

Preface

(Il brano che segue è stato tradotto dall'italiano)

The English knew and visited Sicily, but they came to the Island after visiting more famous places.

Only in the second part of 1700, after the publication of "A Tour through Sicily and Malta" by Patrick Brydon, the island became a place that should be visited. Brydon's letters describing his ascent of Mount Etna are well written and useful for our study. They can be found in the letters: IX and X.

A Tour through Sicily and Malta London 1773

Letter IX

On the 27th, at sunrise, they set off to visit mount Etna.

They found a certain degree of wilderness and ferocity in the inhabitants of this mountain.

The whole village of Nicolosi flocked round them.

The women, in particular, abused them, because of their white skin. They thought that the visitors were of their same sex, and with difficulty they could calm them.

The women tried to force their guide not to accompany them.

At first they had been obliged to shut the gate of the court, but when their landlord (a priest, assured the women that they were Christians and came with no bad intentions, they became more moderate.

It was with difficulty he could persuade them that they were not come to search for hidden treasures, and only when he took a bit of lava or pumice and put them into his pocket they were sure that their intentions were not bad.

When they asked him what he was going to do with those bits of stone, he answered that they were of great value in his country.

The Sicilians thought that the visitors had a way of making gold out of those stones, and when the visitors tried to explain to them that they didn't know how to do it, the Sicilians didn't believe them.

After a few days the tourists returned to Nicolosi.

One person, who assumed an air of superiority, began to question them.

He wanted to know the reason of their journey, and the visitors answered that the only reason was the curiosity to visit Mount Etna.

Letter X

With incredible efforts and pleasure too, before sunrise they arrived at the ruins of an ancient structure called *La Torre del Filosofo* (which may have been built by Empedocle) or as other people say "the ruins of Vulcano' temple".

In this place they rested for some time.

The sky was clear and it appeared in all its majesty and splendour.

There they observed with astonishment that the number of the stars seemed infinitely increased, and that the light of each of them appeared brighter than usual.

With the naked eye they could see clusters of stars that were totally invisible in from Nicolosi.

That place was only 300 yards from the summit of the mountain, where they arrived in time to see the most wonderful sight in nature.

It was impossible to describe that wonderful scene.

On the summit of the mountain there was a crater that discharges rivers of lava, accompanied by tremors that shake the whole island.

The place was so fantastic that they thought it was an enchantment, and it was difficult to believe they were still on earth.

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This passage starts with the presentation of Mount Etna and goes on with the description of the Volcano.

Brydon keeps on describing the characteristics of the mountain and its creator function.

The narration is introduced with “we”, but then changes into “I”. “I” is also the protagonist of the scene with the rude inhabitants of Nicolosi, those scenes are important to make us understand how upset (*turbato*) the protagonist was.

When the ascent of the mountain is described, “we” is used once again, and goes on as far as the end of the first letter.

At the beginning of the second letter we find again the collective “we” that includes their guide.

The more they go up the more they get tired so they often stop to rest, here the “we” is used till sunrise when “I” is used again because it is nature that speaks.

The “we” of the group comes back when they come down and disappears again with the twisting of the narrator’s leg, till the end of the letter.

From the beginning of the passage Brydon points out the majesty of the Volcano. According to Brydon this mountain is the home of philosophy.

Letter V

The sea-coast of Sicily is very rich.

There is abundance of corn, wine, oil and silk, even if the cultivated part is small in proportion to the whole island.

The sides of the roads are covered with a variety of flowers and of flowering shrubs, and many on the ravines round Etna there are plenty of trees which produce cinnamon and pepper.

The road from Messina to Catania is very romantic, because it is all along the coast.

On the left you can see Calabria, on the right you can see the high mountains and the towns situated near them.

They had built the towns on the mountains to protect themselves both from their enemies, and from the hot climate.

Letter VII

Catania is situated at the foot of Mount Etna, and it has been destroyed several times.

With the eruption of the 16th century, thanks to St. Agatha, they got a small harbour. In fact, a stream of lava running into the sea formed a little port.

This port lasted until the next eruption demolished it, so probably the saint lost most of her credit.

On their arrival in Catania they were amazed that in such a noble and beautiful city, there weren't any inns.

Their guide took them to a mean and dirty house, so they had to look for another lodging.

Thanks to Canonico Recupero' help they soon found a new comfortable lodging in a convent.

The prince of Biscaris (the governor of the place) was very hospitable and generous with them.

Signor Recupero offered to be their guide and showed them the place.

Letter VIII

On May 26th they went to see the house and museum of the prince of Biscari. It was a really interesting place.

One of the group of visitors went out alone and found a magnificent building where he was surprised to see such royal magnificence.

When he turned the corner, though, he found another part of equal greatness, and discovered that what he had seen before was only one side of a square.

When he returned to tell his friends what he had discovered, he found that Canonico Recupero was already with them.

Recupero was angry with him when understood that he had gone out without him, because he had come on purpose to take them there, and to enjoy their surprise and astonishment.

Then they went with Recupero to pay their respect to the monks, who received them with great politeness.

Their museum was a little inferior to that of the prince of Biscaris, but the apartments were more magnificent.

Catania is considered as one of the oldest cities in the island.

The legend tells that it was founded by the Cyclops.

Its ancient name was Catetna, or city of Etna.

It was considered the third city in the kingdom, but since Messina was destroyed by the plague, it could be considered as the second.

It has a University, the only one in the island, and a bishopric.

The bishop gets his revenues chiefly from the sale of the snow of mount Etna, in fact Etna provided snow and ice, not only to the whole island, but also to Malta and a large part of Italy.

But Etna, not only kept them cool in summer, it kept them warm in winter with its wood.

The snow and the wood of Etna represented a very large branch of trade.

After the eruption in 1669 what was spared by it, was destroyed by the earthquake of 1693, when the greatest part of its inhabitants were buried under the walls of their houses and churches.

The city was soon rebuilt and now it is more beautiful than ever.

There are many antiquities in this city. One of the most remarkable is the elephant of lava, with an obelisk of Egyptian granite on his back.

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Brydon makes ironical remarks about Catholicism, because Anglicans, Lutherans and people coming from protestant countries, thought that Catholicism prevented the development of a country.

For this reason one cannot understand the visitors' enthusiasm during the feast in honour of St. Rosalia in Palermo.

From Catania Brydone wrote that he was very pleased to see the Catholics happy faces in their devotion to their saints, especially female ones.

He also envied their feelings and in his heart he cursed (*malediva*) the pride of reason and philosophy, which try to annul these beautiful feelings.

In fact one of the most important letters for our study is the one about St. Rosalia's feast.

Letter XXII

They liked Palermo very much, and in the city they met some very pleasant people.

The *Porta Felice* (the most beautiful of these gates) opens to the *Marino*, a delightful walk which is one of the greatest pleasures of the nobility of Palermo.

In the centre of the Marino they erected an elegant temple, which in summer was used by an orchestra for musical entertainment, and the concert usually started at midnight exactly.

In summer the walk was crowded with carriages and people on foot as far as the *Porta Felice*, where the servants waited for the return of the carriages.

Letter XXVII

The city of Palermo had been busy in preparing for the great feast of St. Rosalia.

They were erecting an incredible number of arches and pyramids for the illuminations.

The whole Marino, and the two main streets of the city, had to be illuminated in this magnificent way.

They were also building an enormous cart, which they called St. Rosalia's triumphal cart.

Letter XXX

At five in the afternoon the festival in honour of St. Rosalia began. The triumphal cart was drawn from the Marino to the Porto Nuovo.

This cart was preceded by a troop of horses, with trumpets and kettle-drums.

Opposite the centre of this great line of light, there was a magnificent pavilion erected for the viceroy and his company.

At some distance, in the sea, there were great fire-works.

The day's entertainment was concluded at the Corso. It began exactly at midnight and lasted till two in the morning.

Two lines of coaches occupied the space between the two lines of illumination, and then they opened to allow all the beautiful ladies to get out of the coaches.

This group of ladies moved slowly round and round for two hours, and they seemed very happy.

The universal joy seemed really to spring from people's hearts, all appeared to be friends and equals.

The visitors were in different coaches among the nobility.

They returned home at about two o'clock in the morning, but writer could not sleep that night.

July 13th

The street was illuminated in the same way of the preceding night, and the conversation of the nobles was held at the Archbishop's palace.

At about ten o'clock the triumphal car returned in procession to the Marino.

July 14th

The two important streets and the four gates of the city were illuminated in the most splendid manner.

The conversation of the nobles was held in the viceroy's palace, the fire-works started at ten o'clock and ended at midnight.

This part of entertainment pleased the nobles most.

July 15th

The assembly of the nobility was held at the Judice Monarchia's, where they had an entertainment of the same style as the others.

Then they reached the square, where the whole church appeared a flame of light.

July 16th

The streets were completely illuminated.

The assembly was held at the praetor's, where there was an elegant entertainment and a concert.

The great procession that closed the festival began at ten o'clock.

During this procession, besides all the religious order of the city, there were ten lofty machines made of wood, decorated in an elegant manner, representing temples and a variety of beautiful pieces of architecture.

A silver box containing the bones of St. Rosalia closed the procession.

The archbishop walked behind the procession giving his benediction to the people as he passed.

All considered, the visitors had enjoyed their holiday in Palermo, and they could say that the festival entertainment had been much beyond any other they had ever seen before.

After the publication of Brydon's letters lots of English tourist started coming to Sicily. And Sicily became to be part of the Grand tour.