

American Consulate
Milan, Italy
May 10, 1941

Dear folks:

It certainly has been a long time since I have heard from you all. As a matter of fact, I fear that something has gone wrong with the airmail service between here and Lisbon, because I don't think anyone here has received any airmail letters for about three weeks. The last letter I got was Daddy's of March 24th, which arrived here on April 14th.

As I promised in my last letter (April 18th), I will tell you about my lovely week end at Bellagio at the Villa of Princess della Torre e Tasso. On Saturday, we had rather bad weather, it being rainy and rather chilly. Sunday, however, was beautiful, and we enjoyed to the full the incomparable scenery of Bellagio and the Lake of Como. The house, called the Villa Serbelloni, is very large, and was, in fact, an exclusive hotel before it was taken over by the Princess several years ago. I should imagine that the Princess must have pretty close to a million dollars, as I don't see how the place could be maintained on less. It has a staff of fifty, altogether. She is the granddaughter of Hiram Walker, who made his pile in the distilling business. Besides the Villa Serbelloni she has one or two other similar places, and you can imagine the expense.

Besides the large house, the grounds are also extensive and beautifully kept up. Every inch of ground appears to have been gone over carefully, and there is not a dead limb and scarcely a dead leaf to be seen in the whole area. The estate includes most of the tip of the peninsula of Bellagio which so enraptured me when I was there with B. C. Hart (from Stuttgart) in May, 1939. From the point one has an unobstructed view of the whole northern end of the lake, with the majestic, snowcapped Alps in the background. The whole business is very near the Swiss border, and most of the larger mountains are in Switzerland, but they haven't found any way of stopping the free importation of the view as yet. It is on an ideal spot, and the grounds are particularly lovely in the spring, when the many types of flowering bushes are in bloom. We crossed the lake on Sunday afternoon to walk through the gardens at the Villa Carlotta at Cadenabbia. This villa is very famous, too, and was originally the property of the dukes of Meiningen. It is now the property of the state, since they were unable to find anyone who could afford to keep it up. I might add in this connection that there is a very close supervision of such sites, which are declared to [be] public monuments. A private person may own them, but any changes of fundamental character must be approved by the state. They can also intervene if the place is not kept in a good state of repair, and the Princess has been compelled to restore some "Roman" towers on the property for which there is no particular use. I doubt very much whether the towers are really Roman; they looked rather more like the fifteenth century to me. Incidentally, speaking of Romans, this place is supposed to have been the property of Pliny, the Roman naturalist, and I was told that he describes it in one of his works.

We also stayed there Sunday night, and were driven to Milan, in spite of the shortage of gasoline, in the princess's car the next morning. The food is marvelous there; rationing seems to have cramped her style very little. One reason for this is that she has her own cows and dairy on the place. She provides dairy products for all her staff, and is thereby able to have as much whipped cream as she wants. It was the first time I had seen whipped cream for about a year. It

was also served with the coffee in the morning. The Princess mentioned incidentally that she has enough supplies put away for a year, but she is afraid that may not be enough.

Nothing to compare with that week-end has happened to me since, much to my regret. I have been in connection with the people at the legation at Bern who are in charge of the courier work. Due to the recent upheavals, the usual routes of communication are disrupted, and so is the courier service. As a result, I shall probably, in the next week or so, make a trip from Bern to Rome and back. I think it will be rather nice, and, as a matter of fact, I was planning to go to Rome anyway over the Memorial Day week end. If I could go now at government expense instead of paying myself, so much the better. I sent my passport to Rome Saturday for a visa.

In living conditions there has been no great change. Prices continue to go higher, the rationing regulations are more strictly enforced when it's to the detriment of the consumer. On the other hand, it happens frequently that even the meager rations are not available for distribution in some stores. Most storekeepers would be glad to go out of business, and they don't mind telling their customers so, but the government won't let them. The profits, if any, go to the middlemen – the wholesalers and jobbers.

Tonight I am going to a concert with Phil Hubbard to hear Wilhelm Backhaus, the pianist. Phil has invited me to eat at his house before the concert; we take turns in this respect in connection with the opera and concert series. It has just started to rain, much to my disgust, since it was as clear as a bell when I left home, and of course I didn't wear my raincoat. The spring has been late and unseasonable. I hope you are all well, and that I will hear from you soon.

Air mail

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