

A Bell for Adano

By John Hersey

W.N.U. FEATURES

THE STORY THUS FAR: The American troops arrived at Adano, a seaport in Italy, with Major Victor Joppolo, the Army officer in charge. Sergeant Leonard Borth, an M.P., was to be in charge of security. The Major set out immediately to win the friendship of the citizens, and to improve their living conditions. The first duties of the Major, after posting the civil instructions, was to find out what the citizens needed the most. He soon determined to replace their bell, which the Germans had taken. Major Joppolo found that the bell was the very symbol of their private and civic life in Adano. He determined to secure a bell satisfactory to the people.

CHAPTER III

Craxi said: "I needed no bell. I was on the beach to welcome the Americans. My woman was with me, the formidable Margherita, and my seven children. We were on the beach in spite of the shooting, to greet the Americans. But what did my children shout? They did not shout: 'We miss the tinkling of the bell.' They shouted: 'Caramelle! Caramelle!' They were hungry. They wanted candy. I myself, who had had enough to eat as it happens, shouted for cigarettes, not for the pealing of a bell."

Borth and the usher Zito came back. Borth said: "It's nifty, Major. All the records are intact. They tell everything. There are lists of anti-Fascists and lists of those who were enthusiastic and the others who were lukewarm. There's a dossier on each important person. It's perfect. Who are these guys?"

Cacopardo said: "Cacopardo is my name, at your service, sir. Cacopardo is sulphur and sulphur is Cacopardo."

Borth said: "I remember that name. In the records it says Cacopardo's crazy."

Craxi said: "That is true. He thinks that bells are more important than food."

Borth turned on Craxi in mock anger. "And who is this?"

Craxi was apologetic again: "I am anti-Fascist. Craxi. I believe in food for the moment."

Major Joppolo said: "They are arguing which is more important, food or restoring the bell. Since we obviously can't do anything about the bell just now, food is our concern."

Craxi looked very proud of himself, but Cacopardo turned to Zito and said: "We will leave this matter to the son of Rosa who was the wife of Zito. What do you say, small Zito, do you consider the food or the bell more important?"

Surprisingly Zito said: "I think the bell."

Major Joppolo was interested by this. He leaned forward and said: "Why, Zito?"

Zito said: "Because the tone of the bell was so satisfactory."

"No," said Cacopardo, "it is because of the history of the bell. When the bell spoke, our fathers and their fathers far back spoke to us."

Even Craxi was swept into this argument. "No," he said, "it was because the bell rang the times of day. It told us when to do things, such as eating. It told us when to have the morning egg and when to have pasta and rabbit and when to drink wine in the evening."

Zito said: "I think it was the tone which mattered. It soothed all the people of this town. It chided those who were angry, it cheered the unhappy ones, it even laughed with those who were drunk. It was a tone for everybody."

Giuseppe came in bringing the priest. Father Pensovocchio was gray-haired and cheerful, and as he approached the group around the Major's desk he made a motion with his right hand which might have been interpreted either as a blessing or as a Fascist salute.

After the introductions, Major Joppolo said to the priest: "Father, we are speaking of the old bell which was taken away."

Father Pensovocchio said: "That is the disgrace of this town. I have in my church a bell which is just as loud as the one which was taken away, though not so sweet and much younger and altogether meaningless as a bell. Any other bell would have done as well in my belfry. I wanted to send my bell. But the Monsignor would not permit it. The Monsignor is the uncle of the Mayor. He has reasons for doing the things he does—Father Pensovocchio crossed himself, indicating that the things which the Monsignor did were somewhat ugly; "—but in this case I believe he was wrong."

Borth said: "It's ridiculous. There are lots of things more important than this bell. Get them some food and don't forget that alleyway."

Major Joppolo said: "All the same, the bell is important to them." And he said then in Italian: "Thank you for telling me about the bell. I promise you that I will do all I can to get another bell which will have some meaning as a bell and will have a good tone and its history will be that it was given to you by the Americans to take the place of the one which was taken away by the Fascists to make gun barrels."

Cacopardo said: "You are kind."

Craxi said: "I thank you, Mister Major, and I kiss your hand."

Major Joppolo said: "You what?"

Cacopardo the historian said: "He meant no offense. It is an old cus-

tom here. Once the important people make us kiss their hands, and later when the actual kissing became too much of a bother, it became the habit merely to mention the kissing, as if it had been done."

Craxi said: "I meant no offense, Mister Major. I am anti-Fascist."

Major Joppolo said: "It appears that everyone in this town is anti-Fascist. Well, we will see about the bell. Now I wish to speak alone with the priest. Zito, you may stay. You are my usher. Giuseppe, you may stay. You are my interpreter."

Craxi said: "Mister Major, the telegram."

Major Joppolo said: "I will try to send it."

Craxi mentioned the kissing again, and turned to go.

When the others had gone, Major Joppolo said to Father Pensovocchio: "Father, I wish to tell you that the Americans want to bring only good to this town. As in every nation, there are some bad men in America. It is possible that some Americans who come here will do bad things. If they do, I can assure you that most of the Americans will be just as ashamed of those things as you are annoyed by them."

Father Pensovocchio said: "I think we will understand weakness in your men just as we try to understand it in our own."

Major Joppolo said: "Thank you, Father. I have been told that you are the best priest in Adano."

The priest said with quite honest modesty: "I am here to do my duty."

Major Joppolo said: "Therefore I should like to ask a favor of you."



Blood and wind rushed into his throat and his throat roared.

You must feel perfectly free to refuse me if you wish. I should like to ask you to say a few words before your mass tomorrow morning about the Americans. I shall leave it to you to say what you wish, if you will merely add that there are certain proclamations which the Americans have posted which ought to be read."

Father Pensovocchio said: "That I can easily do."

Major Joppolo said: "I myself am a Catholic. If you will have me, I should like to attend your mass."

The priest said: "It will be a pleasure to have you." Major Joppolo was glad that he did not say it would be an honor.

Major Joppolo said: "I shall see you tomorrow then."

Father Pensovocchio said, just to make sure: "At the Church of San Angelo. It is by the Piazza of that name. At seven in the morning. Until then, son."

When the priest had left, Giuseppe said in his brand of English: "You doing okay, a boss. All you got a do now is fix a food."

"Yes," said Major Joppolo, "food. We'll go to the bakeries. But first, do you have a crier here?"

Giuseppe said to Zito in Italian: "What is the name of the crier? Did he run into the hills with the others?"

Zito said: "No, he is here, Mercurio Salvatore. He is here. Only, Mister Major, he does not always say exactly what you tell him to say. He will say the general meaning of what you wish, but he will change it some. Even if you write it down, he will change it some."

Major Joppolo said: "Will you get him, please, Zito? I want to send him out to tell the people to read the proclamations."

Zito went. Major Joppolo said to Giuseppe: "We will go to the bakeries, then we will post the proclamations."

Giuseppe said: "Okay, a boss."

Major Joppolo looked down at his desk and saw Craxi's telegram. He undid the safety pin and unfolded the paper and read:

"To Franklin D. Roosevelt, Cap-

itol Building, Washington, D. C. Finalmente di gioia per la liberta da molto tempo attesa che i vostri valorosi soldati anno dato alla citta d'Adano stop vi prego accettare i sentimenti sinceri della mia gratitudine e riconoscenza. Antifascista Giovanni La Concetta fu Craxi."

"Giuseppe," the Major said, "let's see how good you are as an interpreter. Now, this is for President Roosevelt. You must make it as eloquent as you can. What does it say?"

"To Franklin D. Roosevelt and a so forth," said Giuseppe. "Crazy with joy because of a liberty so long time awaited which your brave a soldier have a give to a town of Adano. What's a stop?"

"That's just the end of a sentence, Giuseppe."

"End a sentence. I beg a you accept a sincere sentiments of my gratitude and a recognition. Signed a this Craxi. You going to deliver it, a boss?"

"Sure," the Major said, "the President will be glad to hear."

Mercurio Salvatore, crier of the town of Adano, took a little time to show up, because he had to get into his uniform. His face was happy when he did arrive, because he had thought that his crying days were over. Having been a voice of Fascism for seventeen years, he thought that the newcomers would not want his loud shouts. He had taken his uniform off and hidden it in the house of Carmelina the wife of Fatta. He had then awkwardly paraded himself in civilian clothes and the people, having seen him in uniform for seventeen years, laughed at him.

"Where is the crier?" they asked each other in his presence.

"He has disappeared into the clothes of Fatta which do not fit him," they shouted, and laughed.

Therefore Mercurio Salvatore was happy and grateful when he presented himself to Major Joppolo. "I am glad to be able to serve you and I kiss your hand," he said in his husky voice. Indoors he had learned to speak in a kind of whisper, because he knew the strength of his throat.

If Major Joppolo had been any other American officer, he would have laughed outright at Mercurio Salvatore.

He said: "Crier, I have a job for you. I must explain this to you: the Americans are different from the Fascists. They are different in many ways. For this reason there will be quite a few changes in Adano. I hope that they will be changes for the better."

Mercurio Salvatore said: "Yes, Mister Major," to show that he would remember every word of it.

The Major said: "In order to explain some of these changes, I am going to post at various prominent places around the town a number of proclamations, which will make everything clear. All I want you to do is to tell the people to read these proclamations. Impress on them that the penalties for not obeying the proclamations will be severe. That is all."

Mercurio Salvatore looked disappointed. "That is not much to shout," he said.

Major Joppolo said: "Shall I name a new crier?"

Mercurio Salvatore said quickly: "Oh no, Mister Major, I will make something beautiful of what you have said."

Major Joppolo said: "The proclamations will be posted before five o'clock this afternoon."

Mercurio Salvatore said: "Yes, Mister Major," and left.

He picked up his drum where he had left it outside the Major's office. Ordinarily he had made his first cry in the Piazza Progresso, right in front of the Palazzo, but this time he was self-conscious, and wanted to have a few tries before crying within earshot of the Major. Therefore he went first to the park opposite the Cathedral.

He rolled his drum long and sharply.

He took a deep breath. Blood and wind rushed into his throat, and his throat roared: "Well, you laughed. But you can see that Mercurio Salvatore is still your crier. The Americans are friends of Mercurio Salvatore. The Americans wish to be your friends, too. You have been expecting the Americans for some time, but did you expect the changes which would come after the Americans? Did you know that they were going to change many things after they came? Did you know that they were going to change practically everything except the crier? Well, your crier is here to tell you this."

Now Mercurio Salvatore filled his lungs and belted: "Opposite me I see Carmelina the wife of Fatta in front of her house. I also see the lazy Fatta leaning against the wall of his wife's house. The crier wishes to thank Carmelina for storage of his uniform during the difficult time of the invasion. He wishes also to address a few words to her lazy husband. It is unfortunate, lazy Fatta, that you never learned to read. It is too bad that you were too slothful to memorize the letters of the alphabet. This afternoon you would have had a chance to read of the changes which our friends the Americans intend to bring about here in Adano."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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