



~~FMP~~
~~LFK~~
~~ELT~~

Monday,

June 22, 1959.

rec'd 6/26
AUG 27 1959

Dear Sean,

This letter will fill in details and complete the record of developments since I telephoned you from Rome late Saturday evening with the unexpected news that the owner of the Villa Serbelloni had died. Upon your request that I represent the Foundation at the funeral and then remain at Bellagio until someone else could come from New York to take over, I ~~flaw~~ cancelled my Monday appointment with Professor Calderone, Chief of Cabinet of the Ministry of Finance, flew to Milan and drove up here, arriving late Sunday afternoon.

I telephoned at once to Miss Commens, who seemed surprised and pleased to hear from me, and (I thought) somewhat relieved when I assured her that I was putting up at the hotel and would not add to their burden at the Villa. She said she was sure the family ^{would} want to see me - she would let me



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know when would be convenient. In no time at all word came that a car from the Villa was waiting for me at the door. As we drove up to the entrance, Harmer, the English Superintendent of Grounds and Buildings (to borrow a Princeton title which fits his duties to a T), greeted me and Miss Commens was in the entrance hall. In a minute she was joined by a group of the relatives made up of Frau von Schoen, adopted daughter of the Princess, her young daughter, Prince Raymond, step-son of the Princess, and a youthful Princess Hohenzollern, her step-grandchild.

After I had conveyed to them suitable condolences in behalf of the Foundation and my personal sympathy in their loss, I was escorted into the living room where you and I had talked things over with Miss Commens only a week before. Our visit, Frau von Schoen said, had given her aunt (as she called the Princess) infinite satisfaction and relief. The Princess had telephoned her in Milan, apparently while we were still there, saying how gratified



she was to meet us, and how confident she felt that her plans for the Villa Serbelloni would be realized. I told Frau von Schoen that since your return the Executive Committee of the Foundation's Board of Trustees had taken favorable action upon your report. She asked me to convey to you and the Trustees the family's appreciation of this, adding with great warmth that they all cordially approved the Princess's disposition of the Villa, ~~and~~ not only because it brought "such peace of mind to her dear aunt," but also because it held such promise for the fruitful use of this beautiful property. During all of this Prince Raymond and the young women were nodding their assent, and as Prince Raymond opened the door for me he stepped out into the hall where he detained me for a few minutes to add his concurrence, and to say that he wished he might find an equally happy solution for the eventual use of the family castle which he

occupies at Duina, near Trieste. (I did not encourage any thought that the Foundation was interested in a chain of villas.)

I wish the Trustees might have been present to observe for themselves the obvious sincerity of Frau von Schoen's words. She is a woman of great character, and, so far as one could judge from fifteen minutes' talk, of exceptional intelligence and strength of character.

This judgment is confirmed by Miss Bonavent, with whom I had about an hour's talk after my meeting with the family. With the assent of Bravocato Bossi, the Italian executor, all of the help have been given assurance of continued employment until July 30, at the expense of the Estate (not of the Foundation.) This assures continuance of the existing maintenance service, with uninterrupted supervision by Harmer. Only one change has been made in the administration of the house. The large staff of servants who used to get their meals at the Villa have been put on what Harmer calls "board wages", an

English expression which means that they will receive a modest supplement to their former wages, and will now live at home instead of off the fat of the land at the Villa.

The funeral services took place this morning. I wish I could do justice to the picture. General Rogers and I drove up to the Villa, passing many groups of the villagers toiling up the hill. The entrance court yard was well filled when we arrived, and many had gathered on the sloping grassy hillside which, you will remember, forms a natural amphitheatre. In the center of this stood a base, covered with white lilies. Opposite was the proud red banner of Bellagio, draped with crepe, and flanked by carabinieri.

Rogers and I went in, and were met by Frau von Schoen, who asked me to thank the Foundation for the flowers I had sent in its behalf. (My original understanding that flowers would not be allowed was corrected on further inquiry.) Soon a procession of clergy, in colorful vestments, filed into the court yard, while columns of children (from the Asilo which the Princess supported) formed on the hillside, their white uniforms bright in the clear mountain

sunshine.

Presently the casket was brought downstairs, laid on the base in the court-yard, and here a preliminary service was conducted for about ten minutes. Then the casket was shouldered by a group of villagers and the column started, on foot, down the long winding road to the 12th Century church in the village square. The children led the way, chanting from time to time. Their high voices would carry up over the terraces to us who followed. Then we would hear the deep-voiced liturgy of the clergy, as they took up the chant.

Rogers, Avvocato Bossi and I followed immediately after the family. Behind us ~~were~~ ^{were} the Bellagio banner, the carabinieri, the flower bearers, and then most of the town-folk, old and young - for this American Princess was greatly beloved, for her charities and for herself.

When we reached the narrow street leading from the Villa's gateway to the Church, all shops were closed, blinds drawn, and every door way was filled with grieving citizens, who joined the procession as it passed.



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In the church the service was, I assume, the usual High Mass of Requiem. Against the gaunt white walls and almost black stone columns of the old ~~medieval~~ ^{Romanesque} structure, the colors of the priestly vestments were a startling contrast.

After the service, as I stood in front of a row of the Asilo children, lined up against the church, I felt a tug at my coat. When I turned a little boy, straight out of a Botticelli painting, looked up at me with just a fleeting smile & laid his finger on his lips - I wasn't sure at first whether I was being corrected for speaking out of turn. But another tug soon convinced me that this was a little game. ~~Funerals~~ are a bore for 8-year olds.

They took the Princess D Duina for burial, and to-night the Villa is silent, except for the watchmen making their rounds.

Miss Cammenc returns to-morrow, and I shall be working with her until you or your designate arrives to take over.

Sincerely,

Cliff

2 from CB
900
Villa Serbelloni
6/22/59

BELLAGIO
Grand Hotel
Villa Serbelloni

C
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Y

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