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MEETING-PLACE TICINO

THE SUN-TRAP OF SWITZERLAND

It is not without reason that the Canton of Ticino is called the sun-trap of Switzerland. With an annual 2,230 hours of sunshine it compares favourably with Zurich (1,704), Berne (1,708), Basle (1,756) and Geneva (2,047), and deserves that "meteorological title".

When one connects the Ticino with sunshine, one dreams of deep-blue skies framed by tall, thickly wooded mountains, of the smell of the partly tropical plants and, of course, of the sun covering everything in its brilliant light and enhancing every corner of the old brickwork with special magic. Unfortunately, such dreams are often spoilt by the encroachment of technology and environmental pollution.

With Wines . . .

Any traveller to the Ticino will realise that vines grow everywhere, in every possible and impossible place, on the plain, at the lakeside, on the sunny slopes of the narrow valleys, along houses and garden-walls. Sometimes, vines are trained on struts to form a covered way, a pergola. Heavy bunches of dark blue grapes hang from these green foliage roofs. It is remarkable that the ground under the pergola roofs are cultivated with vegetables or maize — an aspect of the diversity of the Ticino.

In the Ticino, it is mostly red wine that is grown and drunk: "Barbera" and above all "Nostrano". The old vines of the "Nostrano" have largely died out, and in their place, one plants mainly the heavy, fruity "Americano", though the

wine is still called by its old name. At Arzo, Meride and Tremora, one of the rare white wines of the Ticino is grown, the "Vino dei Tre Castelli". Whoever passes through these districts should not miss tasting them.

. . . Maize . . .

On the outside of many farmsteads, golden yellow bunches of corn-cobs are hung up to dry. Maize is cultivated above all in the Magadino Plain and in the Mendrisiotto and supplies the main ingredient for one of the best-known Ticino dishes, the "Polenta".

. . . and Tobacco.

Tobacco cultivation is one of the most typical aspects of agriculture in the Ticino. The main districts for it are the Mendrisiotto, the Luganese (Malcantone) and the Magadino Plain. Over 300 large and numerous small producers cultivate more than 9¾ million square metres. The work is done to a large extent by women and young people. The tobacco is planted in May and harvested in August/September. The green leaves are threaded on string, and hung up in sheds or on the outside walls of houses. In the course of winter, the leaves are carefully pressed into bales and prepared for collection by the manufacturers. The tobacco is then fermented as certain properties, such as protein, must be reduced.

Tobacco growing, maize and wine provide the Ticino with characteristics without which one cannot picture the Canton.

The People

Visitors to the Ticino, be they foreigners or compatriots from northern or western parts of the country, marvel again and again that the Ticino should be part of Switzerland. This Canton is so different from the rest of Switzerland; the people and the language so unlike those of other parts of the country: Melodious names appear; words usually end in o, a or i. No more *Verboten* which indicates discipline, but a *Vietato*, though it is not difficult to believe that under the southern sun, this word is of far less significance than elsewhere. On the other hand, though, it is said that the word *Nonna*, grandmother, still carries much weight. The story goes that a young man from the Ticino, displeased with his home, expressed a wish to emigrate to America in order to start a new life. His wife approved of the plan, as did his mother-in-law, though somewhat reluctantly. The *Nonna*, however, was not at all in agreement and said *no*, upon which the young man stayed at home!

At the Grotto . . .

The *Grotti*, the small inns, are dotted all over the Ticino. They are a favourite meeting place for men. There they discuss events and political topics, eat a trifle and have a drink.

Outside the *Grotto*, there are rough seats with wood or granite tops. Trees or vines are trained along wires form a green roof which protect one from the hot sun and which make a stay at the *Grotto* particularly relaxing.

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View of Lugano and Mount San Salvatore from Monte Brè.