Early Christian Italian super. This unrehearsed incident was not regarded with satisfaction by any but the monarch of the jungle.

Nettuno is named after a famous temple to Neptune which in classical times dominated the heights overlooking the harbour. These two ports were strongholds of the Volscians. When Rome, as a prelude to world conquest, established her power over the cities of Latium five hundred years before the present era she found in those towns the last pockets of enemy resistance.

They are important because they give access to the Appian Way, which leads in turn to Rome. This celebrated road, the oldest and most celebrated in the world, was begun by the Censor Appius Claudius in B.C. 312. It runs from Rome south to Capua and Brindisi; it is about 350 miles long, and from 14 ft. to 18 ft. wide. It is paved with hard stones in irregular blocks, closely fitting together on a firm substructure. Despite the enormous lapse of time a part of it is still in use.

The new Appian Way was built at the end of the eighteenth century by Pius VI, a Pope who defied Napoleon. It is close to the old one, which it rejoins at Albano. Within sight is another celebrated road, the Tusculan Way, leading to Frascati. All three of these great highways are the object of the present fighting.

Those roads to Rome are as unique in interest as they are of importance to the whole campaign. They are the arteries

of a countryside which is rich in fine vineyards and the home of excellent wines. Here, in the Roman Campagna, squat groves of silvery olive trees stand out against a background of cypress and pine. Cattle graze amid the deserted aqueducts, and sheep crop the grass among the tombs. For the place is really a vast cemetery. The Romans deliberately lined their triumphal highways with imposing sepulchres reminding captive and conqueror alike of the shortness and impermanence of life. This is a genuinely classical landscape with its broken pillars and ruined arches against the lovely line of the Alban Hills and Mount Soracte sparkling in the distance.

The Appian Way enters Rome at the Capuan Gate, which gives its name to a famous restaurant. A portion of the ancient wall is to be found in the restaurant's wine-cellar. This place enjoyed in peacetime a well-deserved reputation for superb chicken, roasted on a great spit before a huge fire and served with the cool, dry, white wine of Orvieto. No better introduction to Rome could be either imagined or hoped for.

Rome is a little bewildering at first, but always charming and full of interest. There are so many Romes for those who know where to look—Rome of the Cæsars, of the catacombs, of the early churches; Rome of the Popes and the great artists and builders; Rome of the modern Italy and imperial ambitions. Those political pretensions have been brought low; but the other Rome, the ancient centre of the Christian faith, the Mother and teacher of western civilization, keeps her place unmoved. Her sole meaning for history is in the moral order.

In normal times Rome is one of the most delightful cities in the world. A walk along the Corso provides intimate glimpses of a lively and colourful scene. The presence of two courts, with the Royal and Papal officials from the Quirinal and Vatican respectively, allow