

TOAST OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ITALY ON THE
OCCASION OF THE LUNCHEON OFFERED IN HIS HONOUR BY THE
BRITISH PRIME MINISTER, MRS. MARGARET THATCHER

(LONDON, WEDNESDAY 22 FEBRUARY 1984)

MADAM PRIME MINISTER,

I AM MOST GRATEFUL TO HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTRY FOR THEIR KIND INVITATION AND THE WARM WELCOME ACCORDED ME. MORE PARTICULARLY, THANK YOU, MADAM, FOR THE COURTEOUS WORDS WITH WHICH YOU HAVE DEEMED FIT TO GREET MY PRESENCE IN GREAT BRITAIN TODAY.

MY BEING HERE - IF I MAY USE AN EXPRESSION WELL KNOWN HEREABOUTS - IS A "SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY", FOR I HAVE COME HERE TO ACCOMPANY VENICE TO ENGLAND. IN "LOVE'S LABOUR LOST", SHAKESPEARE PUTS A VERY SPECIAL INVOCATION IN THE MOUTH OF THE SCHOOLMASTER HOLOFERNES: "VENETIA, VENETIA, CHI NON TE VEDE NON TE PRETTIA". FOR CENTURIES, INDEED, VERITABLE THROGS OF ENGLISHMEN HAVE COME TO OUR COUNTRY TO SEE VENICE AND ITALY AS A WHOLE. FOR CENTURIES, TOO, ITALIANS HAVE LOOKED TO ENGLAND AS A BEACON OF LIBERTY, AS A GOAL FOR THE ROAMING SPIRIT. AND IT WAS HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELISABETH WHO ON THE OCCASION OF HER VISIT TO ITALY POINTED OUT THAT THIS CULTURAL OSMOSIS HAS NOT SUFFERED ANY ABATEMENT, THAT IT IS TODAY AS INTENSE AS EVER IT WAS. NEW GENERATIONS OF ENGLISHMEN ARE TODAY CONTINUING THE TRADITIONS OF THE "ANGLOVENETIANS" AND THE "ANGLOFLORENTINES" OF A HUNDRED YEARS AGO, FOR WHOM ITALY WAS A "HOME OF THE SOUL". INDEED, THE HISTORY OF BRITAIN AND ITALY IS LITTERED WITH SUCH EXCHANGES OF "CULTURAL PASSIONS". BUT AFTER THESE INNUMERABLE ENGLISH PILGRIMAGES TO VENICE

AND HER LAGOON, IT IS FOR ONCE VENICE HERSELF TO COME IN PILGRIMAGE TO THIS COUNTRY, TO ALLOW HERSELF TO BE ADMIRER IN THE FLESH, AS IT WERE, AD TO PAY BACK HER TRIBUTE OF HOMAGE FOR AN ADMIRATION SHE HAS ENJOYED THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES.

AND YET IT IS NOT ONLY VENICE THAT RELIVES IN THIS GREAT EXHIBITION AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY IN ALL THE SPLENDOR OF HER ART AND WITH ALL THE FORCE OF HER GENIUS, BUT ALSO THE MYSTERIOUS AND FASCINATING HISTORICAL SIMILARITY THAT UNITES TWO CIVILIZATIONS: THE TRADITION OF THE CITY ON THE LAGOON THAT LED HER TO EXPLORE DISTANT LANDS AND TO CONQUER GREAT RICHES WITH HER DARING INTELLIGENCE, A TRADITION THAT HAS BECOME AN ESSENTIAL PART OF ITALY'S SPIRITUAL HERITAGE; AND THAT OF THE BRITISH ISLES, RULER OF THE SEAS AND MIDWIFE OF NATIONS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD. THIS EXHIBITION THEREFORE SYMBOLIZES A TRAIT THAT IS COMMON TO OUR PAST AND ALSO TO OUR PRESENT, AND WHICH REPRESENTS BUT ANOTHER ASPECT OF THE MUTUAL ATTRACTION THAT RUNS THROUGH ALL THE HISTORY OF OUR TWO COUNTRIES.

ATTRACTION, COMPREHENSION AND FRIENDSHIP, THEN. AND THE DESIRE TO BEAR WITNESS ONCE MORE TO THESE SENTIMENTS REPRESENTS ANOTHER REASON FOR MY BEING HERE TODAY. THESE SENTIMENTS GO BACK A LONG WAY IN TIME, THEY ARE NOT LIMITED TO THE CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL SPHERE, BUT HAVE OVERFLOWN AND REFLECTED IN THE FIELD OF POLITICS. INDEED, IT WAS IN THIS COUNTRY, CRADLE OF CIVIL LIBERTIES AND HAVEN OF REFUGEES AND EXILES, THAT THE MISSIONARIES OF OUR RISORGIMENTO, THE FATHERS OF THE NEW ITALY, WON THEIR SOLITUDE AND FOUND FRATERNAL SUPPORT LONG BEFORE WE ACHIEVED, NOT WITHOUT ENGLAND'S DECISIVE HELP, OUR OWN NATIONAL UNITY. DESPITE GEOGRAPHY, HUMAN AND POLITICAL PROPINQUITY BETWEEN OUR TWO NATIONS THUS MATURED AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE SPIRIT, AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF IDEALS.

BUT THERE FOLLOWED A LONG PERIOD OF DARKNESS, WHEN MY COUNTRY FELL UNDER THE BRUTALITY OF DICTATORSHIP AND ENDED UP BY BEING DRAGGED INTO THE OPPOSITE CAMP. WHEN THE STORM WAS AT ITS HEIGHT, ONE TORCH REMAINED LIT, JUST ONE IN THE WHOLE OF EUROPE, AND IT WAS AN ENGLISH HAND THAT HELD IT HIGH. JUST ONE COUNTRY - YOURS - OPPOSED AN UNFLINCHING RESISTANCE TO THE ASSAULT OF THE ENEMIES OF FREEDOM, A STAND THAT BECAME MODEL AND ENCOURAGEMENT FOR ALL ANTIFASCISTS, WHO, NO SOONER HAD THEY LEFT PRISON ON THE FALL OF FASCISM, SET UP THE PARTISAN FORMATIONS AND GAVE LIFE TO THE ITALIAN RESISTANCE MOVEMENT.

I STILL CARRY WITH ME A LIVE RECOLLECTION OF THOSE DAYS OF STRUGGLE WHEN I FOUND MYSELF BY THE SIDE OF COURAGEOUS BRITISH SOLDIERS, ESPECIALLY MAJOR BRIAN ASHFORD RUSSELL AND LIEUTENANT FRANK, TO WHOM I AM BOUND BY FRATERNAL FRIENDSHIP.

I WAS STILL IN PRISON UNDER THE FASCIST DICTATORSHIP WHEN I HEARD OF THE COURAGEOUS WORDS PRONOUNCED SO FIRMLY BY WINSTON CHURCHILL IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS AFTER THE BOMBING OF COVENTRY, WHICH HAD BEEN RAZED TO THE GROUND. IF I REMEMBER RIGHTLY, ON THAT OCCASION HE SAID SOMETHING LIKE: "WE SHALL FIGHT ON THE BEACHES, WE SHALL FIGHT IN THE STREETS, WE SHALL NEVER SURRENDER" TO THE NAZI BRUTALITY. WE SHALL FIGHT TO THE END, IF NECESSARY WE SHALL LEAVE THE BRITISH ISLES TO GO TO CANADA AND FROM CANADA WE SHALL RESUME THE STRUGGLE TO RECONQUER OUR COUNTRY AND BRING DOWN THE NAZI REGIME. THESE WORDS WERE SPOKEN BY CHURCHILL WHILE THE NAZI ARMY MARCHED UNDER THE ARC DE TRIOMPHE IN PARIS AND A FRENCH MARSHALL, ONCE A FIRM AND COURAGEOUS FIGHTER, SET UP A GOVERNMENT AT VICHY TO SERVE THE INVADER, AN ACT OF COWARDICE THAT DIMMED THE GLORY OF VALMY AND VERDUN, THOUGH IT WAS LATER TO BE REDEEMED BY THE FRENCH RESISTANCE.

BUT AS SOON AS THE LIGHT FLOODED BACK INTO EUROPE, OUR FRIENDSHIP ALSO REFOURISHED AS VIGOROUSLY AS BEFORE. ITALY ENDED UP BY EARNING WHAT CHURCHILL CALLED HER "RETURN TICKET" INTO THE MIDST OF THE GREAT DEMOCRACIES AND RESUMED HER PLACE IN THE FAMILY OF FREE NATIONS BY THE SIDE OF ENGLAND. AND IN RECENT YEARS THIS VICTORY OVER OURSELVES WAS SPLENDIDLY CONFIRMED WHEN OUR COUNTRY STOOD THE TEST OF TERRORISM AND SUCCEEDED IN FIGHTING IT EFFECTIVELY WITHOUT HAVING RECOURSE TO AUTHORITARIAN REPRESSION.

IT IS ON THIS SOLID BASIS OF FRIENDSHIP, MADAM, THAT WE MUST CONTINUE TO BUILD FOR THE FUTURE AND TO FACE THE TENSIONS THAT LACERATE AND ANGUISH THE WORLD TODAY. GRAVE AMONG THEM ARE THOSE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST, AND IT BEHOVES US JOINTLY TO VALUE THEIR IMPORT, DOING THIS COLDLY AND PRECISELY, WITHOUT EVER ALLOWING OURSELVES TO BE CARRIED AWAY BY FACILE OPTIMISM, SURRENDERING TO SMUG DISENGAGEMENT, OR BECOMING ENTRENCHED IN CLOSED POSITIONS. A RAY OF LIGHT HAS REAPPEARED IN STOCKHOLM. AN EMBRYO OF DIALOGUE HAS BEEN REBORN. YOUR OWN TRIP TO BUDAPEST, MADAM, HAS MADE A SUBSTANTIAL PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION TO THIS END AND WILL SHORTLY BE FOLLOWED BY A VISIT TO BE MADE THERE BY THE ITALIAN PRIME MINISTER.

MOST GRAVE, TOO, ARE THE TENSIONS BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH. HERE WE MUST JOINTLY REAFFIRM OUR WILL TO PUT AN END TO THE WASTE OF WEALTH CAUSED BY GROWING EXPENDITURE ON LETHAL WEAPONS AND TO REDEDICATE OUR ENERGIES TO THE STRUGGLE AGAINST HUNGER, AGAINST THE BACKWARDNESS THAT STILL KEEPS ENTIRE NATIONS AND CONTINENTS FAR REMOVED FROM A MORE HUMAN MODEL OF LIFE. WE HAVE TO FIGHT AGAINST FAMINE IN THE WORLD. EACH PASSING DAY FORTY THOUSAND INNOCENT CREATURES DIE OF DENUTRITION. THE DEATH OF THESE INNOCENTS WEIGHS ALSO ON OUR CONSCIENCE.

THE DREAM OF RECONCILIATION IS FAST DISAPPEARING IN THE LEBANON, WHERE ITS PLACE IS BEING TAKEN BY AN INSANE ATTRACTION FOR MASSACRE AND THE ABYSS. WE SHALL HAVE TO CONSULT TOGETHER TO FIND A CONCRETE ALTERNATIVE AND, WITH THE HELP OF THE UNITED NATIONS, TAKE THE WISE DECISIONS NEEDED TO SAVE LIVES, PEACE, AND THE FUTURE.

I HAVE RECENTLY BEEN TO THE LEBANON, MADAM, AND WHAT I SAW THERE CANNOT BUT FILL MY HEART WITH DEEP ANGUISH: BEIRUT, ONCE A SPLENDID CITY, HAS NOW BECOME A GHOSTLY MASS OF RUINS, WHERE DESPERATE WOMEN AND FRIGHTENED CHILDREN ROAM AMID THE DEBRIS IN SEARCH OF FOOD. AND THE MOURNFUL RUMBLE OF THE GUNS UNDERSCORES THE DESPERATION IN WHICH INNOCENT PEOPLE ARE LIVING.

THIS IS HAPPENING IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, AT A TIME WHEN MAN HAS SUCCEEDED IN LIFTING HIMSELF INTO THE HEAVENS, SETTING OUT IN CONQUEST OF OTHER PLANETS, LIKE THE MOON, ONCE A SHINING SYMBOL OF OUR DREAMS. EVEN THIS ENCHANTMENT OF OUR DISTANT YOUTH HAS NOW DISAPPEARED. MAN HAS BURST THE FETTERS OF GRAVITY, LET US NOW DO AWAY WITH THE CHAINS OF EGOISM.

LET US KEEP OUR FEET FIRMLY ON THE GROUND, LET US REALIZE THAT WE ARE THE BROTHERS BOUND TOGETHER BY THE SAME DESTINY: WE MUST EITHER WALK TOGETHER IN FRATERNAL UNITY, HELPING EACH OTHER AS WE GO, OR WE SHALL ALL PERISH IN THE NUCLEAR HOLOCAUST. THAT IS THE TRAGIC DILEMMA FACING MANKIND TODAY.

IN PURSUING THE SUPREME GOAL OF PEACE, MOREOVER, WE MUST TAKE COGNISANCE ONCE AND FOR ALL OF JUST HOW GREATLY THIS SELFSAME PEACE NEEDS A UNITED EUROPE, OF HOW LONG THE WORLD HAS BEEN WAITING FOR THIS. IN LINE WITH THE SOLEMN DECLARATION WE HAVE UNDERWRITTEN, WE HAVE TO RELAUNCH THE COMMUNITY AS QUICKLY

AS POSSIBLE, WE HAVE TO DEVELOP IT AND ENLARGE IT BEYOND AND ABOVE THE CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND OUR PERIODIC CRISES. AN OLD SAYING HAS IT THAT INTERESTS CAN TOLERATE COMPROMISE, BUT IDEAS CANNOT. I DO NOT SHARE THIS VIEW. GREAT IDEALS REDIMENSION OUR INTERESTS AND PAVE THE WAY TO GREAT COMPROMISES. WHEN INTERESTS STIFFEN AND BECOME ENTRENCHED, THIS IS A SIGN THAT IDEALS ARE WEAKENING. ABOVE INTEREST, LET US NEVER FORGET THIS, THERE STANDS REASON, AND THIS REASON, BE IT CLEAR, IS ULTIMATELY ALSO OUR INTEREST. YOU IN ENGLAND WENT TO BATTLE IN 1939 IN DEFENCE OF REASON, WHICH AT THAT TIME WAS FREEDOM IN PERIL, AND FOR LONG YEARS YOU CARRIED ON YOUR SHOULDERS THE FATE OF THE PERSECUTED AND THE OPPRESSED, SHIELDING THEM AGAINST TYRANNY AND VIOLENCE. TODAY, ONCE AGAIN, YOU ARE OBEYING THE COMMAND OF REASON AND TOGETHER WITH US, FIRMLY AND PATIENTLY, YOU ARE SEEKING THE ROADS THAT LEAD TO UNION IN EUROPE AND TO PEACE IN THE WORLD. THE HOPE THAT FILLS MY HEART EVEN BEFORE I FORMULATE IT IN WORDS IS THAT THIS ENDEAVOUR MAY BE CROWNED BY SUCCESS.

I THEREFORE RAISE MY GLASS TO DRINK A TOAST TO THIS VIEW OF THE FUTURE, TO FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES, TO THE SERENITY OF HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN, TO THE PROSPERITY OF THE BRITISH PEOPLE, OUR FRIENDS. AND I RAISE MY GLASS TO YOUR GOOD FORTUNE, MADAM. YOU ARE OFTEN REFERRED TO AS THE "IRON LADY", THOUGH I DEEM THIS APPELLATION TO BE MISTAKEN. YOU DO INDEED HAVE A WILL OF STEEL, BUT YOUR HEART IS GENTLE. MAY THESE QUALITIES OF YOURS REMAIN IN THE SERVICE NOT ONLY OF YOUR PEOPLE BUT ALSO, AND ABOVE ALL, OF PEACE IN THE WORLD.