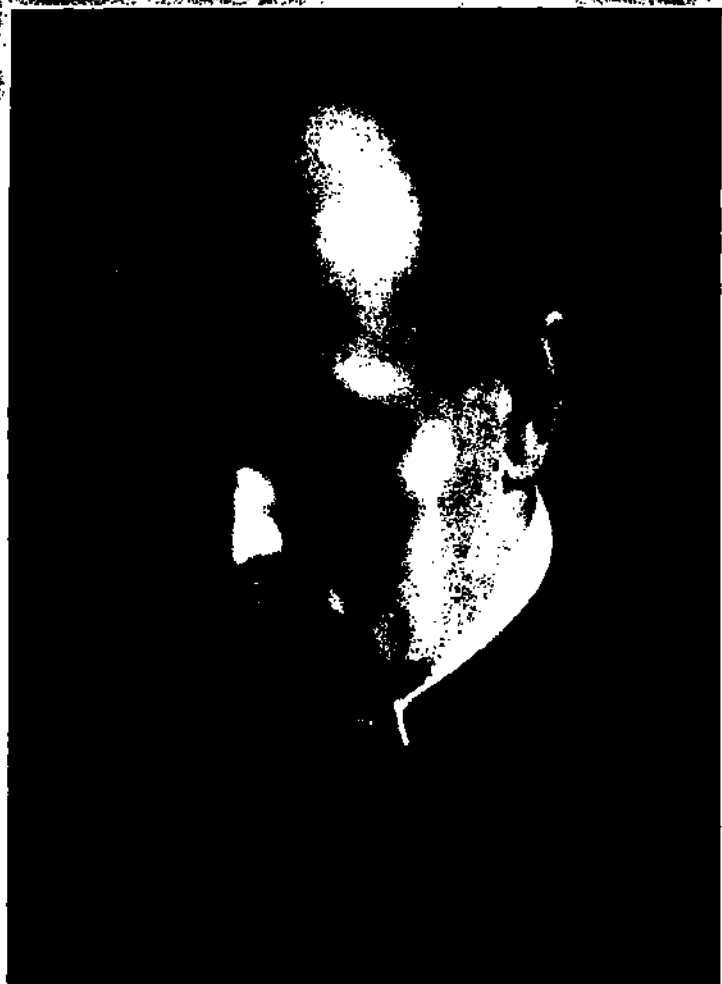




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## **BENITO MUSSOLINI—THE MAN**



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# BENITO MUSSOLINI —THE MAN

*By Vahdah Jeanne Bordeaux*

*Author of "Eleanora Duse, the Story of her Life"*

*Preface by His Excellency*  
*PRINCE LUDOVICO*  
*SPADA POTENZIANI*  
*(Governor of Rome)*

*With Twenty-three Illustrations*

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*This simple story of his life  
is dedicated to*  
**BENITO MUSSOLINI**  
*—the Man*





## PREFACE

**T**HIS story of Benito Mussolini's life is told with clarity, directness, and charm. Here are facts, but no tiresome details : nothing of importance has been omitted, nothing that does not bear on the character or work of the man has been included. The whole story, a biography, if you will, runs smoothly and connectedly. Best of all, there are no historical discrepancies.

The great work that the Duce has done for Italy is described with accuracy, and I, who know the man as well as it is perhaps possible to know him, find that with delicate intuition, Madame Bordeaux has at all times divined the light and shade of his character. She has shown him in his loveliness, in his moments of anger ; the man of lofty ambition, the man of many sorrows ; yet always one feels the great heart of the man, the indefinable something that is Benito Mussolini.

What else can I say ? Madame Bordeaux's book speaks for itself.

*Ludovic Span. Roman*

ROME

May 7th, 1927



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

**T**HIS story of Benito Mussolini's life does not pretend to be a political document. Not being Italian by birth, I do not feel that I can permit myself to take sides for or against Fascism ; therefore no statement made in the following pages is to be considered as slanderous, or written with the intention of hurting Mussolini, or the country he represents.

Of the innumerable books written by foreigners, detrimental to the man as well as the cause Mussolini stands for, I have nothing to say, other than that I do not consider it for me, or any other foreigner, to sit in judgment.

Mussolini stands for the greatest post-war achievement of any country, and those who set out to belittle him only succeed in belittling themselves.

He may be a revolutionary, a bungler, journalist, and any other ignoble thing that the anti-Fascists, backed up by certain men who are no longer considered worthy to be Italian citizens, wish to call him ; but the fact remains incontestable that he saved Italy from unending disaster, that when the crucial moment came in 1922 he went forth from the tranquillity of his editor's office to face the mobs, and possibly death, with the same fearlessness that he had done innumerable times before. He it was who led the " Black Shirts " to Rome to swear allegiance to Italy's king. He it is who is modernizing Italy, making her grander day by day : clean, orderly, prosperous.

Never in modern history has any event been more impressive, more heartrending than his departure from Milan ;

never has there been a more touching sight than Mussolini as he stood on the car platform, his remarkable face pale above the black shirt, as his train pulled out for Rome. Ten thousand people were gathered in and around the station that eventful night, and when he raised his right hand high in the Fascist salute, the cheer that rose from the dense crowd was echoed and re-echoed over the entire city of Milan.

I lived in Italy all during the socialistic reign, and I was there when the Fascists came into power. I was one of the crowd to see Mussolini depart in triumph, my voice one of the ten thousand raised to cheer him on his way. I lived in Italy after he became Prime Minister, and I *know* how his rule has brought order and prosperity out of chaos.

So without prejudice, in all sincerity, I am writing of Benito Mussolini, the man, not only as I see him, but as he really is, and as such the world must judge him, in all his hideousness, so called by his enemies, glory, and—perhaps, misery.

ROME—PARIS—ROME

1926-27

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE . . . . .	7
AUTHOR'S PREFACE . . . . .	9
DOVIA . . . . .	13
CHAP.	
I. <i>UN BAMBINO DELLA DOMENICA</i> . . . . .	15
II. THE PROPHET WITHOUT HONOUR IN ANY COUNTRY . . . . .	38
III. THE PROPHET BEGINS TO FIND HONOUR . . . . .	72
IV. " <i>AVANTI, SEMPRE AVANTI!</i> " . . . . .	93
V. A SON OF THE PEOPLE GOES FORTH TO WAR . . . . .	125
VI. THE BIRTH OF FASCISM . . . . .	148
VII. FROM GREY NOONTIDE TO THE ROSEATE DAWN . . . . .	168
VIII. THE GIFT OF A SECOND MASK . . . . .	187
IX. THE MARCH ON ROME . . . . .	195
X. THE DUCE . . . . .	218
XI. "RENDER UNTO CÆSAR . . ."	242
AN IMPRESSION . . . . .	279

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

BENITO MUSSOLINI . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
ALESSANDRO MUSSOLINI AND ROSA MALTONI, THE PARENTS OF BENITO MUSSOLINI . . . . .	<i>Facing page</i> 22
THE HOUSE IN WHICH THE <i>DUCE</i> WAS BORN . . . . .	22
ON THE TERRACE OF THE VILLA TORLONIA . . . . .	50
THE VICTORY HALL, CHIGI PALACE . . . . .	76
THE MAN AT HOME WITH HIS TWO SMALL SONS, VITTORIO AND BRUNO . . . . .	102
VITTORIO AND BRUNO MUSSOLINI AT THE FARM AT FORLÌ . . . . .	102
BENITO MUSSOLINI, HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN, EDDA AND VITTORIO . . . . .	132

	<i>Facing page</i>
WITH GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO AT HIS VILLA IN GARDONE . . . . .	162
MUSSOLINI'S SUMMER RESIDENCE . . . . .	180
SIGNORA MUSSOLINI AND THE <i>DUCE</i> 'S THREE CHILDREN . . . . .	190
IN THE PIAZZA COLONNA, TWO HOURS AFTER THE FIRST ATTEMPT ON HIS LIFE . . . . .	198
OPENING THE NEW STADIUM AT BOLOGNA, JUST BEFORE THE FOURTH ATTEMPT ON HIS LIFE . . . . .	198
AT THE COLISEUM, CELEBRATING THE FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MARCH ON ROME . . . . .	198
AT LEGHORN . . . . .	210
<i>DUCE DEL FASCISMO</i> . . . . .	222
WITH HIS FAVOURITE HORSE, A SUPERB IRISH BAY . . . . .	236
THE DEPARTURE FOR TRIPOLI, AFTER VIOLET GIBSON HAD WOUNDED HIM . . . . .	236
THE DICTATOR . . . . .	244
H.M. KING VICTOR EMMANUEL AND MUSSOLINI . . . . .	268
THE PRIME MINISTER . . . . .	284

## DOVIA

**O**N the railway line Bologna-Ancona, between Faenza and Cesena, is the city of Forlì, one of the historically important seven in the Romagna hundreds of years ago.

From the old Porta Ravaldino one turns towards the valley of the Rabbi and a tortuous rivulet, only about three inches deep, but sufficient for a few frogs and eels.

The route, the one means of communication, passes through San Martino in Strada, the unimportant hills, Fiumana, and completely leaving the valley of the Rabbi enters what is now known as the country of Mussolini—the fields of his first pilgrimages and solitary rambles.

Here in the isolated wastes, miles from telephonic and telegraphic communication, miles from railways, colleges, theatres ; here he learned to question his inner-self, here he remained for long hours in silent contemplation. Here he dreamed his youthful dreams of glory, planned his revenge on those who had, or might, some day wrong him.

Little vineyards, arid fields, and sloping pastures on the line of barren hills. Here and there a sad and lonely tree, enormous landslips produced by the storms and rains of many winters.

On the peaks imposing remains of towers and rocks, Rocca d'Elmici on one side, the Torre delle Caminate on the other.

The country road follows the fantastic volute of the Rabbi until it ends in a *borgata* (tiny village) of a few scattered houses lined up on the one visible street. Bare,



unadorned nature, human poverty and misery like a mantle is over all.

There is a blacksmith's shop, and near by, built on a slope, like a crow's-nest, a miserably poor, almost squalid house, scarcely more than a shelter from winter snows and summer suns ; a house that owing to the outside staircase, once a sign of a certain wealth, might in days gone by have been the home of prosperous gentility. A few sparse trees, hayricks, and tumbledown shanties surround the house ; at the back a precipitous path, slippery and muddy except in the hot weather, leads off to the hills ; and at the foot is the village.

Dovia—a poor benighted spot, a fraction of the commune of Predappio, too unimportant, too small to be even a tiny dot on the map of Italy ; to-day, thanks to the efforts of Benito Mussolini, Dovia is being transformed into a gay and artistic little city. But forty years ago it was poverty and misery with a great view of the barren hills that rolled away, away to all parts of the unknown world beyond.

# BENITO MUSSOLINI

## CHAPTER I

### *UN BAMBINO DELLA DOMENICA*

(A Sunday child)

**I**N the year A.D. 1883 the 29th of July fell on a Sunday. It was a very momentous Sunday for the small, un-beautiful, and unimportant village of Dovia, a wing as it were of the town of Predappio, in the province of Romagna.

Eight days before the sun had entered within the constellation of Leo.

As the people of the little village, dressed in their very best, loitered about in the public square, gossiping and listening idly to the ringing of the church bells—for besides being Sunday it was the fête of the patron Saint of the parish—word was passed about that at two o'clock, in the modest house of Mussolini, a boy had been born to Alessandro and Rosa.

Doubtless no one thought as the news spread from one to another of the loiterers, that some forty-odd years later the boy so humbly born would be called the saviour of his country, the Napoleon of the twentieth century, or even the Oliver Cromwell, the most salient feature in contemporary history.

Had it been an ordinary Sunday instead of a special Saint's day, the fact of the Mussolinis having a baby might have created a greater impression, for his father, the village blacksmith, was a very popular man, and the gentle signora

Rosa, the kind schoolmistress, was beloved by all who knew her. Several men were heard to mention Alessandro's good fortune in receiving the gift of a *bel maschio*, as boys were always, even in that walk of life, less responsibility than girls. But then Alessandro, the blacksmith, from working continually with horseshoes had become a lucky man. However, babies were very frequent in Dovia, and one more or less made little difference in the life of the community.

According to Italian tradition, a Sunday child is destined to meet with a happy fate, and always to achieve success in everything ; yet not one person among the merry-makers who gathered together on that hot Sunday afternoon ever dreamed of predicting the true future in store for the newly born.

That was practically forty-four years ago, and then it was not the fashion to have horoscopes cast as soon after birth as possible ; and even if it had been done in big cities, who in Dovia would have had the money to pay for such a foolish luxury ? Who would have cared enough about the baby born in the house of Mussolini to enquire into his future ? However, had an astrologer been called in, very briefly, this (according to Cheiro) is what he would have prophesied :

A child born between the twenty-first of July and the twenty-first of August, particularly when the sun has entered into the constellation of Leo, will always aim to get above the common herd of humanity, and will in turn be naturally attracted to strong personalities—in fact, he will forgive any fault in the people he likes so long as they have individuality and purpose.

He will be one of those who represent what might be termed the heart force of humanity. He will be overflowing with sympathy, and generous to a fault.

He will defend a friend in the face of a million foes, and

disloyalty and deceit are the only things that will ever break his great heart.

He will be exceptionally truthful and honest, but often he will be terribly deceived, and have a tendency in the end to become bitter, severe, and over-critical.

In time he will have great luck in money matters, though the early years of his life will be fraught with hardships. He will crave the "gold of love" above all, and this is the one craving of his life that will never be entirely satisfied.

He will have great magnetism and the power to inspire others, and eventually become a great leader; like Napoleon, born in this sign, he will be able to lead his men through fire or death. He will be intensely proud, and often easily wounded through his pride.

He will have tremendous tenacity of purpose, determination, and will power, once he will have put his mind on some definite subject. He will be apt to attempt the most daring and difficult things.

Impetuous and quick-tempered, he will make many enemies through his frankness and straightforwardness.

He will find his greatest strength in public life.

Very frequently he will feel isolated and lonely, and if not actively employed in some work or purpose, he will become melancholy and despondent, with thoughts of suicide. Attempts will be made on his life, but he will die in his own bed.

That, and much more is what would have been predicted for the baby boy born to Alessandro and Rosa Mussolini, in a very humble cottage close to the blacksmith's shop, in the village of Dovia, on Sunday afternoon, July 29th, 1883.

Dovia, in the early 'eighties, did not boast of a very good reputation. The inhabitants were mostly illiterate, and of a class only once removed from peasants. They were

quarrelsome ; and at the time of Alessandro Mussolini's migration from Mendola to Dovia—to be exact, in 1880—they were ready to listen to Internationalist doctrines, or any other that might disturb the public peace. The ideas of the Internationalists, Mussolini had picked up during the years 1875-80, and was attempting to spread about the little portion of the world in which he chanced to live. A group which he eventually formed had many members. Later, it was completely broken up by the police.

Alessandro Mussolini was the son of Luigi Mussolini and Caterina Gardumi, and was born in Predappio, near Forli, on November 11th, 1845. He never went to school. When only a little over ten years old he was sent to Dovadola, a place not far from his home, as apprentice to the blacksmith there. From Dovadola he was moved on to Mendola, where he lived until 1880. Having become a master blacksmith, he opened a little smithy of his own at Dovia, and it was there that he knew and loved the sweet schoolmistress, Rosa Maltoni.

The passion for politics seems to have been born in Alessandro Mussolini, for he gave himself with ardour and sacrifice to propaganda—first for Socialism, then Internationalism. He was a pioneer propagandist with Andrea Costa and Amilcare Cipriani ; a tenacious fighter, but above all, an honest man. Because of his ideals he passed through numerous political trials and was even imprisoned in the Rocca of Forli (state-prison).

Against her family wishes Rosa Maltoni, who had been assigned to the village school of Dovia, married Alessandro Mussolini in 1882. Benito, the first child, was born a little over a year after the marriage. Young Mussolini, although over thirty-five, was hardly a suitable match for *uno signorina così carina e colta* ; for Rosa Maltoni, who was born at San Martino in Strada, had been educated at the Normal School of Forli, daughter of a

worthy family, had a right to expect a suitor more in her own class.

Alessandro was as intense in his love as he was in his political propaganda, and much to the surprise of the little village where everybody knew the gay, rollicking blacksmith and the gentle, refined school-teacher, he won her love, and her father's consent to their marriage.

With the care of a wife, even though she earned money herself, Alessandro Mussolini became more serious in his work, and tried, without much success, to lay up money for a rainy day, or the education of possible children.

Signora Sarfatti, in her book *Dux*, writes of the Mussolini family as being of ancient Emilian stock ; then she goes on to say that the present family, Alessandro and descendants, have no way of ascertaining as to whether the Mussolinis of the thirteenth century, who in those great days of the Italian Communes were *Capitani del Popolo* (Captains of the People) in the city of Bologna, were ancestors or not. Others who have searched in the history of the almost Dark Ages have found what may possibly be a connection, but nothing is certain. Probably the Mussolini family took refuge in Romagna during the medieval communals after having been exiled from Bologna, where a street and a tower still bear the name.

In the general history of Italy, as well as that of Bologna, I have not been able to find any mention of a Mussolini ; but what need has Benito Mussolini to trace his ancestry back to the thirteenth century ? What need to rake up ancient history ? So far as history is concerned, the name begins with him, and probably ends there.

Alessandro Mussolini was a hard worker, earnest in his efforts to establish International doctrines, a kind and loving husband, though not always to be depended upon to do other than see to the welfare of his friends, after he

became the proprietor of a modest *osteria* next door to the smithy.

He was a manual worker, and of the people, but he was intelligent, and never was there anything really vulgar or uncouth about him. He went to Dovia as a blacksmith, and he remained there in that capacity, yet he managed a little wayside inn, a very low-class place such as one would expect to find in a village the size of Dovia ; and eventually he became Mayor of the place. When his first-born was a grown man, Alessandro was arrested as an associate of Bakunin, the Russian revolutionist ; and also of Andrea Costa, who was Italy's first apostle of revolutionary Socialism. He served three years in prison. Costa had been particularly active in Romagna, and in Mussolini he found a willing partisan to his theories, as he did many others in that hot-bed of revolution and sedition. Costa's comrade and friend, the beautiful Russian Nihilist, Anna Kuliscioff, a romantic and fascinating figure, later became the soul of Italian Socialism, exercising an immense secret influence over the entire country.

During the term of three years which he passed in prison, it seems that Alessandro Mussolini learned to read and write, so that towards the end of his life he had acquired a certain culture, more along political lines than those of art or higher education ; yet many times he was known to sit in the smithy and recite Carducci with his son Benito, as an antidote to sadness or fatigue. He was an ardent partisan, like every son of the Romagna who had any self-respect ; a rough countryman, an unpolished diamond, but liked by all who knew him.

There are many people, mostly those of anti-Fascist sentiments, who insist that Alessandro was the worst kind of a revolutionist, and that he passed about half his grown-up life in prison. Yet according to Benito Mussolini, his father only served one term, and then he was more the

victim than the leader of the revolt. In any case, he knew how to intervene impartially in certain disputations with a frank, outspoken eloquence, not devoid of wit and rough culture ; and in his *osteria* he served good wine. His favourite brands were the sweet and golden Albana and the sparkling red Sangiovese from the hills. He was a big stout man, red of face and jovial, and although an Internationalist, he was at heart something of a disciple of Mazzini. In those days the Mazzinian party, although the most sterile, was the purest of the old political groups in Italy, the only one of them which had maintained itself uncontaminated by parliamentary intrigues and electioneering trickeries.

Never inclined to save, though always meaning to, the patron of the *osteria* at Dovia, too cordial and convivial, used continually to keep open house instead of securing his pay in advance for the many glasses of red wine drunk by his customers. He was equally happy working lustily at his anvil, or emptying a glass with his friends. He gave little thought to the payment at those times, and often his guests were regaled free of cost, with food as well as drink. This generally happened when any kind of a conference was going on, or at election time. To any remonstrance from his gentle, timid wife, he would always tell her that she could think of the education of their children, as she certainly was not a school teacher for nothing . . . and anyway, why pay for schooling when they had it at home free ?

The signora Rosa seems to have been pale and worried looking, for nobody in the little village of Dovia, and there are still many left who knew her, can recall her otherwise. She was looked upon as something of a saint, but a very nervous one, who seemed to have her nerves under the control of her indomitable will, so that outwardly she was tranquil and smiling, with energy to spare. She was the



village schoolmistress before and after her marriage, and she held her classes in the *osteria* itself, in a room above the smithy ; the hammering from below and the sound of bellows acting as a rhythmical accompaniment to her quiet voice as she imparted to her scholars the little bits of learning which they were capable of taking in, and she capable of teaching. She was an incarnation of gentle goodness and unconscious nobility, reserved, humble, retiring, sensitive in the extreme. A blend of all the austere virtues, a compendium of all that went to make the ideal matron of ancient times.

While intensely proud, and ashamed to admit even to her innermost soul the fact that between her efforts and those of her husband they were not able to pay for their children's education, in 1895, while Benito was a student at Forlimpopoli, a moment came when they were not able to pay the small sum necessary for him to continue his studies. On September 20th, the anxious mother finally got her courage to the point of going to the Prefect of the town to remind him of his promise of a bounty : " If you will recall, Excellency, that this year the economic discomforts in this little town are very severe because of the small crops and the total lack of grapes, the only product of this part. And it is because of this, that my poor family find themselves in straightened financial conditions—so so much so, that we are obliged to stop the studies of our poor child of twelve, who is at present at the State Normal School of Forlimpopoli, and who according to his teachers promises something special. . . ." A year later the reply came that despite the Prefect's promise, no help could be rendered.

Yet Rosa Mussolini never gave up her efforts for her son. She never in all her life asked for help for herself, but for him, her first-born, she was ready to make any sacrifice, material or moral. It is true she was little above a peasant,



ALESSANDRO MUSSOLINI AND ROSA MALTONI, THE PARENTS OF BENITO MUSSOLINI

THE HOUSE IN WHICH THE *DUCE* WAS BORN



but she was in every way a refined example of what a woman in her class can be. Regarding Mussolini's mother there does not seem to be a dissenting voice.

The Sunday child was named Benito, not from family sentiment, for his father had none, but after Benito Pablo Juarez, the Mexican revolutionist, who, born of a poor Indian family, obtained an education, nobody knows how, and was admitted to the Bar in 1834, after serving as deputy in the National Congress of Mexico and as Governor of Oajaca, where he was born. He was banished in 1847 by Santa Anna, but returning later assisted in the latter's downfall; was successively Minister of Justice, President of the Supreme Court, Vice-President, and Minister of the Interior, became President by succession, and after a civil war was chosen President in 1861. Civil war was continued, and the suspension of payment of the National Debt caused the interference of France, England, and Spain. The French occupied Mexico, Maximilian was proclaimed Emperor, and the army of Juarez was reduced to a scattered band. Maximilian, left to his own resources, quickly lost ground, and Juarez, with a revolutionary army, defeated, captured, and shot him in 1867. From then until his death Juarez was President, but opposition and insurrection continued.

Was it a mere coincidence, or the first move of destiny, that accounted for Alessandro Mussolini giving his first-born the name of a man whose career had been so like what his own was to be?

"Benito"—when one has the fortune to be called by such a name, one should never merit other than benediction, or blessings, so the tradition runs. Yet despite his name, and the fortunate signs of the Zodiac under which he was born, Benito Mussolini's was to be a difficult road, and almost to the letter he was to follow the readings of

the astrologer who might have read his horoscope at the time of his birth. His was a difficult road, difficult because of the strange, silent, unresponsive character which he was to develop, and it was a long road before he became known in his own country, or even remotely heard of outside the confines.

His father and mother are both dead, and there is no one in Dovia who can tell anything of Benito Mussolini as a baby ; he alone recalls some of the things his mother told him about himself when he was very small. "Mother's stories," he says indulgently, "so they must be taken for what they are worth.

"When I was very tiny, before either of the other babies came, it seems I rarely cried as babies are supposed to ; but I had a way of getting what I wanted—I just looked with wide-open eyes into my mother's eyes, and she understood—in fact, so long as she lived she had a way of understanding her wayward son. I was the eldest, and should have been her comfort, yet I gave her more worries than my brother, sister, and father all put together. And still I loved her more than I have ever loved any human being. Often, I think we Italians hurt the thing we love the most.

"I was very sturdy, and as healthy and dirty a small boy as one can imagine. When I was three, my mother began to teach me how to read. I think she wanted to start early so as to awaken my interest before I had formed the habit of being ignorant. I was so small that standing before her I could just rest my chin on her knees as she sat with the book in her lap. It was a much-used book with the letters in colours, and illustrated with strange animals. Each time I learned to spell and pronounce a word I was given a piece of candy, in much the same way as one teaches an animal tricks. When I was five I could read, very slowly and with a certain difficulty, the paper aloud to my father. At the ripe age of ten I was devouring every paper I could lay my

hand on, so as to know what was taking place in the world outside our own little village."

At the age of seven, which, according to religious manuals, is the age of discretion, Benito had absorbed, more or less well, his father's ideas of what a man should be, and become a despot in his home, the big brother who alternately caressed and bullied his quiet, rather fat, short-sighted, unassuming brother Arnaldo.

His life of action really began when he was six, for it was at that time that he went regularly to school, first to his mother, then to Silvio Marani, the head master at Predappio, from whom he graduated when he was nine.

Before he began to do other than study a little with his mother in her free time, Benito had a habit of hiding in the schoolroom, generally on all fours underneath the desks where he could reach out to pinch the bare legs of the boys and girls. And he used to make horrible faces to frighten them when they dared to complain. One little girl, the prettiest in the class, was his special prey, and was always in terror of him when his dark, shining eyes flashed at her from under the bulging forehead. . . . In the mornings he used to lie in wait for her in the fields, or behind a bush where she had to pass on her way to school, and would spring out on her suddenly. When she began to cry from fear, and try to run away from him he would force her to stop, and to go meekly with him. She was fascinated as well as dominated, and at the same time rather proud of being selected for persecution by the son of the school-mistress, even though he was only five and she already seven. After showing her that he could make her do what he wanted her to, he would invariably make peace by kissing her, though the next minute he would be pulling her pigtailed, making her play at being a horse for him to drive. When he had tired of this game he would send her about her business, with a warning not to tell the Signora Rosa,

who would have punished him, if she had known of his misbehaviour.

When about seven, he had his first lesson in fighting. A threshing machine was at work near the smithy, and all the little devils of the village were revelling in the sight. Benito, always ready to touch something that did not belong to him, had got hold of a wheelbarrow left by one of the farm hands, when suddenly a bigger boy called to him to come and play. Benito ran up to the boy, received a blow in the face, while the other made a run for the wheelbarrow and disappeared with it.

It was the first time he had been struck by a bigger boy, and little as he was, he knew that to hit a small boy was the act of a bully, that the other boy had got away with the wheelbarrow because he was bigger, and the wheelbarrow was the thing he himself wanted to play with. He put the question in the back of his mind to be answered later in life, and his pride hurt more than his face, as he ran home crying. At the door of the smithy he found his father. "Who dared to hit you?" his father asked. "A big boy, eh? And you didn't have the courage to hit back? Coward! Don't come blubbering about me if you can't take care of yourself, even if you are hit by a bigger boy! Get out of here, and wallop him—and if you can't do it to-day, wait for him until to-morrow; only don't let me see you around until you've given him the beating he deserves!"

Young Benito ran a grimy hand over his face, dried his tears, snuffled as small boys will, and while performing these necessary actions he pondered over his father's words. It was his first encounter with gratuitous perfidy, and it instinctively taught him the rule of the survival of the fittest.

His fists, he decided after examining them carefully, were not large enough to really hurt, and besides he wanted to go the big boy one better, so he hunted about until he

found a fair-sized stone with an edge sharp enough to cut. Before supper he had braved the enemy in his lair, and had had his revenge. "You cut my face," he yelled, "now mind out for your own!" Three times he plastered his foe on the head with the sharp stone, and then while the other was crying from the acute pain he calmly set off on a dog-trot for the smithy.

From then on he was an active urchin, intelligent, fighting, and stubborn. And he never put up with bullying again; nor, in fact, after a time, was it even tried on him. A bully is a coward, he was taught. And he learned that a man should not turn his cheek or use the Tolstoian doctrine of no resistance. The doctrine of Fascism, as it exists to-day, was on a large scale that inculcated by Benito's father: We must not always be looking to our paternal or maternal government; we must not be running to the protection of apron-strings, thereby shirking our own responsibility.

Yet he was a restless boy, always seeking for something just beyond his reach. He was an audacious buccaneer (he says that himself), and often he came home with his head cut by a stone. Yet never once as a boy did he let an injury pass; with him it was an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. He rarely struck first, but whoever played him false paid dearly—a principle which he has never relinquished.

During the little holiday time he had he often went out with his brother Arnaldo to work along the river-side, hunting for things which he had no right to. Once he got hold of some decoy-birds which had been set in a snare. The infuriated owner ran after him, but he ran faster than the man, and at a certain point he forded the river, but even then he did not relinquish his booty.

As he looks in retrospect over the years, Mussolini finds that the first evolution of ideas really took place when he was seven, for even now he can recall distinctly his sensa-



tions when he found that his infantile trust in the big boy who called him to play had been misplaced. It was something like a man's sensation when his eyes are suddenly opened to the hideousness of everyday life hitherto unknown. The slap in the face and the loss of his toy, the wheelbarrow, were, one might say, his first disillusion, for he somehow lost his faith in man's integrity at the same time ; and nothing since has made him regain it.

From the day he went after his so-called friend with a stone, and by violence forced the larger boy to respect him, he has lived and thrived on the theory that if kindness fails to bring a desired result, violence will not.

The fighting instinct, now so marvellously developed, was born in him, for one word from his father had been sufficient for it to burst forth full grown. And it is that very instinct, perhaps received from fighting ancestors, which has enabled him to rise to the power of Dictator.

It was cheaper to use his son than to pay a boy to blow the bellows, so when still very small Benito was taken into the smithy to help the blacksmith. And he was frankly afraid of the flames. From some points of view Alessandro Mussolini was a good father and solicitous for his son's welfare, but he was severe and not too patient. If the boy did not pay attention he was apt to get a "cuff over the ear," or be told in plain words that he was an idiot and would never be any good in the world. Many were the blows he received in order to be made to keep a sharp look-out, and if by chance he closed his eyes so as not to see the sparks fly, or winced from fear of the red-hot anvil, he knew an extra sharp cuff would come his way.

"You'll never learn to be a blacksmith, or anything that's worth being," his father would yell at him. Alessandro had gone through the same pains in his own youth, but like most fathers he had forgotten his early struggles, and had no sympathy for the weaknesses of his son.

"Spare the rod and spoil the child," was Alessandro Mussolini's theory. "Better a blow to-day from his father, than two blows from a stranger to-morrow." He was a rough man of the people, but he knew instinctively that life was going to be hard for his first-born, the wild, unresponsive child who so early learned to keep the tears back, and who never outwardly complained or rebelled even when a rawhide strap was used on him.

Once after a hard beating for something that had not been entirely his fault, Benito disappeared for several hours. His father hunted for him, and his mother worried, while he was wandering about the lonely country-side lost in rebellious thoughts. When night had fallen over the little village and all the inhabitants were already asleep, he crept home and went straight to bed.

His mother, with quiet tenderness and firmness, succeeded in managing him better than his father with all his cuffs and beatings. She appealed to the instinct of veneration for the mother which is innate in all Italian masculine minds.

When he was ten years old, Benito Mussolini was already physically a man.

It was at this time that his love for his mother took on a more personal tone. Before, she had been merely a mother, a gentle, thoughtful one, but a mother; then she somehow became *his* mother, his property of which he was both proud and jealous. With an appreciation of his mother came a certain love for, and joy in all femininity. Girls became girls, not merely sexless playfellows as they had been before. He found that he liked very much this new sense of the importance of being a male, and of taking his place among men.

Noting the subtle change in her son, the Signora Rosa became more ardent in her efforts to distract his mind from worldly things, to keep him a child as long as possible. Being a very devout Catholic, she took him with her to

Mass each Sunday, hoping vaguely that he might become sufficiently interested in the Church to one day take Orders. But Benito had very little interest in what was taking place in the church, especially when the great ceremonies were on. The candle-light, the penetrating odour of the incense, the colours of the sacred vestments, together with the long-drawn-out chanting of the congregation and the sound of the organ, disturbed him greatly. He was often restless, and many times had to be sent home long before the Mass ended.

He was a prey to distractions in church, and in the smithy as well. In church he frequently watched some girl, and if she did not smile at him he would make faces until she began to cry. In the smithy he thought of the wide open fields, the winding river, and the countless birds flying freely about. More than once he cursed Nature for having made him a human being instead of a bird, for the free life of the animals seemed to him much grander than that of man, subject as he always was to the will of some superior. Still, on the whole, he was an efficient help to his father, intelligent, quick, and alert. He was fascinated by anything in the nature of mechanism, and had his father been a watchmaker instead of a blacksmith, he might have followed the family trade. Instead he took to his father's political teachings.

At the time when he was outgrowing not only his threadbare trousers, but his teachers and companions as well, his mother finally persuaded his father that Benito must be sent to a boarding-school, to be under a discipline stronger than theirs. He rebelled at the idea of being shut up in a school, in a prison as it were, for he had settled in his mind that a priest's school and a prison were one and the same thing. He supported the confinement, but never changed his idea about it.

It was decided that he should go towards the middle of October, when clothes, equipment, and money would be ready.

During the weeks preceding his departure, he was more troublesome than ever before. A vague sense of unrest disturbed his thoughts, and during the last days of his freedom he did nothing but wander about the streets, over the fields, and then along the ditches and through the vineyards, where the ripe grapes hung in tempting bunches.

And he reflected over his reasons for not wanting to go away to school. They were many, he found, and each in itself was sufficient. First, he was going to miss the joy of wandering in the open, the possibility of communion with the birds and other animals he so dearly loved. He had a passion for birds, and in particular a certain breed of small owls. Then there was his great friend, old Giovanna, who up to that time had been one of his chief educators.

Old Giovanna was a mysterious old woman, who, it was said, had been beautiful in her youth, and the heroine of many passionate love affairs. She had been married three times, and according to public tradition she had mysteriously got rid of all her three husbands. The sudden end of the second presented a dark question which had never been solved. His predecessor had been found dead one autumn morning, his limbs entangled in the branches of a tree, not far from the entrance to his miserable house. From then on, grown people as well as children fought shy of the rustling leaves of that tree, especially in the dark.

Between old Giovanna and her third husband there had been a long dispute as to which should die first. Giovanna won.

Benito was a great friend of Giovanna's, and in constant attendance. Her strange imperious ways had a fascination

for him, not entirely devoid of fear. And he enjoyed the dark stories told about her by the village people, as much as he did the feeling of excitement she gave him when she talked in her cracked voice about her magic lore. She told him strange things about the moon, of the influence of its cold light upon men and affairs, and the danger of letting its rays shine on your face when you are sleeping; she taught him how to interpret dreams and omens, and to tell fortunes by cards. From her he learned why oxen allow themselves to be led by women, and why the front paws of a hare are short.

And then another of his passions would have to be given up, his reading of Victor Hugo. A copy of *Les Misérables* in Italian, atrociously printed on the poorest paper, with two columns of small type to the page, with many of the pages torn or missing, had somehow found its way to the little village of Dovia, and Jean Valjean, Cosette, as well as the Bishop, had already begun to play their part in shaping the character of the boy who read the book aloud in the cowshed beside a dingy oil lantern during the winter evenings, with the countryfolk gathered about him.

In the dark corners, as in a lecture-hall, sat his audience. The flickering light cast shadows on the rafters and the floor. The oxen chewed the cud, ruminating, and jostling up against each other. The women did their spinning, sewing or knitting; the men smoked dark clay pipes and drank freely of the weak wine which comes from the already used grapes; the village youths and girls would now and again say some jesting word or indulge in a playful shove, the rustic way of courting and flirting.

In this setting, in the warm atmosphere generated by the cattle, Benito did his first public reading, reading on and on until the childish voice was hoarse—sometimes until midnight. When he could read no more the women would go, walking home over the moonlit, glistening snow, or on

dark nights carrying their big lanterns to guide their footsteps, their hearts still quivering over the misfortunes of the convict, and Mario's great love. Many of the men would remain to talk over what they had heard, and to keep up the debate until it was almost time to go to work. It was grave, sententious talk for the most part, for country people are wont to ruminate like their cattle, but occasionally the younger men would break into heated discussions. The phantasms of the author's brain moved and excited their simple minds and hearts. They probably had only understood a part of what they had heard, just as Benito had not understood all he read, but one and all responded to the sense of life imparted by the wonderful old man to his work. To their ears Hugo's rhetoric rang true in a human sense, if not artistically. And his words were those of one who believed in the great ideas dominating his time—in Liberty, Fraternity, and Virtue; and that is why, despite its many faults, the value of the story came home even to a young boy like Benito, who at that time was only able to see in it what was true and good and eternal.

He experienced very little grief over leaving his brother and sister, or in fact his father. Arnaldo was only seven, and Edvige three. But what made him miserable as the hour of departure arrived, was the thought of leaving behind a little bird which he had in a cage beneath his window.

The day before his departure he quarrelled with a companion, and when trying to hit him on the head his fist smashed against a wall. His knuckles were so badly hurt that he had to leave with his hand bandaged. At the moment of parting, all the neighbours were assembled, and more than anything in the world, Benito wanted to weep; but seeing his mother crying was an incentive for him to force the tears back. Everybody cried, as with head bowed and determination clearly written on the pale face, the boy

made a dash for the farmer's cart drawn by an old donkey. Amidst shouts and cheers of good wishes, father and son drove off in grand style. Before they had gone more than a couple of hundred yards the donkey stumbled and fell.

"A bad omen!" exclaimed Alessandro with an oath. But the animal got up and they continued on their way. During the drive to the School of the Salesian Fathers at Faenza, Benito did not utter a word; he sat and stared at the country-side where the leaves were already beginning to fall. He followed the flight of the swallows and the course of the river.

From Dovia to Predappio, then to Forli. It was the first time he had seen a city or large town, and it made a great impression on him. On entering Faenza the thing that attracted him most was the Iron Bridge which connects the city with Lamone, a suburb. They reached the school about two o'clock. Alessandro got down and clapped the great knocker on the barred gate. The door opened, and presently he was being introduced to the "Censor," who looked at him closely, then said:

"He's a lively little fellow, I expect."

There was no reply to the remark as Alessandro embraced and kissed his son. When the door closed on his father Benito broke into dry, tearless sobs.

It was farewell to his games, to freedom, and to his mother; but it was not for always, and there would be vacations when he could go home to the trees and the sparkling rivulet of his native place, that rivulet where he took the old horse to drink on summer mornings, and where he played with the boys in the afternoons when school was out.

He thought longingly of the old horse which his father had bought one day when the inn was prosperous—at least, he had paid a few lire down, and the balance in wine. Benito loved that horse, for he had learned to ride it bare-

back, spurring it along with his dirty little tough heels—and often he stole sugar to feed to the animal, just to hear him whinny.

Yes, he knew well enough he was going to hate this new life, yet with a certain stolid resignation he settled himself to get the most he could out of his teachers and companions. He was precocious to an extreme, but he had no ambition to study other than history, his preference being for that of Rome.

From the time he first learned to read, the story of Rome, with its myths and legends, had fascinated him. The thought of Rome is supposed to be in the hearts of all the people of Romagna; certainly it was in that of Rosa Mussolini, and she willingly imparted all her knowledge to her son.

Rome—in Romagna their name for the Milky Way is *La strada di Roma*, and they believe that if one will only go straight ahead, being guided by it, one will eventually arrive at the Eternal City. Rome was one of the first words Benito Mussolini learned to write, and Rome was the one word the boy wrote continually on the margins of his lesson books, or cut with a penknife on the benches and desk-tops.

An incurable restlessness took hold of Benito while he was at boarding-school, and often he threw himself with passionate ardour into tasks and occupations quite beyond his age and capacity, or laid desperate plans of escape from his self-styled prison.

He resented so much what took place all about him, and he lacked the ability to make himself understood, for when he began to talk on a subject he lost his temper and made his listeners afraid of him. And most of all, he resented the idea of very old people having to do manual labour. On one of his vacations—he must have been about fifteen—he was sitting in front of the door of the smithy, looking longingly at the distant hills, and wishing ardently that he would



not be sent back to school the following month, when he saw an old farmer hoeing a field. Without a second's hesitation he dashed off to the spot, nearly a mile away, and surprised the old man by grabbing the hoe from his hands, and setting himself to work in the other's place. When he had completed the job he was sweating at every pore, and very tired. He handed the hoe back to the farmer, who had been sitting calmly watching the boy, then set off as suddenly as he had come.

He remained a prisoner nearly six years in the school at Faenza, an untamed rebel fighting continually with his schoolmates ; then he was expelled.

He was a leader of all the marauding expeditions of the neighbourhood, and when he gave the word of command, not one of his young friends dared to refuse to accompany him. It was in the early autumn and he had decided that an apple tree which leant temptingly over the wall of a nearby farm must be shaken. The peasant to whom the farm belonged, enraged by the audacity of the boys, or rather their leader, loaded his gun and went after them, and fired at the boy who was already up the tree. He brought him down with a wound in his leg. Frightened by the shot the crowd scattered—all but Benito. He was the leader, and he went to the rescue of the practically unconscious, wounded boy. Without paying attention to the warning shouts of the farmer, who threatened to shoot him also, Benito lifted his fallen friend on to his shoulders, and thus carried him home.

When he saw the wounded boy being taken care of by his mother, he went in search of his timorous companions, to administer a lesson to them for their cowardice.

He enticed them all into his barn, and when they were gathered together he closed and locked the door ; then, ten to one, he brandished a huge wooden club in their faces, advising them to stick to their colours in the future, or else

to keep away from him, *for in his crowd there could be no cowards or slackers.*

Thirty years have passed since the day Benito Mussolini, a pugnacious, wild, uncultured boy, first announced what was to be one of the fundamental principles of Fascism.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PROPHET WITHOUT HONOUR IN ANY COUNTRY

**I**N the Normal School, "Giosu  Carducci," at Forlimpopoli, run by the brother of the famous poet for whom the school was named, Benito continued his studies.

An avid reader, the restless, hitherto non-studious pupil, in the serious atmosphere of the new and superior school, settled down to his first hard work, determined to do the three years' course in two. And while his vivacious and exuberant personality was the source of continual worry to the various professors, in all his lessons he was their satisfaction and compensation.

As a proof of the respect they had for his ability, when he was seventeen he was asked to give a commentary address on Verdi, at the Forli theatre. It was a great honour for an undergraduate to be permitted to speak, and at the time Benito was properly proud of his success.

To-day there are many who speak disparagingly of Mussolini's culture, claiming that he acquired it too rapidly for it to be more than superficial. . . . The foundation of his profound culture was laid when he was a mere boy, and when he graduated from the Normal School he already possessed a culture of which the average Society man of any country would be very proud.

With astonishing rapidity the soul of the youth awakened, and brought up as he had been, an ardent Internationalist, in the Romagna, the preferred spot of political passion and Socialism, where the socialistic sentiment was so

strong that even the roofs of the houses were painted red, his first political instincts were shown in writings. . . . From political writings he merged into poetry, rather bad poetry, then the innate political instinct dominated all else.

His effervescent spirits continued to overflow, and he began amusing himself by developing ideas which frightened his less intrepid companions. He rarely entered into conversation, except to talk of overthrowing the social order. One famous day he directed a fierce regicidal outburst. . . . When called before the Principal to explain himself for having broken the rules of the school by raising his voice against the King, he refused to retract his words or to give up his opinion, adding insult to injury by saying, in a sullen tone :

“ The autocrats fill me with hatred and disgust ! ”

But for the intervention of one of the senior teachers, who had become very fond of him, he would have been expelled at once.

The teacher who defended Benito against all the others must have felt instinctively the destiny of the master-student, though he was not enough of a psychologist, nor were any of the others, to imagine that the unusually industrious student (for by that time the dare-devil had become completely absorbed in his work), the student who lived a great deal apart from his companions, gave his confidence and friendship to no one, but remained shut up in himself, prey to a boundless ambition, was one day to be the Dictator of them all !

He had his own special way of studying, in that he discarded the hard and fast rules, and gave his time only to what he considered necessary for him. To arrive at a given point in any study, and then stop as a proof that you knew all there was to know on the subject, did not suit his mentality.

His idea of proper living and learning, even then, was in a continual progress towards a super-superiority.

The professors complained, threatened to have him expelled if he would not follow the regular curriculum, but he did not change. He thought as he liked, and he worked in the same way, unable to do otherwise.

He was an auto-didactic.

And among other things he was a discourteous scholar, seeking refuge on the back seats in the class-rooms, having no thought of gaining the sympathy of his teachers or companions.

He still hated the confinement of school, even though he realized the necessity of it. In a vague way it had been decided that he was to teach, to follow in his mother's footsteps, and in order to do that he must of course have a teacher's diploma.

Before leaving his own *Borgata* to continue his studies at Forlimpopoli, Alessandro Mussolini said to his son :

"Remember, Benito, I have no one to help me in the smithy, and I'm not so young as I once was. . . . Either you study so as to make something of yourself, and show yourself worthy of your mother's and my sacrifices—or else you will be a blacksmith like me. Either way I won't be unhappy, but I want you to understand now what I mean to do with you."

The threat did not disturb him any more than the future examinations. He knew if he wanted to he could say all that was needed to content his instructors, thereby pleasing the direction of the school, and his father as well.

During the summer vacation of his last year at school, he frequently went to Forli, on foot, to close himself in the Public Library, consulting, devouring volume after volume of the deepest political studies. He often sat at the table for hours consecutively without feeling the slightest fatigue ;

nor did the walk from Dovia to Forli and back, at least fifteen miles, worry him.

The petty narrowness of the life at Dovia annoyed and irritated him. Already his spirit was soaring far away, visualizing unknown heights of grandness. He felt a stranger among the people with whom he was forced to live.

Often closed in the little room, bare of all beauty or pretence of even comfort, which at night he shared with his brother, he would speak to an imaginary public ; yell and gesticulate, entirely oblivious, in his improvisation, to all material surroundings. So deep was his ardour that the imagination converted all into reality. Once his mother, disturbed by the noise he was making, came into the room without his hearing her. In consternation she watched and listened to him, then in a burst of uncontrollable fear she asked :

“ Benito ! Benito, dear ! Are you raving mad ? ”

His young intense face had been hard while he was speaking to the huge imaginary audience, but turning to her, his mother, it instantly softened. Quite calmly, and with conviction, he replied to her frightened question :

“ No, mamma, I am not mad. I am merely practising my rôle, for the day will come when Italy must fear me ! ”

Indulgent mother that she was, she smiled, but did not reply to the extravagant words. In her secret heart she also believed, with a mystic faith, that her boy would be great, but the way to that greatness was still long.

From then on she redoubled her efforts to save money, a soldo, a lira, to make the nest-egg to give this son a chance to live, to try his wings, to go, if need be, far away, perhaps to find outside their own little world the grand road of his destiny. . . .

He was just eighteen when he returned from Forlimpopoli, with an elementary teacher's certificate in his shabby pocket.

His mother, who had never been strong, worn-out from years of toil and deprivation, was in failing health. In order to be near her, Benito applied to the Municipality of Predappio for the post of Communal Scrivener, which was then vacant.

Two long weary months passed in anxious waiting, two months of boredom and petty annoyance—then the position was refused. They told him it was because of his youth, but in reality it was also because of his too-openly expressed revolutionary sentiments.

"Don't you care, my boy," his father said, seeking in his rough way to comfort him when he saw how the refusal hurt Benito's pride. "Your place is not here in this *Borgata*. Go into the world, lad, take your chance in the great fight, for with or without Predappio, you will be the Crispi of to-morrow!"

In that dark moment of discouragement, those kindly words from his father shed a ray of light on his way that has never been dimmed in all the years since then.

The evening Benito Mussolini received the telegram in which King Victor Emmanuel invited him to Rome to form a new government, he was alone with one of his most intimate friends. He read the telegram and remained for several minutes lost in thought, the large magnetic eyes opened towards the vastness of the Great Unknown.

"What are you thinking about?" the friend asked gently.

With a start he came back to the question in hand. In a trembling voice, in his own dialect, he said:

"*A pens a e mi babb.*" (I'm thinking of my father.)

Then he threw himself sobbing into his friend's arms.

Once again at the beginning of a new pathway, this time the glorious one, he had encountered the serene and tranquil shadow of his father, had heard, as, years

before, the kindly voice encouraging him to face the world and life.

Out of pride in his offspring, who had a diploma for real book-learning, a thing that he never really believed possible for one of his sons, Alessandro Mussolini, in a fury against a Government which refused to consider intelligence above any petty sentiment, bearded the lions in their den, and in no hesitating manner attacked the Mayor and Councillors of Predappio. He had convinced himself that his son was going to be a great man, and he wanted those ignorant, self-centred men to know it. In the Mayor's office he cried out angrily when they told him that Benito, as well as being too young to have authority over scholars, was politically undesirable.

"Mind my words," he yelled, "you will be sorry you refused to give my boy a job! The time will come when it will be told how Predappio would not have Benito Mussolini as Scrivener, just as they tell to-day, with contempt and scorn, how the native town of Francesco Crispi would not have him as Communal Secretary!"

It seems strange that the blacksmith of Dovia should compare his son, an obscure youth, with one of the most illustrious statesmen of Italy, and particularly as Crispi was the Republican's arch-enemy, and in abuse of whom the Democrats and Socialists of 1900 vied with each other.

To-day Benito Mussolini is a great admirer of Crispi, of whom he says: "Whatever he was he was by birth; nothing in him was acquired. Masterful, haughty, contemptuous, uncompromising, irascible. He was that at twenty, and at fifty he had not changed. Whilst I——" Mussolini does not add what he thinks of himself, or the changes that have taken place in his position and character during the past twenty years.

The thought of having to live in Dovia, of the useless



exile of his youth in a town that offered no possible advantage, drove him to accept the first offer that came after months of waiting for a reply to any of several demands for a municipal position. . . . The appointment was for a six months' substitute in an elementary rural school in the Commune of Gualtieri-Emilia.

Gualtieri is a pleasant enough little town on the banks of the River Po, between Guastalla, a fairly important provincial city, and Boretto. The town proper is about a mile from the river, and after Dovia it seemed a lively place to Benito Mussolini when on a dull, foggy afternoon of February, 1902, he got down at the bare little station, bare as to building, but filled with a curious crowd of people. He was met by a member of the school-board, who took him to modest lodgings, where he was to have room and board for forty lire a month, heat extra. His salary as a teacher was fifty-six lire a month. The problem of paying expenses was a difficult one, for if he was to pay his board, have a shirt or two washed each month, have a tiny fire in his room from time to time, there would never be a soldo over for coffee in the evenings, or a cigarette by day.

In Gualtieri he always had credit, and was always in debt.

The evening of his arrival, at the one café, or *osteria*, he was presented to the notables of the town, Socialists and Administrators. The following morning he took up his teaching. The school-house was about two miles from town, on the main road. Some forty pupils presented themselves, most of them proved to be scarcely up to the average intelligence. There was only one session, from eight-thirty to one; and school over, he was free to dispose of his time as he saw fit.

The first days were very monotonous; then little by little the circle of acquaintances widened and became more intimate. The country was delightful, and with the coming of spring he found his thoughts turning more and more

towards the village beauties, and one particular beauty who had fascinated him from the day of his arrival. One and all were more than willing to walk out in the moonlight with him, when they could escape from the watchful eyes of their mothers, for the elder people looked upon the young teacher with certain suspicion and distrust. Still it was all pleasant enough, but not leading to anything definite ; and the pay did not even permit him the luxury he craved, the purchase of at least one new book each month.

He grew rather fond of the school-children, and they in turn adored the young master with the flashing eyes, who was always inwardly rebelling at fate, the fickle goddess who had given him an education, which instead of satisfying him, only served to whet his ambition.

The months passed all too quickly, and the summer vacation was almost upon him. He would be out of work again, and not a soldo saved. Then, too, there were complications of a private nature which made his departure imperative—lovers' threats and tears. . . . What was he to do ? After long and solitary communion, he decided that teaching children to read and write was not the vocation for a man of his brains. He knew, for something inside advised him so, and old Giovanna had often told him to listen to his own intuition, that he was wasting his time where he was, even if he had been able to remain indefinitely ; but at least he must manage to stay in Gualtieri until the hand of fate pointed to the next step of his way.

He may have been wasting his time ; yet the six months in Gualtieri were of some benefit, for he learned much about certain female proclivities toward the male, and also much that was new in politics. . . . The Socialism in all of the Emilia was not to his liking, did not appeal to his deep and romantic temperament. He felt a distaste for the methods of the pleasure-loving Socialists and Nationalists, and the rather coarse existence they were inclined to lead.

He must have been overpowered with his own importance then, he says, for while he did not like to see sour faces, he felt that political questions should not be discussed, or mixed up with merry-making over glasses of red wine drunk to the accompaniment of revolutionary chatter.

No, he was not satisfied with Gualtieri ; and living near where he was born, was bringing him a poor enough existence, and the world was large. . . . Gualtieri was certainly better than Dovia, for it was impossible to find anything worse than that volcanic centre, which had not even the repose of moors and green things. In the tormented state of nature of his birthplace he had found no signification, no symbol of the beauty he knew from reading was to be found elsewhere.

To the fervour of the young man's soul looking at the panorama of life, with its great question why, the country without vivid joy presented only a crude serenity. And that he was not seeking !

He was young, active, brimful of health, and he possessed then, as now, a fatal attraction for the opposite sex. On all holiday afternoons, and almost every evening, he danced with the merry-makers, the gayest in the gay throng. And he learned to play the violin, not very well, but sufficiently to open his heart to the wonder and beauty of all music.

And often until well into the night he played cards, gambling, increasing his debts.

Among the many friends he made in Gualtieri there were several who owned a few interesting books, so he was able to indulge his passion for reading. His hero then was Garibaldi, the fighter, the idealist and man of action. On a certain day, a bust of Garibaldi was to be unveiled in the Square. The orator of the occasion did not put in an appearance. The Square was filled with people who had come from the neighbouring towns, and they were restive. The Mayor and other civil authorities were more and more

annoyed. At last someone thought of the young school teacher, and suggested that he might as well do something to earn his pay ; and—when all was said and done, he was the best-educated men in their midst.

Mussolini had been dancing and drinking in the *osteria*, and at the opportune moment he sauntered out into the Square, his coat thrown carelessly over his shoulder. The waiting crowd literally pounced upon him.

“Garibaldi ? A speech ? ” he laughed merrily at the worried men. “But I never made a speech in my life ! ” he laughed again. “And yet—why not ? ” He got on the shaky stand, and for an hour and a half proceeded to hold forth on the Garibaldi legend.

In Gualtieri they still talk about that speech.

The fatal day which was to force his hand came at last. Either he return to the drabness of Dovia, or make up his mind to emigrate, to travel. At the last moment he decided to seek his fortune in Switzerland, as it was the easiest country to be reached. After coming to a decision, the next difficulty was that of finding the necessary money for the third-class ticket.

He wrote to his mother that he was ill and needed money for medicine and doctor. It was the first lie he ever told her, and the last.

She confided forty-five lire to a neighbour going to Forli, to be sent to her son by money order. It was all she had been able to save in the six months he had been away.

The last day of school in Gualtieri, Mussolini wrote on the blackboard for the pupils to copy :

“*PERSEVERABDO ARRIVI !*”

(Persevering one arrives !)

On the evening of July 9th, 1902, Benito Mussolini arrived at Chiasso, a frontier station. While waiting for

the train to take him to the centre of Switzerland, he bought a paper, *Il Secolo*, and to his horror read of his father's arrest.

At Predappio, and also at Orte, the electioneers of the popular parties had broken the urn to prevent a victory for the clericals, the legal authorities had selected groups to be imprisoned, and Alessandro Mussolini happened to be in one of the selected groups.

The news made Benito hesitate as to whether his duty to his mother, then alone in the poor home, was greater than his duty to himself. He decided in his own favour, and continued his voyage, his only luggage a very shabby canvas bag, a relic, no doubt, from some descendant of the venerable Noah.

When he reached Yverdon he had two lire and ten centimes left, and as that would only have taken him a short distance, perhaps to the next station, he left the train to continue on foot.

He walked an entire day ; the evening came and he was still walking.

He was hungry, very hungry and thirsty, and he was tired. At last he found a deserted bridge, under it the dried bed of a stream ; and not having a better place to go to, he settled himself with his back against the stone wall, and drawing his knees up to his chin he rested his head on his knees, and closed his eyes.

Thus he passed the first night, and many others in a foreign land.

The bitter life of the *Caminante* had begun. The curtain rung up the drama.

The most desolate, desperate period of Benito Mussolini's life began in Switzerland. An exile, he passed the first days without companionship, money, or hope ; sustained by a superior will power and a certain instinct which commanded him to persevere in that new land until he had

found for himself a means of entering upon the road that would lead him to a desired end.

Some there are who say pride drove Benito from Italy ; that he meant to show those who had refused him work, that though the prophet was without honour in his own country, in a new land he would be appreciated. . . . And others insist that a hopeless love, or certain threats sent him over the border of his own country, thrust him penniless, uneducated in the languages of the other land. If the latter is true, no one will ever learn much of the story from Mussolini, for he has never in all his life been known to boast of his conquests, nor, in fact, even to mention the name of a woman who has in any way been intimate with him. . . . But the reason the most likely is the prosaic mania for emigration which is latent in all Italians. Yet, whatever the reason, it was strong enough to urge him on despite the troubles at home, and the need his mother may have had of him.

All he knew of manual labour was that which he had learned in his father's smithy, and, while strenuous, it was limited in its nature. Despite his inexperience, he immediately sought for manual labour. From Yverdon he walked to Orbe, where he found a job as a common hod carrier with eleven hours a day at thirty-two centimes an hour pay. His work was to carry stones and cement for a building in construction. He slept on straw with the other workmen, and ate potatoes roasted under ashes. The third day the overseer reproved him for being over-dressed. He was still wearing his teachers' clothes, the only ones he had. When he was paid at the end of the first week he had to spend nearly all the money he had earned for a new pair of shoes, as his old ones were completely worn-out. . . . After a couple more weeks he departed for Lausanne, believing that he could not be worse off in the big important city than he had been in the uninteresting town.

One night, shortly after his arrival at Lausanne, again without money, and tired and hungry from walking the streets in search of work, he huddled in an inviting doorway for shelter from the cold evening wind. He had a blinding headache, and a disconcerting pain in the pit of his stomach. With weary, bloodshot eyes he looked upon the gay and carefree as they passed his shelter, while in turn the gay and carefree stared at him curiously, suspiciously. What was he to do? Of a sudden he turned up his coat collar, clutched his bundle (the canvas bag had died a natural death and a bandana now took its place), and started to walk as fast as his tired legs would carry him, towards the outskirts of the city. There, under some lonely tree——

No one has ever heard the full story of the horror of that night, which was to serve in his mind as the first milestone marking the long march to—Rome.

At daybreak he walked calmly back to Lausanne, by chance encountering a kindly man from the Romagna, who not too willingly gave him a few pence. He bought and devoured a whole loaf of bread, drank water from a public fountain, washed his face, then turned towards the busy district of the city, with the firm conviction that before noon he would have work.

An Italian, owner of a wine-shop, took Benito on as errand and delivery boy. It was humble work, but less strenuous than the former job at Orbe, where many days he had made 121 trips up to the second floor of the building in construction. Then, in the evenings his arms were swollen and painful; in his new position the legs did all the work.

At that time, and during almost all of his stay in Switzerland, he supported the most squalid misery without a word of complaint. He lived in a misery under which a less strong temperament might have fallen into infamous or irreparable actions. However, through it all, he found a compensation for the world's hostility in his unconfined



ON THE TERRACE OF THE VILLA TORLONIA





liberty. . . . And never did he stop planning . . . even though he had no personal belongings worthy of the name, he owned political books, and wrote revolutionary articles.

In Switzerland he first read Karl Marx.

Until cold weather he pushed a provision cart about the city, delivering orders barefooted and bareheaded. He was badly paid, had only dry bread to eat, and an occasional glass of red wine, when the patron was not looking. But he had a smile for everyone who offered him a kind word or a modest tip, and he never failed to be most profuse in his thanks whenever customers paid him extra for delivering the wine.

Once again he changed his profession and his position. He became a builder, assisting a carpenter, specializing in window-frames, which he says he learned to fit very well. His favourite game—rather a striking symbol—was to plant the green branch on the top of a finished edifice. The fact that he risked his life every time he did it never seemed to enter his mind. He went up because most of the other workmen were afraid to.

The building season over, he was again without work. Another tragic period of homeless wandering and hunger, a day when all he had in his pocket was a nickel medal of Karl Marx. He had no place to sleep, and he had not touched food for over twenty-four hours.

Severe cramps in the stomach prevented him from walking. In the Montbésion Park he sat down at the foot of a statue of William Tell, and meditated. Meditation is difficult when the stomach is yelling for food. The black eyes bulged in the white set face, the mouth was drawn in a wickedly hard line. So ferocious was his expression that passers-by were frightened by him, believing that he was insane. His one desire as he sat there, and it was written on his face, was to strangle someone, to make someone suffer as he was suffering. But it did no good to sit still

and think, for in the confusion of his thoughts at that time there was no hope of a solution to the question confronting him. He left the Park and turned his steps towards Ouchy.

At sunset, the striking of an old clock, the very gentleness of the tone, aroused him from a lethargy into which he had fallen. An infinite melancholy assailed him, and there on the banks of Lake Léman, he asked himself dispassionately if his life was worth living another day.

For answer, the peaceful blue waters lapped the shore. The evening star appeared in the west, and a tranquillity settled over all. Into his turbulent thoughts came the strains of distant music. "Sweet as a mother's song over her baby's cradle." The orchestra of the Hotel Beau-Rivage playing for the guests at dinner.

A starving beggar, he leaned longingly over the hotel fence to listen to the concert.

Presently several people came out of the hotel and strolled past him. They spoke a language unknown to Benito Mussolini. He surmised it was English.

He wanted to ask them for a little money, just enough to pay for a night's lodgings. . . . But the words died on his trembling lips.

The women were richly dressed, covered with gold and diamonds. He had not a sou to bless himself with, no place to sleep ; no bread to eat. In fear he ran from them.

He passed the night under the stars, hunger and cold tormenting him—preventing him from sleeping. During the long hours before dawn he no doubt forgot the prophecy of Goethe :

"A Sunday child shall have a brilliant fate."

The morning after, he looked at himself in a shop window. He was unrecognizable.

Another time while wandering about the city of Lausanne, he saw a light at the end of a little street, like a beacon

beckoning to him. He approached. It was only a modest lamp hanging over a well-laden table. Several men, a woman and a little girl were gathered about the cheerful board. Too tired and empty to consider other than animal instinct, Benito entered the tiny yard in front of the house, abruptly, and as one within his rights, went in at the hospitably open door. Like a spectre he stood there while ten eyes looked at him in fearful astonishment. "Have you some bread?" he asked rudely. No reply. "Give me a piece of bread!" he commanded. Still silence. Then a hand reached out, hesitated, slowly took a hunk of bread from the stacked plate, held it a second under the soft light, then thrust it at him. "Thank you," he mumbled. Silence, and the ten eyes staring rudely. "Good night." And he disappeared into the darkness munching his bread.

Not long after that came the most serious night of all. . . . He had taken refuge under a bridge in Lausanne, only to be routed out by the pouring rain. He hurried along a lonely road in the hope of finding some sort of shelter, and in the yard of a printing establishment he found a discarded packing-case about the size of a sentinel's box. He arranged himself fairly comfortably, and sheltered from the driving rain he soon fell asleep. A policeman rudely awakened him in the early hours of the morning, and arrested him for vagrancy. Together with an old professional vagabond, arrested at the same time, he spent a day and a night in jail. While in solitary confinement he had ample time to reflect, and in the horror of a filthy cell he came to the conclusion that his wasted days in Switzerland were due to the fact that he had not put his mind into his tasks, and that until he gave himself, body and soul, to the work in hand he could never accomplish anything that would be even a step towards his future betterment.

He went back to his old patron, the Italian wine-seller, and asked for work, which he received. And as soon as he

managed to have a presentable suit, presentable in that the holes were patched, and his shirt and collar clean, he went to the University of Lausanne to wait upon the eminent Italian professor, Vilfredo Pareto, who was an instructor there.

Professor Pareto took an immediate interest in young Mussolini, and without thought of pecuniary recompense, offered the use of his vast knowledge for what it could be worth to the boy.

Benito worked from early morning until dark to earn the barest necessities of life, and in the evenings he studied ; later he interspersed his studies with conferences to his labour companions. He wrote innumerable revolutionary articles, more for the practice in writing than with a hope of publication.

From the time he began to study at the University, and with Vilfredo Pareto privately, no manual labour was too hard for him, no hardship dimmed the brightness of his hope, nor diminished his ardour. His companions began listening to his discourses. They not only listened, but they followed his teachings, recognizing the man in their midst as one apart from the common herd.

It was at that time, among a few foreigners : Russians, Germans, Italians, and French, dispersed in a hostile country, that Benito Mussolini began his first work of organization. He convoked force, discipline ; attempted to prepare them for the ultimate task he had in mind.

Just when, or at what period of his remarkable career, Mussolini changed his political opinions is a question asked by many of his ardent admirers and followers, as well as by his enemies.

Benito Mussolini *never* changed his opinions, for each step in his political career was a step towards the expression of an idea which he was striving to develop. Nationalist,

Revolutionist, Socialist, and eventually Fascist. He was really always a Fascist, for the principles of Fascism are to Socialism what the Protestant Episcopal Church is to the Roman Catholic : a split.

When a youth of twenty, Benito Mussolini was already a man who thought along new lines, as new and strange then as the ideas he set in active motion appeared almost twenty years later.

From his extreme youth he has always been a deep and remarkable thinker, a profound, tireless student, and a fearless worker. He often, very often, made mistakes when he was twenty, and at forty he also made them. In the past, whenever he found himself in the wrong, he willingly admitted it, just as he has done during all of his powerful Dictatorship, and will continue to do so as long as he remains Chief of the Fascists of the United Kingdom of Italy. On the other hand, he has the courage to stick to his convictions at no matter what cost. The real character of the man has never changed ; it has merely been modified and fortified by the change in his conditions.

While an instigator of labour reforms, working by day for the few francs necessary to pay for his poor existence, he was studying German, perfecting his French ; and far into the night, by feeble candlelight, reading all the political and philosophical books he could lay hands on.

Regarded by the police of Lausanne as an undesirable guest in the city, he was constantly under their surveillance ; the knowledge that he was being watched did not disturb him greatly, nor make him renounce his projects. It is not by doubt and fear that one arrives at the realization of a project, he claimed.

Just when things seemed to be going better, when he began to see a ray of light ahead, a chance to accomplish something that according to his precepts was worth while, a telegram from Predappio called him to his mother's

bedside. She was dangerously ill, and feeling that the end could not be far off, she at last found courage to ask the wandering son to come to her aid.

Regardless of everything, plans, or promises made to his associates, he took the first train for Italy. A fear, such as he had never known, even in his darkest hours, assailed him as the slow train delayed for what seemed hours at each station along the line. Deep down in his heart the love for his mother was greater than all else in life, and if he could not get to Dovia in time——

Yet only a few weeks after his return, when the doctor declared his mother out of immediate danger, he returned to Switzerland, together with his brother Arnaldo, who had an offer of work with an agricultural concern.

Nothing is known about the actual living he made during his second sojourn in Switzerland, and he himself refuses to enlighten the curious. In any case, whatever he did to earn his daily bread, it brought very meagre returns. Sometimes articles written by him appeared in the Socialist papers, and it was believed that he was the ringleader in most of the Socialist conferences. He was fighting his way, pondering over and maturing his projects, measuring the dangers and advantages; then throwing himself head first into the fray, regardless of the danger to his reputation, or even to his life.

It is thought, and even stated as a fact by some, that he was at that time being paid to instigate strikes, as well as for the secret political work; yet the Swiss police were unable to prove the authenticity of this statement.

Whatever intimate relations he may have had with certain women who claimed to be in his confidence, it seems certain that he always lived alone in some bare, cheap furnished room. He spent a great deal of his free time with the foreign student element, and among them he had a very particular friend. He had none of the social habits

generally attributed to the Latin youth, for at meal-times and at night he leaned towards solitude. To eat with a friend was at once a torture and a pleasure ; however, he preferred to gulp his food alone, then to sit for hours over tea or coffee with some of his Russian friends. Summed up, he was an ardent, uncultured apostle of an idea, and he knew only too well that just the idea was not sufficient. Man had to be awakened before he could adapt and sacrifice himself for an idea—and the awakening was the difficult task that he finally set himself.

Misery, humiliation, and suffering of every kind left him unchanged, his spirit unbroken. Before he went back to Italy to do his military service in 1904, he had organized more than one union, planned various successful strikes, and been the means of bettering the conditions of his brothers in poverty, even at the expense of impoverishing his own.

In order to study the characters and temperaments which difference in race accounts for, he forced himself to mix intimately with many nationalities, specializing in the Russian students, women as well as men ; in fact, most of his interest was aroused by a woman. The Russians in Switzerland at that time were a strange, dissolute, eccentric, fantastic group : Nihilists and Bohemians, and as students are wont to be, the last word in fervid modernity, they were all Revolutionaries—otherwise they would have been in their own country—and delighted in taking Benitouchka, as they called him, to any and all kinds of lectures and conferences, which he with his open mind and thirst for knowledge was happy to attend. One day they persuaded him to go to a lecture given by Emile Vandervelde, a young Belgian. Vandervelde was a moderate leader of a moderate " Reformed Socialist Party " in Belgium, and the *bête noir* of all the Revolutionaries. His placid and doctrinaire mentality and Flemish bourgeois temperament stood for



only two or three ideas : Co-operative progress, anti-Clericalism ; Parliamentaryism, with a sprinkling of Republicanism. Socialism, he maintained, could be installed any day the party saw fit ; he was for constructing a great many houses for the people, many cheap restaurants, many libraries, popular University halls, in order to be able to have millions of votes controlled by the Proletariat. When everything was arranged, a motion was to be passed by Parliament, passed by a majority of one, and—Socialism installed. It was a grand idea, or so Vandervelde thought, and he was considered a man of discerning intelligence ; but the crude notions of his form of Socialism, at once scientific and evangelical, visualized at a distance by the revolutionaries with whom Mussolini associated, was a thing that could not stand.

The subject of Vandervelde's lecture was Jesus Christ, as Saviour of the enslaved populace, and as precursor of Socialism ; Christ, the first Socialist, etc.

The lecture-hall was crowded ; lost in the dense grey mass, last among the unknown, was Benito Mussolini. To him the lecture was a trifling thing, for his taste was for the severe, and not the milk and water Socialism ; his ideal was Babeuf, and all the deities of the young Russian Nihilists, and it is just possible that a fair-haired Russian had some influence in his taste at that moment. A certain Helen M. received him every day in the privacy of her poor little home. She was a Moscovite, divorced from a Russian, and a student at the University.

Be it known that besides Karl Marx, Benito had given hours to the study of Nietzsche and Sorel, and he had absorbed elements of Greek philosophy. In addition Spinoza, Kant, Hegel and Fichte had been carefully studied ; Schopenhauer devoured. Passing all these he had gone back to Buddha : Buddha satisfied him, as he believed that only the supreme philosophies of the extreme Orient had

succeeded in getting beyond the divine leaven of Greece. Therefore, adept as he was in all the esoteric creeds, it is possible to imagine Benito Mussolini's mood when he repaired to Vandervelde's lecture. Understanding him as they did, his companions took particular delight, as a means of a new amusement, in exciting him to reply to the lecturer.

Badly dressed, his face pale, the expression hard, the great eyes intense, bulging from inward agitation, he attracted the attention of all those near him. With anxiety they watched his every move.

Vandervelde, the popular lecturer, after violent applause, launched himself heatedly into his subject, sure of easily convincing his public. But, unfortunately, not all of his listeners were convinced ; there was one in the crowd who protested, raised his voice, rudely interrupted the well-studied discourse.

That one was Benito Mussolini.

There was immediate confusion in the hall. How was it possible that among so many tame sheep one mad lamb had been permitted to enter the fold ?

Someone more indignant than the others yelled :

" Shut up, idiot ! If you don't like what the lecturer says, maybe other people do ! "

Not at all disturbed by the protest, and urged by the fascinating Helen beside him, Mussolini in turn yelled :

" I'll say what I think ! I'm perfectly within my rights, and if you don't like it, you can go to—— ! "

Despite the confusion caused by the interruption, Vandervelde managed to terminate his discourse. When he had finished, the man who prevented Mussolini's speaking yelled sarcastically to him :

" Now, if you still want to, and have the courage, is the time for you to speak ! "

The tone of the invitation did not discourage or

intimidate him as the man expected it would, nor did Vandervelde's celebrity make him hesitate. In a loud voice he replied to the challenge :

" I'll speak, and you'll stay to listen to me ! "

And before anyone had time to expostulate he had jumped on a bench, and with vigour clearly attacked the subject of the ideas expressed by Vandervelde. So well did he put forth his own thoughts that not only the public, but the lecturer as well, recognized in the practically unknown youth an ingenuous and doctrinal force far beyond the ordinary.

First he held forth against the Gospel, defending, glorifying the spirit of Julian the Apostate ; and then he went on to his favourite subject—Rome. Rome, the Imperial Empire, Rome the magnificent, why had it fallen a victim to the outer barbarians and to the gnawings of the feeble ideologists within ? And after all, what permanent results had the Man of Galilee left behind Him ? From that, he launched out in defence and laudation of Buddhism—his latest discovery. In what way could the meek Palestinian Messiah, with His four discourses and petty parables, be compared to Buddha and his elaborate body of doctrine in forty volumes, the outcome of forty years in the wilderness, as against a mere forty days . . . ? Forty years of untiring ardour in converting, watching over, transforming and purifying souls for other incarnations !

The clever Belgian, with the imposing, chic beard, permitted the unknown youth to wear himself out ; good-humouredly sarcastic, when Mussolini had given full vent to his enthusiasm for the Buddha, he rose again, and began in his most elegant style to bedeck his victim with laurels. Then, with the skill that had made him famous as a lecturer, he proceeded to turn his dear comrade, and his enthusiasm for Buddha, into merciless ridicule. His last words were :

"It is not fair to condemn Jesus Christ if some misfortune due to his revolutionary preaching cut off his career."

A roar of laughter, literally a howl of joy, went up from the entire audience—alone with Mussolini his friends were silent. He was checkmated, extinguished. He had lost in the argument, but it had taught him a good lesson, shown him that in order to argue with a lecturer who has his discourse well prepared beforehand, one must either have an exceptional power for public speaking, or at least know his subject. He secretly resolved that no lecturer would ever down him again.

Yet that roar of laughter has never entirely ceased to reverberate in his ears.

Being continually watched and followed by the police of Geneva, Mussolini was forced to move from one cheap lodging-house to another.

Not being in favour with the local authorities, the Italian Consul also deemed it wise to be against him. He was an object of suspicion on both sides of the Swiss-Italian frontier, and was finally expelled from Geneva.

He could perhaps have returned to Lausanne, but what would have been the use when there was nothing there to interest him? His way, irrevocably signalled, took him where he was destined to go, left him in the end very little choice as to what he was to do.

The trouble was that his work of instigation had become too active; under his inspiration the agitation of the masses increased day by day. He was not even permitted to continue his humble manual work, which from time to time he did sincerely try to do. And he was forcibly ejected from the place where he had begun to find himself.

He left Geneva without regret or bitterness towards the Government. Only in bidding farewell to his little Russian

world with all its colour and variety—particularly the pale-haired Kursisthi girls, and Helen M., did he feel a twinge of sorrow. It was an end to long talks, drinking tea, and cigarette smoking ; ardent discussions and debates in which they were all seeking to get to the bottom of things. He took refuge at Annemasse, in France, just over the frontier, quite near Geneva and Lausanne. There, part of the time he gave lessons in a private school, and the other part he worked as a manual labourer. In Annemasse he might have lived in peace perhaps all his days, if it had not been for a desire to see his friend Helen M., an unwise desire which one day took him to Geneva.

In Annemasse he became acquainted with the wife of the Sous-Prefet, through his ability to tell fortunes, a trick taught him by old Giovanna, and one which he has never forgotten. He began his career as an amateur fortune-teller by reading the cards for his landlady, who passed the word on to her various friends ; and they one and all came to see the nice young Italian, who could read the cards so wonderfully. Among the many women who expressed a desire to have a peep into the future as seen by Benito Mussolini, was no less a person than the wife of the Sous-Prefet. He had the good fortune to tell her something that came true, and after that she was ready to help him in all that was within her power. She was a sympathetic, attractive woman, not too old, but—just over the frontier there was that fair Moscovite whose allure and wideawake mind called to him, and—how could there be any danger in going over to spend a couple of hours ? Who would recognize him when it was absolutely dark ? Who would be standing about watching to see if he knocked at Helen's door ? Helen could not come over to him, so he took the chance of being discovered, and went to her.

He was just in time for supper, and was very welcome. It was a makeshift meal of bread, biscuits, ham, and tea.

When it was over they insisted (Helen was living with a woman friend) that he spend the night, and not take the last train back, as he had planned to do. They only had one room, but he could sleep there, and they would go to stay with a friend nearby.

So he was left with the prospect of an unwontedly luxurious sleep in a deliciously feminine bed, his enjoyment enhanced by the consciousness that he was plucking forbidden fruit in defiance of the law. He had walked over the mountains from Annemasse, over fifteen miles, as it was too expensive to travel by train, and there was also the danger of being recognized by the police. He was tired, and he slept the heavy sleep of healthy youth. During the night he was awakened by the landlady in the next room exclaiming to her husband: "I tell you there is someone in there! The Russian girls are out, so it must be a thief!"

"Rubbish," replied the husband in a drowsy tone.

"You're always hearing noises. Go to sleep!"

To his dismay Benito then realized that his friends had neglected to tell the landlady that they were leaving a friend to sleep in their room. It was too late for him to speak, and if he was found there his explanations might lead to grave consequences. He was in a fix, but the best he could do then was to keep absolutely quiet, and perhaps the landlady would go to sleep, as her husband had suggested.

He fell asleep very quickly. Evidently he snored, or turned over heavily in the narrow bed, and the partition was evidently thin. Once more he heard the woman's voice.

"I tell you there is a man in the next room!"

"All right," said the resigned husband, "I'll get my gun and go and see." He made a slight noise as he got out of bed. Benito shook from fear, while drops of sweat came out on his brow.

There was silence ; then the husband announced that the gun was being repaired, so the best thing he could do was to go round to the police station.

He heard the man grumbling, evidently while he was dressing, then the sound of heavy footsteps going to the street door.

He wondered, as he lay waiting for the return of the landlord, and at least two policemen, what he was to do. How explain that the Russian women were nothing more than good friends, who had kindly offered their bed to a fugitive, an outlaw ? There would of course be a scandal, and the poor girls probably expelled from the country as accomplices, but accomplices in what ? Only trouble could come out of the matter, regardless of the way the wind decided to blow. Perhaps it would be wiser to act the part of a burglar, a part he had never tried to act before. But perhaps it was his duty as a gentleman to do so ?

Again footsteps, those of the landlord, alone. He permitted himself the luxury of a sigh, and still another when he heard the man tell his wife that the police station was closed for the night.

After that he remained very still, afraid to turn or even to stretch his legs out straight, and of course not daring to go to sleep again. At last morning came, though he believed it never would. And then he heard the merry voices of his friends calling to him : " Benitouchka ! Benitouchka, how did you sleep in our bed ? "

" How did I sleep ? " He called them to his side, and told them the tragic story of the night.

" Oh, how thrilling ! " they exclaimed laughingly. " But wouldn't it have been amusing if you had been arrested ! " And they continued to laugh immoderately.

" Not so amusing as you think," answered Benito seriously. " I have been arrested for vagrancy, banished

for plotting, but never have I been punished for having slept in a lady's bed ! The novelty of the charge is the only thing that would have been amusing ! ”

If he had fallen in love with the wife of the Sous-Prefet at Annemasse, or even a Swiss maiden, it would have been safer—but less educational. However, Benito Mussolini never looked for safety.

Someone once said that the only way to understand a foreign race was to fall in love with a woman of that race. His knowledge and comprehension of Russians was one day to prove very useful, to him and to the country he was to serve.

“ Seek the soul of Rome upon Roman lips,” was Goethe's motto, long before Benito Mussolini proved the truth of it.

Not wishing to be black-listed as a deserter, Mussolini returned to Italy early in 1904, to present himself for military service. He was assigned to a bersagliere regiment, in the city of Peschiera.

While he was home on leave in 1905, his mother, after a lingering illness, passed away. It was the most poignant suffering, the cruelest grief which had ever come to him.

When, by the stillness of the body over which he had been watching for hours, he realized that his mother had actually gone from him, in an agony of soul he grabbed her two hands, kissing them again and again, while sobs shook his whole body. It was with difficulty that the other members of the family persuaded him to relinquish his hold on her.

She was only forty-six years old, and when he perhaps needed her most she had been taken from him ; the first vital affection of his life, the one real passion, which never so long as he lived was he going to forget, or cease to grieve for. She had been so absolutely his, the companion of his soul, the mother, sister, friend. His love for her had been a physical thing, in her he had found the pleasure that a



man finds in the woman he loves, in its purest sense. To embrace her, to kiss her, to feel her gentle caressing hands on his face, his hair, gave him a sense of unalloyed joy ; her goodness and purity gave him faith in all women. To look into her deep, understanding eyes thrilled him to the depths of his being ; with her he was tender, loving, without fear. Her death plunged him into profound solitude, made him feel as though all his fatigue, work, and misery had been for naught. If he were to succeed in life there would be nobody to care—and yet she had given him that life, and whatever he did with it would reflect on her.

He begged them to let him remain there beside the beloved remains through the first night, to watch alone with her. A sense of the eternity of his loss had so taken hold of him as to make him lose all idea of rapport with the outside world. An impenetrable shadow came between him and the heart of his own life . . . all the formidable will power to overcome obstacles was powerless before the awful mystery of death.

There with his head on the bed close to her head he cried. Cried as only a strong man can cry. The agony spent at last, he rose to his feet, swayed, and fell fainting into the arms of Severina, the faithful old gossiping woman who had worked for his mother, and in the *osteria*, even before he was born.

She was buried in the lonely, humble little cemetery at Varanno, where to-day many visitors go to kneel beside the rustic grave of the adored mother of Italy's chief.

A few months after the march on Rome, the new Prime Minister paid a visit to Dovia, and, accompanied by Don Pietro Zoli, rector of San Cassiano, the little church where Rosa Maltoni Mussolini used to worship with her children, and where Benito was baptized and made his first communion, went to his mother's grave. The mother who

had left her firstborn to fight his fight unaided, left him too soon to exalt over his victories, or to gather together, even for an instant, the recompense for her many, and often terrible maternal sacrifices.

The one mark of beauty in the cemetery is a grand old oak, under the shade of which Benito often played beside his mother. That tree, by his order, is always to remain there, as a sentinel watching over the dead, a memorial to her.

And yet there are some who say he has no sentiment.

Shortly after his mother's death, while still on leave at Dovia, the soldier Mussolini wrote to his captain :

"Of the ten letters which I have received in these days of sadness and sorrow, many will go into the fire because they only repeat the same banal phrases ; but yours, my Captain, I am keeping among the dear memories of my life.

"Now, as you say, it remains for me to follow the counsels of my dear mother, and to honour her memory by fulfilling my duties as a soldier and a citizen.

"To the women one leaves the tears and sighs—while strong men must suffer and die—in silence—rather than to steal tears from the weaker sex. To work, and to work in the way of well-being—to honour the memories of home, and that more sacred one of the Patria, not with sterile lamentations, but with sincere work. It is well to remember, to commemorate the heroes who with their blood have cemented the unity of the Patria, but it is still better to prepare ourselves so as not to be ignoble descendants of those heroes . . . to enforce our hearts to be valid bulwarks wherever the barbarians of the North tried to reduce Italy to a 'geographical expression.' These are my sentiments."

Between this letter, and various others written fifteen

years later, there is very little difference in the sentiments expressed ; merely, perhaps, that they are expressed more forcefully, or better.

After being discharged from the army, Mussolini was once more called to teach in an elementary school, at Caneva, a fraction of the Commune of Tolmezzo, in the Friuli Province. Besides teaching, he studied Latin and Greek, political questions, and speeches.

He taught French in a boy's school at Oneglia, where as the police seemed to be much interested in his movements, he kept quietly to himself.

Zurich was another Swiss city where he enrolled at the University, and where he again mixed with the Russians, quite a different lot from the merry, fun-loving ones at Geneva ; in fact, they were an over-serious crowd, representing the stolid, mysterious side of the Slav character, without any of its charm.

Zurich in time became uncomfortable, for even though he had planned to study and to let organizing alone for a while, he was continually brought into conferences, and almost against his will, into the active socialistic element.

From Zurich he went to France, deciding to try his luck once more in that country. At Marseilles, where he settled, he mingled quite openly with the workmen, and instigated more than one strike before the police discovered him. Later, he was held by the city authorities until he could be expatriated.

Easter Day of 1908 Benito Mussolini spent in prison at Lucerne. It was his second imprisonment in Switzerland. This time the charges against him were more severe, and he was ordered to leave the country for good. He asked to be allowed to go to Germany, so far an untried country, where he believed he would find the socialistic sentiments he was searching for. The favour was denied

him, and under guard, he was conducted to the Italian frontier.

He did not make the trip alone, as nothing quite usual or normal ever seemed to happen to the already extraordinary man. Another Italian was ordered from the country at the same time, to whose tragic story he was to listen during the weary hours of the trip, made in a common cattle car, in which they were packed so tight that no one could even sit down.

At the end of a brawl over a woman, he had killed a man, and he himself been atrociously wounded in the thigh. Before leaving the prison he had managed to show Mussolini the terrific gash, without offering any explanations, and Mussolini, being wise, had not asked for any. Instead he had torn strips from his own shirt to bandage the wound in the hope of momentarily stopping the flow of blood ; but it was not until they neared the frontier that he heard the whole story, a part of which he had suspected.

With a superhuman courage, the man had managed to keep silent for days, so that, not having any actual proof of the murder, the police had merely put him in prison until such time as a car-load of political suspects from various countries were to be deported.

It was a strange and tragic voyage ; the assassin slowly dying, when medical aid could have saved him. The hours dragged on. The blood from the assassin's wound dripped, dripped until he was standing in a thick red pool. Mussolini put an arm about the man, trying by physical support to give him courage for the last miles of the journey. The frontier was almost in sight, when above the rumbling of the train he heard :

" I'll die as soon as we reach Italy, but I'll die instead of being hanged as I would have been if they had got me in Zurich. You've been a friend to me, and I wish you luck along your way. . . . Write to my mother, and when you can

—go to see her—tell her all—and that I killed him, but before her God I'll be absolved from my sin—in dying. Her address is in my pocket—Promise me——” Sobs stopped further speech. At last, as the miserable train pulled into the station where the Italian guards were to take charge of them : “ Swear—you'll go——”

And thinking of his own mother sleeping in the peaceful cemetery at Varenò, away from all the sorrows and futile regrets, Benito promised, a promise which was only a few days later fulfilled.

1908 closed the romantic period of the wandering life outside and inside the confines of Italy. And it closed with a return to Dovia, or almost, one might say, between Dovia and Forlì, as several days a week he walked to the library at Forlì in search of books and papers. Not infrequently the revolutionary spirit got the better of him, and he became a party to some discussion dealing with the dense hostility of the world.

He continued to study Latin, and also to prepare for French examinations in order to have a teacher's certificate from the University of Bologna. One old friend tells how he presented himself to the examining board :

“ Mussolini sauntered into the hall where the professors were lined up, with his hat on the back of his head, and a cigarette in his mouth. The examiners were shocked, scandalized by the lack of respect shown in a student. He stopped still in the centre of the hall, eyes wide, so lost in the thought of the examinations before him as to be absolutely unconscious of having committed a breach of etiquette. Awakening, as it were, from his abstraction, and throwing the cigarette on the floor, he exclaimed :

“ Oh ! I forgot I was in an Academy ! ” Then shame-faced he fled to the corridor to await his turn.

When he was finally questioned he gave such excellent

proof of preparation and cultured knowledge of the language, that the professors were most warm in their praise, and entirely overlooked his first rudeness.

Antonio Beltramelli, another friend, and author of one of the finest books on Mussolini published so far, says : " I always, or nearly always, saw him alone, crossing the square of Forlì, evading the ' portici,' so as not to meet the people who annoyed him. Coat collar turned up, hat down over his eyes, the head bowed. A thick black beard ; the face pale. If by chance he raised his eyes, one could see rising like a great internal light, a will force of granite. Impenetrable eyes ; eyes that could see through us without giving anything of himself. Among his own people as he was, he voluntarily remained a stranger. However, there were times when, caught off his guard, on the pale face signed by virilely firm lines, miracle-like, appeared the smile of a happy child.

" Nineteen years of hard work, unutterable physical and mental suffering ; the responsibility of a nation resting on the broad shoulders, have deepened the firm, virile lines. The black beard has gone the way of beards, and the face is even paler ; sometimes the eyes are hard, violent, yet at rare, unexpected moments, the softening, infantile smile still comes."

## CHAPTER III

### THE PROPHET BEGINS TO FIND HONOUR

**I**T was apparently the calm before the storm, for the tempest was to begin again. Things were being set in motion, but not by his own efforts. For by some strange freak of his character, the wanderer was suddenly tired of fighting and struggling, and had he been left to follow his own desires, he might have settled down at Dovia, or Forli, and been an elementary teacher for the balance of his life. He was passing through a state of lassitude, but the mental lethargy was not the only reason for his resting in Dovia.

His mother was gone, yet he felt the need of being near someone of his own flesh and blood, and his father, who ever since his term in prison had been in poor health, wanted him at home. And—there was a girl.

In a sense he was in love, perhaps he had been for a long time without considering it, for the girl was the little blonde peasant who had come to help at the *osteria*, as well as to do the drudgery when his mother became too ill to take care of the house ; but most of all, she was useful in washing the thick glasses in which the dregs of the rich red wine lingered.

She was a sweet girl, little Rachele Guidi, a good girl, and certainly very different from the brilliant Russians, and particularly Helen M., or the wife of the Sous-Prefet of Annernasse, to whom Benito had become accustomed. She knew nothing of life, for her world was limited to Dovia, and an occasional glimpse of Forli on holidays, as

the great capital of the world ; and the grandest man in the universe was the son of her *padrone*.

Often, when there was nothing for her to do in the *osteria*, she would steal over to the smithy to listen to the father and son discussing some political question. What they said meant nothing to her, other than the pleasure of hearing Benito's voice, so full of light and shade. Many times, among others, she heard the name of Angelica Balabanoff, and even when she learned that the Russian was pitifully ugly, and nothing more to Benito than a political friend, a famous Socialist agitator, she was still jealous, as a woman can be stupidly jealous when she loves, no matter who or what her rival may be.

In Switzerland, Mussolini had become very intimate with Angelica Balabanoff, so much so that he was called a disciple of the Slav terrorist. He and Angelica had at one time been fellow-boarders in one of the innumerable *pensions* in which he had lived. She was the woman who inculcated in him the principles of German Kultur ; and she, without knowing it, prepared him for his rôle of Dictator.

Letters came frequently from Angelica urging Benito to take a definite stand, to do something worth while for the Cause.

Poor little misshapen, hunchbacked "Comrade Balabanoff," as she called herself, was of an extraordinary intelligence—a strange hysterical creature with a flashing mind. She was a monomaniacal idolatress of Karl Marx ; and never attempted to reason things out for herself, the Master's word being sufficient for all her needs. She was impetuous and passionate, spoke in many tongues, and her perorations were marked by the infectious heat that invariably goes with blind faith.

Benito often thought of her, even without a reminding letter, but what could he do then ? And besides there was Rachele



Rachele Guidi loved music, the difficult German classics or the Neapolitan love songs ; all sounded the same to her when Benito played them on his violin. And because he enjoyed watching her enraptured expression, as well as the feeling of the bow in his hand, he played for her very often.

Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast, and music soothed him, for his breast was very savage. Music seemed to reach to the depth of things, and in the sublime heights to which it also carried him, he found a new joy in life, a fortifying strength.

One Sunday, a Socialist deputy was holding a meeting in Dovia ; though Mussolini was a party militant, he did not leave his house to hear the time-worn arguments and stilted phrases of a deputy nobody had ever heard of. How could he, he who had been to conferences where real speakers held the platform ? He stayed at home, and standing by the open window played the violin the whole afternoon. Later, when his friends came over to chide him for not appearing at the meeting, he said : " Socialism is not made by chattering and hackneyed words ! " And he continued his interrupted concert to an audience of one.

When about ready to begin the most intense battle that had ever been sustained for revolutionary Socialism in Italy, in his music he revealed the future movement of the ferocious scourger of the false shepherds of the great masses.

There was a time and place for everything, and Sunday afternoon was not the time for a meeting to be taken seriously. For when in a festive mood, which Sunday, being a day of rest, imposed, a Socialist meeting was out of place. Also, to have gone to the meeting that day would have interrupted his love idyll, as, until the meeting was over, the *osteria* was empty, and Rachele was free to remain with him.

To all outward appearances he was resting in Dovia—it

was a case of the Prodigal Son having come home to be fêted, and to indulge in a rustic flirtation. That was all true, but he was not letting his experiences as an instigator of trouble, or the teachings of Angelica be lost. In Dovia he held secret conferences, and kept the revolutionary spirit in motion.

Little Rachele was falling more and more in love with the serious, wide-eyed man, the world traveller, the man who knew more than all the others in Dovia put together. Perhaps she was less impressed by his book-learning than she was by the fact of his being the *padrone's* son. She was innocent, and she was young, with the fresh beauty that belongs to youth. She was not pretentious enough to expect such a grand, deeply learned man to marry an ignorant girl such as she, nor did she really hope that Benito—everybody called him Benito—would look seriously upon such a humble person. But she did love him, and to her uncultured mind love was the pardon for any sin of the flesh. Being loved by the blacksmith's son, and such a son, she was already raising her station in life.

He was also young, his had been a free life, and among the women with whom he associated intimately there was little thought of marrying and giving in marriage; even if marriage had come in his mind he would not have associated it with the girl who had been working for his father and mother for so long. . . . Still, he was young, and the fire of youth coursed madly through his veins.

Few men in this world toss aside the choice bits when freely offered. Benito Mussolini was not an exception to the rule.

On February 6th, 1909, Mussolini once more left the Romagna, called to Trento as secretary to the Labour Union, and to work in the editorial department of the weekly paper, *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore*.

Though a Socialist in Austria, for Trento was Austrian then, he did not try to hide his political sentiments, traditional in his family, as *irredente*. Therefore it was not long before he was suspected by the Royalist party of the Hapsburg Empire, and the Austrian police as well. His openly aggressive attitude was a preoccupation for the liberal Italian element, and the clerical element also.

He received the large sum of 120 kronen a month as a fixed salary, and he was more than content with his new life and prospects as a journalist, propagandist, and politician. The only thing distasteful was the beer-drinking class for whom he had to hold his propaganda conferences. He gave private lessons in French, and in his free time took lessons on the violin.

From *L'Avvenire* he passed to *Il Popolo*, a Socialist daily edited by Cesare Battisti. As far back as the time he taught school at Tolmezzo, in the beautiful Friuli, Mussolini had been interested in seeing at close range the feeling called forth in his compatriots of the north, by the mutilation of their country. The elbow of the Friuli, when on one side of a foolish little rivulet, was Italian, and on the other it was Austrian; that condition was a constant source of agony to those on the Italian side. (Yet why should it be? Frontiers have to be somewhere, for if they were to be done away with Europe would be all one country. . . . How marvellous, and how difficult to govern!)

At Trento he saw it for himself at close range, and while it was not all milk and honey, he never regretted the chance that had called him to the frontier, thus enabling him to participate in the emotions of the Italians torn from their native land; and also giving him the priceless benefit of coming into close contact with Cesare Battisti, the future hero and martyr, the incarnation of the hopes of the group of *irredenti* who were to strive for the recovery of the lost provinces.



THE WHITE HOUSE, WASHINGTON, D.C.  
The German representative signs the Pact with Italy in 1936



Working on *Il Popolo*, Mussolini took his full share in the movement which was to bear fruit after the war in the restitution of Trento, Trieste, and Pola to Italy.

Cesare Battisti was a famous Socialist, a leader of the Socialists in those Italian provinces under Austrian rule ; but, as such, in ardent opposition to the official Socialist.

Battisti was a keen judge of men, and he recognized at once what a valuable recruit had come to him. From Mussolini's advent, he was to reap the benefit of finding time for his scientific studies of the geography of the Trentino, which are now held in high esteem by serious students of the subject.

Mussolini's work seemed too little to him, so after practising on the violin several hours each day, he began to feel the need of other studies. Indian arithmetic ; with its philosophy and strange formulæ in accordance with geometrical and graphic rules, and Spanish and German literature were settled upon as the most interesting subjects. During the year he composed and printed a thesis, "*Sulla Poesia di Frederigo Klopstock*." Klopstock was an author the least intimately known of all the German writers, and certainly apart from Mussolini no one in Italy, unless it be D'Annunzio, knows of him at all.

Life was moving along most peacefully ; perhaps never since a small boy had Mussolini been so contented. He had a regular salary, and extras made by his teaching ; he was able to supply all his modest needs, and a few luxuries as well—when he made the fatal mistake of voicing quite openly in the paper, a long-cherished sentiment :

*Il confine d' Italia non si ferma al Ala.* (The confines of Italy do not stop at Ala.) Nothing more than that statement was needed for him to have the entire police force down on him. He was arrested by the Imperial police, and immediately expelled "from all the countries and provinces of the Austrian Empire."

And so it came about that after this last parenthesis of life outside the confines of Italy, in October, 1909, Mussolini was once more at Forli. Shortly after his return to the Romagna, a Florentine group of *Il Voce* published a book of his on historical and political ideas picked up during his stay in Austria, *Il Trentino visto da un Socialist*.

"You may beat me, but you will listen to me!"

These were his words when, towards the end of 1909, he took his place at the head of the Socialists in the Romagna. He soon dominated the provincial organization, and with the expression of his power, which he made felt at once, there were fights on every side. He revealed a new type of Socialist, absolutely different from that of the abject and ordinary politician.

He lived in Dovia, walking to Forli and back each day. He gave conferences several times a week at Forli, where he was in constant attendance at the party headquarters. At Dovia, he also reorganized the Socialist party. The antique ideas and way of reasoning of the uneducated peasants, who formed his group in Dovia, irritated him constantly. "Should do—we should do? No! 'Should do' was what had made Italy take her place with Spain as the land of '*domani!*' No!" To one and all he said the same thing:

"It is not that one should do so and so. . . . It is one *that one must!*"

When they stared at him blankly, unable to understand the meaning of the word *must*, still more irritated he would yell:

"I tell you, get it through your blockheads, *not should do! Must, must, must do!* No one has ever got anywhere by putting off until to-morrow, the work to be done to-day. *Should* is to-morrow—*must* is to-day!"

In 1922, just before, and after, the march on Rome, he was teaching exactly the same principles.

His proud, decided, violent way of forcing showed the masses that in Mussolini they had a leader, who while he might be a little mad, knew how to get ahead in the game.

His theory that it is worth while to work day and night without thought of rest, if one is to win, was rather foreign to the rest-loving temperaments. Thus only, by his own example, was he able to prove his right to force his constituents.

To all outward appearances forging ahead, this period still remains the most isolated of all, unless one looks into his present life.

Only in solitude can great problems be thought out to a right solution ; and only in isolation, spiritual and material, could he enlarge his personality, find his method in its minute particulars.

He never consented to put any theatricality into his work in order to get the sympathy of the people ; no concessions were made to the current taste, and the mentality of the crowd, in order to be acclaimed and put on the platform. He was disdainful and rudely severe at the suggestion of a change in his policies in order to draw the people to him.

" Down me if you will, but listen to me you must ! " He was downed more than once, yet there were always those who were ready to listen to him. And never, since the beginning of his political career, has he swerved to the right or to the left.

Those who were not with him were against him, and if they could not change their views and follow him, he had no thought of changing his to accommodate theirs.

He was a lonely man, an apostle of a new régime. He lived with an inward intensity, and in the ardour of a formidable assumed task. He never sought the slightest personal advantage ; demanded nothing for himself. He



wanted, and intended to have, all for "the idea" for which he had made clean his body and soul.

He was rough and sharp-spoken with nearly everybody ; his eyes rarely smiled. He saw too clearly into the distant future then, knew instinctively that his present work, no matter how good or effective it might be, was merely the means to an end ; the tiresome road he had to follow before he could actually find his real self, and the work that was his.

It is said that a man of destiny always knows what is in store for him, what trials he must pass through before reaching his goal. In a sense it must be true, for all those who have some special mission to fulfil seem to have gone in a direct line, without hesitation, to the end. . . . Certainly Mussolini's life has given ample proof of the theory. Other great men in history have begun their work early, the goal always in sight, but none have had more obstacles to overcome than he has, none more humbly born have risen to fame, and no one in the annals of history has ever reached the profoundness of culture and absolute greatness in all branches of public and political life at the same time.

In 1910 he lived tightly closed in his profound passion, too strong within him even to be explained as a doctrine.

He read, and read with avidity, all the most recent publications, especially the French ; and for days after finishing a book, he lived in the thoughts it had aroused.

If the book was strong, powerfully profound, Mussolini let himself be carried away by it, for a short time at least, while the idea it had awakened was still only an idea.

Someone said of him then :

"Mussolini has the ideas of the last book he has read, and a vision of the last woman he has seen."

Neither statement was exactly true. He had little or no time to think of women, for as a matter of fact, women in the abstract had very little interest for him, other than as

beautiful pictures to be looked at, admired, criticized, and forgotten in the next one. He had already been in love several times, as much in love as it was possible for a man of his temperament to be ; he had had many mistresses, but most of his love affairs were of short duration, like his stay in various cities. However, he did have an interest in one woman, a simple, unpretentious woman, who was to be the mother of his child.

And as to his ideas, reading did affect them, as it must every intelligent person, but not to the point of making him a mere mimic of some author. He gave in quickly to an ideological system, as a practical construction ; and quite as easily, even brusquely, gave it up. He would never sacrifice the logic of present facts to a theory—no matter how sublime or venerable.

This, many people believe, is the secret of his political success.

On January 1st, 1910, Mussolini founded and edited *La Lotta di Classe*, a vivacious, polemical paper, compiled almost exclusively by him.

Patient and gentle with his friends, he read all they wrote, and willingly published everything possible in his paper. . . . "The paper belongs to everyone," he often said, "so everyone has a right to contribute to it."

One day in his office, a young lawyer, Gino Giommi, inflicted on Mussolini the reading of a long article. It was a speech for the first of May celebration.

He listened with resigned desolation, then said to Giommi :

"Those are not my ideas, but still it's all right. Somebody has to think out and prepare the speeches. Don't change anything. The whole speech is useless, and much too long, but don't change it, for as you seem to like it, that proves that somebody likes it !"

In private life he talked little, and in public, only when he was forced to by the necessity for propaganda. In this period he was continually preparing himself for a blow from the Republican party, with its potent organization trying to down the Romagna Socialists, the strength of which it already feared.

He lived in poverty with Rachele Guidi and the baby girl, Edda. Rachele, who loved him enough to follow wherever he might lead, never trying to force him to marry her, not even for the child's sake, content to be near, to serve him in his hours of need. They lived as husband and wife, and few there were in their little world who cared or questioned as to whether a few words had been mumbled over them by some town clerk.

Never in those difficult days did she suggest that a ceremony would regulate her position, nor did she even bother to think about it; never did she say a word that could add to the worries he already had; instead she guarded the little money he brought home, spending it with care. She kept the very humble home comfortable and clean, cooked his meagre meals, kept his clothes spotless. She was always ready with a cheerful word, and she knew when not to talk. When he wanted company she was there, her smile a welcome to the tired, distracted man, at no matter what hour he came home.

Often Italian women, regardless of class, love like that, and while they never are blatant in their love, no sacrifice of self is too great to make for the loved one. But not all women are rewarded as Rachele Guidi has been.

Despite the poverty and misery in which they lived, Mussolini refused a rise when it was offered him, so as not to appear to benefit by the organization, like all those who spring up in politics, and make a show on stolen money. Politicians in general he despised.

Adversary of the Reformist opinion, after a congress at

Milan, where he completely downed them, he rendered autonomous the Socialist Federation of Forli from the direction of the party, and through the columns of his paper flung himself vehemently at "the over-fed Socialists of the new era, the so-called intellectuals of the academic positivism who watch with an incommensurable asinine smile all the idealistic attempts." (Already the Mussolini of Fascism.) And he added: "To the honourable, obedient, and resigned types, those who follow the shepherd, and at the first cry of wolves disperse, we prefer the audacious little resolute nucleus, which has given a reason to its faith, knows what it wants, and marches directly to it."

"As to the Official Socialist Party, it is already a grand firm heading towards bankruptcy." That was for the Party; on his own account, he declared: "I am not, and never will be, one of the jugglers of *Montecitorio*" (House of Parliament).

From 1910 his motto was that of the Fascist: *combattere costruendo!* (To fight constructing! Literal translation).

As this is not a political document, it is useless to go into the details of all his campaigns and conferences, or to translate speech after speech, yet some of the steps in his career must be noted, otherwise the story of the man's evolution from Socialist to Fascist is lost. And after all, in telling the story of Mussolini—the man, there would be very little were the politician removed.

In September, 1911, Giolitti, then Prime Minister, organized the military expedition which was sent to Tripoli, to effect the occupation of Libia.

Two years before that, Austria had thrown a spark into the proverbial haystack of the Balkans. The annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina gave the signal for further inroads on the possession of the Sick Man, the spoiling of whom was

to be eventually a terrible cost for Europe. Bismarck, who might have held the Austrian Government in check, was dead, and the Kaiser had evidently forgotten his warning that the whole of Eastern Europe was not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian Grenadier. Germany had encouraged Austria in her territorial aggrandizement, and in order to maintain amicable relations with their ally, the Central Powers had agreed to give Italy a free hand on the Libian coast.

Treves, the editor of *Avanti!* the famous Socialist paper, maintained that it was more than ever necessary to support Giolitti. Only Socialist support could hold Giolitti to a liberal home policy favourable to Socialism, and moderate his ambitions in Africa. If the Socialists were to abandon him, there would be nothing to restrain him, and he would be driven into a colonial policy of extreme reaction. This was the general reasoning in Socialist circles. Bent on vote-catching intrigues and on securing parliamentary influence, Treves was enthusiastic at the thought of serving and supporting his beloved Giolitti.

On the night the troops landed at Tripoli, there was a heated dispute between Treves, Turati, a so-called Socialist, and Anna Kuliscioff, the great Russian who so easily influenced events and dominated men from behind the scenes. The following day *Avanti* came out with a magnificent article in which it was declared that the Socialist party, confronted with the Tripolitan adventure, would go over to uncompromising opposition to the Government. Treves, as was so often the case, confuted his own propositions of the night before.

But the young editor of Forli, who took a very different view of the matter, made himself heard. He dared to show that he had no objections to a war of conquest or colonization which goes formally with the democratic and humanitarian philosophy of reforming Socialists. The expedition

was condemned on principle as an act of violence, and most Socialists were opposed to violence in every form.

A disciple of Angelica Balabanoff, and of the great Blanqui, Nietzsche, and of Sorel ; in short, something of a terrorist, Mussolini, heretic as he was believed to be, felt the superstitious horror of warfare in general. It was really on the ground of political strategy that he disapproved of the Libian adventure.

On September 30th, 1911, he printed the prophetic words :

" Italy initiates to-day a new epoch in her history, an epoch of uncertainty, pregnant with unknown perils. War is nearly always a prelude to revolution."

He had no real intention of opposing the enterprise, but if there was to be any opposition at all, it should be unrestricted and revolutionary in its nature. He personally harboured no illusions as to what could be reckoned from the Italian people. They were not ripe for a revolution. All they could be counted upon was to shout. He proved that, by collecting a crowd to listen to him speak and to cry : *Viva la Rivoluzione !* The crowd vanished at his words as though struck by a cyclone, and when mounted guards arrived to put down the disorder there were only a few stragglers left. *Vigliacchi !* he shouted as they ran helter-skelter.

Backed by a few of the more venturesome spirits, he eventually succeeded in doing enough to incur the disapproval of the authorities, and eight accusations were drawn up against him.

Each one of the charges would have been sufficient to put him in prison ; summed up, they warranted a considerable term.

On November 18th, 1911, handcuffed, Mussolini, along with several other prisoners, was brought before the Court. His defence was a long and very elaborate one, and set a

number of the jurymen, as well as the Judge, thinking. Never before in the annals of the Court had such a speech been heard.

He ended his defence :

" When I declare myself in favour of vandalism, I mean in accordance with my theories of economic vandalism, which is not to be confused with barbarity. I condemn the placing of a pole across the railway tracks with a view of derailing a train, even though I have been accused of doing it, because the train which was to pass was neutral. Vandalism, according to my theory, should have a moral bearing."

He declared that his speech made at a public meeting on September 25th had been historical, geographical, and illustrative. He also explained that the Nationalists wanted a vast Italy, while the Socialists were for an Italy well cultivated, rich, and free. And he concluded :

" If you acquit me, I shall be pleased ; if you condemn me, I shall be honoured."

He was sentenced to one year in prison.

To a friend who deplored the sentence in his presence, Mussolini turned and said roughly :

" If you sympathize with me, I'll break your face ! Go out in the highways and byways, and tell the people that the enterprise is calculated to injure the interests of the Nation, with which the interests of the proletariat are indissolubly bound up. Tell them that I, we, want an Italy that will be in a condition to fulfil the recognized duty of freeing her children from economic and moral impoverishment—and that we're going to have what we want ! "

Then he was put under lock and key.

In February, 1912, the Court of Appeal of Bologna reduced Mussolini's term from one year to five months of seclusion, which he had already served.

For five months he had cooled his heels and ardour in a

miserable prison cell ; but it was not enough to make a martyr of him, though this term—coming as it did on top of other periods of imprisonment—was sufficiently hard to bear. In order to pass the time, he wrote a study on John Huss.

During the period that Mussolini was in prison, the little family, unwillingly deserted, had great difficulty in managing to exist. The prisoner had many friends who might have helped Rachele Guidi in her struggle, if she had had the courage to ask them. Among the near neighbours there were kindly souls who found some little remunerative work for her to do, but even with that there were many days when the mother went without food in order to give the child enough to eat.

Poor little Rachele ! She was very unhappy then, feeling that it was an everlasting disgrace for her beloved Benito to be in prison ; for to her way of thinking, prison was prison, and whether the crime was theft or political beliefs, the sentence stood for the same thing.

Free once more, Mussolini began to look about for a new field of action. His father having died in 1910, there was no longer a home tie or a real reason for remaining in the Romagna. In fact, Forli was a continual reminder of his loss, for every stick and shrub suggested his father to him. He was a rolling stone, and like all rolling stones he had not had time to gather moss ; but he intended to gather a great deal, and therefore he wanted to settle in some place where he could have a position with a future.

The first thing he did was to throw himself head first into the two Socialist congresses of Reggio Emilia and of Ancona. In the first, he made them expel the exponents of reform ; this step called him to the direction of the Socialist party. In the second, he sustained the incompatibility of the Socialists with the Masons. That drastic move was to put a good many machines in motion.



He lived then as best he could on the little money he was able to earn by making odd speeches in public, and writing newspaper articles ; but at best it was a trying, precarious existence. Necessarily he dressed badly, as in fact he had done all his life. He owned one shabby, very shabby suit ; a strange sort of cassock, called a *zimarra*, served as a top-coat ; a once black bowler, a pair of many times soled shoes, and a couple of cheap shirts constituted his wardrobe. But his appearance did not bother him ; enough that the healthy young body under the old clothes was clean. He had an absolute mania for personal cleanliness, super-induced by the forced uncleanness of his various terms in prison. Even on the coldest mornings, in a room devoid of all comforts or even lightly heated, he permitted himself the luxury of a small pitcher of hot water, left over from what had been boiled for the coffee, and under the greatest disadvantages he succeeded in scrubbing his body as well as his face.

Like a lost soul he wandered about the streets all day, for, not having any fixed hours for work, he was afraid that if he stayed at home he might get into lazy habits. He wanted to work, to use to the full both mind and body. And he wanted to be alone. In the one room which he called home he could never get away from the chattering of the child, nor the low crooning voice of the mother, trying to keep the child quiet, and by her noticeable effort disturbing him more than if she had been making a noise. The fact that they irritated him did not mean that he loved them less—if anything he loved them more ; but the forced silence of a woman and a child left him no place to think, while when he was outside the noises of the street passed unheard. In a crowd he could always be alone and free to think out even deep problems.

In his tenacious desire for something big, something grand, there was the exasperation of incontestable strength.

Only a few weeks after the congresses of Reggio Emilia and Ancona, the official heads of the party gave proof of having recognized Mussolini's capacity to conduct and to win the most severe battles by offering him the position of editor of the most important Socialist organ, the daily paper, *Avanti*.

What was he to do? At first he hesitated, asked advice of all his friends, naturally without heeding it at all. He was going towards his fortune, he felt sure of that, and still he hesitated. It would mean an end to his life of misery and absolute poverty. What was he to do?

He was still young to be the leader of a political party; that, at that time, was one day up and down the next. He had no illusions as to the glory of the new position, nor even personal vanity to satisfy. And in his heart he did not believe that this move would mean the complete systematization of his life.

Somehow, those deep mysterious eyes of his saw beyond the newspaper office at Milan, saw greater possibilities there than merely being an editor was supposed to offer. Yet he hesitated.

If he accepted the position would he still have the freedom of thought necessary for progress? Or would he be like a prisoner barricaded by the impregnable party dogmas? Would he not be made smaller in his own eyes, and before his own convictions be a diminished thing? His open loyalty and his courage as well, in the years to come, might they not be put to better advantage, if he remained free?

He had been a dreamer of great dreams for years, but in none of his dreams had he been held down by the opinions of others. Neither the individual nor the masses had been able to change him, in his dreams. And if in reality——?

He walked out to Dovia. By the side of his special little rivulet he paused in lonely contemplation of the situation. At his mother's grave, in the silent city of the dead, he

questioned his heart to find the why and wherefore of the case. He walked back to Forli still undecided.

At the Café Prati, his regular haunt, he drank the usual cup of hot milk, which generally composed his evening meal. The solution came with a shrug of the broad shoulders, a resigned gesture of the fine small hands. He accepted.

While making the necessary arrangements to leave Forli he was plunged into a sadness from which music alone had the power to lift him. Why he should be sad he could not explain, even if he had tried to. One night, while walking with a friend in the silence, under the starlit sky, he paused at the Porta Cotogna, and made a sign for his friend to stop. A soft breeze stirred the bare branches of the trees in the Public Gardens; a gentle breath of air, almost like a human sigh came to them.

"I would like," said Benito, "to be a great musician, a great composer, so as to be able to blend all the voices and all the palpitations of the universe in one marvellous canto, one hymn." A long silence, then his eyes illuminated by a strange inward light: "Why, oh why, am I not a real musician?"

Another time the same friend found him one sunny afternoon (not sunny for the friend, who was without money and had not eaten for two days), seated before the Café Prati, intently sipping a cup of hot milk. Mussolini invited his friend to sit down at his table, took one penetrating look at him, called the waiter, and ordered another cup of milk.

"Drink it," he said abruptly, "it will do you good."

It was unnecessary to insist. At a gulp the cup was emptied, then Mussolini got up, paid for his friend's milk with the last sou he had, and smilingly said:

"Come along with me! We'll go over to my house, and I'll let you hear a magnificent piece on the violin."

He hated what is known as society, but he readily opened his heart to a congenial soul, and he had the ability to divine another's needs.

They walked through the bright sunshine to the modest house, where in one humble room he lived and had his being.

Rachele and the baby were out, so he told his friend to sit by the open window, and taking his violin from its shabby case, he carefully tuned it, then standing where a ray of sunshine fell across the instrument, he played a fragment of Beethoven's 9th Symphony.

Under his agile fingers the passionate notes burst forth, filling the little room with sobs of joy and sorrow, laughter and tears.

The politician, the man struggling for an idea, was lost in the musician, the artist, exalted, enraptured by his playing. The very air was pregnant with hope and joy. Joy radiated from him, and suddenly he had communicated his own joy to his friend, who, only an hour before, had been on the verge of suicide.

He who had known the pangs of hunger, instantly recognized the famished look in others. He who had needed consolation, knew how to console others.

The last days in Forlì he dashed through the streets as though running away from disaster; shoulders thrown back, eyes flashing, his hat at a rakish angle. The old *zimarra* which he clung fondly to, gave a strange originality to his whole appearance. He had deliberately assumed an outward fierceness, no doubt to cover the ache in his heart at the thought of leaving for always the home of his childhood, the home and last resting-place of his parents, the scene of so many of his struggles. Yet, despite the ferociousness of his appearance and manner, he had moments of exquisite sweetness.

The last evening in Forlì he bid all his friends farewell

at the Café Prati. Then with an intimate, arm in arm, he walked silently about the deserted streets until well into the night. When they were at last chilled to the bone, for the weather was very cold, he took his friend home. At the door they stood in silence, then Benito said :

"Thank you for keeping me company in the cold. Thank you for understanding my need of companionship—and—silence. In the knowledge of your sincere friendship my lonely soul has expanded, and I am better—better able to go forth on my new mission, stronger to face the future, no matter what it may have in store for me." Suddenly he kissed the man on both cheeks, and disappeared into the dense darkness.

In December, 1912, the little family was installed at Milan, and Mussolini began his work as editor of the *Avanti!*

According to the mystic Pythagoras, who flourished about 580-570 B.C. and whose Quaballah is applied by many of the present-day students of numerology, the name Benito Mussolini signifies : Wisdom, Solidity, Strength, Power, Protection, and Justice.

And there are those who do not believe in the Science of Numbers, or that a name signifies anything in particular. As editor of the daily paper, organ of the Socialist party, Benito Mussolini was to show that there was something in *his* name, and that behind the name there was a powerful force with which the world had to reckon.

## CHAPTER IV

"*AVANTI, SEMPRE AVANTI!*"

"*A***VANTI, sempre avanti!**" (Forward, always forward!) was the password for those who came in contact with Mussolini during his early days in Milan.

The savage fighter, careless in his dress, misanthrope and disdainful, changed in appearance. The great metropolis of Lombardy, and the importance of his new work, corrected many exterior faults. He did not exactly try to be elegant, but he acquired a slightly different bearing. The old *zimarra* was reluctantly relegated to the archives, and a real topcoat bought with some of the first month's pay.

A new era in his life began, and while he went tranquilly on the even tenor of his way, towards the period in which he was to stand absolutely alone—a unique figure in the history of Italy—he still had much to overcome, many systems to overthrow.

He had not come to Milan and the *Avanti!* with submissive propositions. They had to follow him, believing in his ideas and principles, or he would leave the paper, and even the party.

"Believe me, and follow me," was always his rule, and still is.

He never has made it a practice to seek out the servile, or to train slaves; rather has he searched for men who could live in the ardour and spirit in which he lives.

Through him the revolutionary section of the party was

taken over to the direction of the party itself. The Reformists were completely beaten. The party was in his hands ready for reorganization. Under Treves' direction the *Avanti!* had had a circulation of about forty thousand. In a short time Mussolini had brought it up to a hundred thousand, which was exceptional for an Italian paper.

As far back as 1912, Georges Sorel, in the following words, had prophesied that Mussolini would be Duce of the Imperial Italy. "Our Mussolini is not an ordinary Socialist. Believe me, you will one day see him at the head of a sacred battalion, with his sword saluting the Italian flag. He is an Italian of the fifteenth century, a '*condottiero*.' Perhaps it is not yet known, but he is the only energetic man capable of repairing the Government's weakness."

So it was not only astrologers and fortune-tellers who were predicting a future for the very simple man who, though not yet thirty years old, had been made head of a strong political party, and editor of an equally noticeable daily paper. Many there were who believed in him then, and there were many who already hated him.

Among those who believed most ardently in Mussolini, and rejoiced in his new position as a means of working him into power, was the famous Russian terrorist, Angelica Balabanoff. Forcing herself upon him as she had been trying to do for years, she hardly allowed him time to settle in Milan, before she presented her card and self at his office, unable to find his residence.

He was out, at least to her, not being in a mood for recriminations and revolutionary chatter. Nobody could or would give her his home address, so she bombarded the office with letters, until in order to get rid of her, he received her.

She had been travelling all about Italy, always accompanied by one or more lovers; for ugly as she was, she

boasted that she never lacked partners on her propaganda expeditions—her one rage was that she had never been able to convince Benito Mussolini of the use of taking a trip with her.

Angelica was extremely learned, with a formidable range in the field of philosophy, sociology, and economics. Mussolini believed that she would be a considerable help in his strenuous literary work; and as she had imposed herself on him, he decided to make use of her by handing over the less important subjects for her to work on. At his suggestion she was eventually made Associate editor of the *Avanti!*

Despite her intelligence, Angelica was completely lacking in culture. She had no assimilation of knowledge through criticism and reflection. She was a woman with one idea; no matter where she was, or what happened, she kept to the Left. She had no sense of humour, nor beauty, nor had she even a bowing acquaintance with the sanitary uses of water.

There were frequently clashes of temperament between them, and fierce feuds. He was never active or revolutionary enough for her. Often over some comment of his or hers, would they have a terrible fight. Then for days, or even weeks, they would not speak. Their communications during these silent periods were entirely by letter, often very sharp and spicy. She wrote: "Your remarks were not vigorous enough. You should have heavily emphasized the victory of the Extremists at the Congress. Wake up!" To which he replied: "Don't interfere with things you know nothing about! Push ahead with your own work, and leave mine alone!"

After many months of such fights, in which sparks and curses flew in every direction, he discharged her.

After that, as much to show him as for any other reason, Comrade Balabanoff became an important personage



in Italian Socialism, and she never tired of denouncing him as the hired assassin of the bourgeoisie. Finally expelled for anti-militarist propaganda by the stupidly patient Italian Government of 1913, she founded, with Lenin and Trotzky, one of the groups of exiled Russian Revolutionaries who traversed Germany on a special train provided by the Kaiser, so that they might go and prove a thorn in the side of the still patient Kerensky. They overthrew him, and Angelica became a truly great person, riding about in official automobiles; her deformed little body reclining upon cushions which had once belonged to no less a person than the Tsarina. In 1924 she was expelled from Russia as a dangerous anti-Revolutionary!

Mussolini continued his work of reorganization, by his youthful enthusiasm bringing the masses completely to his way of thinking, so that a word from him at any time would have started a revolution—which was the last thing he wanted—*then*.

To his adversaries Benito Mussolini, the young Editor of the *Avanti!* remained an enigma. "Is he insane?" they asked each other. "Has he lost his head, or become giddy from standing on the heights of his new success?"

And somehow he managed to keep them all guessing. Even those who worked near and with him, understood as little of the real man as his adversaries did. His real friends still less. Enemies and friends alike watched him with the greatest interest, approving or disapproving, and through it all he went straight ahead, gaining in power day by day.

Following Father Coué's method, he could have said: "Every day, and in every way, I am getting greater and greater." Perhaps he did resort to Coué, but he has never confided to anyone the exact system he used to arrive where he is to-day.

In Milan he had set foot in one of the most ungrateful and niggardly groups of all Italy. He was paid a miserable wage, about enough for a dog to live on, but absolutely inadequate for three human beings. His directors were stingy, covetous, greedy, despicable, capable of slandering all those who fell into their net. With the excuse that Socialism was poor, and obliged to fight the middle classes, as well as landed proprietors, they gave salaries that made one shudder.

It is said that in the Socialist administration there were people who demanded practically everything for nothing. According to the administration, to work for the *Avanti!* was an honour, and a rising young Socialist such as Mussolini should not have material needs when surrounded by so much glory!

Poor Benito, he had hardly sufficient money for food, for besides himself there were always the two others, and already another baby was expected. His entire fortune amounted to 500 lire a month, while the editors of other papers flourished on 12, 15, 20, and even 25,000 lire a year. Even Treves, his predecessor, had been paid 700 lire a month; but Treves was an older man, and a more experienced editor; and even though the circulation of the *Avanti!* was double what it had been under Treves, Mussolini's salary remained less.

There were certain social demands upon the life of a newspaper editor which entailed extra expenses, usually met by the paper. Not so with the *Avanti!* Not possessing either dress clothes, or a dinner jacket, Mussolini was frequently put in the embarrassing position of having to refuse invitations that would have been to his advantage both as Socialist and journalist.

Once the poor man had the imprudence to have his teeth cleaned. He was presented with a bill for fifty lire. Merciful Heavens! He had only twenty-five in his pocket, or in

the world. Mortified beyond words, and inwardly irritated and resentful, he scurried about to find the money to pay the balance of his bill. A friend might have loaned him twenty-five lire to buy food for his starving family, but to pay an outraged dentist! And the dentist was inexorable.

There is no doubt that he tried very hard to make both ends meet, but there are certain natures which can never renounce cherished habits while they have a penny in hand. Mussolini was one of these: he had certain extravagances that continually emptied his pockets of the money that should have gone to pay the gas bill, or to buy a pair of shoes for his small daughter, a hat for himself—not to mention a dress for his wife, for gentle little Rachele Guidi was known in Milan as the Signora Mussolini.

One memorable day, when he was in the humour to buy something artistic, he discovered a plaster bust of Dante. "Perfect!" he exclaimed. "What home could be complete without a portrait of Dante, the man who wrote the Italian language!" He bought the treasure at once, and took it to his friend Paolo Valera. "Keep it," he said magnanimously, as he handed the bust over to Valera, "I'll perhaps come to get it someday, but in the meanwhile you might as well enjoy it!" It is still where he left it, and, according to Signor Valera, in a rather pitiful state.

Then he had the habit of stopping to peer into the windows of all the bookshops, and being able to read in three languages, there was always something on exhibition to tempt him. He might stay for minutes, or hours, his face glued to the pane, studying the titles, wondering what was inside, and trying to settle in his mind whether the books he wanted were really worth buying. Surreptitiously, he would count the money in his pockets, then dash into

the shop to pore over the coveted volumes. The result was sure to be disastrous. At least once a week he would go home or to his office with twenty to thirty lire less than he should have had ; but he carried a neat package under his arm. Until the books had been devoured he would not even glance in a window again.

With something interesting to read, something new to think about, he plunged himself into long periods of silence, when, if his friends saw him at all, he was distracted, taciturn.

He edited the *Avanti!* with a small and inefficient staff, and the outside contributors were mediocre ; therefore most of the work of writing the necessary articles and fill-ups fell upon him. The printing was practically the only thing they did not ask him to do !

The reason for the deficiency was financial penury. The editor was being forced to get along as best he could, to read every foreign paper that came into the office, and also to listen to the news brought in by Angelica Balabanoff. He somehow managed to know pretty well what was going on about them, but it still remained difficult to write meaty articles on second-hand matter. He could not, no matter how hard he worked, be chief reporter, as well as editor-in-chief. The foreign political notes were also slightly neglected, as the one correspondent, Alessandri, in Paris, had too vast a territory to cover : Great Britain, the United States, France, and the Colonies.

It would have taken millions to make the *Avanti!* the equal of the *Secolo*, or the *Corriere della Sera*, the best dailies in Italy. Benito Mussolini had no money, yet it was not the penury that disgusted him so much as the people who enforced it. Better days were coming for him, and for those who worked for him ; he was convinced of that, quite as much as he had been convinced of his own future when he was an errand boy in Lausanne ; even when

begging for his daily bread, he had mentally put the present from him, looking hopefully towards the future.

The slackness which characterized the pre-war life of Italy was repugnant to Mussolini's mind. He had seen how the labouring people work in other countries, and he wanted the Italians to do the same ; he knew that in order to make people work he must set them an example. So as to show himself a worker who never slacked, in the intervals when he managed to be free from the paper, he gave conferences, which as well as filling his spare time helped him financially, and also enabled him to make the acquaintance of many useful people. The party was badly provided with intellectual lecturers ; in fact, there were no trained orators nor University men beside Mussolini. All summed up, he was not a brilliant speaker, nor in fact is he now. He had his subject well in hand, as his thoughts are absolutely neat, and he put it plainly and with conviction before his public. His speeches, like his writings, were not always polished, fanciful or brilliant, but they were concise—no waste of flowery phrases ever appeared in any of his political speeches or writings. His action is direct—was, and probably always will be. In his writing there is the irresistible spell of the man who has something to say.

At the time that Mussolini took over the editorial direction of the *Avanti !* there were grave troubles taking place in Southern Italy, where everything lagged behind the progressive north. Men in the south were still struggling against starvation wages, striving to rise above squalor and misery. The Socialist leaders had not had time to care for the poor, ignorant agricultural Italy where there were no factories with workers to organize, wages to raise, parliamentary seats to win. The southern landowners could not conceive of others than the Pope, Governor, soldiers or police, to defend them, or help them to fight their battles.

On one hand there was ignorance, haughtiness, and cupidity; on the other ignorance, exasperation, fanaticism. With the madness of desperation the masses came forth and threw themselves on the soldiers. Result: shots, cries, and shouts—the Square red with blood.

In January, 1913, Mussolini wrote in the *Avanti!* referring to an exceptionally violent affray of this kind. "Is it, then, possible that in the Italy which we think of as a great paragon of all that is civilized, unarmed old men are being shot in the public square, and pregnant women and babies are being destroyed? And that when the poor of Roccagorga appeal for drainage, medical aid, water, and light, the Government which has no money for such things sends armed police there to down the people's protest in blood! The day will surely come when the mob will itself impose a check, reacting against homicidal violence, avenging, not merely metaphorically, nor with ballot papers, their dead, their massacred, and the cruel mockery of the lying Government and the conniving judiciary."

And still later:

"We have deplored the blindness of the dominating classes, who, instead of foreseeing and preventing, merely repress. And we have said that it was necessary to bring rural Italy (the thousands of Roccagorgas scattered about throughout our peninsula) to more human conditions of life; that is to say, to reduce to the minimum the special causes of that which we have been wont to call the 'classical Italian massacre' because it dealt out to, and has always been dealt out to, unarmed crowds which rise in revolt not to overthrow the Governments, but to obtain that which for more than a century has been the patrimony of all civilized countries. . . . Therefore, we point out to the ruling classes of Italy their definite duty. At the base this work of ours, which seems to official eyes a work of negation merely, is in reality most valuable in so far as it spurs on

the Government to take thought of the morrow. If the Government cannot do so, or does not know how to do so, so much the worse for it and all concerned ! ”

At that time he spoke as a Socialist through the Socialist organ, but it was the individual, the patriotic Italian wounded in his natural pride, wounded as only a real man and a patriot one can be. Eleven years later, he was to show himself the same man, the same Italian.

The editor of the *Avanti!* indulged in no flowery language, he did not speak of liberty and oppression, instead he merely asked for doctors, drainage, water, and light for those in need of the simple health conditions of life, which were what the people of Roccagorga wanted the Government to give them. They did not want to upset the Government ; therefore Mussolini asserted their right to resort to arms, if necessary, their right to kill before they themselves were killed by disease.

In the spring of 1914, Mussolini and his associates of the *Avanti!* were put on trial in Milan for their actions regarding the Roccagorga incident. Margherita Sarfatti was present at the trial, and she has ably recorded Mussolini's speech in court.

“ I feel no regret,” he said, “ and I shall never feel regret at having written those articles after the telegram brought me news of the events taking place in the south. It was my desire that the unfortunate people of Roccagorga should realize that, side by side with them, unfortunate Italians that they were, there lived other Italians who understood their misery. And I would like the social significance of this discussion to be taken to heart alike by those in Italy who govern, and by those in Italy who allow themselves to be governed.”

Then Mussolini proceeded to appeal to the jury to acquit the manager of the *Avanti!* taking the entire responsibility



THE MAN AT HOME, WITH HIS TWO SMALL SONS, VITTORIO  
AND BRUNO

VITTORIO AND BRUNO MUSSOLINI AT THE FARM AT FORLÌ





for its articles upon himself. “All the thunderbolts of the law ought to fall upon my head ! Not only am I guilty of the crime, but I am a decidivist, and I will probably commit the same crime again—in fact, it will almost be a point of honour for me to do so. Prison life is not intolerable—the Russian proverb says that a man to be complete should spend four years in a public school, one at a University, and two in prison.” And he concluded : “ I will make a suggestion which I should not submit to a bench of magistrates in their robes, for they could not be expected to be intelligent men—or, at least, intelligent and unprejudiced enough to take the truth and full beauty of affirmations which may seem paradoxical. I will say that you ought to acquit us, not because we have not committed the offence, but because we *have* committed it, and because we promise to commit it again ! Imagine an Italy in which thirty-six millions of citizens should all think in the same way, as though their brains were all cast in the same moulds ! You would have a madhouse, or rather a realm of utter boredom and imbecility. The King himself, faced by thirty-six millions of monarchists, would feel the need of insisting upon the existence of a Republic. It is necessary that side by side with those who cry No ! No ! there be those who cry, Yes ! Yes !—side by side with those who exalt the army, those who decry it—side by side with those who acclaim our bourgeois society, those who would fain demolish it.

“ What we most stand in need of are dissensions, clashes of view, strife. Unanimity, uniformity, spell brainlessness and death. Gentlemen of the Jury, render homage to the ancient philosopher Heraclitus, who declared : ‘ Strife is the origin of all things.’ Then allow us to go on with our strife, give us freedom for this, and you will render homage to a great philosopher and to a very great principle—the principle of Freedom ! ”

It was a long harangue, but sufficiently dramatic to, in a

certain sense, convince the Jury. The directors of the *Avanti !* returned to their interrupted work.

Despite all the editorial work, conferences, and even various calls to the law court, Mussolini lived the isolated life customary to him at all stages of his career. The ordinary Socialist gatherings had little attraction for him, and he never believed in burdening himself with purposeless social ties. "Better be on with a new work than off with an old friend," was one of his sayings, when chided for keeping too much to himself. "When you don't see me, I'm working ; when I sit about in a café I'm only wearing out the seat of my trousers for nothing . . . and trousers are expensive luxuries. Working, I may also be wearing them out, but at least I get paid for doing it !"

As a proof of his continual work, he founded a weekly review, serious and lively, called *Utopia*, after the famous work of Sir Thomas More.

He really enjoyed editing this review, and took the interest seriously to heart. When anyone brought him ten lire to pay for a year's subscription and asked for a receipt, he generally replied rather rudely : "Receipt ? What good's a receipt ? If the magazine comes out, you'll get it, if you don't get it, it hasn't come out—in either case a receipt won't do you any good—and I haven't any receipt forms ! The magazine is in my head ; I'm doing it all alone, and there's not going to be any bureaucracy about the way it's done !"

He would not descend to preliminary announcements as to the illustrious personages to be among his contributors, as is the custom with new magazines. He claimed the paper would speak for itself. Thirteen years ago he did not believe in publicity, the nauseous publicity of post-war time.

In one of the early issues of the little review, all its aims were set forth by Mussolini under the heading, "The Desperate Adventure."

"Here," he wrote, "I am able to talk in the first person singular. Elsewhere I stand for the collective view of a party—a view which may be, and always is my view. Here, I stand for my own personal view, and I do not have to trouble whether it agrees or not with the average view of the party.

"Is it true that Socialism is, from the standpoint of the ideologist, a worn-out thing? Is it true that Socialism cannot lead to any new truth? Is it possible to give a soul back to this body? A will to this mass? A new meaning to this dim faith? I have replied 'yes' to all these questions; but I have never honestly cherished the illusion of being equal, alone and unaided, to such an enterprise, which, if not a desperate one, is certainly arduous. And therefore, I have decided, at my own risk and peril, to offer to Italian Socialists—to those who study, and who think, the means of studying Socialism, and thinking it out anew."

Then Mussolini proceeded to analyse and reflect, as only he knows how to analyse and reflect, upon the whole theory of Socialism in general, and the teachings of Marx in particular. It was quite a remarkable essay, and if it has not already been, it should be preserved for all students of European history. And it was an essay which he might have written ten years later when his Socialist paper, organ of the party, had become Fascist.

The Fascism of to-day is nothing more startling (for those who do not know anything of it) than a realization of the Revolutionary-Socialism of the pre-war period.

The prologue to the world war in Italy only came in June, 1914, and was known as the Red Week, and so far as revolutions go it ended in failure. Revolutions always succeed so completely that the opponents deny, and even friends question there having been a revolution, or they end in failure. The Red Week from June 7th to 14th, was

accompanied by affrays which were violent and sanguinary enough, though a little like *opéra-bouffe* seen in the light of later events.

In Milan, Turin, and Bologna, and in all the other great cities of Italy, except to some extent in Florence and Rome, the revolution was restricted to a general strike, which was kept going a long time and with much excitement. But in the real revolutionary regions: Ancona, Rimini, Forli, and Ravenna—in fact all over the Romagna and the Marche—improvised committees of action took the reins of power. But the vast preparation needed for a revolution was lacking, the strategic plan did not exist, and above all, the men necessary to a success were missing.

In the Romagna, cities and towns remained for days in the hands of the committees waiting for the Republic to be proclaimed in Rome, or in Milan. And while waiting, farms were being sacked, poultry and cattle stolen, and things made generally unpleasant.

The few soldiers in garrison at Forli, Ravenna, Rimini, and Ancona were held in their barracks; the police were also put under lock and key. The civil authorities had mysteriously disappeared with the military; and there were none to take their places.

The Labour Union was badly managed, the heads being men unequal to the great work. And there were many ridiculous and pitiful episodes.

It was not permitted to pass through the city streets, or to drive about the country, without a permit from the Republican or Socialist parties. It was all so amateurish that many of the would-be brutal acts became farcical, the pettiness of which was not, however, laughable. Many of the same type of acts were to be repeated in Italy from 1920 to 1922.

For example:

An Englishwoman arrived in her car at Forli, from

Florence. Not having a permit, she was taken through waves of angry people brandishing sticks, umbrellas, and fists at her, to the door of the Chamber of Labour. The woman did not speak Italian, and knew nothing of what was taking place. They continued to ask her for her permit, and she continued to explain in a language that no one, not even her chauffeur, understood.

Fortunately for the woman, someone began to jest about the affair ; so instead of sequestering the automobile, and taking her prisoner, the crowd was placated, and after a lengthy discussion, and still more lengthy consideration, the Chamber of Labour gave her a card permitting her to circulate freely in the revolutionary territory. To show their disdain and contempt for a rich foreigner, when the automobile finally departed, the crowds yelled, whistled, and swore after it until it was out of sight.

While the cities were practically deserted, the country was overrun with sequestered vehicles of every sort : automobiles, bicycles, autocars, etc. They all carried the red flag, and tore over the roads at a fantastic speed, firing revolvers, and in general terrorizing the tranquil country people.

The men and women working in the fields would stop in fear, and gazing after a line of dust which the automobile had stirred up on the road, exclaim :

" It's the revolution passing ! " And no doubt they offered thanks to the Virgin for the passing.

Near Ravenna, the brave revolutionists waited at a bridge ready to stop all automobiles not flying the red flag. Many were detained for several hours, and robbed of whatever valuables the occupants happened to possess.

In another town, a General and several officers were taken prisoners, conducted through the principal streets in their automobile, and placed in custody for several hours, the gay company driving about in the official car, whilst a

laundress rinsing her clothes in the river took the opportunity to declare her liberty by throwing her wooden *sabots* at the prisoners. Not succeeding in her noble attempt to hurt them, she closed the incident by launching the coarsest and most vulgar words in her vocabulary at the General through a spy-hole in the door of the shed in which they had put him.

In a nearby town, a troupe of destroyers went into a church and began firing at the sacred images, and committing the most obscene actions in all parts of the edifice.

In still another city, a crowd of young men and women forced a priest to strip to the skin, presented him with a cornet, and conducting him to the centre of the street, made him head the procession in the primitive costume, playing the cornet.

*En masse* they entered quiet and peaceful homes, taking any food they found, even to the midday meal simmering on the stove in a poor home. If they did not consider the food they found good enough for them, it was thrown into the streets.

All over the country lists were being made of the homes of the despised upper classes that were to be burned—and while planning to destroy the rich, the poor were suffering. Committees were formed to begin action against the hated landowners.

But on the third day, word went about that the cavalry was arriving, so instead of beginning their burning of houses, the revolutionaries contented themselves with stealing poultry and destroying a few more church doors.

People with mysterious orders came and went in automobiles. In the country there was great consternation and a prodigious fear: everywhere a fearful sense of waiting and complete disorder.

What in the world was going on? Was there really fighting somewhere? And what had been done with the

innumerable members of the House of Savoia? What would eventually become of the King and Queen?

From Ancona and all of the Marche, extravagant information poured in to the smaller cities.

All the rich people had disappeared, so the information stated. The Republicans and Socialists had joined hands, and were genially discussing the situation; the populace yelled with joy, cursed, and drank quantities of red wine, stolen, or paid for with stolen money.

Mussolini, as editor of the *Avanti!* called for a truce. He asserted boldly, as he had done in advance, that a general strike did not seem to him, and had never seemed to him, calculated to attain the objects immediately desired. It was not likely to achieve anything tangible; and it would only keep alive the revolutionary spirit and habituate the people to danger, make them realize what danger was, and make them welcome it. He also derided the tame Socialism which was ready to dispense with anything revolutionary for fear of failure.

He gave forth his ideas with courage and conviction, showing that whether they were true or false he himself believed in them. He had the habit of practising what he preached; and when he ordered: "Citizens of Milan! go into the public squares! Socialists! to the Piazza del Duomo!" he himself fearlessly led the way. He was among the first to arrive there, and the last to go away. Unheeding the cavalry charges, he remained in the midst of the fray, erect, motionless, his arms folded in an attitude of absolute calm, eyes ablaze, as he hurled forth his invectives.

Until Mussolini's time the Italian Socialist leaders had been men of learning who stood in dread of tumults; and only duty ever forced them to face a committee. They disapproved, from force of habit, of everything new in the nature of agitation. This new leader was showing himself



a man of action, a soldier, a fighter. A leader who was ready to take the lead, was something beyond their comprehension. But—they let him go ahead, for the time being.

And, if anything, his faith in himself became stronger, thus inadvertently preparing him for the tremendous fight ahead.

"If," he said, "I did not know that I was surrounded by a thick wall of love and hatred, life would be intolerable for me, other than as a duty."

The Red Week over, Mussolini found his relations with the party slightly strained.

And while the harmless operetta was being performed in Italy, at Serajevo the act of violence which was to plunge the world into war occurred. Without any warning the European conflagration burst forth.

The Italian Socialist party closed itself in a suicidal form of the most absolute neutrality, and in consequence acted stupidly by failing to consider the tremendousness of the event. In a war of nations and races, the nations and races must deny each other.

At the beginning, Mussolini was with the party, and his articles struck a note of resolution that was followed for some time. . . . Italy must be neutral!

And eventually the easily influenced Government proceeded to proclaim Italy's neutrality. It was so simple to do that. Thus the summer vacations of the Government workers would not be unnecessarily delayed.

On September 7th, it was decided at Fiuggi, where many of the Ministers were taking the "cure," that the situation was dangerous, in that Italy was absolutely unprepared for war, and that an armed neutrality would be a reasonably safe neutrality.

Belgium had entered the war, and the *Avanti!* highly approved and applauded the Belgian Socialists' decision to

take up arms against the "mad and criminal" exhibition of Prussian and Pan-German militarism.

Benito Mussolini considered the situation coldly, using all his own special logic. War and Socialism were, in his eyes, "anti-theatrical and irreconcilable." It was important not to evoke a state of mind which was full of danger, but to look realities in the face and not to cherish illusions.

Be it remembered that Mussolini was, to all intents and purposes, a Socialist, but more than a Socialist he was a true politician, and a patriotic Italian. Whatever he professed, wrote, and spoke about, from the very beginning of the European war, his political intuition advised him that Italy could not remain impassive in the war without fatally diminishing herself as a nation.

Italy, remaining neutral, would naturally fall into a more or less masked slavery. One knows how the Treaty and the Pact are respected by the great nations, when they feel their strength. And to trust in the kindness of the victorious?

Sentiment is not a political affair, and he is foolish who invokes it in his relations with the people. They do not need mitigation, but a sound and decided resolution.

In September, 1914, the Socialist party in Milan held a conference to consider the great problem. Was it to be absolute neutrality or relative neutrality? Mussolini was chosen, quite naturally, as the chief supporter of absolute neutrality. And it was that very night that he made the first open movement towards Italy's intervention.

It is said, and one can readily imagine, that he was a very dramatic figure as he stood before his public revealing his mind in all its nakedness. His utterance was frenzied, and manifested anguish of spirit.

He seemed to be seized with distrust of himself, afraid of his own inability to resist the fascination, inability to

keep his mind cool and well-balanced, and to judge the *pros* and *cons* for Italy—for the Italy of the Italians, not for the International Socialism. He did remind his public that they were all Socialists, but more as a phrase than as an assertion; for from a national point of view, he told them, "we must remember that we are Italians." When he finished speaking, the Reformist speaker, who was supposed to oppose him, was left without anything to say, other than that he agreed with Mussolini.

With the Socialists' weakening, Italy's great hour struck. The millennium of Latin civism had come to a tragic cross-road. Already a battling group was showing signs of restlessness. The Nationalists, those who always had grand ideas for enriching and enlarging the Patria, were well launched in the ideas of war. The most fervid and generous spirits, as well as the most illuminated, were following them.

"Now or never!" was the anguished cry, the sob that broke forth continually.

But the masses were really passive, they understood very little, and cared less, about the war chatter.

Gold rained in Italy, so why go to war? To risk everything and lose all?

From the early summer (the Red Week) to the autumn of 1914, the distance travelled by Benito Mussolini's spirit was immense.

In that short time he lived his greatest interior drama; the greatest up to that time.

At last an heroic resolution came to him. He drew it out to its fullest extent, debated it, took it to pieces piece by piece, reconstructed it, then:

*Italy cannot remain neutral. She must emerge from the twilight sleep and assert herself. . . .*

It had to be all or nothing! He would stand or fall as the fates decreed, but his sense of right would not permit

him to remain silent ; he was forced to declare himself for what he sincerely believed was for the ultimate good of his country.

*All or nothing !*

In October, 1914, Mussolini suddenly resigned his position as editor of the *Avanti!* and passed unconditionally to the Interventionists.

He who had been looked up to by everyone in his party, whose opinion had been asked at all times, without warning of any kind now found himself alone.

His companions of the night before scattered to the four winds, horrified at the open show of violent disloyalty. The chorus of vituperations, of accusations and threats, can hardly have been equalled in recent history. The multitudes threw themselves against one man standing alone.

Not being able to lapidate the fugitive, they tried to morally demolish him. Not having the courage to face him, they did their mud-slinging through the columns of the daily papers, their calumny so subtle as to be scarcely more than a whisper from ear to ear.

His friends had little to say, for it seemed then that he had very few friends, and the only one who made any comments on his move was Anna Kuliscioff. "It is only by such decisive and instantaneous actions," she declared, "that one can get at the heart of the great public. Wise, well-considered movements are of no avail."

On the day after his sudden and unlooked-for break from the *Avanti!* to which he bade farewell with calm pride and unaltered faith, he refused to take a penny of the salary actually due to him ; so the governing body of the Socialist party chivalrously offered him a small portion of a sum to which he was undoubtedly entitled. They urged him to accept at least a thousand lire to cover the immediate needs of his family.

He refused.

If he refused to accept that which was his rightful due, how could he manage to live, he who had never been known to save a *sou* in his life? Rumours began to float about during the agitated days which followed his resignation. Mussolini, it was insinuated, then told half openly, had sold himself, he was the Italian servant of French gold!

Such reports disturbed his friends and sympathizers much more than they did Mussolini; and his enemies who dared to show their faces in public, though they took care to utter their words in private, rejoiced over the report against him. His friends believed him incapable of taking a *sou* for himself, while his enemies claimed that the money was perhaps the capital necessary for the founding of a daily to rival the *Avanti*!

Yet enemies and friends alike knew his sentiments towards Austria, and the opposition she had always made to weigh upon the Italians living at Trento. Mussolini had lived there: the story of his unhappy past, and what he had done and suffered there, was no secret, nor certainly were his sentiments at that time. Despite that, when the Socialist party saw him take up the fight for intervention beside France, jealousy, envy, and stupid meanness made them raise a terrible and injurious suspicion against him.

"Who pays for his fine words?" was asked on every side.

It was insinuated in a few French papers of that time that Marcel Cachin and Charles Dumas had been the intermediaries charged to buy Mussolini for France—but an honest Frenchman considers it rather broadly calumniating the probity of Cochin, who had the reputation for respecting even his adversaries. On the other hand, Mussolini is not a man to sell himself; in fact, if there is one man in the world who is not for sale, that man is, was, and always will be, Mussolini.

On October 25th a meeting, famous in the history of Italian Socialism, was called by the party section of Milan. The accused did not hesitate to appear before his prosecutors.

Pale and impenetrable, he faced the yells and hisses, the avalanche of abuse. The inflexible will of the man was plainly visible on the intensely hard, severe face. His eyes challenged the eyes of the crowd assailing him, but not a facial muscle moved. Once more the fascination of the man was superior to the formidable hatred that wanted only his destruction.

When he spoke his voice was firm, his words precise. From the prosecuted he became the prosecutor. Pandemonium reigned. They stood and yelled at him, shaking their fists in his face. They hissed when he tried to speak, they interrupted his words by hissing. They hissed until, above the horrible roar, the calm voice at last made itself heard.

"I tell you that from this moment I will neither pardon nor pity those who in these tragic days have refused to speak the word for fear of being hissed, or from a still greater fear of the cry : Down !

"You think you can do without me, and that another will take my place. Without flattering myself, I can safely say, you will see ! Amilcare Cipriani can no longer be your candidate because he has declared, both by word and letter, that if his seventy-five years would permit him, he would be in the trenches fighting against the European military reaction which suffocates the revolution."

He outlined conditions, accused them of pettiness and jealousy ; showed them their injustice to him personally, in that they had not considered trying him legitimately, as they would have done with another, and that that alone showed him that they still feared his power over them. He told them that the European war was not a thing of every

day, as in too many ways it resembled the epoch of Napoleon.

"Waterloo," he declared above a new outburst of yells that were trying to silence him, "was in 1814; perhaps in 1914 some other principle will fall, some crown go to pieces; perhaps liberty will be saved, and a new era initiated in the world's history, especially in the history of the proletariat, who in all critical hours has seen me here, or in the public square."

They listened with ears wide open, and they continued to hiss, literally hurling imprecations at him: "Traitor! Hireling! Assassin!"

Wounded to the depth of his being by the cruel injustice of it all, still outwardly calm, Mussolini, above the incessant hisses, yelled at them:

"Though you delight in yelling, though you beat and bruise me, do not believe that by destroying my prestige you will be able to forbid me the Socialist faith, nor that you can keep me from working for the causes of Socialism and revolution, as I see them. I am, and will remain a Socialist. Socialism has taken root in my flesh, and I cannot tear it out!" There was a moment of calm; hisses dying in the throats of the crowd, as in the purest, clarion tone, slowly he pronounced the words which have now become celebrated:

*Voi oggi mi odiate perche ancora mi amate!* (You hate me to-day because you still love me!)

Then he descended from the stand, passed through the silent crowd, and disappeared.

He was officially expelled from the Socialist party on the 25th of November, 1914.

But even before the judgment of the party was official, Mussolini knew perfectly where he was. He was not a man to stand still and wait for things to happen. *Bisogna aiutare il destino* (One must help fate) was his idea. If the

*Avanti!* had become too small for his ideas and plans for Italy's intervention, then he would go ahead on his own, for he *had* to go ahead.

A contract for some advertisements, and a sum of 4000 lire obtained on a bill of exchange was all the capital available. Mussolini believed it was sufficient to begin on. Two workmen, a printer and the paper supply man, were the only people who had to be paid at the beginning, for the staff would be composed of those animated by the fire of enthusiasm.

Thus was a new daily paper conceived.

One day, shortly after the famous meeting of the Socialist party, Mussolini dropped in to see his friend Paolo Valera, full, as usual, of revolutionary plans. In the course of the conversation he mentioned his intention to start a paper of his own. “Help me to find a title for it,” he said.

Though they had been very intimate in the past, that was the first intimation Valera had of the serious project of Mussolini's mind. And like a wise friend, he made no reflections on the announcement; instead he set himself to finding a name for the unborn child. Everything that he suggested was either too red, or misleading. Finally, *Il Popolo d' Italia* came to life.

It was not long after that it became generally known that Mussolini was going to have his own paper. Well, it took money to found a daily. Again unfriendly voices were heard: “Who pays?”

Admit then that France had offered Mussolini help. What would the next move be? She might have offered, and he might have accepted, in order to be able to see the triumph of right and justice. Certainly not for himself would he have made a move. Without a paper, controlled by him, he would not have been able to do anything of real value for the new cause. But the French who were the



first to benefit, and in fact the only ones, by Italy's intervention, would never have been wretched enough to reproach him for coming to their aid, even if by so doing he was indirectly helping himself and the sentiments he stood for.

However, for those who know the man, it is not necessary to suppose that France or any other country was financing him. The journalistic talent of Mussolini had many admirers; his intervention idea had generous partisans, rich and disinterested; and what more natural than for those partisans to offer help when they knew of his difficulties with the *Avanti*!

One cannot, at least an ordinary person cannot, found a paper with intentions and work alone. It takes money, and a great deal of money. Under the circumstances, there would not have been anything disgraceful in his accepting help from anyone who believed in him, and his ability to second a cause through the columns of a daily.

Therefore *nothing* justified the outrage: "Who pays?"

Regardless of what was being said about him, or perhaps the better to disprove it, Mussolini went ahead with his preparations; and on November 15th, 1914, *Il Popolo d' Italia* made its first appearance.

That evening he dined with friends at Casanova, a well-known restaurant in Milan. He was very nervous, and only ate a few lettuce leaves dipped in salt. He looked and acted a little like a caged savage, so much so that his friends were worried about his health. They went on to Biffi's, a café in the Galleria, for coffee, and afterwards his friends accompanied him to his office. There they left him pen in hand, ready to write his editorial.

*Audacia*! was the title of the first editorial in the new paper. To either side of the proud name of the paper stood two mottoes: *Chi ha del ferro ha del pane* (Blanqui) and *La rivoluzione è un'idea che ha trovato delle baignettes*

(Napoleon). The first : He who owns a sword need have no fear for his bread ; the second : Revolution is an idea that has bayonets to support it.

From the first issue of *Il Popolo d' Italia*, the second part of the editorial leaned closely to later events, while the first part was an explanation of what had been :

" Do we wish to drag out a miserable existence under present conditions, content with this *status quo* of the monarchy and the bourgeoisie, or do we wish instead to break to bits that wretched combination of intrigues and cowardice ? Is it not possible that this is our hour ? Instead of making ready to put up with the impending events, is it not better to try to dominate them ? The duty of revolutionary Socialists—may it not be to awaken the sleeping consciences of the multitudes and to throw quicklime into the faces of those dead—and there are many in Italy—who persist in the illusion that they are alive ? May it not be a cry : ' We are for war ! ' May it not be—in the present condition of things—much more revolutionary than to cry : ' Down with the war ! ' "

" I myself have given my answer to these disturbing questions, and thus explained the origin and scope of this paper. I shall produce a daily which will be independent, liberal in the extreme, personal. My own—perhaps a poor thing, but my own ! For it shall be answerable to my own conscience, and to nothing else. I have no aggressive intentions towards the Socialist party in which I propose to remain. But I am disposed to fight against anyone who may try to prevent me from criticizing freely an attitude which for various reasons I regard as fatal to the national and international interests of the proletariat.

" And, resuming the march—after a brief halt—it is to you, young men of the generation, whose fate it has been to have already begun the making of history—it is to you that I address my inaugural appeal.

" This appeal, this cry, is a word that I would never have uttered in normal times, but which I give out to-day clearly and vigorously, without reservation, and I give it with full confidence, that one awful and fascinating word : *War !* "

While the perfidious calumniators continued to whisper surreptitiously of French gold, the fighter, still hopelessly poor, saw that *Il Popolo d' Italia* went to press each night. The editorial rooms were in an improvised office, where week by week all those connected with it eked out an existence, menaced with being carried away by the mere daily necessities. No one really believed that the paper could live long enough to become important, yet they willingly gave their all to the supreme effort. For the weekly payments to the printer, the one person connected with the venture who insisted upon being paid, they usually found a new supply of work in lieu of the money which was always promised for the following week. Sometimes he did receive money instead of a promise.

It was a precarious way to manage a business, but it is one that always works when there is sufficient faith.

Benito Mussolini's companions, besides Alessandro Giuliani, who for years had been the " news gossip " of the *Avanti !* and who had resigned with him, was his brother Arnaldo, a substantial aid, and a strenuous fighter from the very first hours.

Arnaldo always did the worrying, but there were times when things were too heavy even for his broad shoulders ; then against his wishes, he was forced to ask help from Benito, though it did not do him much good, for Benito never had time to think of the business end of the paper.

One evening Arnaldo was particularly desperate. Every possible source was dry ; no new possibility of help was in sight. They needed paper, and their creditors were indignant. He called on Benito to advise him, explaining

the serious situation, and telling him frankly that they could only probably publish for another twenty days.

"We're short of everything," Arnaldo said disconsolately. "If no one comes to our aid we'll have to go into bankruptcy!"

There was no change in Benito's expression as he listened to his brother's *triste* recount—no sign of emotion. He reflected a moment, then resolutely:

"All right, Arnaldo! Advise me a fortnight before the fatal day, so we can have time to divide the chairs among the staff, and give each one a certificate for good service."

Despite Arnaldo's worry, and Benito's refusal to consider their conditions serious, the tragic hour never struck, for Arnaldo Mussolini managed to succeed in carrying to safety Benito's treasure, the beloved child of his brain, the brightest, youngest, and the most battling paper Italy had ever had.

Arturo Rossato, in an article on Mussolini, describes the editorial department of *Il Popolo d' Italia*, so as to give an excellent idea of the wonderful luxury of the establishment, born allegedly of French gold.

"The editorial rooms are fantastically luxurious. At first sight they make one think of a disordered rat's nest, but on closer examination one becomes convinced that Benito Mussolini is the most profound nabob of Italian journalism.

"At 35 via Paolo da Cannabio, the tiny door is always open, the dark entrance illuminated by a miserable lamp that from time to time remembers to be electric. A creaking stairway leads to a sort of gallery, on which it is possible to walk, but would certainly be dangerous to dance; glimmering lights punctuate the darkness, and point the way to the editorial offices of *Il Popolo d' Italia*, the craziest and most original editorial offices in the world.

"There were real chairs surrounding the tables, not very safe or beautiful chairs, but chairs which really only served

for foot-rests, because the editors generally sat on the tables when important visitors were being received. In the summer the staff worked in their shirt-sleeves, so as not to have the name of being shirtless. In the winter there was a stove, a stove that gave out a great deal of smoke, and sometimes a little heat.

"Mussolini does not believe in the scholarly intelligence : to his collaborators, or those who hope to be, he says :

" ' Do something, show me ! ' "

" If they know how to write, well and good ; if not, he finds a pleasant way of sending them about their business.

" In the early days," Rossato goes on to say, " there was an infuriated babel in those two rooms. Outside, the street screamed of the scandal and the stench of the imaginary French gold ; outside the implacable crowd waited for its daily paper ; outside the machines roared impatiently ; outside the hostile or friendly demonstrations called to the man inside, for love or hatred ;—and there in the rat-hole, the infernal maniple, the mad unwilling to become wise, the melancholy ghost of honest misery.

" After the first fortnight of killing work, in fact just when a determined jury of honour was severely weighing the *pros* and *cons* so as to clearly explain the whole story of the millions of French francs which had been given for the installation and upkeep of the new daily, Mussolini said to me with the serenity of a mortified child :

" ' I know you should receive your salary to-day ; but to-day I haven't a *sou*.'

" ' All right,' I answered.

" ' All right, yes. But I can't give you anything. The little I have I must divide among the three delivery men. They are poor and must be paid. We—we can wait.'

" ' All right ! '

" Not one person on the staff cared about the millions—in France. And the staff didn't care whether they were

paid or not. Mussolini was there and that was enough for us. The paper came out regularly, and we were satisfied. The demonstrations were made each day, and they were more than sufficient to keep up our interest in exterior things, as well as our nerves on edge. And there were complaints from every side, but—Mussolini was behind us, and we were with, and for, him.”

And so the life of the paper went on, becoming stronger and stronger as each new and forceful article was devoured by his growing adherents; the paper founded by a mere youth for the youth of Italy was being appreciated by its own kind.

And the fight against neutrality, and against those who sustained it in good or bad faith, was continued.

Each morning the paper was searched for a signature: Mussolini. It was nearly always there, a brief article of a quarter of a column, or half at most; and the meat, the food for thought that those of all classes were in need of, was in the article.

By his writings in *Il Popolo*, and by his speeches, Mussolini worked directly upon the minds of the cultured and intellectual. And more indirectly he got at the uneducated masses through his friend Filippo Corridini, editor of a little paper called *Battaglie Sindacali*. This Corridini was a tribute of the people and extremely popular. For years he had been fighting for Revolution and idealistic Syndicalism against the narrower forms of economic Socialism, and against the materialistic tenets of those who talked about the *ventre*. An individualist and anti-Parliamentarian, a self-taught artisan, he had seen the inside of several prisons before he was thirty. In the frail body of a consumptive there was the gallant spirit of a fighter. Despite his malady, already in a serious stage, he was one of the first to volunteer for the front the moment Italy entered the war, and he met his death heroically in the first line of the trenches.

During the period from November, 1914, to May, 1915, *Il Popolo* was the centre of a new fervour, almost religious, in its character. And Mussolini, with Corridini, prepared the state of mind which was to result in intervention.

If Italy was not carried to irreparable ruin, if to-day she holds an important place in the world, is listened to, respected, and observed as she never has been since becoming a united nation, it must not be forgotten that the greater part of the credit goes to the man who, maligned, despised, abused, and disowned by his party, still had the courage to stand, even alone, for the one thing that he believed could save his country. His was the voice and power that helped to overthrow the offer of the Germans to give Trento and Trieste to Italy, if the Italians would join the Central Powers in the war ; and his was the voice in the wilderness of the fearful and cowardly which cried for an intervention with the Allied forces, then the weaker side in the war.

According to his concepts, the Italy that had formed the ancient history of Europe must co-operate to form the new history. To keep a country apart was equivalent to taking the life of that country.

And so " Diana " came forth ; Benito Mussolini sounded his magnificent *réveille*. Sleeping hearts were stirred, awakened—a new soul was born in modern Italy, the soul of heroism ; and with the generosity of youth, when the roll-call came in May, 1915, they answered :

" Present ! "

## CHAPTER V

### A SON OF THE PEOPLE GOES FORTH TO WAR

**A**T last the terrible tension broke, and on May 24th, 1915, Italy declared war on the Central Powers. Mussolini asked immediately to be admitted, as a volunteer, in the operating military body. His demand was rejected.

Having the necessary educational titles for admission as an officer in the army (and one unfortunately knows how many unworthy men were admitted), even that simple right was refused by those who still sat in judgment on men and the world, viewing all things with the National antique mentality.

This refusal was a bitter pill for Benito Mussolini to swallow, but there was nothing to do about it, other than to wait patiently for his class to be called to arms.

Resigned, he remained at his post, continuing his battles through the columns of *Il Popolo*, urging all to go forward. At last his call came for August 31st, 1915.

Before he had a chance to get into uniform his enemies began asking : " Why is not the famous interventionist off to war ? The famous son of the people who would become a god has clay feet, and is perhaps unable to march ? Why not put him in a general's uniform, and send him to the front on horseback—he knows how to ride, for he learned to straddle a horse in his father's smithy ! "

The *Avanti!* which from the day of Mussolini's expulsion from the Socialist party down to the date of the General Election in 1919, never once printed his name, was



never tired of asking these questions about him during the early months of the war, well knowing that he was unable to enlist as a volunteer, owing to the fact that his own military class was to be called to service almost at once.

And the poor volunteers ! It was not until August, 1916, that the Government remembered the respect and consideration due them—they had previously been a target for gibes and sneers. There were approximately 200,000 of them—a number unparalleled in any country in which obligatory military service exists. And certainly a number to call forth thought, wonder, and reverence.

Youth and old age, boys with their fathers, the real flower of the land ! There was one old volunteer veteran among them, who at sixteen had enrolled under Garibaldi. Many of them were fathers of large families from almost every walk of life, and how many of them were spared by the inexorable reaper ?

When his call came, Mussolini had very little preparation to make other than to see that the proper editor was installed at *Il Popolo d' Italia*. He selected Alessandro Giuliani as the most reliable and intelligent among his remaining staff, and being an older man, there was little danger of his class ever being called to military service.

All business matters satisfactorily arranged at the editorial office before leaving Milan to join his regiment, the 11th Bersaglieri, Benito Mussolini married Rachele Guidi.

Given his Latin blood, and the usualness of illegal unions in all Latin countries, Mussolini's act in marrying Rachele Guidi was a very noble one. She had never been his intellectual equal, and he had long since given up the idea of transforming her, or making her into other than a kind and gentle home body ; but, in every sense of the word she had been a good wife to him, and she was the mother of his two children, Edda and Vittorio. He had recognized her position by living with her as his wife, but unfortunately

before the law a common-law wife, in Italy, is not a wife, and in all countries the children of such a liberal union are illegitimate. He could, according to Italian law, have legitimized the children without giving his name to the mother as well ; yet—if he were not to return from the war—she would be without a position in the world, and penniless.

" Perhaps I never thought of it in the rush of my outside work," Mussolini told an intimate friend the day after he had taken Rachele Guidi to the *Municipio*, " but I guess I have always had a conscience-stricken feeling regarding *la mia signora*, for now that she is my legitimate wife a great weight has been lifted from here," he laid a hand over his heart. " Rachele has always been a good girl, and it wasn't for me to make her otherwise. . . . If I get mine at the front, her pension will keep them from starvation, and that's all I've ever been able to do for her."

At last, wearing the coarse, ugly grey-green uniform of a common soldier, the heavy hob-nailed boots, Private Mussolini, Editor of *Il Popolo d' Italia*, from the training quarters of his regiment wrote a farewell letter to be published in his paper :

" DEAREST FRIENDS,

" The period of the war zone, which must not be confused with the fire zone, is now over. It has been shorter than I anticipated, less than a fortnight. When these lines appear before the eyes of our people, I shall be beyond those wickedly drawn frontier lines which must be cancelled because they are a peril and a shame already too long endured. I do not need to say how happy I am ! You who have been my comrades in our long vigil and who remain to-day the resolute and faithful pursuers of my unfinished tasks, you at least know how I have looked

forward to this hour, how I have longed for it ! My joy is intensified by the sight of courage which prevails among the men who belong to my own 84 class (year 1884).

"The masses are sound ; and I believe that in the firing-line these fellow-soldiers of mine will be ready for any sacrifice. By this, you see that my impressions are definite and optimistic.

"The Italian army goes forth to victory ! Certain, inevitable victory !

"But we who are making ready to endure the hardships of winter in the trenches, and the danger involved for combatants, wish to have our hides safe. So, therefore, ever on the watch ! Give out strenuous blows ! Do not allow the hyenas a moment's peace !

"We shall fight here ! You also must fight down there !

"The programme which I leave to you is embodied in this motto : ' Let there be no disarming ! '

"I know that you are, and will be, faithful to this watch-word. I know that you are not disarming, and that you never will disarm. You are burning with the same fire as I am, you feel a deep affection for this paper to which you have given your best efforts ; you understand that the magnificent battle begun by me ten months ago is not yet finished, that it has merely entered upon a new phase ; you hate—with the same hatred felt by me—All who are the enemies of Italy are our enemies.

"As for me, I have no personal preoccupation. I am ready to take the blows destiny may have in store for me. They matter very little—life seems an insignificant thing before the thought of war.

"As the proud Roman saying has it : '*Necesse navigare, non vivere.*'"

On the way to the front Mussolini's regiment passed through Tolmezzo, where ten years before he had taught

in the school. His former landlady was on the river-side that evening waiting to greet him, to offer him bread, fruit, and wine. Hers had been one of the lonely hearts to grieve for him when he left Tolmezzo, and never had she forgotten the night he knocked her lover down for having raised his hand against her. Never had she forgotten, nor ceased to be grateful to Mussolini for having saved her from the fury of a lover's jealousy—jealousy that was perhaps not ungrounded. She had no way of knowing that his was the regiment to pass that evening, except that she had read in the papers that he was already in a training camp—her woman's intuition told her the rest.

"Where are you off to, Benito?" she asked when the greetings were over. (That was in the days when he was still called Benito by many.)

"Where do you suppose?" he answered with a smile. "One does not step off here en route to Paris! I'm going to the front, *cara*! And aren't you pleased to see that I am about to fight for your Friuli?"

"Yes, I am," she said seriously, "but more than the thought of the fighting, I am glad that fate has at last brought you again my way. Come home with me, I have your room ready for you, your old room! I've had it ready ever since we went into war, for I knew that someday you would be passing through. After the long march you will be needing a good night's rest."

He hesitated a moment, tempted by the thought of sleeping, perhaps for the last time in a real bed, and tempted also by the idea of spending a few hours near her, for the ten years that had passed had only added to her beauty and charm.

"No," he said at last, "I am a soldier like all the others—if there were beds for us all, yes, but I cannot be the weakling among the brave. Give me that bit of ribbon

you have on your breast " (the Italian tricolour). " Pin it on my breast—a little souvenir of you, and your kind thought for me. *Addio!* "

He spread out his cape, and lay down on the ground in front of a church, resting his head against a step worn smooth by generations of pious feet.

The halts along the way were numerous: Verona, Vicenza, Treviso, Conegliano, Perdenone, Sacile, Casarsa, Unine, Cividale. A night of rest from the crowded, stuffy cars. A night so dark that one could not see an arm's length away, and the tired soldiers all billeted out. Mussolini and several companions were sent to the attic in a peasant's house, where the rats ran about freely. The trip had been long, they were utterly exhausted, and despite the rats slept soundly.

From Cividale to San Pietro al Nalisone. Stupezza, the last Italian town before the new frontier. Excellent beer was to be had there, at the price a soldier could pay. Then came the old confine, a house on one side of the street and the sentinel's post on the other. The Austrian signs had already disappeared.

There was a moment of emotion for Mussolini as he passed into what in 1909 was Austria, and recalled that in October of that year the right to remain in any part of the Austrian Empire had been taken away from him.

Ten years had changed a great many things in his life, as well as in the life of the nations.

They halted there, on what had been the frontier, and their commanding officer, a young lieutenant, shouted:

*Viva l' Italia!*

Mussolini at the head of his line repeated the cry, and four hundred voices were raised in chorus:

*Viva l' Italia!*

An hour's halt at Robich . . . then Caporetto. Multitudes of soldiers were swarming about there, and quantities of

war equipment was everywhere to be seen. In the night the rumbling of cannons came distinctly from the direction of Gorizia. Sentinels watched over the improvised camp of fresh troops. The terrific silence of darkness and the feeling of war.

At each halt, as soon as it was known that the 11th Bersaglieri was passing, there were officers who wanted to meet and shake hands with Mussolini, the editor of *Il Popolo d' Italia*, the interventionist. The fact that he was only an ordinary soldier never made any difference—for in Mussolini's case the uniform did not make the man!

On the hills of Monte Nero they at last took their stand. In the hell-fire of the fighting Mussolini was always in the first line, ready and willing to face any and all danger, encouraging those less intrepid than himself. The commanding officers of every company in the regiment asked to have Mussolini with them as an example to the other soldiers.

In Italy there were still many who hated him, but there in the trenches, over six thousand feet above the sea-level, in holes cut out of the solid rocks, in rain, snow or sunshine, suffering from the biting cold, or sweltering in the heat, he was beloved by all.

"We do not take fortresses by force, we must take the mountains," Mussolini wrote in his diary. "Here the rock is an arm, and as deadly as the cannon."

Again he wrote:

"The evening wind blows up cold, and carries the stench of the forgotten dead. The night is clear and starlit.

"This morning from a first line trench, I saw a bit of a battlefield not over five hundred feet square levelled by bombs and mines. . . . Broken bits of rock, huge cartridges, barbed wire, pieces of torn uniforms, knapsacks, broken

flasks ; everywhere signs of the tempest that had passed. The Austrians are not over ten feet away."

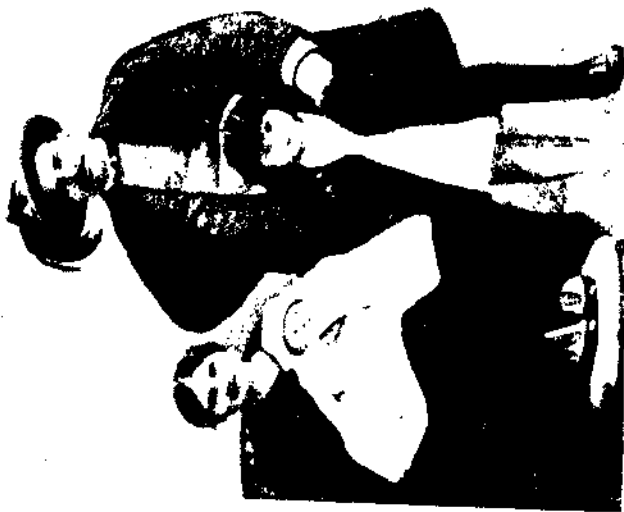
About a month after he arrived at the front, in order to break the routine of a long, tiresome day, an order came for the soldier Mussolini to present himself, fully armed, at the regimental headquarters. With his knapsack slung over his shoulder he marched off to the modest little shack, in a presumably safe spot back of the first line of trenches, where the command of the regiment had their quarters.

"First of all," said the colonel, "I want you to know that I am pleased to shake hands with the editor of *Il Popolo d' Italia*, and also proud to have so valiant and patriotic a man in my regiment. Next, I have a proposal to make to you. You will remain here at the command with me. You will still be exposed to the artillery fire . . . you will relieve Polazeschi of a part of his administrative work . . . and in your free time write the history of the regiment during the war. We feel that you are too valuable a man to be constantly exposed, as you are, on the firing-line. The proposal is my idea, and is being made as a proposal, not in the form of a command. You are free to do as you wish, to remain in the trenches, or to come here."

"I prefer to remain in the trenches with my present companions," Mussolini replied unhesitatingly. "Though I appreciate the honour you confer on me, I feel that I will be more useful in the trenches."

It was not very long before this story was known to every man in the regiment, and more than one evinced some surprise at Mussolini's refusal to live in certain comfort, and away from first-hand danger ; but he knew the people with whom he was working.

Mussolini's first captain was a man who had a rare ability for commanding ; he had been made a staff officer,



BENITO MUSSOLINI, HIS WIFE, AND CHILDREN. FODDA AND VITTORIO  
 This photo was taken a few days before Mussolini's departure for the front, 1943







but after a short time he returned to resume command of a company, feeling, like Mussolini, that his place was in the trenches. He was a man who knew men, a soldier who knew soldiers. He never had to use disciplinary measures to ensure every man doing his duty. The bersaglieri, and Mussolini in particular, had the greatest respect for him. From his captain Mussolini learned a great deal about leading and commanding men—and he also learned that leaders are born, not made. . . .

And Mussolini himself was a born leader of men.

Returning to the diary :

"A marvellous sunny morning, the horizon limpid. . . . Ten o'clock. A shrapnel whistled over our heads, and five minutes later a second shrapnel burst with a tremendous roar not ten feet from my dug-out, and about three feet from the captain's. I was standing when I heard a violent wind, followed by a hailstorm of splintered stones. I went out. . . . Someone groaned near me, then there was a quick call :

" ' Stretcher-bearers, stretcher-bearers ! ' "

" There were two soldiers below my dug-out who seemed to be seriously wounded. A huge stone was literally covered with blood. The officers were running about giving orders :

" ' Stretcher-bearers ! stretcher-bearers ! ' "

" There were so many wounded that we had to borrow stretchers from several companies. Two of the men were dying. . . . Jananilli, Lieutenant M.'s attendant, was one of them ; a bullet had entered his breast and come out close to the spinal cord ; they found the bullet between his skin and his undervest.

" ' Lieutenant, please sir, embrace me,' Jananilli pleaded. ' It's all over with me ! ' "

" Lieutenant M.'s eyes were brimming with tears : ' He was so brave and so good,' he murmured as he knelt

beside the stricken soldier, and took the weak body into his arms.

"And suddenly Jananilli looked as though he were sleeping, only around his mouth there was a curious blood-red rose. The other, a soldier of my own 84 class, had his head split—a red line divided his face in two parts. Of the other nine wounded, three were serious, two desperate. . . .

"The grave-diggers collected their tools. The dead were piled on an improvised stretcher made from sacks and branches. They disappeared. In this place we cannot have a cemetery, so the dead have to be buried here and there, in the least exposed places. The emotion in my company was short lived . . . an hour or so after it was all over, we began to talk, whistle softly, and even to sing, but there was little heart in the song. . . .

"When the sight of death has become a habit, it no longer makes an impression. To-day, for the first time, my life was in real danger. . . . I did not think much about it."

Later :

"After a month at the front, I have at last been able to wash myself, and also to comb my hair.

"Life in the trenches is a natural life, primitive certainly, and a bit monotonous. We have no *réveille*, each one of us can sleep as late as we wish. During the day we do nothing at all. We are permitted to go, at the risk and danger of being hit by the implacable *Checchino*—to see our friends in the other companies. We play *sette e mezzo* ; or, when there are no cards, we match *sous*. When the cannon booms we count the shots. The distribution of food is the only variation in our day. Of liquid they give us a cup of coffee, a cup of wine, and a little swig of brandy ; the solid food consists of a piece of cheese, about twenty centimes worth, and half a tin of meat. The bread is good

and we can have all we want of it. There is no hot food, some time ago the Austrians kindly bombarded our kitchen and blew up the mules, marmite, and cooks. But the mail hour is the hour of the day awaited with impatience by all the bersaglieri. When 'Posts' is called, we hurry from our dug-outs and gather around the mail-carrier. No one then thinks of the danger of being shot, or cares about the shrapnel fire. I have written a letter for J. and one for Mac. One can't refuse these favours to men who may die from one moment to the next. Mac's fiancée is called Genoveffa Paris. This foolish name takes me back, I don't know why, to the time of French Royalty."

"The Italian soldier is gay, particularly when it isn't raining. And also when it rains, he accepts the ducking philosophically."

"After the guns have been put in order, comes the general 'house and body' cleaning. The sun is pale and sickly, as though the powder smoke has dimmed its light. The wounded pass by whilst Donadonibus is in the sun trying to pick off lice. . . .

"'Cavalry to the right! Cavalry to the left!' the lice-picker cries and laughs, a laugh that sounds like that of a perfectly happy man.

"Rain and lice, these are the two enemies of the Italian soldiers. The cannon comes after.

"Other sad news: A shot from an outpost killed one of our men while he was working to rearrange his dug-out.

"The war of position demands a mental force, and a grand moral and physical resistance. One does not have to fight in order to die here."

After a very short time in the ranks, his own platoon selected Mussolini to command them. One of his fellow soldiers was sent on behalf of the whole platoon:

"Signor Mussolini," he said, very much embarrassed, "now that we have marched side by side with you, seen your spirit and courage under fire, we want to be commanded by you."

And not much later his promotion to the rank of corporal came. It read :

"For his exemplary activity, his fine bersagliere courage and serenity of mind. First always in every task involving hard work and boldness ; regardless of discomforts, zealous and scrupulous in discharging his duties. . . ."

He was eventually to arrive to the grade of sergeant, and there his official career ended.

There are many people, ardent admirers of Mussolini, the Mussolini of to-day, who say : Why compare him to Napoleon ? Napoleon was a great general, a general who rose from a corporal, while Mussolini went to war as a soldier and retired as a sergeant. So what did he do in the war ?

What did he do in the war ? Once for all time that question must be answered. Mussolini spent many months in active service in the trenches of the Alto Isonzo zone—in the first line doing all the jobs that demanded fearlessness and courage.

Any of those who made their way with, or after him, over those tragic passes of the Arsiz, the Jaworcek, and the Kuhl, in a temperature of twenty degrees below zero, will not easily forget those days of extreme hardship, or the man who was unfailing in his cheerfulness and encouragement—nor will they ever ask what Mussolini did.

Then he was on the Carnia, a relatively tranquil zone, but where the discomforts were very great, especially in winter, and there winter began in September. In the Italian trenches there was no comfort whatsoever for officers or men, no heat but that of their bodies, no

protection from the weather ; their dug-outs were dug-outs, not improvised lodgings.

After Carnia, Mussolini was sent to the famous region of the Bassissimo Isonzo, and on February 23rd, 1917, about two o'clock in the afternoon, he was wounded. There were forty splinters found in his body when he was X-rayed. He was severely wounded in the head, the right shoulder, and the left hand—this is from the doctor's report.

It is true he had no great and brilliant war record, no startling promotions, nothing to show his marvellous ability to command ; but to anyone who knows modern war tactics it is impossible for a man in these days to have a spectacular career at the front. At any time Mussolini could have taken a simple examination for the officer's course, and passed to the grade of second lieutenant, but he preferred to remain in the ranks, in the posts of greatest danger, ready at any, and all times to volunteer for the dangerous missions which had to be performed.

For nearly two years he was a target for the enemy . . . and there were hundreds like him, hundreds who did their simple duty from the beginning to the end.

He also fights who only stands and waits to die !

In October 1915, from the Jaworcek, Mussolini wrote :

“ Every morning when the coffee is rationed out there are arguments and quarrels among the bersaglieri—above all, between the ordinary soldiers and corporals. It seems strange to me that men who may be called upon to die at any moment have time to fight over a drink of coffee. Yet, in a way it is easy to explain : coffee is the only liquid that a soldier really wants, and he drinks it with the keenest pleasure ; on the other hand nobody expects to die, and for a sense of distributive justice they want their proper ration. When the portion is not the same for all they yell :

“ ‘ *Camorra!* Down with the *camorra!* ’

“ But unfortunately there is always a *camorra*. To the soldiers of the first line, those who should be sacred to the others, not even a minimum part of their coffee gets to them. Coffee, chocolate, wine, and brandy pass through too many hands before arriving at its destination. The *camorra* seems like a normal enough arrangement, but it irritates all soldiers, especially in the war. On every side one hears: ‘ Government thief!’ But yelling an abuse does not better conditions, and the *camorra* ends by having an exciting influence on the spirit of the troops. It seems to me that in order to make soldiers happy, these petty *camorras* should be done away with, and an abundant and just ration of coffee distributed. The problem could be solved by importing, if need be, all the coffee to be had in Brazil.”

The Eleventh Bersaglieri is the Italian regiment *par excellence*, the regiment that distinguished itself during the war in Libia, as well as in the world war. All, or nearly all the provinces of Italy were represented. There were Sards, Sicilians, Neapolitians, and men from all the cities as far north as Udine. . . . And, strange as it may seem, there on the mountains that were once Austrian, not one of them was ever heard to say, “ I’m going back to my country.” They said: “ I’m going back to Italy.” Thus Italy appeared, perhaps for the first time, to many of her sons as a living entity, as the mother country.

“ In war,” Mussolini wrote, “ one despises money. He who has it sends it home. We don’t quite know how to spend the *cinquina* (about three pence). There is the victualler, but he’s a long distance from here, and he has only tinned sardines. He comes around at night, and goes away in the day-time. The worthy man is afraid of shots

and shells : if I were the Colonel I should force him to remain here with us—in the first line.”

“The bombarding is not continuous. Mine was the last shot fired. Immediately after, we returned to our posts. During the calm this afternoon, many of us went to look at the enormous hole produced by the explosion of a 280. I found a shell that was still warm, weighing at least five pounds. Since it was unusual, I put it among my war trophies. The heavy artillery gets fewer victims than the medium and light, but it has a demoralizing effect on the soldiers, completely disarming those of the infantry. When the artillery fire begins on us, we are like a crowd of men condemned to die. When the hiss-s-s announces a new projectile, each soldier asks himself where it will land. Against the cannon there is no defence, for the dug-outs are neither deep nor strong. One has only to remain immobile, count the shots, and wait for the end of himself or the bombardment. The kind of wound a cannon shot can produce is another reason for the terrible impression it has on the soldiers. The shot from a machine gun does not lacerate like the cannon projectile.

“The day’s toll in our sector : A corporal decapitated by a 280 shell. Towards evening I went to fetch water, and passed by his grave, in a corner under a rock near a tourniquet of the mule path. Under the man’s name on the rude cross, there is a brief, affectionate epitaph : ‘He was brave.’ At the foot of the cross several illustrated post cards. . . . And on the soft earth someone had scattered a few leaves.

“The evening is calm.”

“Afternoon. The sky is darkening, and there are sharp gusts of wind. Close beside me Razziti, Massari, and Sandri are talking quietly about hemp, and commissions,



and the state of the markets, and about beetroot, just as though they had nothing else to think about.

"The morale seems to be excellent here. But what is 'morale'? It cannot be defined in a few brief words. It belongs to the category of things which are indefinable; they can only be felt, known intuitively. 'Morale' is the sense of responsibility, the impulse towards the fulfilment of duty, the spirit of resistance, which an individual possesses. 'Morale' may vary from moment to moment, from place to place. It is a state of mind essential to victory, especially when troops are opposed to an enemy with great technical skill and efficiency. He who has the will to win, will win! He who has the greatest reserves of energy and determination, will have the victory. A hundred thousand cannons will not give victory if the soldiers will not dash to the assault, if they are lacking in courage to affront death boldly. We cannot judge of the 'morale' of the troops from one isolated incident. The actions of one soldier might lead one to believe that the entire army was composed of heroes, while the words of another might make one believe just the opposite. The 'morale' of the men in the first line is not that of the men in the second and third. The older men have a different 'morale' from the younger, the peasant from the city-bred. I have studied those around me, with whom I have shared food and danger: I have listened to them, noted their attitude of mind in varying conditions imposed by war, in the trenches, under fire, on the march, in rain and snow, and my conclusion is this: the 'morale' of the Italian troops, all of them, is above the standard. The men are well disciplined, brave, eager; and while the rations are scant, there is never a serious complaint. For the leader who knows how to take them the right way, they will do anything that is asked of them, from the dull routine of labour battalions to the rushing, deadly assault of the

bayonet charge. In a word, the 'morale' of the troops depends upon that of the officers who command them."

The night of October 4th, 1915, was one of the hardest Mussolini ever passed in the trenches. It was cold, the temperature twenty degrees below zero. In the teeming rain, in the absolute blackness of the stormy night, one by one, in Indian file, the squad made its way over a rocky path. When the luminous rays of the Austrian rockets ploughed the sky they threw themselves on the ground. When they at last reached the outpost, it was not easy to find any sort of shelter. Not a ray of light outside the rockets was permitted, and those spent, the darkness seemed denser than before. Finally then, Mussolini and Simoni, the heads of the squad, hid themselves back of a rocky mass.

"Simoni," he asked, "in the case of an Austrian attack, which is our front?"

"The one to the left."

Mussolini was not convinced by the reply, and feeling the heavy responsibility resting on him, for on the firing line the guard must constitute a guarantee and a first defence for those who stay behind, he wormed his way about in the mud until he had located their front. Fortunately for those Italians on whom the guard responsibility rested, the Austrians never took the offensive first, so they were always able to get located in time. The Austrians would counter-attack, but never attack.

Towards midnight, after six hours of rain and thunder, a great white silence slowly descended upon them—the saving grace of the snow. They were already buried in mud, soaked to the skin, and Simoni said to Mussolini:

"I can't move my toes any more; I guess they're frozen!"

And the snow fell slowly, slowly. They, and everything

about them was white, and the cold seemed to have entered their very veins, to have frozen the blood there. They were condemned to absolute immobility, for to move would have been to awaken the Austrian machine guns. Near Mussolini someone groaned. Lieutenant Fanelli whispered comforting words that were given in an abusive tone of command . . . the soldier replied desperately :

“ I know ; but Lieutenant, I'm frozen, and I can't bear it any longer ! ”

Both the officer and the soldier were from the south, and unused to other than sunshine, so they probably suffered more than the others. Presently the Lieutenant called Mussolini and Simoni to him, and ordered them to get back to the captain in command to ask for relief. It was four in the morning, and the watch should have lasted fourteen hours longer.

Mussolini and Simoni found the captain in his dug-out, explaining the condition of the others after six hours of rain and four of snow, and with the captain's promise of an immediate change they returned to their post.

They found Lieutenant Fanelli still standing as they had left him, while many of the soldiers had fallen unconscious in the mud and snow. At last dawn came, and with it, the relief. . . .

In February 1916, Mussolini's company passed from the Jaworcek to the summit of Rombom. And the 17th of February he was in the first line on the Kuhl, where it was always from five to twenty degrees below zero ; and where, if they stood still for a few minutes, the snow became frozen to their shoes, adhering to the stiff soles like a metal.

April 1916, Mussolini writes of another night, quite an ordinary night to those at the front :

"A long night on guard, tormented by snow until midnight. The Captain stayed to watch with us all night. To help pass the time he recited from Cassa's *Neronoe*, and in between verses we hummed softly. At midnight Reali, the squadron's chief cook, prepared us a punch, hot enough to burn our insides ; then he entertained us with tales of the usages and customs in the United States. About 4 a.m. a violent call came from our left :

" ' To arms ! To arms ! ' "

"As quick as a flash of lightning we were out of our holes (there were four in the trench) and in line.

" ' Ammunition ! ammunition ! ' "

"In that moment the sleet whipped our faces so that we could scarcely see. The ammunition case was in our care, and in a second we were ready.

" ' Fire ! ' "

"I fired three shots, then warmed my hands on the heated barrel of my gun. The Austrians did not fire even one return shot."

"There was a glimpse of sun this morning, then of a sudden it began to snow ; and now it has been falling steadily for exactly fifteen hours. If it continues, our situation in the trenches is apt to become very difficult. To-day, we have been without bread for the first time."

"I have spent an afternoon of true fraternity and happiness," Mussolini writes later on. "Some soldiers of the Fifth Engineers invited me to their cantonments, close by. I am proud to record their message, which shows the morale, of the Italian troops after more than a year of warfare. It is a document which I shall preserve among the dear souvenirs of my life, perhaps the dearest up to the present. The message, which was presented to me in the form of an invitation, reads : ' To Benito Mussolini,

who hearkened to the voices of the smoking ruins of Belgium, and of invaded France, and who asserted the rights of humanity against brute force. With the admiration of true Italians, and with the affection of his fellow soldiers.' The signatures follow. And those men who thus expressed their fervid love for humanity and justice, were not officers or men of rank, but simply a sergeant, a corporal, and five obscure privates."

"I often think," he also wrote in April, "that the position of our trenches does not permit us, in case of a serious Austrian attack, the slightest possibility of a choice. Our trench is at the very edge of a cleft of the Kuhl, which precipitates almost vertically for several hundred yards to the plain where the Brigade command is stationed. To retreat would signify precipitating ourselves into the abyss. Therefore we must advance, or at least resist to the last man. Well, we are ready to resist!"

Blinding snows, drizzling summer rains, nights of freezing, penetrating cold, days under the sweltering rays of a summer sun—with hours of uninterrupted duty, passed—slowly. Under the date of December 25th, the diary recorded many memories of the past :

"To-day, as every day for the past month, it has rained. I have received Christmas cards which bring me echoes of my distant childhood, for to-day is Christmas, the third Christmas of the war. Twenty-five years ago I was a rough, vicious and violent boy. Some of my contemporaries still bear the marks of my assaults. I was a truant by instinct ; I would roam the river-banks from morning to night, robbing nests, and stealing fruit . . . I went to Mass. In Dovia there were very few who did not go to Mass, and my poor father was one of them. The trees and hawthorn hedges which bordered the road to St. Cassiano were silvered over with frost. It was cold, but warm compared to what it is here. The first Mass on

Sundays or fête days was for the early risers. When we saw our neighbours returning, it was our turn. I remember I followed my mother, and that inside the church there were many lights, and in the midst of the lights an altar. In a little flower-decked cradle lay the Gésu Bambino. All this appealed to my vivid imagination, but the incense went to my head and made me almost faint. A peal from the organ ended the long ceremony. The crowd swarmed out, and the people hurried along the street chattering cheerfully. How many years have passed since then! And each time it is harder to find an echo to an old memory, to find again the poetry of this return to Christmas—only by bringing a souvenir of the past to mind, can one overcome the lack of sentiment, for to-day the heart is withered and seared like a rocky slope. The sound of guns recalls me to reality. . . . It is Christmas in war-time, and in the trenches silence reigns, a silence full of home-sickness.”

And on that same sad Christmas Day, a member of the staff of *Il popolo* came through several miles of trenches, through snow and mud and under fire, in order to bring his warm devoted greetings to his chief, as well as the cheering material comfort of a good roast chicken.

On February 23rd, 1917, while taking part in a bombardment with twenty soldiers and several officers, Benito Mussolini was wounded by the explosion of one of their own shells.

He was thrown several yards, and literally covered by a shower of splinters and earth. He was put on a stretcher, and carried by his own soldiers to the first field hospital at Doberdo. From Doberdo he was transferred to the hospital at Ronchi, where he remained until he was well enough to be moved to Milan.

There was a terrible shock in Milan when the news of Mussolini's being in the hospital reached the offices of

*Il Popolo*. There were fearful details of the forty-two wounds, with the entire body bruised and full of splinters of all sizes. And for many long days there was anxiety among his friends as to the result of those forty-two wounds.

On one of his innumerable rounds, the King visited Mussolini in the hospital at Ronchi, and talked with him at some length. . . .

The newspapers all over Italy became greatly excited over the convalescence of the already famous man. And unfortunately, one paper was imprudent enough to publish a photograph of the patient, and the hospital where he was being cared for, with notes showing the exact position of his bed.

The day after the appearance of the photo, out of a clear sky came an enemy aeroplane, which proceeded to drop bombs on the hospital building. A devastating scene followed.

"There was the hiss of a grenade," Mussolini wrote. "It exploded in the vicinity of the hospital. Another followed immediately, then a third. Still another. All of them apparently only a few yards away.

"Another, and closer. My neighbour, whose leg had been fractured by a bomb, began to count the explosions. There had already been fifteen.

"Cries of anguish came up from the floor below. There was a distant rumble, another much nearer, then the sound of breaking glass in the outside corridor. A dense white dust poured into our room. Strange figures began to emerge from out of the dust, the wounded who were able to walk. Mad with fear, many of the bedridden had managed to throw themselves on the floor. Their agonizing cries filled the building. One man lately wounded in the shoulder rolled down the stairs. The hissing still continued, for, fearing they had not caught me, the Austrians were not yet ready to stop their bombing. Between the

hiss of each grenade there came an interval of deadly silence.

"The doctors and nurses seemed to be everywhere, doing their best to bring order out of chaos. Finally, when a certain calm had been restored, it was announced that in the afternoon all the wounded were to be transferred to hospitals beyond the Isonzo. Every face brightened."

"And I?" Mussolini asked the doctor.

"You will remain here to keep me company, as you are not yet in a condition to be moved!"

"Though I prefer to be alone during a bombardment, because I fancy that if I am alone it will be more difficult for the enemy to find me, I am not sure that the same theory holds good in a hospital," Mussolini reflected, as one by one the other wounded were taken out of the hospital, and placed in *camions*.

However, that afternoon he remained alone in one of the most desolate of desolate places. All his companions in pain had been taken to safer quarters, only the doctors, the chaplain, and a few nurses remained to await new arrivals.

Twilight, silence and solitude. And in this solitude the life in the trenches of Corporal Benito Mussolini closed.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE BIRTH OF FASCISM

**A**T the earnest request of his editor, Alessandro Giuliani, who came to see him in the hospital at Ronchi, in March 1917, Mussolini, flat on his back, with a temperature of 104 degrees, managed to write a few words for his beloved paper, *Il Popolo d' Italia* :

" I want to say that for the ideas of justice that guide the Allied Armies, I would have accepted even a harder fate without a murmur.

" I am proud, in the fulfilment of duty, perilous duty, to have tinted the way of Trieste with my blood."

Therein, perhaps, lies the nobility of Mussolini, the man, in 1917.

Taken from the official hospital report :

" The patient presented numerous splinter wounds in the left shoulder, the left hip, the right wrist, and the right leg—the left shoulder and the left leg being the most serious.

" A wound in the cardiac region that would have been mortal was stopped by the *roulini di marcia* (identity disc).

" We proceeded to extract the splinters, which under X-rays proved to be forty-two.

" Fever followed the operations, for several days running up to 40-40.5 (104) degrees. Complications were feared. The tibia was scraped.

" While in his bed the patient seemed to be lost in contemplative thought, but when he was brought into the

operating theatre he acquired a singular verve and vitality. His mobile glance wandered from the surgeons to the medical instruments. . . . He liked to watch the preparations made by the nurses. He looked with a firm eye at the bistoury, and when the knife went into his flesh he recovered almost instantly from the spasm, with clamped jaws and a curse on his lips. Immediately after the shock he smiled with that strange smile of melancholy and pride, incredulous and resigned ; intelligent and resolute. A watchful, indefinable smile.

" The splinters have all been removed, and the wounds are closing up. Mussolini is in terrible pain. It has been figured out that the surface line of all the wounds that are torturing the body of Benito Mussolini altogether reach one yard. The two leg wounds are so wide that, opened, a man's fist can enter."

On April 2nd, Mussolini, at his own request, was sent to a Red Cross hospital at Milan, where one of his friends, Dr. Binda, was in charge. He passed his time in between painful medications, in studying Russian and English, and in reading literary and philosophical books. In the afternoons his wife and children were in constant attendance.

During his sojourn in the hospital, no political man, Italian or foreign, passed through Milan without going to salute the wounded soldier.

In August, still walking with crutches, Mussolini was discharged from the hospital. A few days later he returned to his work on *Il Popolo*.

The darkest period of the war followed. Italy continued to lose ground, even though there were several splendid victories, until in October 1917 came the terrifying retreat from Caporetto. The retreat was due, so it is said, to the fact that the preceding victory of Bainsizzi took the troops from their stronghold, and extended them over too long a front to be easily controlled ; and there was a lack of

material and reserves, which—as regards both men and materials—were needed to re-enforce and press home the attack.

The Allies also left the Italian army without sufficient aid to face the united forces of her enemies.

The situation became more and more acute. . . . The officers and men stationed in the cities, in the ministries and other Government departments, went about with long faces, and each day the Ministry of War was swamped with demands to be sent back to the front, in any capacity, for each man felt that unless he was in line doing his bit, Italy could not be saved from the Austrians.

On the other hand, there were many who questioned, the ones who had never seen the front, and who feared they might: "To fight? To die? Why?"

With ever-increasing energy, the editor of *Il Popolo* repeated in various formulæ his undying conviction that: "Political liberty is for time of peace; in time of war it is treason. It is not possible that while the obligation to fight for their country is laid on millions of men, a few thousands can be allowed the freedom to betray their country, and render fruitless the sacrifices of those who fight—which is what the retreat from Caporetto really stood for."

On October 17th, a few days after the great disaster of Caporetto, Mussolini issued an appeal, which later events proved to be only too well justified: "It is absolutely necessary that a decision be made. It is not the moment to pander to the extremists, and to those who are openly anti-patriotic! The policy of Leninism which has been brought from Russia must be openly acknowledged as a false policy. We must abandon the great phrase 'Liberty.' There is another, which in this third winter of the war ought to be on the lips of the Cabinet, when an address is made to the Italian people, and it is—Discipline!

"Our dilemma offers us two alternatives: either we have discipline to-day in order to achieve victory to-morrow, or we can expect total collapse following upon defeat."

The defeat was not far off.

With the retreat of the army, came terror and disorder everywhere. Women, children, and old men from all parts of the North were ordered to leave their homes, and to take refuge as far from the war zone as possible. The scenes of thousands fleeing from their homes, leaving practically all behind, were merely a repetition of those in Belgium and Russia; only coming as they did, after nearly three years of what might be termed successful war, they seemed a little worse; for an army that could win and resist so long should never have been permitted to retreat in a moment of weakness.

When reorganization was at last accomplished, the greatest damage had already been done. In a week, the enemy had entirely overrun two rich and flourishing provinces, and thoroughly furnished themselves with all the things they needed so badly.

The reorganization was carried through swiftly and effectively. The troops of the unbeaten Third Army of the Duc d'Aosta, the troops of the Carnia, and all the many posts and lines which had never wavered for a day, only withdrew under orders. They withdrew in perfect formation, keeping their front to the enemy, fighting and contesting every inch of the ground. Withdrawn from the Isonzo, they clung for a time to the Tagliamento, fought on the Livenza, and held the line of the Piave.

In the days that followed, they clung with unflinching courage and the desperation of one who clutches at a twig in order to keep from falling into the bottomless pit—too quickly. In those days the whole spiritual atmosphere changed. Every Italian worthy of the name felt himself age in the week of atrocious anxiety from October 25th

to November 1st. They had reached up to the heights of victory—only to have fate throw them down into the mud of defeat. But the day was to dawn when Italy would arise, unanimous, with but one thought, one resolve ; to regain the lost ground, to attain once more to victory. . . .

This new spirit from the outset was fanned and encouraged by *Il Popolo*, which from first to last stood firm. And the chief protagonist in all the new uprising was Benito Mussolini, whose wounds were not quite healed, and who still walked with a stick.

Full of spirit and courage, he inspired and worked without respite ; until the whole nation responded to his appeal. Even when all others despaired, he never doubted, nor hesitated. "Face the enemy," was his cry on October 27th, 1917. The bulletins spread consternation throughout the country, yet he wrote : "Not the gravity of the hour, but the greatness of the hour." He summoned all to the duel to the death in that zone of horror, between the upper and the middle Isonzo, where Austria, assisted by her German ally, had flung all her strength.

"Unity of soul," was the cry on October 28th, and it never changed until the end. Cadorna eventually fell, and General Armando Diaz was made Commander-in-Chief of the Italian armies. Then began the long hard struggle toward the victory that was to end the war.

Conditions were very bad in Italy, not only for the troops but for everybody. Bread, and above all macaroni, was scarce, no fats were to be had, whilst milk was limited ; and meat was rationed along with rice, sugar, flour, coffee and innumerable other things. There was little wood to be had, and that very expensive, and no coal. One could only use a limited amount of gas and electricity. Trains were running but on a greatly reduced schedule, and never to time. The country had nothing more to give, unless it was its blood ; but its honour was saved.

Mussolini wrote in *Il Popolo* : " We can endure cold and hunger ; they are of no account. Invasion means cold and want, and above all humiliation. That we cannot and will not endure. We should win, and we will win ! "

He knew from his own experience how long the way was, and what the impediments might be, but nothing could make him deviate from the finality upon which he had fixed his hopes.

He held inspiring conferences at Modena, Parma, Vicenza, and Florence. His words, like an animating flame, cheered all those who heard him. " Italy, the nation," he said, " must be formed into one solid body, one will. It is worth while to fight, to resist, to attack, and to win."

And he thought of nothing else, until like an unseen force he had become the will of the army, as well as the entire civil population.

On May 24th, the third anniversary of Italy's declaration of war, Mussolini spoke at the Comunale Theatre of Bologna. An immense public heard and approved him.

In Turin, practically the only city in Italy, there had been an attempt at revolt, which, through Mussolini's persistent efforts, was eventually turned into a logical endeavour to aid and strengthen the weakness at the front.

In June 1918, Italy had a real victory, and other victories of no real importance, except that they served to revive the fallen spirit among the troops. Then in October came the great victory of Vittorio Veneto, when the Italians routed the enemy, making them take ignominiously to their heels. That was the decisive victory which really put an end to the war.

And it was on the birthday of King Vittorio Emanuele III at eleven o'clock in the morning that the armistice was signed.

Fighting on all fronts ceased on November 11th, 1918 !  
Peace !

After, there were difficulties, as a natural consequence of such a tremendous war. The discharged soldiers without work, the readjusting of the masses to a normal life. The soldiers who returned from the trenches sought for work and found none. They had no money, and it was difficult, often impossible, to earn any.

It was a shameful thing that those who had shouldered a gun against Austria and Germany should have to hold out their hands for charity. And Italy was not the only country where this thing happened. It was terrible that those who had been ready to die for their country could not find the means to live when the war was over. But the governing classes had not the time, being busy governing, to make preparations for the demobilization. The value of the *lira* continued to drop, war industries were naturally closing down, thus throwing thousands of other men, and women as well, out of work. The Government made no effort to stabilize the exchange ; in fact, at that time the stabilization of monies had not been thought of ; nothing was done to prevent prices rising, nothing whatever was done for anyone, except the *pesce-cane* who were on the top of the financial wave of the period, and well satisfied with themselves, and what the war had done for them.

The cost of living increased daily, misery knocked at many a great, as well as small door, at the very moment when all Italians had expected their Italy to be a terrestrial Paradise.

The first real manifestations of Bolshevism in Italy occurred at Milan, on February 18th, 1919, four months after the Armistice. That manifestation was answered a month later, on March 23rd, at the same place, by the first meeting of the Fascists.

In a small hall of a very old palace, hired for the occasion, some forty-five men met together ; among them perhaps eight or nine well-known names.

There were many international questions to answer in all this internal confusion, and nobody was capable to tell the Italians why they who had won the war should be among the poorest post-war nations. Italy was losing inside and out, for there was little to be hoped for in the foreign questions about to come up.

There was then but one solution to the problems : Socialism did not satisfy the needs of the masses, and even the upper classes were at a great disadvantage, owing to the decrease in their money values, and the increased cost of living. And it was to satisfy the growing need of a new political party that Mussolini was able to advance certain of his own principles of advanced Socialism, for which he had been fighting, almost from birth.

The great originality of Mussolini lies in this, that while on the surface he may seem changeable, in reality his nature is unalterable, and forms a harmonious whole. In some respects he may appear a romantic, yet in essentials he is a pure classic—a Roman of the ancient mould in the assurance with which he places his people, mankind, and their very human will in the centre of creation as its ruling force.

Fascism, which was to overthrow the Bolshevism that threatened to prove a real disaster for Italy, was really born immediately after Vittorio Veneto ; but did not in any way become an active force until after the meeting of March 23rd, 1919. The original strong minority which wanted and forced the war, was formed of divers political elements : Socialists, Republicans, youthful Monarchists, Futurists, Syndicalists, Anarchists, and Revolutionaries of every kind.

This minority, after the final victory, recomposed and



invigorated itself to defend the victorious and the victory as well, against the troublesome counter-attacks of the Socialists. These, infuriated by not having been able to prevent war, and then seeing it gloriously realized, wanted to profit, for electoral reasons, by all the inevitable disillusion and disadvantages of the post-war conditions. All over the country campaigns broke loose against the Interventionists, giving them credit for all the misfortunes that Italy was passing through.

This campaign, formed by the ambitious demagogues of Signor Nitti, one time Prime Minister, reached a grade of impudence that rendered the life of the excombatants, the valorous mutilated, and volunteers of all classes, difficult and even humiliating.

And in the meanwhile a tremendous strike mania swept over the country, destroying little by little the best Italian industries. Menace of revolution continued, as well as the imposition of excessive wages. Against this, Fascism with its excombatant members, headed by Benito Mussolini, fought strenuously—and in Fascism there were already such fighters as the Futurist Marinetti, the famous captain of the Arditi, Ferruccio Vecchi, and dozens of names well-known in the world of art and literature.

The fundamental idea of Fascism is : That the victorious war should be fecund and productive for Italy in every sense and in every value : moral, spiritual, material. The immediate end : Inside peace ; that is, the fight to a finish against all the inevitable evils generated by the human conflict ; the courageous and energetic reaction on the dominating class ; so that confronting them with a series of radical reforms in keeping with the times and the new popular conscience, Communism, or rather the disjoining, the destruction, the decay would be counter-acted ; the creation of a diverse political civility, of a new

social ethics, of a complete resurrection of the darkened spirits of the hatred and rancour of class.

Fascism was to construct, to renew, to purify ; not to destroy for the sole joy of destroying. In the new regime proposed by the movement, the class war was understood as the loyal fight between loyal adversaries, no longer looked upon as a mutual constraint, but as a reciprocal propulsion towards an even better production and towards a saner life. And the nation was not to forget the incontestable fact that the war had been won by those who were a part of the new regime.

Summed up as briefly as possible, Fascism was to accomplish the work of reconstruction in the highest sense of the word. Along with reaction and revolution, the masses were taught that national salvation and *resorgimento* rested uniquely in an honest desire on the part of all Italians to work. The value of the efforts of the humble classes would be recognized and recompensed by Fascism, quite as much as that coming from the elevated classes.

The Fascists were constituted the National Guard, and were to operate when and how their leader deemed best. And every Italian was to work for the reorganization and the reconstruction of the country.

This new body, later to form a complete army of improvised politicians, was essentially revolutionary ; but they wanted to force a patriotic revolution of combatants. And for that they offered an armed opposition in the Piazza del Duomo of Milan, on April 15th, 1919, to the first insurrectional attempt of the Socialists. On that day, the redoubtable act of the burning of the *Avanti !* occurred. They destroyed the machinery and all of the furniture in the building, but did not injure any of the workpeople.

This act of reparative violence was done to save the honour of the ex-soldiers who rebelled against the nameless

infamy which daily offended the sacrifice of those who died in the trenches.

Those who were thus hit made a point of protesting loudly at the reaction, but to their surprise they found a man who did not run away from responsibility, as they were in the habit of doing. "I am not afraid of words," Mussolini announced, "I am a revolutionary and a reactionary. I have a compass to guide me, and I know perfectly well where I am going. Everything which makes for the greatness of the Italian people will be supported by me. Everything that tends to belittle, degrade, or impoverish the Italian people will be opposed."

Meanwhile Nitti was giving the amnesty to the deserters.

Gabriele D'Annunzio marched from Ronchi, and took Fiume on September 12th, 1919. But the D'Annunzio enterprise did not produce, as it was intended to, a grand Italian revolution. The Fascist forces were still exigent; the Socialists and Nittians still unruly, so Marinetti and Vecchi, at the head of the Fascists of Milan, a meagre body, were commanded to attend the celebration of Vittorio Veneto, and to defend Fascism against Socialist assaults.

No blood to speak of was shed then.

The Fascists took part in an election for the first time on November 20th. The list was composed of Mussolini, creator of Fascism; Marinetti, creator of Futurism; Padrecca, initiator of the anti-Clericals, the famous Toscani, who was an illustrious animator, and several other well-known men.

During the campaign, there were continual altercations, and more than once the candidates were shot at, but they succeeded in forcing free propaganda for themselves, and in holding public committee meetings in the very heart of Socialist Milan.

Conditions all over Italy were getting worse and worse.

The *lira* continued to decrease in value, and demands of all kinds were becoming preposterous. Everywhere the red flag of the Socialists and Communists was to be seen. Women were not safe in the streets, particularly if they were well dressed. It was dangerous for women to wear silk stockings, and no one even thought of putting on a jewel—in fact, almost all the rich women had stored their valuables in the banks. The working classes were more and more exigent. Wages increased, and so did the cost of living. Dissatisfaction and dissent were felt on every side.

During the summer of 1919, to give only one example, at Pegli, a small unimportant seaside resort near Genova where there are several factories and shipbuilding works close by, the Socialists so ruled the place that the summer residents lived in constant fear of any and all kinds of assaults. No dancing was permitted in the Casino, lights in public places had to be out at 11 p.m. The guests in the hotels were forbidden to wear jewels, or other than very modest evening frocks. There were also many and absurd food restrictions. At one of the factories a Socialist workman was killed in a fight with a Fascist. At two o'clock in the afternoon, the manager of every hotel, the owner of every villa, was advised that no light in his house was to show that evening. All shutters were to be closed and blinds drawn at dark, and to remain so until ten o'clock the following morning, when the funeral of the martyr was to take place. Shops were ordered to close, and flags to be put at half-mast. *Lutto cittadino*, general mourning for a man who was killed in a brawl!

Needless to say that the order was followed to the letter.

It was also said that during the same year, on July 20th, a revolution would begin. The Socialists had joined, unofficially, with the Bolsheviks, and pillaging had already been going on for some time in all the resorts within an

hour or two of Genova. Every day *camions* filled with men, the red flag flying, would dash along the sea road on its way to rob some nearby farm of poultry, fresh vegetables, fruit, and eggs.

Terror was spreading among the upper, as well as the peaceful working, classes, of which most of the women expected to be killed, or at least raped, and to have their children torn from their breasts.

On the afternoon of July 19th a *camion* came from Genova, passing at a breakneck speed along the coast road, through Pegli; the mad blowing of the horn drove the women and children to cover, but from the windows they peered out curiously.

A second and a third *camion* came along, and they saw that the men were dressed in the grey-green uniform of the Italian army, and the flag standing out straight in the breeze was the tricolour. The intervention was to all outward appearances the Government at Rome. It was Rome, for the ordering of troops to protect the coast towns had come from the Minister of War, but the instigation of the counter-attack was the head of the young body of Fascists, who for months had been using voice and pen towards a step which would, if only temporarily, quiet the rising Socialist-Communist party.

The editorial department of *Il Popolo*, continually menaced, was protected by a military guard of volunteers. Added to the sense of tragedy surrounding the place, there was an adventurous, even humorous side. In the fortress, which the rooms housing *Il Popolo* had become, arms were hidden everywhere; arms from the war that was over, ready for the war about to begin. More than once it happened that a member of the staff saved the entire building from being blown to bits, by stopping the office boy from lighting a fire in the stove where perfectly good bombs were perhaps carefully stored away!

Mussolini's life was in constant danger, yet he remained cool, calm, absolute. He came and went about Milan as freely as he had done in the early days before the war; and he journeyed all over Italy for Fascist propaganda. Forbidden by Nitti, in October 1919, he flew from Novi Ligure to Fiume to visit with D'Annunzio. From Fiume he went to Florence by air, on October 9th, to attend and to speak at the first Fascist Congress.

While lunching alone at a restaurant that day, he was continually annoyed by certain men who took pains to say insulting things as they passed his table, and to make wry faces at him. Of a sudden Mussolini drew a service revolver from his pocket, and levelling it said, coldly: "I'll shoot the first person who passes my table again!"

No one gave him any further annoyance.

Before beginning to speak at the Congress, he asked pardon for not having had time to prepare his speech. But even though it was not prepared it was none the less of great importance, for in it he laid down the basis of the most original creation of Fascism, the schemes for the corporations of industrial and agrarian workers. It was a scheme which, in its aims, had something of a Socialist and collective hue, yet in its methods it was purely aristocratic and based entirely upon the community of national interests. No concessions were to be made to the masses, no appeal to the so-called true working man. "I am not telling you, my friends, that you are as gods; for as I truly love you, I say to you that you are dirty, you must arise and cleanse yourselves; you are ignorant, therefore set yourselves to gain instruction. Horny hands are not enough to prove a man capable of guiding a State. A revolution can be made in twenty-four hours, but in that time one cannot create a new social order for a nation which is part of a world order. You must not, however, mistake us for a bodyguard of the bourgeois, which, in

so far as it consists of profiteers, is utterly vile and contemptible. Those people must defend themselves as best they can ; we will not defend them.

" We will defend the nation, the people as a whole. We will work for the moral and material welfare of the people. And I am convinced that with our policy, we shall be able to make the masses one with the nation."

It was a very spectacular meeting, as public meetings are apt to be in Italy, the land of theatrics ; but in this case the man was sincere, as future events were to prove. While the dramatic entered into the entire Congress, many truths were driven home. He was showing the Socialists that he was not afraid of them : that the Fascists were not afraid of being seen in the streets, nor circulating freely about the country.

More than once Mussolini's courage had impressed the populace, and it was to become legendary ; and never, in his own country at least, has his sincerity been doubted.

In November 1919, the list of audacious forerunners was beaten by Socialists and Nittians, who were able to obtain the arrest of Mussolini, Marinetti, Vecchi, and fifteen *arditi*. They were all thrown into prison, and remained at San Vittorio for twenty days, accused of organizing an armed band, and of attempting to endanger the State.

The day after his arrest, *Il Popolo* came out with an enormous headline across the front page : Benito Mussolini, Guilty of Having Defended Italy after Caporetto, Has Been Thrown into Prison.

More and more the people were suffering from the excesses of the revolutionaries. The faggot was beginning to exasperate even the calmest. When anyone correctly dressed (this applied more to men than to women) had the impudence to walk past a factory, it was not unusual for him to be dragged in by force and made to literally



WITH GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO AT HIS VILLA IN GARDONE.

*Facing page 181*





cover his clothes with oils and grease until he was dirtier than the dirtiest workman.

An attempt at Leninism was made, without any success, in the Fiat automobile factory. Russian money was pouring into Italy and being freely spent from one end of the peninsula to the other ; the downfall of the kingdom seemed imminent and inevitable.

The Fascists tried, with an even greater force, to down the red flag. The Black Shirts became more numerous—each Fascist ready and willing to pay with his life, if need be, to save his country from disaster.

The terror of Bolshevism was such that the best and youngest bloods were joining the Black Shirts, and Fascism soon became a National party. And in creating the *squadristo* the brigade at once constituted a real army of public security and order : but it was an army that had a long way to go, before, victorious, it could enforce the law and maintain order.

With the growth of Fascism, the opposition became even greater. Mussolini and his young army was a real force to reckon with, and the Socialists who had once despised him now feared him. They had been able to keep him out of Parliament in 1919, but other elections were coming, and each day he was growing politically stronger.

Every insulting act that man can be subjected to they inflicted upon him, every stupid demonstration that could attract his attention, or wound his pride was carried out. With the petty, jealous instinct that was theirs, they continued their campaign against him. His ruin or his death was their one object.

He did his regular work, wrote some of the finest articles of his journalistic career, and made many of his greatest speeches. He went about as was his habit, even though a day never passed that he was not shot at from some dark street, or from behind some protecting structure. But

all the opposition, despite the remarkable growth of his own party, was getting on his nerves. He lived at too high a pressure, worn by the constant strain of editing the paper, conducting the political campaign of the Fascists, and organizing, organizing propaganda throughout Italy. His necessary activities were innumerable, and he added to them by all sorts of fantastic occupations. Every day the courtyard outside the editorial rooms echoed with the click of crossed swords—his daily fencing lesson. Next, he took up motoring, and obtained a driver's certificate. Then he learned to fly.

Of course, along with the worries of his daily work of organizing and directing his party and the newspaper (for which he wrote at least five articles each week), Mussolini had the usual financial worries. By this time his children were grown up, and there was a new baby as well. Shoes were expensive, and so was food, then there were five to feed. As editor-in-chief, as well as owner of *Il Popolo*, he earned a reasonable amount, yet he never had a *sou*, or in fact anything above the absolute necessities of life, a very simple life, and his books. He never spent anything on clothes; and, as in the old really miserably poor days, he was always shabby.

He went about in an old top coat, the collar invariably turned up, and a shabby soft hat well down over his eyes. He walked fast, with his hands in his coat pockets, the right one generally clutching a revolver.

He had no money, so it was said, yet it takes money to go in for expensive sports such as aviation, motoring, and fencing. True, but not when one has friends in every walk of life, and those who could teach him anything were glad to have him as a pupil, even if he could not pay them for his lessons—and not the least of these was Rudolphi, the fencing master of a cavalry regiment in Milan. Rudolphi was not a celebrated master, but he knew how to fence,

and he had taught many a young officer the art, and had trained officers, and private citizens as well, for more than one duel.

Rudolfi and Mussolini fenced together almost every day until the pupil became as adept at fencing as the master, but it did not make him discontinue his bouts, nor feel less appreciation for Rudolfi's efforts, or his friendship.

In Milan there is a very smart fencing club, quite the last word in comfort and elegance. Both Mussolini and Rudolfi would have enjoyed their bouts more if they could have had the use of a spacious and well-lighted hall ; but despite their efforts, neither of them could find a way to be admitted to the club, for both class and political reasons their entrance had been refused. And one of them because of his political ideas at that time.

Certainly he lived in no possible danger of stagnating. When there was nothing in the way of strikes, or threatened attacks to occupy him, he always found himself confronted by some unexpected incident, such as a duel.

In all duels he imposed himself on his adversary by his cold assurance. He fought many times, but the most famous duels were those in 1915, with Merlino, and the well-known Treves. After the war, the best known was that with Missiroli, when his adversary left the field of honour a very sorry sight.

Once, at the offices of *Il Popolo*, when a friend was paying Mussolini a friendly visit, a menacing crowd filled the street below, yelling and threatening to fire on the editor, as well as any member of the staff who happened to be there. "Down with Mussolini!" they yelled. *Viva la Russia!* Held back by the troops, the subverters began singing the International, and trying to break loose at the end of Via Paolo di Cannobio.

It has been said, that before and immediately after a

duel, Mussolini's pulse was perfectly normal. His friend did not take his pulse that particular day, but judging from the fierceness of his smile, the light in his eyes, and, in fact, his entire attitude, he concluded that then, at least, Mussolini's pulse was unchanged.

He was seated carelessly before his work-table, in a modest little room, dignified by the name of editorial office. The walls were bare, except for a large map of Italy with a small paper flag pinned to the dot that marked the city of Fiume. On the table there stood a huge glass of milk, that from time to time he stirred contemplatively with a very small spoon ; and a monumental revolver of the prehistoric type, that, with the milk, formed a strange and interesting contrast : food for babes and arms for the man ! The yelling became more menacing, the crowd had broken into the courtyard, and, mingling with the yelling, could be heard the shrill police whistles, and the dry charging of muskets. Stirring, and sipping his milk, Mussolini said :

" They yell, cry, and make an infernal rumpus, but take away their red cravats and flags, and they are only a bunch of idiots. Don't be afraid, my friend, they won't come up here, because, you see, I'm dead ; at least they gave me up for dead when we were beaten in the election ; but they know that if by chance they did venture in here, this old revolver would be brought into active service, and that there are at least two shots left in it, for two of them ! You may not know it, but in Milan there are not more than two heroes, listed as such, who know how to face danger, and they're both sitting here, so, I can drink my milk in peace."

Yet, at that very time, at a memorial service for the " Garibaldini ", who fell at Argonne, Benito Mussolini declared his undying faith in the Italian people, in their race virtues, and in their work for the future.

"We are the fighters of the grey noontide," he said, "but we are sure that a roseate dawn will come."

And, in between moments of strenuous labour, he was searching, searching; not for fame and glory, not for power and wealth, all that was to come to him, but for a second mask, through which no human being could ever by any chance penetrate to the real man.

## CHAPTER VII

### FROM GREY NOONTIDE TO THE ROSEATE DAWN

**I**F the year 1919 was a bad one in Italy, 1920 was no less so. Unexpected crime and disorder seemed to exist everywhere.

From January 13th to 22nd, there was a strike of the postal-telegraph and telephone workers, contemporaneous with the general railway strike. The Government tried to put a bold foot forward, but only succeeded in managing to have a greatly reduced train service, and no service at all on the postal-telegraph-telephone lines. On January 29th, the Government conferred with representatives of the railway syndicate, and as a result, the strikers were all set to work again without any punishment. The terrible Anarchist, Errico Malatesta, appeared on the scene and was arrested. Then the "reds" made such an uproar that, almost with apologies, he was set free—to head other general strikes!

Strikes were threatened in Bologna, and several nearby cities. In fact, there was a strike in some part of the country almost every day, and it was impossible to take up a paper without seeing an account of a bloody combat somewhere.

February 19th brought a strike on the Ligure metallurgicals, and the occupation of the factories. Naples followed the example set in Ligure. In the Veneto there were grave disorders, at Cavazere a war memorial was destroyed. On the 29th of the same month there were grave incidents at Milan: attacks on the Royal Guards, and the

savage hunting of the army officers, with several mysterious deaths.

Again, many were killed, and a large number wounded in a general strike which lasted until March 7th.

The "daylight saving" hour provoked new disorders in Turin, because the Socialists did not wish to adopt it. On March 24th, the workmen closed the factory of one of the most important industries in the north, occupied the offices, and held the owners as hostage.

April opened with a three-day strike in Bologna, caused by violent altercations between Socialists and Fascists, and several Fascists were killed—shot vilely in the back. And on the 16th, the International Peace Conference opened at San Remo.

The railway officials of Leghorn and Genova refused to transport the Royal Guards and the carabinieri; they even went so far as to stop the trains, and to make the Government representatives on their way to San Remo get out. On the 24th, there was a general strike at Venice, with relative conflicts; and on the 28th a meeting in favour of the Socialists was held at Rome.

The first of May, European Labour Day, all work ceased from one end of Italy to the other, and few, indeed, were the non-partisan citizens who ventured out of their homes that day. At Turin, Viareggio, Pisa, Imola, and Naples there was fighting and bloodshed, and several deaths were reported. Other postal strikes on May 4th, a wreck on the railroad near Leghorn, and a general strike in the city kept the Socialists interested.

The Government made a feeble attempt to prevent a strike in Rome, which, however, took place only a few days later. Nitti fell from power, but was re-elected on the 21st.

Insurrection in the Carnia, and a Soviet regime constituted; strikes in the Friuli.



On the first of June, Verona, under the Socialists, refused the War Cross offered to the city, and on June 5th, Spezia came into the front line with an attempt at anarchy.

At last Parliament made a move. On June 8th, seventy senators deplored the inefficient conduct of the Government, a conduct that under-valued the Victory.

Words ! Nitti continued in his shameful works. The Nitti Government fell on June 16th, and Giolitti came into power.

Belluno, Cremona, Milan, and Naples indulged in strikes, often bloody, with the Royal Guards, making the lives of those poor men, who were forming a sort of military police, utterly unbearable.

On June 26th, a bomb was thrown on the Restaurant Cova, the smartest restaurant in Milan ; the building was damaged, but no lives were lost. And the same day there was an anarchical uprising in Piombino ; then followed the very grave events at Ancona : a regiment of bersaglieri was taken over by the Anarchists, and everywhere revolt was spreading. Fighting was going on continually in the streets, and no country road was safe for motoring after dark.

In July, a seven-day strike left Rome without any means of transportation, trams and all public vehicles being under the control of the Syndicate, or Confederation of Labour. The populace, tired and sick of it all, turned, like the proverbial worm, and for days there were the most atrocious and revolting acts committed in all parts of the city.

In Milan, the offices of the *Avanti !* were destroyed. A general strike of protest followed ; for the Socialists had decided that the Fascists were beginning to go too far. Riots and strikes—until at last the exasperated crowds turned on the Socialist deputies. The reaction of Rome and Milan was echoed all over Italy.

Many factories were occupied by the Communists, the

red flag flying, and the establishments guarded by an armed band.

Machine guns were placed on all strategic points, whilst the Red Guard arrested any and all enemies. They improvised a red tribunal, which pronounced and executed the death sentence, in the name of the *Revoluzione Mondiale*.

No doubt if the Communists had had a good leader at their head, they might have won over the great mass of labourers and workpeople, and dragged in their wake the Socialists and reformers of the Confederation of Labour. Instead, their leaders were weak of will and intelligence, while on the opposite side there was the much-feared Mussolini, whose Fascists were coming more and more into the conflicts; not only coming in, but causing them.

About that time Marinetti and several other Futurists left the Fascio of combatants, having been unable to force on the greater number of the Fascists their anti-Royalist and anti-Clerical tendencies.

Then followed more conflicts, and still more strenuous attempts to control them.

Lenin watched from Moscow, using his great power to force the revolution, and expecting each day to see the results. The Italian Socialist party obeyed, as well as it could, the orders sent out by its Mongolian chief.

At Trieste, Piero Belli, a Fascist and reporter for *Il Popolo*, was seriously wounded by an Anarchist. Enough! As one man the Fascists of Trieste went forward for their revenge. The example set by Trieste was followed in many other cities—the Socialists began to find life a little more difficult, and terrorizing almost an impossibility.

From then on, the Fascists became a difficult army to handle, and many a time Mussolini had to call his leaders together in serious council. A successful conflict, and the

younger Fascists inevitably lost their heads, sometimes committing grave errors.

Mussolini's chief asset, or one of his chief assets, was his severe realism, his insistence on obedience, and his willingness to take risks, but the risks were not to be taken without orders from him.

Lenin knew all that Mussolini was doing, knew of his fearlessness, and above all, of his intelligence and political sense, and more than once he remarked : " Mussolini ? Ah ! It is a great pity he is lost to us ! He is a strong man who would have led our party to victory."

Trotsky spoke in exactly the same vein : " You, Lenin, have lost your trump card ; the only man in Italy who could have carried through a revolution was Mussolini."

The Socialists knew only too well that the Russian heads spoke wisely, and that the one trump card in Italy was lost to them ; but they realized their loss several years too late, and when they could not get him back, it only remained for them to beat him, to put him out of the running.

In September 1920, exactly one year after D'Annunzio had occupied Fiume, the Socialists seized the factories in practically every city in the country. They expelled the owners, the engineers, and even the technical experts from many places. They set up committees of workmen, after the Soviet pattern, and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat was attempted on a large scale.

Yet Gioletti, in his blind, old-fashioned way, undoubtedly good in its time, refused to grasp the situation, and remained set on peaceful methods of persuasion, as though strikers who had been striking for a couple of years could be treated with peaceful persuasion. He said : " Let the workers see for themselves how difficult it is to conduct an industry ! Let them find from experience how bad trade is ! Let them run their heads up against the walls

of economic laws ! ” Instead he should have said : Our troops are needed to protect the public buildings, and the politicians sitting in them ; we cannot scatter them all over the country.

Owners of factories sought in vain for protection. Small bodies of troops, when they were sent out, could not even make their way through the tumultuous streets, and when the soldiers did try to make an assault, they were spat upon for their trouble. The authorities stood by, figuratively speaking, biting their nails, but outwardly calm.

At Verona, during a peace commemoration, Fascists and Communists fought a regular young battle—in which neither side gained anything other than flesh wounds !

Military revolt had appeared in several places : The soldiers took their officers prisoners, and disarmed them. In Ancona, in order to subdue the rebellious garrison, it was actually necessary to bombard the city.

Towards the end of 1920, Bologna had become completely Bolshevik. Bologna, the city of columns and arcades, of antique magnificence, the beautiful city of open squares and palaces unequalled in the world for their grandeur and architectural beauty ; Bologna, the towered city of Dante, so often overlooked by the tourists of the beaten track, Naples, Rome, Florence, Pisa, Paris, was the cradle of the Bolsheviks. Bologna, the proud, was meditating her last ruin. Bologna was the field of extreme experiences, the anatomical theatre of Bolshevism.

In all the books written about Mussolini one reads of his wonderful courage, for even his enemies admit that he is brave, that fear is an unknown word to him, yet not one of his biographers gives any very glowing examples of the bravery so often alluded to. Mussolini is a brave man, a man utterly devoid of fear.

During 1919, when Mussolini was circulating freely

about Italy, speaking here and there, arousing enthusiasm on the Fascist side and hatred on the opposite, he faced danger daily, for the Bolshevik-Communist-Socialist party wanted his life then, as they do now—only then they did not know of his inestimable value to the country.

He spoke very often in public, where he was surrounded by enemies, who wanted to get him, but were afraid ; and it was just that show of his courage that brought hundreds into his still new and unproven party.

Whenever a leader failed to manage a group, or convince them of the necessity for strict obedience to the regulations, Mussolini spoke. And his words were law—with a mystic, almost hypnotic power he convinced his public. While at every meeting he ran the risk of being shot, or at least arrested, fear never detained him a second, never once made him shorten his speech, or hold back condemnation, if he felt inclined to condemn.

Leaders, real leaders, are born, not made, for they always seem to have sprung upon the world full grown. As a soldier, a corporal, and a sergeant at the front he was commanded, and he obeyed ; but the time was rapidly approaching when as a general he was to ride at the head of his troops, and as he had obeyed, he intended to be obeyed.

While all the strikes, fights, and unnecessary deaths were taking place, Mussolini was apparently sitting calmly in his little office, watching over the destiny of his first-born, *Il Popolo d' Italia*, and writing articles to help the growth of his second brain child, Fascism. Yes, he was sitting in his office, when he found a moment to rest and collect himself. He was in his office, also, because that was where he was king, and they, his enemies, knew where to find him, if they *dared* to seek him out. He talked a great deal in public, and he wrote even more. Words, idle words, that kept up the courage of those valiant men, who, like

Mussolini, were ready to fight, to use any violence when kindness failed, and, if necessary, to die in the cause of a greater, grander Italy.

Of the lives lost from 1919 to 1922, and the march on Rome, in every fight two Fascists paid for the life of one Communist. Why? Because the Fascists fought in the open, and the Communists—never, if they could help it.

Before Mussolini was generally known, by people not interested in politics, almost everyone had occasion to know what Fascism stood for, to see how the Fascists protected the helpless against the onslaught of the enemy. Many of the Fascists of 1920-22 are well known to-day, while others have helped to pay for Italy's glory and supremacy. And from those early pioneers one learned much of Mussolini's fearlessness.

Bologna was almost the Chief's (he was not the Duce then) home town, for what was Forli but a part of Bologna, and Predappio a part of Forli? And Dovia was really Predappio. . . . The call of the blood upon him, Mussolini went to Bologna on a certain Saturday. The Bolsheviks had made it known that the following day they were going to enter into full possession of the city.

A *camion* with a few armed Fascists met him at the station. He came from Milan in a second-class compartment, and as there was no hall for him to speak in, they drove about the city in the *camion*, stopping in the public squares, where he spoke to the crowds gathered about, protected from the enemy by the little group, which, with revolvers levelled, surrounded him.

He spoke to many hundreds of people that afternoon, while now and again a bullet whizzed over his head—into space. Infuriated members of the enemy party tried to break through the lines of intense men and women, but until the City Guards drove both friend and foe away, and forced the *camion* to move on, he continued to speak.

Driven from one square, they moved on to another momentarily more calm.

Words! He only urged them to fight for right, told them that might would follow, if they kept their courage high, and pinned their faith in the Fascists who had come to save them from unending disaster. For, summed up, Fascism was a simple doctrine—the doctrine of rebuilding a ruined country so that she could take her rightful place with the great nations.

He spoke with ardour and sincerity, and he said a great deal that politicians and such people wanted to hear, said much that they, and the simplest among them, could understand. All those who listened to him were convinced, for Mussolini has never spoken in public without convincing his audience. Had he been permitted to really talk to the civil authorities the many times he was arrested, no doubt he would never have had a prison sojourn to boast about.

As he faced, and calmed, a furious mob, dodging stones and pistol shots in the autumn of 1920, so had he done in 1919, when with Marinetti he had spoken from a *camion* in nearly all the important, and many unimportant, cities in Italy. There in Bologna his coat had been riddled with shot, his hat knocked from his head by a well-aimed stone, but he did not stop speaking for amongst the howling crowd there were men who wanted to be convinced. Those who had the temerity to stay with him were often wounded—still he spoke; still, like an evangelist, he continued to give forth his message, to expound his idea.

Then he used to tell his idea with frenzy. "They do not understand it yet," he often said, "but once an idea has been launched, it will grow, even if the originator of the idea is no more."

The Sunday following Mussolini's speeches in Bologna, fifty thousand people were to have been in the Piazza

Vittorio Emanuele. There were not even half that number, though those who did appear were armed with hand bombs and revolvers, ready to kill. The "Red Guard" stationed at strategic points in the city should have operated at a given signal, whilst various groups were posted to attack individual Fascists.

All during Saturday night the municipal automobiles brought groups of the "Red Guard" from Imola to Bologna, whilst from all the centres north of the city they came in by train, or in private automobiles. The revolt was to have been directed by the Labour Union.

One might say that the terrible events of that Sunday in Bologna were the real beginning of the revolution in Italy, the revolution that began officially in October 1922, and ended with the march on Rome.

Giulio Giordani, war-mutilated, and one of the first and most ardent Fascists, was assassinated by a Bolshevik, but the Socialists and anti-Fascists never bothered to write about it, never took the trouble to tell the story of the heroic death of one of Italy's shining lights: a man, who, had he lived, would to-day be on Benito Mussolini's right hand. In fact, no books have ever been written on the Fascists who died for the betterment of their country, nobody has ever deemed it worth while to tell the world of the flower of Italy's youth ploughed down like grain by the Bolsheviks and their kind. No one has perhaps dared to show the Socialists and Communists of 1920-22 in their true cowardliness and hideousness. Instead, a few Socialists and anti-Fascists of 1925-26 have had the presumption to write of the mysterious killing of *one* Socialist. But—that comes later in the story!

When Giordani was slain, his companion Oviglio, who should have avenged his death, leaned over his dead friend, then looked with awe and horror on the assassins, and coolly laid a loaded revolver on the seat beside him. "God



help us ! " he said in a tone that no one who heard him will ever forget, " it's brother against brother ! You can kill me if you wish, but I will not shoot an Italian." This gesture stood then for the new spirit in Italy, for the new national conscience.

Material existence had become much easier for the little Mussolini family. The paper, *Il Popolo d' Italia*, was such a tremendous success, that the owner-editor at last had a little, a very little, money for himself. He, with his wife and children, lived modestly in a comfortable apartment with a maid-of-all-work, and but for the constant danger surrounding the husband and father, they could have been a very happy family.

He who was always kind and gentle with his wife and children was unusually affectionate to Rachele in those days ; though he was seldom at home, other than to sleep and to grab a bit of food, always alone, for he never managed to be there at the regular meal hour.

With his children he was a tender, loving father, severe, in that his word was law ; but he never punished them, perhaps because they were afraid to disobey so imperious a parent ; they never needed to be punished. At home, whilst often silent, as he had always been, he rarely seemed depressed ; the frank, calm expression of the unnaturally pale face rarely changed, and if she had not heard about it outside, the Signora Mussolini would never have imagined that her husband was living under a terrible nervous strain, from the tension of which he was apt to break at any time. He made few confidences, and from experience she had learned not to ask questions.

What was he thinking about as he sat staring into space, idly stirring his tall glass of milk ? What was behind those extraordinary protruding black eyes under the massive brow ?

Was he thinking, dreaming, or merely resting a mind already weary of the waiting fight ?

The reverie that might be upon him when he stood by the open window of his home, in the street, or in his office, rarely lasted more than a few minutes ; then with a bound he would be back to the work in hand.

Some there are who believe that those fits of abstraction are a certain power of inner sight which Mussolini possesses to a marked degree, and on which he calls when difficulty of any sort arises. Perhaps they are the moments when mental fatigue forces him to repose in reverie . . . or, in 1920, in a fleeting dream of Rome—the one word that as a boy he had written on the margin of his school books, or carved upon the wooden benches or, recollecting his studies at Geneva, and the theory of the imponderable, he was able to apply it to economics as well as to politics.

On Christmas Day, 1920, Benito Mussolini was rudely awakened from a reverie with the news that the beacon of the Adriatic had been extinguished in blood. Fiume had been taken and evacuated, the "Commandante" (D'Annunzio) wounded ; and brother fighting against brother, forty legionaries had fallen at the hands of their brother soldiers of Italy.

While sorrowing, Mussolini at once recognized the bitter needs of the hour. Therefore he worked on improving the treaty of Rapallo, for the State having decided, the Nation being pledged, it was necessary to accept the conditions. Five weeks after the events at Fiume, Mussolini said in an important speech :

" Let no one reproach me because I have not made that easy, cheerful, always pleasant little thing called a revolution. The Fascists have not yet promised to make a revolution in Italy, nor in the event of Fiume being attacked had I promised to make a vital move. I have never written anything to D'Annunzio to lead him to believe that revolution

in Italy depended on my inclination alone. I do not 'bluff,' nor talk to hear my own voice."

Then he explained his theory of revolution, which only a little over a year later he was to put into practice. A revolution, he stated, should above all things have a mind of its own, be clearly defined, for only with clear ideas could the populace be won over. A revolution should have a precise objective, a programme already laid down, so that in the hour of victory it could not fail through dissensions.

"Revolution is not a 'surprise package' which can be opened at will. I do not carry the 'grab-bag' in my pocket. Revolution will be accomplished with the army, not against the army; with arms, and not without them; with forces that are properly trained, not with undisciplined mobs called together in the streets. It will succeed when the majority have woven a halo of sympathy around it, and if it does not have that, it will fail."

After the day of tragedy, the red Christmas, Mussolini's far-seeing mind caused him to view the future with hope. *Il Popolo* gave this warning: "The legions of Ronchi, which to-day are being dispersed into all the corners of Italy, obey, departing into the night from the shores of Fiume, because of these principles: Liberty and Justice. They undertook this enterprise in the cause of liberty, because Fiume was to be trampled down by the policy of England, and handed over to the Croats. It was an enterprise of sovereign justice because it strove to prevent the committing of a great wrong. Their action was a superb defiance of the world; it has proved that besides official Italy, entangled in tortuous negotiations, there is another Italy, a warlike Italy, which will be attached to the triumphal car of the successful plutocracy. For fifteen months the attention of the whole world had been riveted on this little rebel city. In my imagination I can see D'Annunzio before



MUSSOLINI'S SUMMER RESIDENCE  
The Park of the Villa Torlonia

*Leaving for a Visit*



me, and beside him are the souls of the forty soldiers, those fresh youths who fell for the Patria—and their images are enshrined in my heart. These are the last to have fallen in the great war, and like all the others, they have not fallen in vain! These dead prove once more that Fiume and Italy are one, one flesh and one blood, and that the dark forces of diplomacy will never succeed in divorcing those who are forever joined together by blood.

"All honour to the Legion of Ronchi, to its leader, to the living who return, and to the dead who will return no more."

The evil auguries of Christmas, 1920, cast their shadows before, and 1921 dawned impenetrably grey.

Every evening the sound of firing could be heard in one district or another of nearly every Italian city. The value of property destroyed at that time ran into millions, and the loss on the railways from lack of support and from theft was almost incalculable.

At this point the Fascists threw themselves blindly into the fray. All possible arms were collected, they accepted every challenge, and daily growing stronger and more powerful, they gave their enemies little rest. . . .

There is nothing so strong as the strength of youth—or at least, youth thinks so; so to the provocations of the ambuscaders, to the crimes of the Communists, the ever increasing army of Fascists replied with vigour. Their impulse never lessened. Their courage was renewed and invigorated with each new victim.

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." This, Mussolini said, was "the good law of the desert."

The adversary had to be beaten, to be annihilated, and from the beginning of 1920 there was no slackening on the part of the Fascists. At no matter what cost they were ready to follow the leader, to go ahead.

The fight they voluntarily took upon themselves was a

fierce one ; every city, every town had its wounded, and the Fascist dead were counted at about twenty per day.

The fight, worse than a pest, continued.

Where there was one dead, twenty volunteers were ready to fill his place, to avenge the lost comrade. Mussolini animated and guided the insurrections, inciting the men to action, and in the tragic pauses, with a religious grandeur, he illuminated the perturbed souls of the Black Shirts.

From February 27th to March 3rd, 1921, Florence was in a terrible state of agitation. To put a stop to it the Anarchists were trapped in their lair by a Fascist assault on the San Frediano quarter, their habitual haunt. There was a violent encounter, with the inevitable consequences. As a revenge the Communists, according to their delinquent habits, assailed Giovanni Berta, a young Fascist, at an isolated spot, stabbed him to death, slashed the body until, a mangled corpse, it was only fit to throw into the Arno (the river dividing Florence into two almost equal parts).

Retributive justice was to fall, some years later, on the powerful Socialist leader Mattiotti, who met his death in much the same way.

On March 1st, the most fiendishly ferocious of all the vile assaults took place. A group of marines were sent from Leghorn to Florence to affront the strikers. At Empoli, where they changed cars, they were set upon by hundreds of ambushed Communists. The infuriated beasts, strong in number, if not in courage, in the name of their god Moloch, literally massacred the unsuspecting marines.

This tragic and uncalled-for event found a profound echo in the entire nation. Enough ! came from all sides. Even the most timid found the strength to rebel. The war-like monstrosity must end, it was incompatible with modern ideas of life, and in time of peace a country had no right to menace the life of its peace-loving citizens !

But it was evidently not enough ! Other, and still graver attempts were being organized in the dark, the plans being brought to perfection with a cold and calculating decision.

On March 12th, at Milan, came the tragedy of the Diana theatre, the most unnecessary and horrible of all the atrocities committed by the Communists. A bomb was thrown into the orchestra stalls of a packed house during the last act of a musical comedy. It exploded with the perfection that a well-calculated and aimed bomb should. The detonation was terrific, and when the panic that followed was over, seventeen dead persons were dragged out of the wreckage, and if the reports were true, several hundred wounded.

The Diana was neither a beautiful nor elegant theatre, so the damage done to the building was of little consequence, but the horror of the fragments of human flesh and pieces of limbs, mutilated bodies found among the broken chairs, and bits of red plush bespattered with blood, will never be obliterated from the minds of those who witnessed the terrible scene.

The audience had been composed in greater part of the good middle class : the class that goes to the theatre or the cinema once a week, and as a result of the extravagance eats a light meal before and after the performance.

Two young sisters had their legs torn from their bodies by the barbarous act. Dozens of young men and women lost an arm or a leg, several were blinded for life, and one very lovely woman, who was staying at the Hotel Diana, next door to the theatre, and had happened to be in to see the last act of the play, from an upper box was hurled against the rail, and her nose broken beyond all repair. Her husband, sitting at the front of the box, in some mysterious way was thrown over the edge and into the pit below ; he died from a broken neck.



At the funeral of the Diana victims seventeen coffins were carried through terror-stricken Milan. On the steps of the Duomo, the Cardinal-Archbishop Ratti stood with his priests, giving absolution and blessing to the dead, as, one by one, the coffins were borne before him. Behind him, from the open doors of the Cathedral, came a mysterious glow of light, and the chanting of a Requiem Mass. . . .

The Fascist companies, drawn up in military formation, made their first public appearance on this solemn occasion : each troop had its leader, its name, and its banner. They passed along, orderly, quiet—miles of them—and on either side of the line of the Black Shirts ordinary citizens followed the *cortège*. All traffic was stopped in the city during the funeral, and from the windows of every house along the line of march the flags hung at half-mast.

Alone, on foot, at the head of them all, marched the Chief, his face set ; so alone, so upright in his martial bearing, that looking down on him from a hotel window as he passed by in the midst of the crowd, it seemed as though he were on horseback.

No general reviewing his troops, no king passing in parade, was ever more looked at than Mussolini that day. A quiver of expectation, an emotion, preceded and followed him, far more moving than any applause. A murmur, like the roar of distant thunder, swept over his triumphal way, a murmur of anguish.

There were rumours that bombs were in the way of being thrown, women were crushed in the crowd ; but nothing serious happened ; the Communists sought no other victims that day.

Two months later, May 16th, 1921, the elections in all parts of Italy resulted in complete triumph for the new party. The leader of the Fascists was elected for Milan, Bologna and Ferrara as well—the last only allowing two

candidatures. Both sent him to the Chamber with that avalanche of votes which he had foreseen two years before. He became the leader of a Parliamentary group which had sprung from nothing to thirty-three members. The battle of the polls neither depressed him when he was defeated, nor exalted him when he was victorious.

So Mussolini and his Fascism were not, as sceptics had been wont to say, done for, spent, exhausted, or without vitality. Facts were beginning to speak for themselves.

However, in August 1921, there seemed to be a certain outward accord, or agreement to disagree, between the Fascists and the Socialists, and the papers were reduced to a daily chronicle of massacres and carnage.

Benito Mussolini saw to his sorrow that his valiant soldiers were beginning to lose their sense of measure: many youths of doubtful origin had entered Fascism, and, right or wrong, made a system of violence. It became necessary to weed out the objectional members and for that reason a brief pause came into the movement. Mussolini wanted Fascism to remain a thing apart, an idealistic, symbolical party.

The public began to be tired of useless carnage, began to murmur against Fascism, and the exaggerated actions of its adherents—and if the public was not turning towards Communism, at least Communism was not losing ground.

Mussolini's intuition showed him the grand danger, and before any real damage had been done, he was ready to repair it. His speeches were many, and his articles more than illuminating. Slowly the public, and in greater numbers, returned to him.

"One cannot accomplish anything grand without passionate love and religious mysticism," was what Benito Mussolini told his group at Milan. From Milan his words were repeated to every group in order to reflect

the surroundings, and prodigious element, of the Condottiero's faith.

Day by day he fought his battles for the *idea*. The enlistment opened officially, and step by step the Militia was formed.

"Rome is our starting-point and our symbol, or if one wishes, our myth ! Our dream is of an Italy of the Romans ; that is, a wise and strong Italy, disciplined and imperial. Much of the immortal Roman spirit rises anew in Fascism ; our lictor is Roman, our Fascist organization of fighters is Roman, our pride is Roman, and our courage also. . . ." (*Il Popolo*. No. 95—1922.)

His cohorts were forming, the line lengthening in the grey noontide ; but not too far away, just beyond the sound of firing, the agonizing cry of the wounded, the last faint sigh of the dying, came an almost imperceptible break in the sky, perhaps a pale reflection of the blood shed for the Cause, the first roseate hue of the early dawn.

In apprehension, one man alone, in all of Italy, really watched as he waited.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE GIFT OF A SECOND MASK

“**W**EARY traveller, who are thou? I see thee following thy route without interest, without love, with indefinable eyes, misty and sad, like a sound unsatisfied, which has come back from the depths of light—searching in the infinite for what?—without seemingly breathing, lips that do not hide their disgust, hands that clasp weakly; who are thou? Rest here awhile, this place is hospitable to all—comfort thyself! And whoever thou art, tell me what will please thee now? What will comfort thee? Tell me, for all that I have I offer unto thee!

“Comfort? Comfort? Curious man, what dost thou say? Thou wilt give me all? Give me then, I pray thee—

“What? what? Speak!

“Another mask! A second mask!—”

(Nietzsche.)

The weary traveller—oh, yes, in 1922, Benito Mussolini was already that—paused in his march. The man of mystery, outspoken, the man of great ideals, such ideals as no twentieth-century Italian had ever heard or dreamed of, paused in his march. . . .

What he thought, felt and desired, could no longer be entirely known to the world, nor could his thoughts ever again entirely belong to him as a person. His freedom of speech must be checked, his too-expressive face must be more securely masked for he fray, for the events that had

so far taken place, the history which he had helped to make, were only a beginning.

He conjured up images of himself seated on the throne of power, the Dictator, guiding his people, ruling his country wisely ; for though he will not admit it, Mussolini is an idealist, and never did he desire power for power's sake. He heard them, his people, acclaiming him for his good works, for the vast improvements he had made in Italy, and—he heard the hungry wolves howling for his blood. But—as he had the courage to fight for Italy, so, if need be, he would have it to die for her.

It may not seem possible that the son of a blacksmith, born in an obscure village, could rise to greatness without personal ambition. Yet the son of the blacksmith of Dovia had none. He had what the world called an overpowering, consuming ambition—he had that, it is true—but it was not for himself, for Benito Mussolini the man, it was for Benito Mussolini, the Fascist leader ; for the Mussolinian Fascism, as it has been called, never would have existed without him. . . .

There had been a typhoon in Europe. It had been a bad one. It had changed the landscape of the world, shaken most things and peoples and destroyed many. A few things, mostly those that should not have been, were left as they were. But it had not greatly changed the ethics of nationalities, nor the historical principles of sound economy and finance.

Upon these conclusions, and dozens of others of more or less importance, Mussolini had founded his political party, endeavouring to build the Italy of a perfect *risorgimento*.

The imposing army of Black Shirts, being formed then, was composed for the greater part of men who had served in the war, many of them were the *arditi*, who were the black sheep of their towns and villages, but the bravest of the brave at the front. They had formed the habit of

fighting, and they liked it : with demobilization they had not cared to seek work, and when Fascism called for men, they gladly presented themselves. They did not have to be hammered into soldiery efficiency, as that was already a part of their past. The country was not only threatened, but was supporting warlike attacks, and if, willy-nilly, its citizens did not want to fight, then the Fascists must be ready to protect them. But, on the other hand, when the country was threatened by social dissensions and economic prostration, the citizens who left the fighting to others must do the work for those who, sometimes at the cost of their blood, protected them.

Recovery of the national conscience, of the inner and deeper unity of Italy was always before his eyes. It had led him to force intervention, and it had been one of the means of keeping Italy in the war. There was territory to be redeemed—the territory for which the Irredentists had been contending since 1878, and with a European conflict they had their real chance—but the Fascists, whose hopes and desires were instigated by Mussolini, cherished a more appealing purpose, and planned a more difficult work. Geographically united, Italy was already made, so that all Mussolini had to do was to see to the making of the Italians—and once made they would see to further unity and the holding of the territory that had been redeemed at so great a price.

Unifying efforts in the past had not borne their full fruit, because they had never had Italians as big as Italy to keep up the good work, and once the enthusiasm burned out, there was nothing to complete the *risorgimento*. . . . Disintegrating influences were particularly dangerous at that time in the geographically restored kingdom.

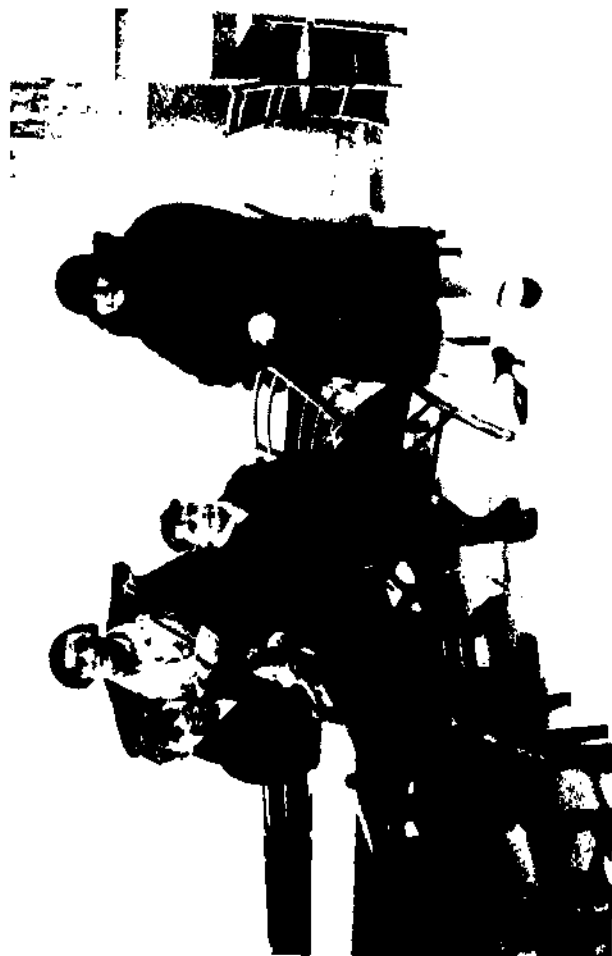
All his weary wandering life in foreign countries, the ardent studies, the readings of Marx, Sorel, Nietzsche, etc., the work for intervention, his humble part in the war,

then the organization of the party, the constant risking of his own life, his untiring work, both in speaking and writing, had all been the simple following of his route, and the inevitable evolution of the man—and never once had he doubted that it was the right route or evolution. To put the king off his throne, to become Emperor? Never! Not in the name of Emperor, not as Benito Ist, could he save his beloved country from ruin.

Benito Mussolini was in 1922, and he still is in 1927, the most ambitious man in the world, and for the realization of his ambition he will tread rough-shod over anything that obstructs his way—the way of the enlargement and grandeur; the *risorgimento* of Italy. . . . He was and is ambitious because he has always known that no other *one* man in Italy, or perhaps in the world, was capable of doing for a country what he could do.

Not forgetting the art of old Giovanna, he laid his cards out on the table before him, not once but many times, at unsuspected moments, when he was supposed to be sleeping, or at least resting. He told his fortune, or rather the fortune of Italy, surreptitiously. What the cards revealed to him he knew intuitively, knew that more than in the cards, his destiny was written in the stars, and that no act of his, then, could ever change the course. What was to be, would be, for his was something more than an ordinary mission. The cards told him (and years before in France it will be remembered, he demonstrated his ability as a fortune-teller) that whether he wished or not, he had to fulfil the mission that had been assigned to him.

He put a bold foot forward, and a pack of small cards in his pocket. His position demanded a bold front, but underneath he was timid, retiring, and had he been able to choose his own pleasure he would never have gone to any function even remotely social. Even when the staff of *Il Popolo* indulged in festive celebrations, among



SIGNORA MUSSOLINI AND THE THREE THREE CHILDREN





intimates he did not drink convivially like the others. Standing alone, he emptied his glass at a gulp. On entering a hall, or even a restaurant where people were apt to look at him, he was self-conscious. and not until he began to talk was he able to forget himself as a person. He hated to go out for other than exercise, or to enjoy the country, yet it was good for the party sentiment for him to be seen in public. It was all distressing to his naturally timid, retiring, solitary nature, but it was only one of the little sacrifices he had to make towards the grand victory.

Let no one believe that there were not moments when, had it been possible, Benito Mussolini would not have turned back, would not have become a free man among men, would not have given up his lifelong dream of Rome, would not have handed the reins of power over to someone less worthy.

In the strenuous days and nights of 1921-22, he first really learned to sleep at any and all times, to snatch a moment's rest when it was offered him ; learned, one might say, to sleep like a horse, standing.

There is no doubt about it, he was a strange, unbalanced—very well-balanced character, and therefore he was fearful of showing his realness, his almost unnatural tenderness, for a man in a high political position has no right to be tender towards any living thing. Abraham Lincoln was perhaps the only great man in political and public life who ever permitted himself to be easily touched, his great heart reached by suffering humanity. Mussolini, who is innately sentimental and tender, would have been a victim to sentiment had his search for another mask not been rewarded, had he not received like the "weary traveller" the gift of a second mask.

By sheer force of will he was able to overcome his natural instincts, and the candour of untrammelled youth, with its freedom of thought and expression, thus making of one of

the most expressive, of expressive Italian faces. An implacable, impenetrable mask.

Benito Mussolini's doing and sayings the whole world knew about, had to know about, but what was going on behind the mask he alone knew, for that was the purpose of the mask ! From the time that he really stepped into actual fame, except for fleeting moments when he had raised the mask for a breath of fresh air, no human being has been able to know Mussolini, the man ; to penetrate even a little way the difficult soul.

No doubt there are many people who think they know him, and the majority of those people are certainly women ; yet no person, since his mother, has known Benito Mussolini, no matter how intimate they may have been, or how frequently they may have seen him. He is not a human enigma, he is *the* human enigma. . . . He gives out exactly what he wants to give out, and he takes from another person what he finds pleasing at the moment ; for when the moment has passed, if he wishes, he will forget it, and the person as well. . . .

"No human being ever really knows another," Mussolini frequently states, "for from the poorest peasant to the greatest man or woman, the soul is impenetrable, a closed book, a locked door to which there is no key. Moments of expansion we all have—moments of profound sentiment, when the soul longs to confide in another sympathetic soul (some souls more than others), moments so fleeting as to be almost imperceptible, when the door to which there is no key opens, and the naked soul in the closed chamber becomes visible to some one person. Then noiselessly it disappears again."

And it is because of the impenetrability of the soul that Mussolini believes we can never have real friends, why we stand aloof, one from another, why we do not really trust each other more. . . .

Unconvivial, unsociable by nature, Mussolini cultivated an inborn aloofness as a weapon of defence, and on the second mask a frown, forbidding, tyrannical. He formed a co-operation of instinct and policy. To him a man's attitude is a confession.

He knew the aspect he had to present to others in order to carry on, and knowing it well, he cultivated the outer man to be prepared for any and all occasions, just as all his life he had been cultivating the inner.

It was not an unusual sight to see him dash out of the editorial headquarters in Via Paolo di Cannobio, a stiff black felt hat tilted forward to hide the intense black eyes, suggesting to a casual passer-by the blackness of the Appenine ravines when the black clouds are hanging low. If by chance he took off his hat, the high bald brow seemed to glitter like an electric lamp.

The collar of his topcoat was invariably turned up, more so, Marinetti says, to soften the violent words that were apt to drop from the tightly closed Romagna lips, than as a protection from the cold, which he always has felt and suffered from.

The left hand in his coat pocket clutched a stick and held it sword-like against his arm, when it was not clutching a revolver.

He was ever in a hurry, even if he did not have any place in particular to go to. He walked fast, so as not to be recognized, to feel the wind in his face, and to get rid of some of the superfluous nervous energy.

He seldom rode horseback, for he could not afford to buy or keep a horse of his own. Any of his friends among the officers stationed in Milan would gladly have loaned him a horse, but somebody else's horse meant very little to him. Horses have a personality, and how could he become well acquainted with the personality of a horse who was just a horse and not his horse? So if he could not canter

about the park, or the country near Milan, he could go on Shank's pony, and that he did every day ; and often while walking through the crowded streets, he was able to feel himself completely isolated—so much so, that he could solve his most difficult problems better than when closed in a silent room. And he had many problems to solve in those days. The voice of the city, and the crowds, never troubles him, even though he loves the country, and the sense of freedom that open spaces give. . . .

He who had been in prison eleven times could stand nothing that suggested confinement, and yet, so pliable is the will of man, he was to learn to support a life devoid of all personal freedom, in his greatness and power to be more strictly confined than any other person in his country unless it be a prisoner in his cell. . . .

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MARCH ON ROME

**T**HE dominating and culminating idea of Rome which had been in Benito Mussolini's mind from childhood, was, in the Fascist revolution, to become a realization. The wild boy had learned through his reading to visualize the city of his dreams as an ancient imperial city, made modern and up-to-date, whilst still retaining all of its antique beauties. "All roads lead to Rome", but for him there was only one way.

A revolutionary? Of course he was; a revolutionary from necessity rather than sentiment; and every step that was taken from the beginning of 1922 up to October 26th, was a forced step.

From the very organization of Fascism, Milan more or less belonged to Mussolini; so in 1922, in that city at least, he could feel secure; but there were cities in the south and centre of Italy which were still hostile to him, and if the red flag was not openly waving there was no assurance that the Black Shirts outnumbered the Socialist-Communists. Before a long revolutionary step could be taken, these cities had to be under Fascist control.

The summer of 1922 was the worst in every way since the war: never before had the principles of Bolshevism been so widely spread, never had the Socialist-Communist been so strong. Then, indeed, was there blood shed in Italy; then, indeed, was the youth mowed down—the youth of the people, the middle class, and the aristocracy as well.

At every resort, quite as much as in the cities, the menace of revolution hung like a black storm-cloud over the horizon of the merry-makers. The children were the only ones who really enjoyed their vacations that summer, for the continual assaults made a quiet, peaceful life impossible.

In August there was a general strike, when for several days it was even difficult to get food. People were afraid to go out of their houses, despite the quiet of the roads, for, like a cyclone, a fighting group might appear at any moment. The Black Shirts were everywhere, at times too much so, for many of them being very young, they not infrequently overstepped their authority and abused in most ungentlemanly terms the very people who were in favour of their cause. But those were unimportant instances in the great whole, and when known to the leaders were always apologized for. . . .

The Socialist-Communists did very little damage to private residences, or their property, though they made up for it in sacking the shops, large and small, where the red flag was not in evidence.

Private automobiles were sequestered, and not always returned to the owners—or if they were, their condition was apt to be deplorable. Yet if the cars were not returned it was not surprising, for of the serious, determined youths who crowded into them in the morning, rarely more than half the number returned at night. Young officers, who had been wounded in the war, volunteered to help in the defence of Italy, to be still more mutilated, or killed. The healthy youths, fresh from school or college, young husbands and fathers, proudly donned the uniform of the combatant, to aid in the remaking of Italy for the benefit of coming generations.

Rimini, the beautiful old resort of the Adriatic, made famous in this generation by D'Annunzio's *Francesca di*

*Rimini*, being near Bologna, the Socialist-Communist centre, suffered more than most of the summer places. The head of the Fascists of Rimini, a magnificent young man of twenty-three, who had gone into the war a volunteer, at seventeen, and received a silver medal for bravery, was naturally the leader of the Fascist movement during the strike. One of his ablest men was shot by a Communist on the second day of the strike, and lay at the point of death in a hospital at Forlì. In a free moment the Fascist leader went to bid his friend and comrade farewell. As he came out of the hospital and went towards his car, which was guarded by six Fascists fully equipped for service, he was shot in the back by an ambushed Communist. Two of his men carried him into the hospital, while the other four went in search of the assassin. He died without regaining consciousness. When word of his death reached headquarters at Bologna, the assassin was released from prison, taken out to an open lot, and surrounded by four Fascists, was shot by all four simultaneously.

That same night the gambling rooms at the Casino were deserted. The jazz played fitfully in the hall downstairs, but there was little or no dancing. The dead leader had been the life of the Casino, the friend of all the musicians, and the *croupiers* as well, his happy smiling face even a greater attraction than the gaming tables, to the women at least. . . . With his death, the summer suddenly seemed to be over and despite the warm weather a great many people found some excuse to leave Rimini.

It was worse, much worse than war. The nation, indignant over the foolish Socialist-Communist challenges, in the main was with and for Fascism.

After the August strike, Mussolini announced that the end of the democratic tragic-comedy was rapidly approaching ; and the fall of the old parties imminent. The force, the life, the will of Fascism represented a new Italy ; youth



rushing before the seniles who for the past ten years had pretended to govern.

From Bolanzo to Naples, Palermo to Trieste and Trento, from the Adriatic to the Mediterranean, in every city and town or tiny hamlet, new men were being enrolled. On every side Mussolini was spoken of with reverence, the educated as well as the ignorant were making a god of him. His name was on the lips of all: the saviour had come, and Italy was about to be redeemed from her enemy.

True, the fight was brother against brother; true, it was really civil war, but only those who followed Mussolini could be right, and right was might. And watching the ranks grow, it seemed that every energetic, able-bodied man within the confines of Italy had put on a black shirt, shouldered a gun, and was in all ways preparing himself to get in line for the march.

Mussolini before, during, and after the revolution, turned to the Italian people with rude honesty, as man to man, not with the flowery phrases one offers to children whom it is necessary to please. A spiritual optimism which, without denying pessimism, accepts and overwhelms it, simply because evil exists in a material sense, and the forces of good will overcome it—this tremendous courage of both mind and deed gave Mussolini his magnetic prestige.

In all of his speeches during September and October, 1922, he declared open warfare on all the opponents of Fascism and the nation, in words which were without rhetoric, but which were composed of hard facts: "Dante is still great," he said, "because he understood that words are living things. The mystery of words is a mystery of life."

From every side one hears that Benito Mussolini is not a great orator. In a certain sense this is true, for a great orator has to fill in the pauses with flowery phrases, and that Mussolini has never had time to do. Gabriele D'Annunzio is one of Italy's greatest orators, yet he has



IN THE PIAZZA COLONNA, TWO HOURS AFTER  
THE FIRST ATTEMPT ON HIS LIFE

OPENING THE NEW STADIUM AT BOLOGNA, JUST  
BEFORE THE FOURTH ATTEMPT ON HIS LIFE

AT THE COLISEUM, CELEBRATING THE FOURTH  
ANNIVERSARY OF THE MARCH ON ROME



never been able to produce the effect upon an audience that Mussolini can. When Mussolini speaks, one is apt to feel the constraint which he forces upon himself, and that he is, as it were, putting his ideas into the form of a soliloquy.

His most important speeches in October, 1922, were mere notes of facts told with virility and force, in the fewest possible words. "Men are necessary instruments, and we must have them now," he said, "therefore they must be completely won over."

He had need of popularity—even more than popularity, idolatrous adoration. Popularity he had then; the adoration was to come later. It pleased him to be pointed out and talked about, for it proved that he, the Fascist head, was becoming widely known; still he suffered from the publicity. He fled from applause, and yet communion with the crowd acted as a magnetic current, obliterating all dissimulation. The people understood him, were in some sense united to him, were even more closely drawn to him when he least permitted them to break into facile acclamations. . . .

Notwithstanding Mussolini's increasing power, the Government remained obstinate, would not see or understand, until the Black Shirts were actually at the gates of Rome.

On September 20th, Mussolini spoke at Udine, his chief affirmation being, "Rome has an essential function of the first order to accomplish in the new history of the Italian nation."

Then he spoke briefly of the history of Rome from the infidel to the Christian era. "And we intend to make Rome the city of our souls. We intend to make Rome the pulsating heart, the ardent spirit of the Imperial Rome of our dreams."

It all sounds boasting, so much blague to those who do

not know or understand the Italian temperament, who do not realize that the Italians need theatrics to spur them on, to keep their imaginations working ; and in order to enjoy their success they must pass through untold sufferings. Heroics and theatrics, and a childlike simplicity in the great events of life—this is the Italian character in a nutshell. It was on those characteristics that Mussolini built his army.

And the Fascism of which Benito Mussolini was the soul and guide accepted discipline as its law. "Only in obedience, only by having a sacred and humble pride in obeying, can we acquire the right to command."

*"We are a Militia."*

And as a perfectly built and united army they worked. For Fascism was to be a collaboration of the classes, though the bourgeoisie had to take into consideration the fact that if the working populace was restless and irritable, there could be no thought of making the nation greater.

And just what was the Fascist programme ?

"It is very simple," Mussolini explained patiently, each time the question was asked. "We only want to govern Italy."

There were many programmes of salvation, but the man and the will to carry them out were always lacking. The liberal state was at a crisis. The political class had conducted the war as an ordinary administrative affair, had lived on the margin of great events ; thus the men of the Government were no longer at the height of the times ; literally, they were worn-out, superannuated, conquered.

Fascism was about to assume a responsibility which called for unlimited courage. That was well, but was it going to be possible to transform the political regime completely without touching the monarchic institute ?

Could Italy be renovated without the Monarchy being shaken ?

To the doubtful ones, the ones who were inclined to believe that their kingdom was tottering, the answer came that Mussolini intended to overturn the nation completely, but that the regime could be renovated without touching the monarchic institute. . . .

He did exactly what he claimed he would do.

People no longer whispered of revolution, they cried the word aloud. It became an essential necessity to appoint some Minister to counteract the movement. Mussolini was offered the post.

It was a strange position they offered him, and strange to offer it to him; strange for him, of all men, to be a Minister without a portfolio. One to act as the Great Umbrella at the Ministry! A poor thing; solidarity without autonomy; responsibility without power! He, a man of the new Italy, her only hope of salvation—was asked to counteract the revolutionary movement. Yet—he had to gain time in order to mature his plans.

Over 40,000 Black Shirts were gathered together at Naples on October 24th, 1922. The meeting was held at the Arenaccia sport field. The Fascists assembled there were composed of groups from every part of Italy. It was said, and truly, that Fascism was measuring her force before launching the final blow.

Mussolini's arrival on the field was announced by three trumpet calls. He entered on foot, at the head of his staff, and the gold medal men. Frantic shouts and yells greeted his appearance. Then above the fanfare the formidable song broke forth:

*"Giovinezza, Giovinezza. . . ."*

Applause, flowers, and general commotions greeted the singing of Italy's marvellous song of springtime and youth.

In an intense silence he spoke, their Chief, standing a

small human figure completely surrounded by the thousands and thousands of Black Shirts. Small of stature, but great enough to dominate those forty thousand souls gathered together to swear allegiance to him. Whenever he paused for a moment in his speech, a profound war-cry was raised, which echoed far away, and returned still more vigorously to its starting-point.

"To Rome! . . . To Rome! . . . To Rome! . . ."

That clear voice, like the notes of a silver bell, that profoundly sympathetic voice, reached to the farthest corners of the field:

"We have gathered here to serenely affirm, categorically, our indestructible unitarian faith, which intends to repulse every, more or less, disguised attempt at autonomism, or separatism.

"The entire country is watching for the results of this Congress—because, and I say it without vain modesty, sometimes a screen for idiots, there is no post-war phenomenon in Europe more interesting, more original, or more powerful than Italian Fascism."

Shouts and yells interrupted his speech for a few seconds.

"To-day," he resumed, "without striking one wounding blow, we have conquered the burning, vibrating soul of Naples, and with Naples the soul of all the south of Italy. This demonstration is complete in itself, and therefore cannot be turned into a battle; but I tell you with all the solemnity that the moment calls for—it is a matter now perhaps of days, perhaps only of hours—when the Government must either be handed over to us, or we will seize it by marching on Rome!

"In order to seize the miserable men who hold political power by the throat in every corner of Italy; in order to act simultaneously, it is necessary for you to be ready and on the alert. I tell you, and I solemnly swear it to you, that if marching orders are needed, they will be given!"

For a second the multitude, stunned by the presence of a reality too grand, and too long attended, remained silent—then the applause broke forth in a howl that fairly made the rafters of the grandstand ring, and in a formidable wave return to drown all other sound.

Mussolini was pale. Rigid, closed in the severe mask of the dominator, he watched the delirium of the vast crowd.

He felt himself, in that moment, the soul and the will of an entire populace . . . a populace that had the right to live. He was prognostication, the overturning—the divine leader of the just and right cause.

That evening at the famous old San Carlo Theatre the success of the afternoon was repeated. It was perhaps the first time that the real meaning of his mission came to Mussolini. That was the first time that something hidden away in his inner soul came before his mental vision, showing him clearly the terrible power that was to be his ; convincing him that no matter in what danger he might be, he could not die until his work was finished.

Yes, he could risk everything—dare all !

Italy, with the best and strongest of her men, was with him. And behind the severe mask there came the calm assurance of a man who goes forward fearlessly, and of his own free will, to meet his imperial destiny.

That day in Naples, Mussolini wore for the first time the scarf of the Roman colours over his black shirt.

The remaining days in the month of October were the grandest that Benito Mussolini had ever lived through, and nothing that has happened since has brought him quite the same placid satisfaction.

Loving chance, chance and excitement as he does, he really lived in the fullest sense during the days that preceded the revolution. He had 300,000 men in his militia. 300,000 Black Shirts of which over 200,000 were under thirty years



of age, and very nearly 100,000 in the early twenties. A few of the officers were between thirty-five and forty, while the greater number averaged from twenty-five to thirty.

After the Congress at Naples, Mussolini returned at once to Milan, to watch over the Fascist movement in the north of Italy. The general command had already been installed at Perugia.

On October 26th, King Victor Emmanuel returned precipitately to Rome from San Rossore, the summer palace, called to the Quirinale, in consultation with Salandra, who had accepted the charge of forming a new Ministry.

But it was the will of the nation that Benito Mussolini should head the new Government.

All preparations were made, and on the evening of October 27th everything was in such perfect order that Mussolini permitted himself to step out of his office shortly after nine o'clock to go around the corner to the Manzoni Theatre, to join a box party, to witness a bit of comedy in the midst of so much tragedy. During the second act of the play, word was brought to him that a long distance telephone call had come.

He rose immediately. *Ci siamo!* (it's here) he said calmly as he grabbed his hat and coat. "Good-bye!" Without further explanation he left the box.

Five minutes later he was again in his office, and on the long distance telephone. The Black Shirts of Cremona, anticipating his plans by a few hours, had seized the telephone, telegraph, and postal service, as well as various public offices. There was the inevitable loss of life.

By midnight, at the offices of *Il Popolo*, feverish preparations were being made for the barricades. Motors left hurriedly, bearing hundreds of copies of the ultimatum, which had secretly been made ready for distribution some

time before, and which were to be placarded all over Italy the next day. It read :

“ Fascists of Italy !

“ The hour for a decisive battle has struck ! Four years ago the Army of Italy entered upon the supreme offensive, which was to lead it to victory : to-day, the Army of the Black Shirts grasps that incomplete Victory and, marching with determination upon Rome, leads her back to the glories of Campidoglio. To-day, Leaders and Legionaries have been mobilized. The martial law of Fascism has been put into force. Under the orders of the Chief, a secret Quadrumvirate has been formed, with a mandate to concentrate all the military, political, and administrative functions of the party in their hands.

“ The Army, as the supreme reserve and safeguard of the Nation, should not take part in the struggle. Fascism lays renewed stress on the deep admiration it feels for the Army of Vittorio Veneto. Nor does Fascism march on the agents of the public administration, but against the class of imbecile and mentally deficient politicians who, during four long years, have not known how to give a Government to the Nation. Those classes which compose the productive bourgeoisie know that Fascism wishes only to impose discipline on the Nation, and to aid all those forces which assist its economic expansion and its well-being.

“ The working classes, the farm and factory hands, the railway and maritime workers, and the civil servants have nothing to fear from the Fascist rule. Their just rights will be loyally observed. We shall be generous to our unarmed adversaries. We shall be pitiless towards our enemies.

“ The sword of Fascism is drawn to cut the numerous Gordian knots which emmesh and strangle the life of Italy. One impulse animates us, one desire draws us

together, one passion inspires us : to contribute to the salvation and to the greatness of our country.

“ Fascists of all Italy !

“ As Romans, summon up your spirit and your strength. We must conquer. We will conquer !

“ *Viva l' Italia ! Viva Fascismo !* ”

The next day *Il Popolo* published a stirring appeal :

“ Summed up, this is our situation : A great part of northern Italy is completely in the hands of the Fascists ; Central Italy-Tuscany, Umbria, and the Marche is entirely occupied by the Black Shirts. In places where the public offices have been taken by assault, the Fascists have occupied the railway stations and post offices, the nerve centres of the life of the nation. Victory, complete victory is assured, with practically the unanimous consent of the nation. Now the Government must become entirely Fascists.

“ Fascism will not abuse its victory, but it does not intend to have it diminished. The Fascists have been, and are, wonderful. Their sacrifices have been great, and must be crowned with complete success. The men of Rome must understand that the old forms will have to be swept away. A constitutional settlement may be arrived at to-day, but to-morrow it will be too late. A decision must be made now ! Fascism desires power, and means to have it.”

Ancona, Perugia, Siena, Florence, Pisa and Arezzo were all in the Fascists' hands.

The Council of War had arranged for the advance from Perugia. The assembly of 250,000 Black Shirts, of whom 100,000 had been mobilized, was carried through with speed and decision, according to plans drawn up with infallible strategic foresight by Mussolini himself. The centre of Italy was cut across by three diagonal lines, which, while protecting important points, all converged on Rome, ready to crush her in the grip of their three claws. One

line ran from Pisa to Civitavecchia, the second from Perugia to Monterotondo ; and the third, possibly the most important, was from the Paduan valley along the coast of the Adriatic, from Rimini to Ancona and Castlemare. Garrisons and reserve troops, each ending in a group of armed men with their respective leaders, were posted along each line.

The Vatican saw more clearly than the stubborn politicians, and almost immediately after the news of the advance was posted, became informed as to Fascism's intention towards the Church.

In the past Mussolini had not hesitated to openly express his anti-religious opinions. His sentiments were not Catholic, and the Vatican had every reason to fear him. But the genius of Mussolini consists in his unexpectedness : he always manages to treat men and situations in a way quite different from what is expected.

For himself the dogma and show of the Roman Catholic Church may not be a necessity, yet he knew that it was for the Italians as a nation ; and knowing that, Mussolini had already given orders to the Command to have the churches respected everywhere.

A great politician once said :

"Only imbeciles refuse to change their ideas."

And Mussolini is no imbecile. In fact he is big enough to change an idea whenever he finds a new and better one to replace it, for with him yesterday must remain yesterday, to-day to-day, and to-morrow—who knows what the morrow may bring forth ?

And there are mentalities in the world so petty as to demand an explanation of the change in Mussolini's religious sentiments !

To those who were not intimately connected with Fascism, the revolution came like a cloudburst out of a clear sky. We had heard that a revolution was imminent, as

it was the only solution to the problems confronting Italy. It was imminent, yet we looked upon it as a future event.

On the morning of October 28th, all was apparently as usual. The morning paper contained Mussolini's article, and showed us that drastic measures were about to be taken, but Italy was always the charming, delightful land of *domani*. And then—it was upon us!

On Saturday afternoon, October 28th, I had an engagement for tea with Gino Rocca, then the dramatic critic of *Il Popolo*. Of course I gathered from the morning paper that things were about to happen, but outside my hotel, the Diana, the streets were quiet, and so far as I could see, everything was in perfect order. At three in the afternoon I received a hurried note from Signor Rocca, in which he told me that the revolution was in full swing. "I will come to see you when it is over, if I live through it," he wrote. "Don't be foolish enough to venture out until things are settled. Be patient, and have faith in the Cause. God help us all, God help him, our Leader."

From time to time through the long, tedious hours of that afternoon and evening, the sound of distant shots came to disturb the absolutely midnight quiet of the deserted streets.

The Ministry of the Interior had ordered a state of siege.

Orders had been issued for the immediate arrest of all members of the *Quadrivirato*.

The Black Shirts were advancing towards Rome.

The state of siege was revoked.

No attempt at a counter-revolution on the part of the "reds." One Fascist had fallen.

It was reported that a great many troops had moved against the Fascists, but it was not believed that the Army would have fired on the Black Shirts, their fellow officers and soldiers. Soldiers of the regular army and the Royal

Guards were wearing black shirts under their uniforms. An order of attack would thus have thrown Italy into the greatest chaos, procuring immediate desertion in the Army, and probably in the Navy as well, thereby creating an anarchistic state.

Facta, the Prime Minister, was for armed resistance, while the soldier-King flatly refused to sign the decree. Orders had been issued by General Fara to the legions drawn up at Santa Marinella, at Monterotondo, at Tivoli, and Orto; "At dawn, on Monday, the Fascist columns will advance on Rome."

Mussolini had given the call to arms.

The headquarters of the revolution, at Milan, were the offices of *Il Popolo*, and the neighbouring Casa del Fascio, was filled day and night with Fascist troops. No one received any pay; in fact, each man paid his own expenses, besides a personal contribution to the levy. Factory hands, students, clerks of all kinds, including salesmen in tiny shops, all alike were ready to accept scanty rations in order to show Mussolini their devotion, obedience, and their readiness to lay down their lives in the service of their country.

Towards noon on October 28th, firing began in the street below Mussolini's office. In a second he had seized a rifle and rushed down to the barricade surrounding the building. "What's the trouble?" he asked in a steady, reassuring voice. "What's happened?" At that moment, though it was not realized until long after, the first direct attempt was made on his life, unintentionally; for a Fascist who had followed him, seeing him mount the barricade, levelled his rifle in the direction of the enemy, and fired. The bullet just grazed Mussolini's head whistling through his hair above the left ear. A hair's-breadth—the Chief would have been killed, the youth who believed he was saving him lynched, and Italy—

At half-past five o'clock on the 28th, Mussolini was called on the telephone from Rome, to be advised that the King wished to consult with him at once.

(From an article by Giulio Barella which appeared in *Il Secolo*, for December 1922.)

" 'I will come to Rome,' he replied without a tremor in his voice, 'when the charge to form a Ministry is official.' He hung up the receiver.

" He stood still a second, his expression serene, the eyes far, far away. Then :

" 'My Ministry—' a hard dry sound like a sob was in his voice. 'My Ministry will be thus——' half closing his eyes contemplatively, he added :

" 'If they will not accept my proposition, and allow me to put in the men I consider suitable for office, then I will have a Ministry that is entirely Fascist, from the President to the last office-boy.'

" That evening he was still at his post in the newspaper office, a grey raincoat over the black shirt and uniform, a soft grey hat, as usual, down over his eyes.

" More telephoning, more excitement, and we are only a few hours before his departure for Rome, in answer to a telegram received from the King's aide-de-camp :

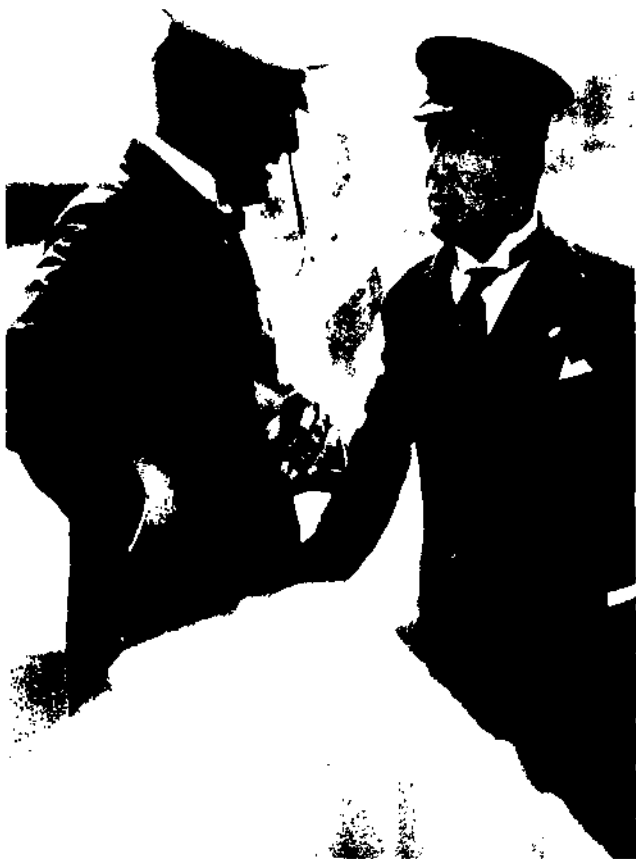
" 'His Majesty, King Victor Emmanuel, begs you to come to Rome at once. He wishes to offer you the task of forming a new Ministry.' Signed, General Cittadini.

" Notified by telegrams and telephone messages, the legionaries cheered and shouted :

" 'To Rome ! To Rome !'

" Time seemed to pass with uncanny swiftness. There were shouts and applause from below, the crowd waiting to see him depart was becoming impatient. Of a sudden he was running down the stairs, and had disappeared in a waiting car.

" Thousands of people had gathered in and about the



AT LEGHORN

The Conference à deux with Sir Austen Chamberlain





station, and as he slowly passed through the throng, alone, in his grey raincoat, hands deep in the pockets, his hat over his eyes, the shouting and applause increased until it was mad delirium.

"He was pale, paler than usual.

"Flowers were showered over him as tranquil and serene, he slowly advanced through the dense crowd to the platform, and the train.

"Arrived at the steps of the special car reserved for him, he stopped and looked over the vast sea of faces turned towards him. The fire of conviction was in the intense eyes, as for a moment his glance seemed to cover the thousands of human beings waiting to see his triumphal departure.

"With swift movement he was on the car platform. The shouting suddenly ceased, a dead silence fell over all. He spoke—only those close to the car heard his words; then a whistle blew—his right arm raised high in the old Roman salute, almost as a gesture of blessing. Amidst the banging of doors and deafening cheers, one lone voice raised in the Fascist song: "*Giovinezza!*" then the entire crowd joined in a great overwhelming chorus. Grating of wheels on steel tracks; thousands and thousands of hands raised in salutation, the waving of hats, flags, and handkerchiefs. A long-drawn whistle . . . and the grey-coated figure became a speck. The Presidential train was on its way to Rome; the son of the blacksmith had become the Duce, and he was going forth to his unending fight.

"When the tail light of the train had disappeared, a great void—terrible in its vastness, seemed to be there in the grimy, ugly station, and as the still excited crowd dispersed, shouting and singing, one noted that there were few whose eyes were not dimmed by tears. He, whom they all loved and trusted, was going to his grand and glorious destiny. He had organized the legions, he had

done much, so much, but he was as yet untried in the actual governing of a nation ; and he was young. No one doubted him, but they feared for him. . . .”

Signor Barella continues :

“ He saw me in the corridor of his train. He stopped and looked at me closely, then said :

“ ‘ . . . In the most tragic hours of my life, you have always been by my side, and you are here this time ! ’

“ ‘ What did your wife say ? ’ I asked him, as the echo of the departing applause died out in the distance.

“ He shuddered, then looked at me tenderly :

“ ‘ . . . She didn’t say anything. Her farewell was a silent one, but at the last moment she murmured : “ Come back soon ! ” ’

“ His wife ! She lives for him, and looks upon him as a god ! She has followed him proudly and happily in all of his turbulent life, and in a mystic silence she has always adored him.

“ ‘ And the children ? ’ I asked.

“ ‘ Didn’t seem to be much impressed, the boys not at all. I asked Vittorio if he wanted to come to Rome for his grammar school work. He replied casually : “ I don’t care much about it ! You come back here ! ” ’

“ The soul of this fighting and inflexible man is of an astonishing simplicity. Though he is strong in his will to conquer, he is weak before the sufferings of others.

“ One day, shortly after the war ended, a valiant fighter presented himself at Mussolini’s house, one amongst the many obscure human beings who clutter the world.

“ ‘ Listen, professor,’ he said humbly, ‘ you will excuse me, and understand me : I haven’t a *sou*, and I’m in rags. You haven’t by chance got an old suit ? ’

“ Mussolini looked kindly at the man, and said unhesitatingly :

“ ‘ Yes, of course I have a suit. Wait a minute.’ Longing

to see a ray of joy on the embittered face, he was about to take off his own coat, and make the man a present of it.

"That day Mussolini's wardrobe was quite empty."

The Presidential trip from Milan to Rome was a continual triumph through an interminable army of Black Shirts. Every station along the line was a bivouac: everywhere there was shouting, singing, waving of flags. Stations densely packed with enthusiastic men and women, who, regardless of the hour, were waiting in the cold for a glimpse of the great Chief, the Duce. And at each station he was forced to show himself, just for a moment, long enough to thank them for the tribute they were paying him. . . .

During the voyage he had little to say, and from time to time he seemed to be sleeping.

At Civitavecchia, in his black shirt, Mussolini passed in review the perfectly trained and drawn up maniples. Then he spoke to the commanders of the *squadristi* :

"Friends, His Majesty the King has called me to Rome to take up the reins of the Government. In every sense of the word I will do it. But I demand calm, order, and discipline from you all, because nothing must be permitted to spoil our victory !"

To the men themselves he said :

"*Princepi, Triari ! Fascisti tutti !*"

"Our movement is already frankly victorious. We can say that we have won without having fired a single shot, because Fascism has been, as never before, the frank and pure interpreter of the highest national conscience.

"You will remain mobilized whilst waiting for the Government to be formed. What you have taken you will hold. But, be it understood, I demand the maximum discipline, the maximum order, and the maximum seriousness.

"Italy is ours, and we swear to reconduct her into the way of ancient grandeur.

*"Viva il Fascismo! Viva l'Italia!"*

Amidst the enthusiasm of the Black Shirts, electrified by the import of his words, the train departed.

At Santa Marinella, he gave the order for the thousand Fascists to remain there on guard, as there might still be some difficulty in the formation of the Government, and a protective force be needed outside the city.

At 10.42 a.m., Benito Mussolini entered Rome.

As soon as he got out of his car, greeted by a formidable ovation, and after having saluted Michele Bianchi and several others, he went directly to the Colonel in command of the station, who stood before him rigid, at attention, and said :

"I have entered Rome as Head of the Government, and my first salute is for the glorious army. *Viva l'Italia! Viva il Re!*"

The old trooper, deeply moved, replied :

"The Italian army will always be ready to do its full duty."

At 11.15, he entered the Quirinale, the Royal Palace.

Admitted to the presence of the King, who if the truth were known was far more nervous than Mussolini, he said :

"Your Majesty, I first demand pardon for presenting myself in the black shirt of my party, but, as you know, I come direct from the fortunately bloodless battle."

Then he is supposed to have said : "I bring to Your Majesty the Italy of Vittorio Veneto, reconstructed by new victories, and I am Your Majesty's faithful servant."

Theatricalities of this description are not at all to Mussolini's taste, therefore, as flowery words pleased the Italians, the legend has been handed down. What he really said was very different, and while absolutely respectful, was marked by frankness free from all flattery.

At noon he came out of the Quirinale, through a delirious crowd, and made his way to his hotel, where for three solid hours he devoted himself to matters of urgent moment, including some of the minute details upon which great enterprises are so often wrecked.

The first legionaries had entered Rome at dawn that morning (October 30th) by the Ponte Milvio. There had been a slight effort at resistance at one spot, when shots were rained down from the windows of several houses in the quarter of San Lorenzo, one of the poor quarters of the city. Several Fascists were slightly wounded, enough to have coloured the way to Rome, but no lives were lost.

When, finally, amidst outbursts of every form of jubilation, the endless stream of legionaries had wound its way into the Piazza del Popolo, only the point of the obelisk, older than Rome itself, stood out above the sea of bareheaded men and youths with their black pennants.

At three o'clock there was a fanfare of trumpets, and an unfurling of banners and huge flags. The excitement was something utterly impossible to describe ; it was something between the expectation for a bomb to explode, or the Last Judgment—so said an American woman who saw it all from a window of her apartment at No. 3 Piazza del Popolo. Just how Mussolini really got there she never knew. It seemed as though he had descended from a cloud, for all of a sudden he was there at the head of the forces, and when some of the howling and shouting died down, she saw the sturdy, almost marble-like figure raise his hand in command, and in another moment they were moving forward in magnificent and wonderful array.

The triumphal march took five hours, the route being by the Corso Umberto, and past the resting-place of the Unknown Soldier in the Piazza Venezia, where every man genuflected before the symbol of the great sacrifice, giving an impression of the surging of the waves of the sea.

Then the Chief led his victorious followers up the Via Nazionale to the Quirinale hill and in front of the Palace, from the balcony of which the King looked down on that vast and impressive, strongly determined mass, and in his heart thanked God for having Mussolini for Italy. General Diaz, the Commander-in-chief of the Army, and Admiral de Revel, Chief of the Navy, rode to either side of him.

The great function over at last, Mussolini escaped to his hotel.

The Government, which the new Prime Minister formed in so short a time, was, one can say, of National concentration. With the King's sanction, it entered upon its duties at seven o'clock that evening. At eight o'clock Mussolini was working as Prime Minister.

His first act was to abolish the bureaucratic consultations.

Immediately after entering the hotel from the functions of the official occupation of Rome, without taking time for other than a glass of milk, he summoned the head of the railway administration. "It is eight o'clock. I will give you just twenty-four hours," he announced, "in which to dispatch from Rome to their respective stations the 40,000 *squadrists* who are now being demobilized."

"But, Excellency," the astonished official replied, "that is impossible. We could not even have done that in war time! We must have at least three days."

"I said twenty-four hours. Impossible is a word that I do not understand—in fact, it is not in my dictionary. Therefore I must ask you to carry out my orders." Then with a change of tone: "You know, Commendatore, that it can be managed, that it must be managed! And need I remind you that you personally will find that the Government will know how to reward services rendered to the State?"

The despatching of the 40,000 men was almost

impossible, but Mussolini possesses power, call it charm or hypnotic, which gives him everything he desires. The Commendatore gave his word to do as the Chief wished, and in sixty interminable trains—over and above those engaged in the ordinary passenger service—the *squadristi* left Rome that same night.

It was a magnificent beginning for Mussolini, but hard on the Black Shirts, many of whom were in Rome for the first time, and had been looking forward to a prolonged stay in the Eternal City. Their disappointment was great, and there was some grumbling about ungratefulness, but no breach of discipline.

The task before the Prime Minister was a stupendously bitter one, which could only be accomplished by the most rigid system of discipline. It seemed almost as though at one glance he had seen it all clearly, and made a point of the urgent necessities.

In ten salient points he summed up the business of reconstructing a too-long neglected nation. His points especially dealt with improvement for the unappreciated working classes, race sentiment, and conscience. Foreign politics, and a seriously and carefully organized programme of interior reconstruction, and economic finance. . . .

The March on Rome brought a new Government to Italy, gave the Nation its Dictator, Fascism its Duce, thus opening the grand way to the far-away future.



## CHAPTER X

### THE DUCE

**C**HIEF of the Italian Government, Prime Minister, Duce of Fascism, Foreign Minister, Minister of War, Minister of the Marine and Aviation, are a few of the titles belonging to His Excellency Benito Mussolini—and yet under all this dignity, the simple soul of the son of Rosa Maltoni and Alessandro Mussolini has not changed. For those few who are fortunate enough to approach him, to find him in a moment free from any one of his official jobs, he is the most charming and delightful man ; emphatic in his expressions, without being vulgar ; a man of profound culture, which not infrequently he is pleased to pass as superficial—and above all, the pleasing characteristic is a marvellous sense of humour.

The amount of work which Mussolini had to cope with during the first months of office was incredible. And to all who, in his own interest, urged him to spare himself, he would reply : “ No matter ! . . . it is now or never. I am like the surgeon at the bedside of a suffering patient in danger of death. No matter how tired the surgeon is, the operation must be performed at once ; for were the surgeon to rest, the delay might prove fatal. If I knew I was to die to-night I could not take a moment’s rest now, even to save my life.”

The sittings of the Council of Ministers lasted for five or six hours, and there were thirty-two sittings during the first two months of office. Mussolini kept his eye on

the work of all his colleagues, and all matters of importance, even in regard to insignificant details, were decided by him. His colleagues worked with a similar energy, but were not able to withstand the strain as well as their Chief; one of them, quite a young man, died from overstrain.

Yet with all the work he had to do, he found time to be just a human being, with the desires that other men have. One of the first things he did after settling the most urgent questions of state, was to go to a smart English tailor on the Corso Umberto. It may not have been entirely human vanity which prompted him, or made him desire to be well dressed for the first time in his life, as much as the knowledge that a man in his new position had to have proper clothes for all occasions. His riding breeches, morning coat and striped trousers, dinner and full dress suits—things that he had never possessed before because he did not have the money to buy them, or as editor of *Il Popolo* absolutely need them—were ordered, and only a few days later did he discard his black shirt, except for official occasions.

Mussolini now has many official uniforms, with their respective hats, capes, coats, and scarves, and other decorations; and his private wardrobe is that of any man of taste occupied in public position. His taste in ties is very quiet, and at all times he prefers dark, sober colours. He wears no jewellery, a weakness with many Italian men, other than a watch-chain, a wedding-ring, and an unobtrusive little gold ring on the middle finger of his right hand.

This little gold ring was his mother's one piece of jewellery, and the only legacy she left him.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from time immemorial, had always been at the Consulta, but Mussolini did not like the small palace with its restricted quarters, and the

furniture of the heavy taste of the grand days of Crispi. He selected the Chigi Palace, one-time German Embassy, as the residence for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry selected, he gave orders for the archives to be transported at once. The service chiefs were horrified at the mere idea of moving in a hurry, and told him that it would take at least a couple of months. Mussolini looked at them, his face implacable.

"If necessary, ask me for a thousand men and forty *camions*, and I will give them to you," he announced, "but in eight days I wish everything that pertains to my administration to be at the Chigi Palace, and in order!"

Needless to say, his orders were carried out!

The world at large knows pretty well all the political questions that were asked and answered wisely by Mussolini; the papers for four years have been full of him. Endless accounts have been given of the improvements made all over the country—and scandalous stories have been written of his brutality; yet never has his worst enemy denied his love of work. He is a glutton for work—never has he tired of it, nor tried to escape it for a minute.

Mr. Washburn Child, the ex-American Ambassador, who better than any foreigner knew Mussolini, says that never in his life has he encountered a man who loved work as Mussolini does. And Mr. Child was the first person to say that the new Prime Minister was a glutton for work, and that if he did not ease up on it, he would die in harness.

At the time of the marriage of H.R.H. Princess Ylonda, Mussolini insisted that the vacant Grand Cordon of the Annunziata, the highest honour the King could confer, should be bestowed, not on himself as the King proposed, but on the ancient President of the Senate, the Honourable Tittoni. "I have done nothing," he said, "to

deserve such an honour from Your Majesty. I should prefer to earn my honours, and until I have earned them I must wait. For the present, my one ambition is to work."

Noted as he always had been for his courage, it soon became legendary, and almost, one might say, his people began to wish he might fear something, so as to learn to keep as far as possible out of danger.

His will knows no obstacles, and he never has or will waste time to convince those who do not agree with him : he eliminates them.

Of a tireless activity, he works day and night with a marvellously supple spirit. He is neither religious nor superstitious, but he has a blind faith in his star. His entire doctrine is contained in the two words which he has chosen for his motto :

"Live Dangerously."

When questions first began to arise as to the freedom, or lack, in Italy, discontented voices, mostly coming from anti-Fascist quarters, murmured that their liberty had been taken from them, and that nothing had been given in exchange. In a public conference, with something like 30,000 Fascists present, Mussolini announced :

"If there is a man in Italy who is not free, I am that man." And he added : "I accept this servitude as the highest premium that I can have conferred on me."

And it is true : of all the men in Italy, he seems to be the only one who must have forgotten the meaning of the word liberty. Yet when one stops to think what his life had been, how freely he had roved the world, then pictures him now, one is forced to wonder how he supports his prison life—for being closed within the four walls of any one of a number of magnificent rooms in any number of wonderful palaces, never free to go out, or come in at will, never to be able to walk out among the common herd,

never to be allowed to see or talk to a person unless at least a dozen people know when, how, and why ; never to have any privacy, except during the still watches of the night, to be asked to discuss your innermost thoughts for the world to comment on—is that not being a prisoner ?

From nothing, he had realized the grandest dream of a pure ideal that could ever illumine the spirit of an Italian. Thousands, millions of people had profited by it all ; he alone was the loser—he had given up his rights as a free citizen to fight for the rights of others ; through him men were to come into fame and power, only to cheat and degrade him, just when he was to need them most.

In all his glory and power Mussolini did not forget his friends, those who had been kind to him in the past, those who in his poverty had shown their friendship for him. The first of a long list of friends to be put in positions of power, was his old teacher in Geneva, Vilfredo Pareto. The second to join Mussolini at Rome, in an intimate, though not a political position, was his friend Rudolfi, his one-time fencing master.

The Duce did not forget the hours they had spent together in one of the bare rooms in the newspaper quarters, nor did he forget that he and Rudolfi had both been refused admittance to a select fencing club in Milan. He wanted to square things for Rudolfi, and to show certain people that if they did not want the young fencing master, he, the Chief of them all, did. As soon as his private residence had been arranged, Rudolfi was called to Rome, to the position of *scudero*, the head of his stables, and his constant companion when riding for pleasure, or officially, Rudolfi still occupies this honourable position ; he still accompanies the Duce when he rides, even in the beautiful gardens of the Villa Torlonia, where he lived during the summers of 1925 and 1926, the little time he has to live away from his



DUCE DEL FASCISMO



offices. Rudolphi is perhaps closer to him than any person of his household, and certainly he is nearer his heart.

"We must forget the work of the past in the work of the future. What we did yesterday is of little importance; it is to-day, and most of all to-morrow, that counts. But friendship and human love, if such things exist other than as sentiments of which one speaks, they alone, of our past, should be treasured and remembered always." When anyone asks Mussolini to tell them something about his work, he is apt to ask why they want to learn of what he has done, instead of what he means to do.

Few there are of the men who came into power with Mussolini who have remained an integral part of the Government; but of those few Luigi Ferdazoni is perhaps the most valuable aid in the reorganization and reconstruction. He is one of the few who possesses real strength of character, who is not fickle and changeable. Should a catastrophe befall Italy, he is the one man up to the present who could possibly take up the reins dropped by the iron hands now holding them.

A very interesting article appeared in the *New York Sunday Times*, in June 1926 (the name of the author has been forgotten), in which it was stated that Ferdazoni was the real Mussolini, and Mussolini merely a figure-head like the King. Signor Ferdazoni is a very intelligent man, a man of force and character, who could, if the need were to arise, as I have just said, take up the reins of the Government; but Signor Ferdazoni is not an organizer, not a constructor, not a leader; instead he is a manager, who, when the wheels run smoothly, can easily confront new problems, can follow a tradition, and make others do so. But a power behind the throne? No! There is no power behind Mussolini's throne but Mussolini—the only other



power is a wrecking power, a power which has, and will, use all its force to put him out of his exalted position, if it cannot succeed in killing him. And he himself has always said that he cannot be killed until he has finished his work.

Over 1900 new legislative measures were put in hand by the Fascist Government in less than two years ; many of them were measures of great importance—mostly the task of clearing the ground, of raking the past in order to make ready for the future.

There were, naturally, many evils for which there was no immediate remedy, such, for instance as the high cost of living, far worse in other countries than in Italy. The intensification of this evil was to a certain extent avoided by the continual issue of new paper money.

Mussolini hated the paper money, which he claimed resulted in loss of credit, and in want and misery. Frequently he expressed a desire to smash the printing-presses which turned it out. To-day the printing-presses have very little work to do, for Mussolini has been able to do away with much of the paper money, by re-establishing Italy's credit ; accordingly one, two, five and ten lire pieces, the five and ten lire in silver, are in circulation.

Under the new Government the lira ceased its downward trend, and very soon after Mussolini had things in working order, it began to rise a little ; until, at the beginning of 1924, Signor de Stefani, Minister of Finance, was able to announce in an official speech at Milan, that the year's budget would show a surplus of more than two milliards.

Ever since the war, the lira has been battling with other depreciated currencies, notably the French franc, which stimulated French exports, not only internationally to competitive markets, but to the Italian home market. However, Italy's monetary exchange problem did not make its first appearance after the war ; it has really existed

since the formation of the Kingdom, due to the Nation's difficulty to maintain equilibrium, and a favourable balance between its exports and imports. Even at the best of times the exports have outstripped the imports to only a small extent.

In planning, working, and starting new industries so as to increase her trade, Italy thus managed to keep at arms' length the scourge of unemployment. In 1924, if a man really wanted to work he could find something to do that would pay him a living wage, a condition that did not exist in 1921. Vexatious forms of taxation affecting personal liberty were to some degree diminished for the time being, and all laws injuriously affecting industry were abolished, as well as laws which could possibly have an evil influence upon thrift. The men of a family were given more encouragement to earn and save money for the future, having less to fear from the rapacity of the State.

For many years past, perhaps for decades—there had been talk of the necessity of constructing a single supreme Magistracy in Rome, in place of the three Courts of Cassation, which had always entangled and complicated the administration of the law; but the unification had never been achieved—for the legal worlds of Turin and Naples opposed it. Against all protests, Mussolini's Government abolished a number of tribunals in the smaller towns, and put the rest of the plan into execution without delay. Then too, there had been talk of educational reform; for decades there had been talk! Under Professor Giovanni Gentile, Minister of Education, there was promulgated and carried out in all its details and ramifications, a scheme of reform extending from the elementary schools to the universities.

This reform, which was nothing if not revolutionary, turned the old customs inside out, hit the vested interests,

and upset the habits and inclinations and prejudices of millions of people, over and above the hundreds and thousands of students, teachers, and professors more intimately concerned; but it was for the interest and betterment of the country, and it was instituted with inflexible energy.

Since this reform all over the country, it seems that many modifications have been admitted; among them women teachers are eliminated from all but the most elementary teaching.

Mussolini does not want women in public life any more than is absolutely necessary.

In transforming the educational system there was a complete transformation of a state of affairs which had existed since 1859.

Mussolini's favourite distraction, when he has time for distraction, is motoring. He has a habit of driving at a break-neck speed, regardless of the fear of the others in his car, or the stray chickens and ducks along his route. There is something symbolical of his government in his motoring. . . . His great love for the automobile may in some sense be responsible for the *Autostrada* which runs from Milan to Verona, and is the most superb stretch of road in the world.

Since 1922, Italy's transatlantic steamers have been noted among the finest, while before Mussolini became Chief of the Government, before young blood was mingled with the senile, the Italian steamers were mostly one-cabin boats, and the service second class. The new ships which have been added to the fleet since 1922, the *Duilio*, *Conte Rosso*, *Conte Verde*, and the *Roma*, are of a magnificence which compares with and easily equals that of the best of any English, French, German, or American line.

National monuments are being erected in all parts of

the country, beautifying a little corner of the world already noted for its antiquity, natural old beauties, and charm.

Fine new apartment houses and office buildings are to be found in every city, showing the impetus given to building; unsightly structures have been torn down or remodelled. Cleanliness and order, hitherto unknown in any of the popular quarters of the cities of Italy, now reign. There is a certain something, hard to describe, to be found in the Italians, as well as the country. Harold MacGrath, the well-known American novelist, who has been travelling to Italy for the past twenty years, remaining six months at a time, says that for a couple of years before Mussolini came into power, he had found his most beloved country in Europe quite impossible for a foreigner, and without being interested in politics, or having particularly studied Mussolini's methods, he is ready to state officially that ten years ago, or even in 1923, he would not have believed that Italy could ever have become the country he visited in October 1926.

"Where there had been misery, and filth, and uncultivated fields, seen from bad roads, I found a modest prosperity, an attempt at cleanliness, and during my month's motoring I found the country cultivated, the peasants smiling, and to all outward appearances contented.

"If there is discontent in Italy," Mr. MacGrath stated, "I did not see it, though in the cities I did not talk with the poorer working classes. I saw that the cafés, cinemas, and theatres seemed to be doing their usual business, and certainly the restaurants were filled—the food was of the excellence I have always found in Italy, and the prices perhaps a little higher than in France, but much less than in Germany, or England. And then the wines! Where, oh where, does one find anything better than a bottle of old Barollo, or Lacrimi di Cristo? Mussolini? But Mussolini is the man who has brought order out of chaos,

who has forced cleanliness where there was filth, moral as well as material ; who has enlarged, improved, and beautified Italy—what more can I say of him ? He has done what no man has ever done before him, and I doubt if another will attempt to imitate, or to follow in his footsteps, at least in this century."

And in order to do all that he has done, he has been forced to impose his powerful will, at all times to act the tyrant. It has not been easy to convince a populace famous as artists and poets and the tireless, but seldom really hard-working peasants, that the practical things in life are all-important, and that only through work and sacrifice can one rise to a recognized position of importance in the world, or make their country a power to be reckoned with.

Not in a day or a week has he been able to change the face of the country, but in almost five years of increasing power, by the incessant forcing of his projects.

"I am for the most rigid discipline," he announced in September 1922. "We must force ourselves to the most ironclad discipline, because otherwise we will not have the right to force it on the Nation." The Nation accepted that doctrine in October 1922, and while from time to time there have been murmurs against it, Italians have seen the results, and the growlers have little by little subsided.

They may still growl under their breath, and never venture to openly express their opinions, but they end by agreeing to discipline ; for never, so far, if they will admit the absolute truth, has the Duce been wrong in any really important question. There is not one real, loyal Italian who will not bow down before the stupendous intelligence and uncanny knowledge of the Chief, who in less than five years has made Italy a power among other nations of the world.

Many nations before, and during the war, looked upon Italy as something of an *opéra bouffe*. To-day, they may be

prejudiced against Mussolini, either on principle, or from the influence of the anti-Fascist writings in the newspapers ; but overlooking certain theatrics, which are after all essentially Latin, they must admit Mussolini's greatness, and the force and magnetism of his powerful personality, as well as the importance of the work he has done for his country.

*Chi tocca la Milizia avrà del piombo !* (literally : Who touches the Militia will have lead—in other words, he who hurts the Militia will pay !) That was a command, as well as a warning, which he issued in 1923, shortly before the first celebration in Rome (in the Fascist era) of the founding of the city.

What with all the regular saint's days, the patron saints, the regular national holidays, Italy now has the various celebrations of the Fascist organization dates, so that practically one day a week is some sort of a fête. One of the grandest of all the fêtes celebrated in Rome, is the foundation of the city, on April 21st.

On April 21st, 1923, the *cortège* filed through the arches and beneath the columns of the Coliseum, on its way to the Palatine through the arches of Titus and Constantine, and the Baths of Caracalla, in much the same way as Cæsar and his cohorts in their gilded chariots might have done—only instead of a chariot Mussolini rode a magnificent chestnut, and in place of the flowing robes and massive crown, a simple black shirt with a scarf of the colours of Rome over it, this uniform topped by the Fascist toque.

The interminable procession at last reached the Piazza Venezia, and at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Mussolini sat proudly on his horse, gazing at the immense army in whose ranks were represented the entire youth of the nation. That day, the man behind the mask was contented, proud of what he had been able to achieve, but still avid for the future. While the celebration was going on, he

sat absent-mindedly, from time to time leaning forward to gently stroke his horse's neck.

All was going well, marvellously well. Scarcely a voice was raised, other than in praise of the Duce. He was working gluttonously, as was his established habit, and he went here, there, and everywhere for recreation, as well as for official purposes. He drove his own car whenever it was possible for him to make his trips by motor, and spoke at conferences from the north to the south, inspiring and convincing all who heard him. He sometimes went to a theatre, and very often managed to attend a concert ; he also appeared at public banquets. He was the joy and the pride of all who came into contact with him, the idol of the Italians everywhere, and of thousands of foreigners who had never seen him, or ever set foot on Italian soil.

The Sicilians wanted to see him, their Duce, to hear his wonderful voice, for already he had been making laws and ruling them for over a year, " and who has seen him ? " It was said that he looked like Napoleon, only his face was more severe, and his smile more magnetic. " But who has seen him ? "

So he went down to Sicily, where the enthusiasm which he aroused was almost pathetic in its eloquence. The mayor of a little village stopped the Duce's motor-car, and humbly said : " Excellency, we have nothing to ask of you other than this : Will you get out of your car for a moment, so that your feet may touch this soil of ours just once—for we fear you will never pass this way again, and we know your touch will bring us prosperity and joy ! " Another village mayor came to him, a little farmer dressed up in his Sunday suit, a rusty black coat and corduroy trousers, with his scarf of office proudly draped over the ancient black coat, and hesitatingly, he gravely said : " Last night my two brothers who were killed in the war came to me in a dream, and they said : ' Go to meet the

Duce, kneel before him, and thank him for having given himself to the work of saving the Italy for which we died.' ” Then humbly, his rude peasant's hat in his hand, he knelt in the dusty road before Mussolini.

A man would have to be endowed with a heart of iron not to feel the beauty, the reverence of such humble demonstrations ; and Mussolini's heart is tender where the simple, honest people are concerned. All the happenings during his trip to Sicily touched the Duce deeply, and though he talked little about his intentions, he secretly planned many improvements for that part of his country. His sense of humour, one of the richest things in his character, never comes into play with other than the great, or the would-be great, who never seem to have realized that the fine, serious statesman ; their powerful, all-powerful Prime Minister, might in his most serious moments be taking them in *giro*, be laughing up his sleeve at their outward homage, their suave expressions of devotion used to cover a certain fear, in the case of diplomats. Anyone who has ever passed five minutes in Mussolini's company, if anything of a student of human nature, must have noted how sensible and sensitive he is, and how profound is his speculative sense of humour.

While the Duce was in the extreme south, in Rome, and in the north of Italy, the anti-Fascists, too long permitted to circulate freely their propaganda as well as their persons, had been plotting for an eruption that would put Vesuvius to shame. At the meeting of Parliament on June 7th, the President of the Chamber advised all the politicians that the hour of the fraternal communion for the national good had struck. He called upon them in vain ! The opposition was being nourished by the hope of insurrection. The papers at once took up the news of Mussolini's loss of precedence, and began publishing long articles on the impending disaster. Then for weeks continual incitations



for civil war were being launched. They accused Mussolini of tyranny! Their statements were backed up in such a way that Fascism was again on the point of passing through a vast and profound trial.

In a discourse on the 28th of January, 1924, Mussolini emphatically denounced the impudent and murderous enemy. His denouncement had little effect, for numbers of the Black Shirts continued to fall into the adversaries' traps. In March of the same year, Nicolo Bonservizi, head of the Fascio in France, and foreign correspondent for *Il Popolo*, was shot by a Communist while he was calmly dining in a modest Italian restaurant in the heart of Paris.

The Communist, it seems, was a new waiter in this restaurant, sent there by his group, to await Bonservizi, who was an habitué of the restaurant. The dinner was served by another waiter, and it was not until the unsuspecting correspondent was about to pay his bill that the foul act was committed.

There was very little about the brutal, villainous atrocity in the foreign papers. Nicolo Bonservizi was only a secondary Fascist leader, and a newspaper correspondent of no particular note. It was a murder, but not what one could call a luxurious one, in that the assassin was not highly paid. Bonservizi was young, capable, intelligent; he may have had a wife and children, or at least a mother dependent upon him; yet the outside world had very little interest in him: he was merely another Fascist to be cut off in his prime—there were still hundreds of thousands of them. "Peace to his soul!"

The body was brought back to Italy, and buried with full Fascist military honours. The funeral procession consisted of between three and four hundred thousand persons, and was held in drenching rain. In all the great mass of people, Mussolini was the only calm person. At

a certain point the *cortège* was held up for fifty minutes—everybody murmured through the annoyance of waiting, and complained of the weather, yet he stood motionless, his hands at his sides, at attention, while streams of water issued from either side of his hat, dropping upon his already soaked coat. He stood a very monument of impassiveness. When at length the cemetery was reached, unaffected by the unceasing downpour, except that his voice was hoarse, Mussolini delivered, calmly, and impressively, a noble oration in honour of the martyr. Then, in accordance with the impressive Fascist rite, he knelt on the damp ground with the others.

The assassination of Bonservizi was evidently merely a beginning for the series of material and moral provocations inside and outside the confines which were to become more and more intense. . . . On June 6th, 1924, the Socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti paid, unique among his own party, the continued crimes of anti-Fascism and anti-Italianita.

Then came the horror and gloom of impending disaster. The lira dropped, the country seemed to be going to pieces, and everything from earthquakes and tidal waves, to the overthrow of the Monarchy and Fascism, was predicted.

The Duce knew everything that was taking place, but for the time being he was helpless to arrest the onrush of tragedy. Behind the implacable mask the man suffered intensely, as powerless he watched the relentless fury of the anti-Fascists. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." If they could not have his blood on their heads, they at least meant to have his ruin.

The fact that the revenge the anti-Fascists demanded had been anticipated in the murder of Bonservizi and hundreds of others, never dawned upon the infuriated minds. Mussolini was the all-powerful one in Italy, and

the murder of so great a person as a Socialist deputy could only have been accomplished at his instigation.

Impenetrable, more than ever closed within himself, Mussolini remained at his post, not even trying to silence immediately the mad fury, nor to insist upon a true censor. He believed it better to wait, if need be, through long months of moral hideousness, for the hour of justice. In their grey physiognomy, those days very much resembled the days of Caporetto.

Fascism had somehow got into a circle to which there was neither exit nor entrance. Many of the leaders were under suspicion, and were being watched by their own, as well as the opposite side. A breaking up of the Militia was called. There were threats of a process against the régime. Denouncements were made to the Supreme Court, false testimony was diffused. Tons of printed pamphlets, containing the most infamous calumny, invaded the peninsula. Still Mussolini did not move. What, his followers began asking, was he waiting for? He did not move for the very simple reason that he knew their plan was to isolate him, and to thus bring about his fall, and that of Fascism with him.

His closest associates were amongst the most gravely suspected. Several were arrested, others mysteriously disappeared in foreign lands.

There were long, tedious trials, and still more trials, and the enemy's fury grew apace, though its power did not. To openly accuse Mussolini of the murder of a member of his own Parliament was next to impossible, for his faithful followers (and there were still enough to defend the Duce) would have killed the accuser before the words could be uttered. No, Mussolini was never openly accused of other than instigating the murder of Matteotti.

The anti-Fascists claimed that Matteotti was becoming too strong a power, and that Mussolini had begun to fear

him. Fear him? But what had Mussolini to fear? He, better than anyone, knew that neither Giacomo Matteotti, nor a dozen Matteottis, could oust him; he, better than anyone, knew the men in his country, knew that when the cards were all shuffled, the highest trump would be found in his hand.

He had waited a great many years to see the grandness of Rome, he could wait innumerable days to see Italy return to him, absolutely, and for always. . . .

Benito Mussolini did not instigate the murder of Giacomo Matteotti. Benito Mussolini is innocent of all complot to have Matteotti done away with. Matteotti was an able man, a man who might have gone far. Being a Socialist, he naturally was against Fascism and Mussolini, as the head of an opposing party, though it was never supposed that he had any personal enmity for Mussolini the man. Matteotti was a proposition to fight against, and the only serious menace to Fascism at that time.

With the keen intuition that is his, Mussolini may have divined something of the hatred that his leaders felt for Matteotti, and he may even have had certain leaders closely watched by the secret police; but certainly on a mere divination the Chief of a Government cannot put a number of men under arrest.

Through his organization and leadership of a great opposing and revolutionary party, Mussolini may perhaps be held responsible for the inadvertent death of many men, but not for that of any *one* man.

Mussolini does not think that the death of any one person can make a very great difference in the life of a country, for when one dies there are many to take his place.

As he feels about the life of others, he feels about his own. He belittles life, except it has a real purpose, though he does not deny the seemingly useless person the right to live.

Benito Mussolini is innocent of the killing of Giacomo Matteotti, his hands are not even remotely stained with blood. He can look as fearlessly into the eyes of the fatherless children of Matteotti, as he does into the eyes of his own.

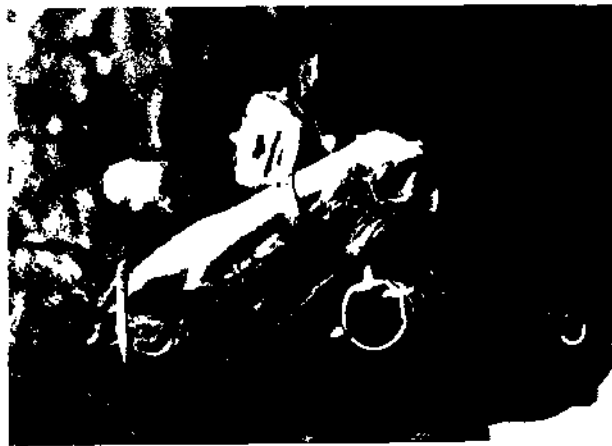
Matteotti's murder was premeditated and carried out by his own personal enemies in his *own party*, aided and abetted by certain *canaille*, who unfortunately are to be found in every political party, Fascism not excepted.

Probably the name of the actual assassin, or assassins, will never be revealed, unless there is a deathbed repentance, or, ill-gained money having all been spent, the murderer ventures to return to his country for more, and in some unguarded moment gives his secret away.

Even men of honour have been tempted by love of gain to commit atrocities, but it is evident that the men responsible for Matteotti's death have had little honour to lose, and much to gain—some say it took millions to get Matteotti out of the way! Be that as it may, he was only one of many martyrs who paid for the greater new Italy, and the time has come for the subject to be dropped.

Mussolini firmly believes that anyone has the right to kill before being killed. That idea gives the gist of the Fascist theory of that form of violence which he calls "legitimate" only when it is "necessary, loyal, and surgical." And in it also we have the foundation of his programme of Government. "The people," he declared in July 1924, "on the innumerable occasions when I have spoken to them close at hand have never asked me to free them from a tyranny which they do not feel because it does not exist; rather they have asked me for railways, houses, bridges, water, light, and roads."

After Matteotti's assassination, the first utterance that Mussolini made in an address to the Grand Council of the



WITH HIS FAVOURITE HORSE, A SCOUT RE-  
IRISH BAY



THE DEPARTURE FOR TRIPOLL. AFTER  
VIOLET GIBSON HAD WOUNDED HIM



Fascists, was one of vehement impatience and protest against the infuriated storm which had broken out, and which prevented him from applying himself to the task of ordinary administration—the only task which he considered as vital and essential, that of giving the people what they wanted and were continually asking for : bridges, water, roads.

During the interminable months that followed, not one, but all the men of the party, and of the Government, were made to show their worth. Mussolini, at the Chigi palace, remained more alone, more superb than ever ; without doubt or fear for the future, secure in his destiny despite the blow that seemed for a time to have broken him. Once he said : “ Only an enemy who for long nights had planned to do some diabolical thing to me, could have affected this crime.”

And how intensely he suffered, the loneliest of lonely men ; for not even in his own home was there anyone to whom he could open his heart, supposing he had longed to, no soul to whom he could for a second show the agony in his soul. Then as now he lived alone in a great palace devoid of human joys, or the sound of happy laughter ; for since becoming the Duce he has deemed it wiser to keep his wife and children at a discreet distance, for if they were in Rome they might at times distract him from his work.

In the old days in Milan, in the office of *Il Popolo*, he had often talked of the plays he meant to write, and he even went so far as to jot a few notes in a little pocket memorandum book. While the Matteotti trials were going on, and Italy was in a state of general upheaval, according to Margherita Sarfatti, he found a real diversion in play-writing. “ He was very much taken up with his dramatic schemes. A short time after the Matteotti affair seemed to have crushed him, I met him going out one day, looking a



little more cheerful. He showed me a packet of manuscripts which he told me was a new play, with which he had succeed in distracting his mind when in need of relaxation from his worries and troubles. It was a play based on the life of the 'Campagna,' and this man, tired, exhausted, worn-out by his bitter experiences, had found refreshment in recalling the incidents of his own childhood."

Towards the end of the year the anti-Fascists had become so strong that they had actually announced their intentions of pushing Italy into a position of shame. If Mussolini had not remained firm at his post, it is believed that they would have recommenced a civil war, and the country have been worse than compromised.

The last days of 1924 were the blackest of all, and yet the Duce had never seemed to be more secure or serene. On January 3rd, 1925, he brought a sudden counter-attack, and the enemy circle was finally broken. A few rigidly applied public measures were sufficient to subdue the vile adversary, who when attacked scurried to cover, to wait for a new opportunity to harm him. In a speech in Parliament, Mussolini personally assumed the responsibility for the régime.

He said, and it must have been with bitter irony, "Up to to-day no one has ever denied me three qualities: a discreet intelligence, great courage, and a supreme contempt for filthy money." Then he went on to say that he was willing to assume the responsibility, political, moral, and historical, of all that had happened. "If more or less lame phrases which have meant well are sufficient to hang a man, bring out your cap and cord! If Fascism has only been castor-oil and oppression and not a superb passion of the best youth in Italy—the fault is mine! If Fascism has been an association of delinquents, if all the violence has not been the result of a determined historic climate, political and moral, the responsibility is mine, because I

have created a propaganda which began with the intervention and ends to-day. Italy, gentlemen, wants peace, tranquillity, and a working calm : we will give her that with love, if it is possible, or with force, if it is necessary. . . . Forty-eight hours after this speech the situation will be cleared in all areas. Everyone will know that it is not the caprice of a person, not the libidinousness of a Government ; nor is it ignoble passion, but only the endless, potent love for the Patria."

With that speech the tide turned, the Duce of Fascism came more fully than ever into his own.

Until 1925, while still forcing a rigid discipline upon himself, Mussolini circulated freely, when he had a moment to spare. He rode horseback in the Villa Borghese, he rode through the city with only a small escort, or often alone with Rudolfi. He went out in his car, with Cirillo his chauffeur to protect him, but that was not difficult, for it would have taken the world's champion sharp-shooter to have caught him on the wing, as he drove at incredible speed. And quite often he managed to have a little vacation with his family, who live at Milan, and in the summer at Forli. . . . He never refused to attend banquets, even though he hated them, and not infrequently he went to the theatre, in which he is very much interested. He attended practically all diplomatic receptions at the various Embassies and in society as well as in political life he was very popular with all, while never intimate with anyone.

He had fought a hard fight, a terrible fight—only he in his secret soul will ever know how terrible—a fight that sapped the moral, then the physical strength, and the cast-iron will gave way, the nerves refused to carry him on.

A forced parenthesis came towards the end of the winter, for the doctors insisted that the illness from which he was

suffering was too grave to be longer neglected, for neglect would mean the giving up of hope for a cure. All during the time of forced repose and cure, the late Queen-Mother was, of all the interested people in Italy, the most interested in his condition.

As little as they really knew each other, a great affection had grown up between Queen Margherita and Mussolini, which dated from the day he was first presented to her. Margherita of Savoia was a woman of insuperable regality, and when he came before her she observed him attentively, curious to find some sign of embarrassment regarding the proper etiquette. But she was deluded, for the new Chief, very new then, revealed only a proud naturalness of manner and a perfect comportment in the surroundings. Only a short time before her death, during Mussolini's illness, the Queen observed to Licinio Cappelli the editor, that Mussolini, besides being a grand man, was also a handsome man. "What a pity," she added, "that so many photographs spoil him and make him so ugly."

He was miserably unhappy during the enforced repose, physical but not mental repose, for during all of the time he was kept from active work he was planning many new improvements for Rome, and studying, studying philosophy.

With the first spring days, those incomparable spring days of Rome, when all the flowers in the world seem to be blooming for the pleasure of the fortunate who flock to the Piazza di Spagna, or wander through the beautiful Villa Borghese to the Pincio, Mussolini, who loves nature so intensely, was again permitted to go out, to breathe the balmy air, to revel in the awakening of spring, the beauties of budding nature, the youth and life of all things. . . .

"Oh," he was heard to say as he stood on the terrace of the Villa Torlonia, where he was staying to recuperate, looking at the blossoming garden stretched before him, "to think that some day I must leave all this, that some

day I shall be where the roots of the flowers are, but unlike the flowers, I shall not bloom."

A political crisis had been inevitable, but it might have taken another form. Probably some part of the super-structure may have been broken under the shock of the Matteotti crisis, but it left unbroken a solid mass of humanity, strong in its greatness, united, with the one man who had saved them from ruin this time as he had in 1922 ; united with the one man, who like all human men is bound to err, but on whom, no matter what happened, they could rely.

## CHAPTER XI

"RENDER UNTO CÆSAR. . . ."

**T**HE scene was apparently set for a moving picture tragedy, when at nine o'clock in the morning of November 4th, 1925, the police forced an entrance into a sumptuous room in an hotel near the Chigi Palace, from the windows of which the balcony on the corner of the Palace was distinctly visible. Zaniboni, an ex-deputy, dressed in the uniform of an Alpine officer, was preparing to handle, not a camera, but a machine gun.

At the same hour, in Turin, General Capello, retired, was closing his boxes preparatory to departure for foreign lands. . . .

At the window in the sumptuous room of the Hotel Dragoni, a machine gun with a telescopic sight that had been used in the war, was discovered ready for action.

A closed automobile, stocked with petrol, food, and papers necessary for passing all barriers and frontiers, waited in a nearby deserted street.

Zaniboni, who was supposed to have received 150,000 lire from some source outside of Italy (from whom it was never discovered), was arrested, together with several accomplices, among them a socially prominent woman, who knew nothing of the complot, unless Zaniboni talked in his sleep. Eight other people were arrested at Genova, thirty in various other cities, and General Capello's brother, a retired postmaster, at Naples.

For several days the national—and foreign papers as well, were full of the infamous affair, and great astonishment

was expressed everywhere over the discovery of a retired General being among those mixed up in the complot. What had Mussolini ever done to the Army?

The evening following the disclosure of the conspiracy a great crowd of Romans gathered in the Piazza Colonna.

"*Viva Mussolini ! Viva the Duce !*" they shouted under the windows of the Chigi Palace. "We want the head of the infamous Zaniboni ! *Viva Mussolini !*" Louder and louder they continued to call for him.

At last, surrounded by his Ministers, Mussolini appeared on the balcony. Smiling, he saluted the enthusiastic crowd. . . .

The acclamations ceased, and Mussolini spoke. He expressed his satisfaction in the manifestation, as it was a proof of the love his people bore him. There was nothing to fear, he assured them, as all necessary measures for his safety had been taken. He asked the thousands of Fascists gathered there to impose the most severe discipline everywhere, but while imposing discipline, to abstain from any and all acts of violence.

A few precautions were taken, it is true, but a very few, for Mussolini has such absolute contempt for life that it was impossible for his ministers to make him understand that his life, as an individual, no longer belonged to him. Yet who was there in Italy or in the world to dictate to him ? They tried to threaten him with an extra escort if he would not listen to reason, while in turn he threatened to deliberately put himself in danger if they insisted upon taking his liberty away from him. So, who could forbid him to ride horseback in the Villa Borghese in the mornings ? Who had the courage to take the joy of living from him, by reminding him that enemies and machine guns might be lurking behind trees, or around any corner he turned ? Who had the heart to rob him of the pleasure of his solitary

ride from his house to the Ministry? Who could force him to have his body guarded at every step by burly policemen? Who was there to order the secret police doubled or tripled?

Mussolini was the Dictator of Italy, the Duce of Fascism, and he alone could make and enforce a law; and while he did at length listen to reason and consent to an extra police escort, he refused to be guarded on every side every time he moved.

He continued to live much as Mr. Thomas Morgan's articles on 'Mussolini's twenty-four hours' picture him. He got up regularly every morning at seven, went through a few exercises, bathed in tepid water, dressed, and had his breakfast of a single glass of milk; then went for his morning canter. At nine o'clock he was at his desk in the Viminale Palace, where the affairs of all the Ministries, except the Foreign, are handled. He motored through the crowded streets of Rome at the rush hour, his car taking its turn with all the other home-bound cars; and sometimes he lunched in semi-public with official visitors. And again with no visible police escort, he drove off in his car to the Chigi Palace, where, from three o'clock in the afternoon, he received visitors and attended to matters of State and Foreign Affairs. Sometimes, late in the afternoon, he would appear at some very distinguished reception. He presided at banquets, and special gala nights found him in his box at the opera. And whenever the possibility of a couple of days' rest came, he was off to spend it with his children. He lived simply, very simply, and his official life was like that of any Prime Minister. . . .

When his daughter Edda was at school in Florence, he managed to go to see her several times, and each time he advised his wife, so that she could meet him there.

His love for children, another thing that shows him a real Italian, is well known, and never until 1926 did he



#### THE DICTATOR

By Alfredo Banti, Italy's finest sculptor since Michelangelo. This is one of the few portraits for which Mussolini actually posed.

*Facing page 244*





miss an opportunity of passing a vacation with his own sons and daughter.

The Rosa Maltoni Mussolini open-air school, a simple modern building set in a magnificent, well-kept garden on the hills above Rome, is his own personal gift to the city for the good of sickly children, and is an appropriate and beautiful memorial to his mother, the beloved of many school children.

Though there were no demonstrations worthy of note after the discovery of the Zaniboni plot, it brought about the much-needed end of the anti-Fascists in Italy. Mussolini appeared at the Conference of Locarno, and Italy reached an internal unity, political and moral, which had scarcely been dreamed of a year before. By the Duce's work, conditions necessary to the good of the people were established, and a nation rich in force and exuberance was put in the way of advancement along all lines. Anti-Fascism took refuge in other countries, the greater part in France, where, tireless, its members continue to work for the destruction of the man who saved their country from disaster; and with the destruction of the man, the downfall of Fascism.

Fascism can never be destroyed: the bulwarks are too strong, too deeply has it been embedded in the minds of its leaders, the lesser as well as the greater; too well are the children being educated and trained as Fascists for any other political sentiment to enter into their minds or hearts. In Italy to-day Fascism is as solid as the Catholic Church; it has, one might almost say, become a second religion. If he were to die a natural death nothing more than an uprising would take place, but if he were to be killed, a form of revolution against the assassin would undoubtedly break forth. If anything were to happen to Mussolini, another Duce would be elected, and Mussolini's work would be carried on along the lines laid down by him.

The Vatican has never fallen with the passing of a Pope, and Mussolini is not a Napoleon who has established an Empire, then abandoned it. He is a Dictator, the Chief of the Government of a Monarchy which he kept from falling ; therefore were the Duce or Chief to pass on, the Fascism which he constructed, bit by bit, could not and would not die.

Some say that he is a terrorist, and that Italy is under the reign of terror. In a sense he may be a terrorist ; all organizers are forced to be severe and to use discipline, which in many cases may be considered as a form of terrorism. But why not be just, and render unto Mussolini that which is his due ?

To whom or what does he owe the prejudice which exists against him in more or less degree in all countries ? To anything he has done personally ? No ! He owes it to what his enemies have accredited him with doing. Of the newspaper and magazine articles written against him, and appearing all over the world, few contain even a word of truth. Nor are the stories carried over the frontier by foreigners who have visited Italy apt to be other than stories told them by friends who heard them already third or fourth hand. The idle gossips of idle men and women ! Can a great Chief be condemned by intelligent people on such circumstantial evidence ?

One hears that he keeps the Donna Rachele, as Signora Mussolini is now called, hidden away from the world so as to be free to carry on a sort of white slave traffic. The utter absurdity of such a statement is refuted by the monastic life he lives apart from his work. What are left of his evenings are spent in quiet. Sometimes work must be prepared for the next day, but generally he indulges in the cultural activities for which he has a passion. Entertaining women in his home after midnight would not be in keeping with his taste or ideas of cultural activities ;

nor would they keep him in touch with the thought and progress of the times expressed in art, music, and literature.

Full of adventures and struggles as his life has been, it has never been spent in extravagant living. The desires of the body have in general received scant attention ; yet the outside world, the curious prying world, says he has always had a great weakness for the opposite sex. He is a normal man, or rather he was when he had time to be, but he lives absolutely alone, in a self-imposed asceticism in a great big, dull house, the Palace Tittoni, on the Via Rasella, a short street running from the Via Quatre Fontane to the Via Tritone. He never receives women alone in the house he calls home, neither does he receive them in the Viminale Palace ; and those who are admitted to the Chigi Palace are never permitted more than half an hour with him, so when and where does he conduct his amorous relations ?

There is a story told of a very rich, beautiful, and distinguished woman, who under some pretext had managed to be received several times at the Chigi Palace, and in the early days of his career the Duce had gone to a reception at her home. At length, exasperated by the lack of appreciation which he showed for her beauty and allure, and the little progress she was making in her relation with him, she wrote thanking him for past favours, and asking if she might not see him privately, as with all the ushers waiting behind the closed doors at the Chigi Palace she never felt alone with him. After a proper delay he replied that if she cared to come to the Chigi Palace at three any morning, she would undoubtedly find him absolutely alone !

"Women," Mussolini says, "are the agreeable or pleasant parenthesis of life, and considered as such they play a very important part in a man's existence." He does not consider women inferior to men, but being the delicate

sex they are naturally inferior physically, and physical inferiority imposes, as it were, a certain mental inferiority.

He is old-fashioned in his ideas, and patterns all women after his mother, who was undoubtedly a model mother ; and lacking the possibility of fulfilling their true mission of life, being robbed of their birthright, they should turn to some useful work, so as not to be parasites in the world of achievement in which we live.

" Women are the tender, gentle influence that represents the pleasant parenthesis in a man's life, the influence that often aids a man to forget his trials and fatigue, but that leaves no lasting trace. The more virile and intelligent a man is, the less need he has of a woman as an integral part of himself. Women are a charming pastime, when a man has time to pass, a means of changing one's trend of thought; but they should never be taken seriously, for they themselves are rarely serious. Men and women, in almost all their relations together, live a series of lies, and that is one of the reasons that to-day, with the affairs of State on my shoulders, I find I am better able to do my work when living alone. My wife and family are my dearest possessions, but so greatly do I treasure them, that I keep them apart from my day, as something refreshing to go to when I have a moment in which to rest. . . ."

Not like other men even in his way of living, Mussolini prefers to sacrifice himself constantly, to put even the joy of the family from him, in order to be freer to give himself mind, heart, and soul to the work of ruling, advising, and leading his country.

On June 7th, 1926, three days before the anniversary of the death of Giacomo Matteotti, the Duce had the honour, if it can be called the honour, of a first official attempt on his life. It was neither brilliant nor even remotely successful.

At eleven o'clock in the morning, Mussolini left the

International Surgeons' Congress, and came out into the Capitol Square. An enthusiastic crowd acclaimed him as he made his way towards his waiting automobile: the people pushed and shoved in an effort to get a closer look at him, and from the crowd a plain, elderly woman, poorly dressed, advanced, or was pushed forward by the pressure of those behind her. She was seen speaking to a man on her right; then levelling a small revolver, she fired at the Duce. She missed her aim by about an inch, and the bullet grazed the tip of his nose.

For a moment there was a stupified silence and calm such as generally precedes a human fury, then pandemonium broke loose. The woman was instantly and mercifully seized by the police before the crowd had time to become a howling mob ready to tear her to pieces. She was taken to the police station, where she remained perfectly calm, an ecstatic expression on the plain face.

Once again Mussolini proved that he is no coward. In calm, cold blood he gave instructions to prevent any disorder. When assured that all was in order, he permitted the doctors to attend to his wound. A small patch was put over his nose, then he got into his car and was driven home to lunch.

His lunch, always a frugal meal, consisted of a bit of boiled fish, or perhaps a chop, a green salad, or vegetables plainly boiled, and fruit; he ate with his usual deliberation and calm. . . .

On June 7th, less than an hour after he had been wounded, he finished his solitary meal, then without even mentioning the fact to his maid, he went to lie down for fifteen minutes.

For the past three years at least, he has been living entirely on his nerves, yet in the face of danger he has no nerves; which accounts for his fearlessness, but not his disrespect for life.

At the regular hour he was his desk at the Chigi Palace.

Ministers, friends, members of the Diplomatic Corps called. A message came from the King, and from the Pope as well. While under the windows of the Palace and in the Piazza Colonna thousands of people were gathering rendering grace to the Heavens for having protected their Duce.

They called, they yelled, they implored him to come out on the balcony for a second, that they might again be reassured of his safety, see once more with their own eyes that he had not been seriously wounded.

At last the long window opened, and he stepped out onto the balcony to be greeted by an ovation. Perhaps they had not seen the sunshine until the shadows had nearly fallen, for until they saw him erect, vital before them, few in that vast crowd had realized just what Mussolini stood for in their individual lives.

He raised his right hand in the Roman salute, theatrical if you will, but beautiful and impressive and a silence fell on the immense square, a silence so intense that every word uttered by the clear steady voice reached those standing in front of the café opposite. Miss Marion Peabody, who has lived for many years in Rome, was among those gathered in and about the Square, and as Mussolini came out on the balcony she managed to get to a safety spot close to the walls of the Café Singer, directly opposite the Chigi Palace, and at the far side of the Square, then a dark, surging, silent human mass. Miss Peabody is an American, and has never taken any part in the Fascist movements, and she hates crowds, but she was curious to see if Mussolini was as brave as his followers insisted he was, and if in a crucial moment he would be as great as she personally believed him to be. She considered that her efforts to see and hear him were more than rewarded.

One hand resting lightly on the balcony railing, he stood

a second gazing over the sea of faces upturned to him, unconscious that thousands of people were looking at him, waiting on his words, for as he gazed the human mass became as one being, intangible, illusive, changing, yet ever the same—the body of Italy, and he there on the balcony, high above them was the soul. . . . He knew, understood, and loved that vast body, and as the soul of man is immortal he knew then for the first time, that so long as that body needed him he could not die.

"I want you to hear my voice," he spoke at last, "so that you may be convinced that there is no change in its timbre, and also to assure you that the pulsations of my heart have not accelerated!"

Then he declared himself proud to be a part of a generation which never trembled or hesitated to go forward on the road indicated by fate. And he added with conviction that nothing, no one, could stop the march of the victorious Fascism. He emphasized the fact that there were to be no demonstrations, nothing to disturb the usual trend of affairs, or the calm to which they had become accustomed.

His deep voice, calm and beautifully modulated, the firm, straightforward gestures, the tell-tale patch on his nose, all produced an indescribable effect. Before the stupid attempt the Duce was admired, beloved; after, he was venerated, adored.

"Rest assured that no danger menaces the régime!"

"And the foreigner! The woman! Is she to go free?" A sound like the first move in a stampede answered the questions that had been thrown into the air.

"We will face this danger calmly! If those are the words you wanted to hear, I have pronounced them! Again I say there are to be no demonstrations; and above all, the peace of the foreigners in our midst is to be looked after, until we know more on the subject of this woman, no move of any kind is to be made!"



*" If I advance, follow me. If I go backward, kill me. If I die, vindicate me ! "*

The Roman salute, a deafening roar of applause, and the Duce disappeared. The long windows closed, and slowly, very slowly the crowd dispersed.

The would-be assassin was Miss Violet Gibson, an Irishwoman of about fifty, who was born at Dalkey, a suburb of Dublin, and is the third daughter of Lord Ashbourne, twice Chancellor of Ireland.

It was immediately stated by Miss Gibson's family, and generally believed, that she is insane, or at least mentally deranged ; for, while possessing all her faculties, she has certain eccentricities, such as playing with firearms. In fact, on February 27th, whilst in a *pension* at Rome, she tried to commit suicide by shooting herself in the chest, without, unfortunately, doing any serious damage.

She is Irish, she was in Rome alone, and known by her family to be insane. Who gave her her passport ? For without a passport one does not get from one country to another nowadays. Why, if she had the habit of playing with firearms, was she at large ? And why did she select Mussolini among all the men in the world whom she might have tried to kill ? Why did she not stay in her own country, and try her deadly work there ?

The carefully planned attempt, the usage of the demented foreigner, might have had serious international consequences if Mussolini had not had the good sense to foil his enemies by letting the attempt pass as the simple working of an unbalanced mind.

Some said that this attempt by a foreigner was a proof of the anti-Fascist sentiment abroad ; whether it was home or foreign anti-Fascist work, the poor deluded woman was certainly instigated by a far more reaching mind than her own deranged one—and only good came to Italy out of the unperpetrated crime, for it eventually brought

about a vital step which relieved the country of many undesirable subjects. The new law aimed to drive out the riff-raff, but was not a political measure to get rid of Mussolini's enemies: the political outcasts were to come under another classification.

The measure of deportation of the incorrigible riff-raff was like a social purge, ridding the country of numerous pernicious influences. In Naples alone over sixty usurers and forty cocaine sellers, who had been repeatedly guilty of the lowest offences, were on the deportation list. With such people Mussolini had no pity, for they sap the life blood of their compatriots, and give nothing in exchange.

The judgments on all cases brought before the higher court, and eventually to Mussolini, were, and are to be reduced, or revoked. Subsidies and financial help are often granted to the families of offenders. When in a position to do so, and if they wish, the proscribed may take their families with them. Their daily pay is ten lire, and they are sent to islands in the Mediterranean and the Adriatic, chiefly to Pantelleria, off Tunis, and the island of Teniti, in the Adriatic. Their sentences are from one to five years. Deportation for single political or social offences has existed at all times, and in most countries; in Italy it was never really abolished, though until recently it has not been generally applied.

Since the deportation law has been put into effect under Mussolini, in about six months, exactly seventy-five undesirables have been deported. These figures are not guess work, or newspaper talk, for they were given out by the Governor of Rome on March 26th, 1927.

The day following the Violet Gibson attempt, as planned, Mussolini left for a trip to Tripoli, his nose still unhand-somely bandaged.

September 11th, 1926, witnessed the third attempt on the life of Benito Mussolini, the most theatrical, and

the most serious. This time the would-be assassin was a political outlaw, Lucetti by name.

About ten o'clock in the morning, the Duce drove out of the Villa Torlonia, on the outskirts of Rome, where he had passed the summer. The car crossed the Piazza Porta Pia, to the Via XX Settembre, on its way to the Chigi Palace.

A young man suddenly appeared from nowhere, ran wildly towards the car, and with all his force threw a bomb. It hit the side window of the automobile and glanced off to the road, where it exploded. The splinters wounded four people, who were passing, so seriously that they had to be taken to a nearby hospital. But just what made the bomb explode in the road instead of against the side of the car, only a merciful Providence could explain.

Cirillo, the Duce's chauffeur, realized instantly that the bomb which exploded in the road was intended to kill the man in the back of the car, and probably the driver as well. With a presence of mind that should have earned him some sort of recognition, he put on the accelerator, and before Lucetti had time to launch another bomb the Presidential car was well out of range.

Mussolini ordered Cirillo to proceed directly to the Chigi Palace, where, without any conversation on the subject, even with his secretaries, he calmly took up his daily work.

That morning he received a foreign visitor, who had no idea of anything that had taken place, until he heard the crowds yelling in the Square. Mussolini told his frightened visitor, who probably had visions of a revolution having broken loose, of the attempt that had been made less than half an hour before.

He is an exceedingly brave man—that even his worst enemies admit—but there is no theatrical bluff to his fearlessness. He loves life, what he can recall of it when

he looks out from a window of any of his many prisons, or drives through the streets of Rome in his car—then perhaps more than at any time he actually watches the world pass by, and often he has noted the poor who have looked longingly in at his window. He sees instantly the sorrow or joy in a face, and never has he failed to recognize the signs of hunger. Oh, Mussolini is not the Prime Minister of classic form: he is the power driving the motor that turns the wheels of the Government, and he will drive it so long as there is strength in him. "But what," he says after each attempt, "is the life of one man, when there are so many in the world?"

Benito Mussolini's declaration to the representative of the Associated Press was more than serene, for when the Duce is calm, his thoughts are noble, his expression of a rare dignity.

"This," he said, "is the third attempt on my life in less than three months. The last event did not trouble me, for I am a soldier who has his marching orders, and who is ready to risk all for the well-being of his country. The measures of which I spoke to the people of Rome, are not taken for me, but for the Italian people who must not be periodically troubled in their activities. Say to America, and to the Italians of America, that neither the revolver, nor the bomb, nor other deadly instrument can turn me from my pathway."

This message was given to Mr. Robert H. Davis, of the Munsey Publishing Company, who was sent from New York by the Associated Press to interview Mussolini, and whose appointment happened to be fixed for the morning after the third attempt.

When asked if he believes in astrology, Mussolini will laugh, and say no, but under the second mask there is a certain faith in the prophecies which have been made for

him. Of course he could not believe all the diverse horoscopes that have been cast for him, or the thousands of warnings that have poured in on him from the day he entered into power. Warnings have come to him from every part of the civilized world, and in all languages.

"An ancient science is worth looking into," the Duce claims, "for the ancients knew a lot more about life than we do to-day. Before Christ, wise men and soothsayers were always consulted before any important act was performed. And as a result, man followed his destiny almost blindly. Now we try to combat the laws laid down for us, butt our heads against the ruling of fate—with the result that we stumble along instead of marching briskly."

Whatever his methods, whether he combats fate alone, or follows the soothsayers, or his own trick of fortune-telling, certainly he has always marched briskly.

On Sunday, October 31st, 1926, the fourth anniversary of the March on Rome was celebrated in every city and town in Italy. Benito Mussolini, the Duce of Fascism, was asked by the Militia to go to Bologna for the inauguration of the Littoriale, which is a magnificent stadium—the finest in Italy—for all outdoor sports, with a seating capacity of 50,000.

The Black Shirts with their respective leaders came from all parts of the country. Mussolini, in full Fascist uniform, wearing the black toque with a stiff aigrette, somewhat like that of Prince Danilo, in the second act of the *Merry Widow*, entered the arena on horseback, amidst the shouts and acclamations of the greatest crowd that had ever been gathered together in the city of Bologna.

Standing in his stirrups, his powerful body erect, he spoke . . . his speech interrupted from time to time by *bravas* and *vivas*. His last words were :

"Black Shirts! Raise high your muskets! Let the

entire world see the forest of bayonets and feel the pulsation of our firm and invincible hearts ! "

Through deafening cheers and shouts he rode from the arena.

The effervescence in Bologna increased from second to second : the city that was once so Socialist belonged heart and soul to him. The cohorts lunched ; they drank the best Chianti, and by afternoon each Fascist felt himself a *condottiero*. The sun shone brightly, the air was balmy and in every sense the feast day was a glorious one.

In the afternoon Mussolini inaugurated the Science Progress Congress which is one of the useful works organized by him, and ignored by the world at large ; then he jumped gaily into his car to be driven to the station, where his private railway car, one of the most superb in existence, was waiting to take him to Forlì (for a flying visit with his family), then to Rome, where urgent affairs of State never cease to call him.

Accompanied by Signor Grandi, Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs, and the Mayor of Bologna, the Duce's automobile passed slowly between rows of enthusiastic Bolognaise. And suddenly in the midst of so much that was joyous and festive, tragedy was upon them !

How it happened no one quite knew, for somewhere between the Via Rizzoli and the Via Indipendenza, a street that leads directly to the station, a pale boy was seen close to the automobile.

The following day, Signor Grandi recounted the story for publication :

" I heard a shot almost beside me, then I saw a very young man standing close to Mussolini, between the lines of troops and the car. . . . This youth still had his arm raised in the attitude of one about to shoot.

" The Duce saw the gesture and immediately understood it, and that it was a question of an attempt on his life.

Instead of dodging the shot, or at least ordering the chauffeur to go ahead at full speed, he sat calmly erect, without changing his position, and ordered the car to stop.

"When I fearfully asked him if he was wounded, he replied in his usual serene tone :

" 'It's nothing ! Nothing at all ! ' Then in a cool, authoritative voice he added : ' Now we must think of keeping cool ! Nobody here is to lose his head, or make a scene ! ' And smilingly tranquil, the Duce continued on his way. I have never seen him so superb : he passed the officers in review at the station, remaining quite a long time with them. Everyone in and about the station, with the exception of his personal staff, was still ignorant of the attempt.

"The Duce boarded the train, talking affably with us all the while. On his breast the scarf of the Grand Order of St. Maurice was scorched and shot through by the bullet, which after having grazed the Duce's breast passed through the Mayor's coat sleeve, and entered the left panel of the automobile.

"Before the departure of the train the Duce again gave instructions and severe orders so that the rhythm of life at Bologna, and all of Italy, should not in any sense be troubled. That same evening the bullet riddled scarf was sent to the Bologna Museum.

"I know my fate," he announced, "I shall not die until I have completed my work."

While Mussolini was on his way to the station, the tragedy of the Via Indipendenza had its fatal *dénouement*.

From the automobile following the Presidential car, so the official report had it, Signor Ricci, a deputy, and Signor Bonaccorsi, Chief of the Militia, threw themselves on the aggressor, who was immediately seized from their grasp by a thousand fierce eager hands, and in the terrible tumult he disappeared.

The young man Signor Grandi had seen beside Mussolini was Anteo Zamponi, a boy of fifteen, who had never been suspected of having anti-Fascist sentiments, as his brothers were ardent Fascists, and his father a zealous partisan of the cause, and the official printer for the Fascist party of Bologna.

Like mad, howling wolves the Fascists beat the boy : in vain the police and soldiers tried to rescue the unknown from their fury. He, that boy, had tried to kill their Duce—and death without trial or explanation was to be his punishment.

He was a small boy, one among many, and the struggle was a brief one. In the glory of the afternoon sunshine they left the still, bleeding body on the curb. There were no papers found in the boy's pockets, nothing to identify him.

That same evening his father, worried by his son's absence, went out to search for him. He learned of the attempt, and went at once to the hospital where the dead boy had been taken, to identify the beaten, mangled body as that of his son.

The father and mother of Zamponi were naturally arrested and put in prison, where they remained until it was proved that they were innocent of all knowledge of the boy's intention.

The *Evening Standard* (London) and various other foreign papers declared that they believed the child was innocent. Well, if he were, what was he doing with a loaded revolver ? Until twenty, a youth is not permitted to carry firearms in Italy. Why, too, did young Zamponi fire at Mussolini.

According to the opinion of many outside Fascism, the boy was the victim of a complot, for even the most serious and well-brought-up boys of fifteen have been known to be bribed into perpetrating the most atrocious crimes.



And also there are examples of the criminal instinct being fully developed, even at so tender an age.

The lynching of the boy, besides being a tragic and terribly brutal thing, was exceedingly stupid ; for had he been put on trial and made to talk many secrets might have been revealed, and a few mysterious happenings explained.

Certainly Mussolini, who was already at the station calmly reviewing his officers, and had given orders on the spot of the shooting, for calm to be preserved, is in no way responsible for what took place in the Via Indipendenza—nor should blame fall on the two men who first seized the boy to arrest him, for they were only two in an infuriated mob, and mobs are formed of the people who quickly lose their heads with their tempers.

What a marvellous thing it would have been, if Mussolini had arrested the boy himself, had taken him prisoner in his own car. If he had talked to him, shown him the horror of the crime he had tried to commit ! Every heart in the world would have gone out to the Duce then, and Anteo Zamponi, of all his slaves would have been the most faithful, the one person who at any time would have been ready to give his life to save the man he had attempted to kill.

But the great men of this age are men, sometimes human, but never divine. They do not say : " Father forgive him, for he knew not what he did." They do not turn the other cheek . . . they turn their backs, and continue on their way.

Since the attempt of October 31st, a new law has been made whereby capital punishment will be meted out to any person, regardless of race or sex, who attempts the life of the Chief of the Government.

Since October 31st so many new laws have been enforced

that the report of Mussolini being a terrorist spreads from mouth to mouth. Others say he is insane, quite insane. Insane for love of his country, insane not to have people under lock and key, where if their tongues cannot be tied they can at least be prevented from voicing their opinions to the world, stirring up hatred and revolution. That Mussolini is an *exalté* is certainly true, for no calm, even temperament could ever have aroused his countrymen as he did. Calm, emphatic words are for calm, emphatic people, and the Italians are not that; they needed words, words that burned deep into their minds and left them at fever point, words such as he alone knew how to utter.

The hand that wielded an anvil was adept at the sword and the revolver. Into his words and actions he put the enthusiasm of youth, the vindication of early suffering, and he did it at the psychological moment when Italy was still inflated by the victory of the war, and not satiated with the smell of blood. He was the one man in Italy who could keep the people stirred up, and ready to strike out fearlessly when the Socialist and Communist rule was threatening to overthrow the Monarchy, and to put Italy into the class of bankrupt European countries.

He is an *exalté*, yet Mussolini has the clearest judgment, the most alert mind of any public man in Europe to-day, not to say the world. He has no atavism, no profound cult, but he is highly and profoundly cultured, and has a memory equal to that of the late Theodore Roosevelt. He never forgets a face, a name, a date, a kindness, or an evil action: he is a Latin, a Cæsar—hot, passionate blood flows through his veins, and he does have moments when he sees red, moments of terrific internal rage. He has learned to control the outer man and at those times he has been known to make vital mistakes—which in the calm that follows he has always seen, and been able to rectify.

Cæsar is his great inspiration; he has him before him,

or rather behind him, all the time, as a bust of Cæsar is placed well above his desk so that when he is seated Cæsar is looking down upon him, while in Italy, in a modern way, the history of the Cæsars is being repeated.

In certain times the Roman Republic had sixty-four dictatorships, which means there was a dictatorship every four or five years. Sylla had a period greatly resembling that of Mussolini; he also had his Matteotti in the person of Cinna, who was murdered. The populace was so angered against Sylla that he was forced to go away in order to find a way to re-establish his prestige. He went on a campaign in the East, and upon his return he received the greatest triumph ever seen in the Roman Forum. Though only a private citizen the populace acclaimed him. . . . Yes, dictators sprang up periodically in those days—that is perhaps the chief difference from the present time.

It is said that Mussolini is mad, mad with ambition. That he wants to rule the world. It is true that he is mad, mad with ambition for his country. He has an absolute contempt for death, that has been said before, and probably will be again. He would willingly go before the Dread Monster if his work were terminated: to succumb for Italy, for his country, would seem a natural, normal thing to him. Neither poignard, nor bomb, nor revolver have made him level his eyes—he who would deny this courage, this temerity, would be a vile calumniator. Fear is a sentiment that the Duce ignores. He never tries to evade danger when he sees it approaching, he never turns his back as another might be tempted to do; instead he turns—and calmly faces it.

A terrorist he may be, for he makes his people work; yet no matter how hard they are forced to work, he forces himself harder, for his day knows no eight hour schedule. In Italy there may be laws that seem useless to those who do not understand them, but on the other hand, if he

finds a law is no longer necessary, he is the first to think of repealing it. He is ready and willing to listen to all just complaints; he will receive small and unimportant persons quite as willingly as he does the grand, if they have something to say. Everybody in the Kingdom of Italy now has a chance to do something, to be somebody. He is ready to promote any invention he believes is of the slightest value, and to give his help in organizing any national science or sport.

Now things are being done in Italy. Now the Italians are marching forward; producing, building, taking their place among the world's scientists, inventors, sportsmen. Fascism has done that, or rather the power ruling the Fascists, for without that power, without that stern, mad man, where would Italy be to-day?

There are many anti-Fascists, and even non-partisans who think Mussolini has gone too far, and that for that reason alone another party will soon take his place, and that Italy will be the same fine country, only better, for there will be no strict laws, and thus people will be able to do as they please.

No! Mussolini has not gone too far, for if he had he would know it, and turn back. He, the son of a blacksmith, has reinstated the aristocracy, which for fifty years had no official position at Court. Until he came into power, a commoner, a *commandatore*, who may have bought his title by money made in any profiteering way, passed before a Roman prince at a Court reception. This is now changed. Family counts for something to-day, if the members do anything to show their worth. He it was who appointed a Roman prince as Governor of Rome, thus again making an ancient name respected by the populace as well as the aristocracy.

The new propeller system invented by an obscure Naval engineer was brought to his notice. The inventor

was at once sent for, the invention discussed, then, as the man was poor, funds were placed at his disposition so that he might perfect his invention. The result? In a few months, perhaps before this book goes to print, Italy will have the fastest transatlantic steamer in the world. A ship that will make forty knots an hour, and be able to cross from Italy to New York in four or five days. She will be slightly smaller than the *Roma*, but built in such a way that she will verily plough the ocean, cutting her way like a knife.

The reign of Fascism has brought an impetus to Italy that no one would ever have expected. The great work in all public improvements, the building of the Apulian aqueduct supplying forty communes, the building of the biggest tunnel in the world between Florence and Bologna—a tunnel ten miles long, which reduces the running time of trains by hours. The construction of the new direct line between Rome and Naples, reducing the running time by two hours. The electrification of the line between Modane and Leghorn, the longest electrified stretch in Europe.

Since the early ages when cows began giving their milk to be sold in the cities, it has been diluted in Italy. Among the "terrorist" laws made by Mussolini is one forbidding a dairy to sell watered milk; the punishment for such an offence is imprisonment, a fine, and the closing of the shop for a stipulated time. If the offence is repeated the licence to sell milk is taken away entirely. So used were the Italians to doing exactly as they pleased, that they paid no attention to the new law, and in defiance of it watered their milk even more than had been their habit. But they found that Italy had a ruler who made laws that *were* laws. Dozens of milk shops were closed in every Italian city, while the owners were given plenty of time in prison to think of new ways of evading the law in the future!

Then who ever heard of hand luggage being controlled on an Italian railway? As far back as any old traveller can remember, the early arrival at the station frequently filled the luggage racks with his bags, so that a late-comer was forced to put his belongings out in the corridor, thus making it impossible for anyone to pass to and fro. Now a prescribed weight is permitted with each ticket, and anything over the stipulated amount is paid for as excess luggage at expedition rates; therefore those who are in the habit of placing young trunks over the heads of unsuspecting travellers will now have the young trunks checked, left behind, or over his own head, the one piece of luggage permitted him. . . .

So trained are the eyes of the inspectors, that nobody can get by them: a certain woman leaving Rome for Paris, on the Rome-Paris Express, had a suitcase, hat box, toilette case, and two extra coats. Having been thrice called in conference with the Duce, and her bag being lined with his photographs, she felt a very important person as she followed her porter. She very much resented the inspector suggesting that her luggage was overweight. She insisted that she could carry what she pleased, and as a proof waved her sleeper ticket at him. Nothing had any effect, and she was finally politely forced to have the offending luggage weighed, and to pay for exactly twelve kilos overweight. . . .

That was a very good occasion to curse the “terrorist” régime existing in Italy, and to speak of the stupidity of the Fascist Government in general; but the woman in question being rather a sensible person, realized—not that it was for her good, that would be too much to expect of a woman—that laws were actually being enforced in Italy. . . .

These are only a few of the, so called, unimportant laws, laws that annoy a great many people, but that tend to make

a populace honest in business, and ready to enforce honesty in their neighbours.

Then there is the Corporative Government, only in its infancy, but so far very successful. It is spoken of as the Mussolini Corporative Government, for of course he was the one who first thought of trying this form of government. If it does not prove to be the right form of government there will be a change.

Corporations, or Guilds, have been established for all possible classes of workers. There is the corporation of intellectual workers : writers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc. ; the Labour Corporation for each and every class of working people—in all, fifty-five have already been organized.

Among the fifty-five organizations is the Corporation of Antiquaries, which the Fascists will try to control in order to prevent the selling of an object costing five pounds for two hundred. Painters who restore ancient pictures are also to form corporations, and will be severely punished if they fabricate old paintings, and get dealers to sell them as authentic. There are corporations of all kinds of masons, metal workers, gold, silver, copper, and brass founders ; enamellers, coiners, coral, amber, and lava workers ; precious stone cutters, jewellers, watchmakers, and even scissor grinders. Other artistic corporations are those of gilders, varnishers, tapestry makers, workers in terra-cotta, china, and glass ; marble workers, leather workers, lace makers, and manufacturers of pianos, mandolines, and accordians. Photographers, lithographers, felt hat makers, straw hat weavers, and even washerwomen and linotype operators are counted among the professions, and have each their corporation !

This is much like the Guilds of the fourteenth century.

These corporations each have their own Minister who deals with all questions that can possibly arise, and which

are to be presented to him through the heads of the corporation, or their lawyers. All this leads to a state of internal peace, as there will be no more strikes to contend with, for when difficulty arises in any line of work, the employee goes to the head of the corporation and tells his trouble; the employer is called to defend himself, a special committee of experts in that line decides who is in the wrong, and until the matter is decided the workman must continue his work, and the employer must continue to give him work. Thus those who work are protected, and the employer is also assured that his workmen will not leave him in the middle of a rush season, nor even when work is slack. It protects the landed proprietor in good weather, and the workman in bad. What could be better for a nation?

This Corporation Government will probably lead to a Co-operative State, which is what Mussolini is really striving for: that means to have the Chamber of Deputies, not as it is now, but each Deputy as the representative of a certain class of people instead of a district.

Too much money had always been spent for flour on the foreign market. Bread and macaroni being the staple food for the people, the price of both are fixed by the Government, for following the money exchange makes it hard on the poor. So for the benefit of all classes Mussolini ordered, and in company with the King assisted at, a great planting of grain, both he and the King breaking the ground in the Campagna Romana, where vast fields were planted. Enormous crops were harvested, and the price of all farinuous foods reduced accordingly. For a time, until their own flour was ready for use, the bread\* of rich and poor alike, as an economy, was made of equal portions of whole wheat and white flour. Not pretty to look at, but

\* This was the famous "black bread" of which so many foreign papers wrote in 1926.



excellent for the health. The King and Mussolini also assisted at the harvesting.

Mussolini has excited interest in Italian boxers. Spalla and Fregerio, and in fact all Italians who have become recognized in any kind of sport, have found a champion in the Duce. Fascism is youth, and gymnastics give force, beauty, and health to young bodies, and therefore should be cultivated. Champion swimmers have come forward, and this year a team is being prepared for the Olympic Games. De Pinedo, Locatelli, Ferrarin, and Nobile were among the early followers of the Duce, and to-day he has no greater nor more appreciative admirers than de Pinedo and Nobile, and both have been greatly aided in their daring adventures by him. In fact, but for Mussolini's interest in their plans, it is not likely that either of them would have been able to carry out their ideas for expeditions—expeditions which have brought them personal glory, as well as glory to their country.

Like almost all Italians Mussolini is an artist, a creator of taste and style. In one of his speeches he said "Democracy has taken the style from the life of the people. Fascism brings it back by introducing a line of conduct in which there is colour, force, picturesqueness, the unexpected, the mystic ; in fact all that counts to the souls of the multitudes. From art to politics we play on all the chords of the lyre. We are politicians, and we are warriors."

They, the Italian people, like to hear him talk, for he knows how to find just the right words to reach the hearts and minds of a people who, while living in a modern age, are still accustomed to think in terms of the Middle Ages, which were neither Latin nor Roman. One can truthfully say that, in Mussolini, there is the genius of race, which breaks spontaneously from the hard crust of the Mother Earth to carry salvation and renewed youth to Italy.



H. M. KING, A. L. TOR, EMMANUEL, AND MUSSOLINI

At the wheat harvesting, which, owing to the latter's efforts was greater in 1926 than ever before in the history of Italy



Because of all this, Mussolini is an artist ; artist as the creator of Italy's political fortune, artist as the promoter of manifestations of beauty.

Among his other accomplishments he is a tireless architect ; and a monument to record the " Martyrs and the Victory " that will eventually rise at Bolzano was designed by him.

Mussolini is an artist as orator and as journalist. He never says more than is necessary, and expresses his ideas with elementary simplicity. He speaks rather slowly, with a metallic, far-reaching voice.

The commotion aroused in those who listen to him is derived from the substance of the ideas that he expresses, from the force of his affirmations, which seem to be realized by the words themselves. He rarely raises his voice for the perorations, and he only slows down when saying something that by its very grandness must move his listeners. He uses few gestures now, though four years ago his speeches were marked by an over use of gestures, a failing of so many Latins. While a concept is flashing across his mind he is apt to move his head slightly as though under the pressure of a new idea. He never gives way to emotion, whilst those who listen to him remain breathless . . . and he never fails to reach a predetermined end. His force dominates and leads the enthusiastic crowds, which, like modelling clay, never fail to show the impress of his will.

But now he speaks no more. Even on the Eighth Anniversary of the founding of Fascism, which was celebrated with great pomp in Rome on March 27th, 1927, he did not do other than acknowledge the acclamations and cheers when he appeared in the Piazza del Popolo. He did not speak to the multitudes gathered together, though his proclamation was read by millions of Italians all over the world :

“ Black Shirts !

“ Eight years have passed since the day in which, as an augury, the Italian Fascio of Combatants rose.

“ In March 1919, a handful of men affronted the hostility of the Government, and that of the deceived and betrayed working masses.

“ In October 1922, a victorious phalanx passed where the sacrificed had coloured the ground with their blood ; to-day the handful has become an immense army that concurs with the entire Nation.

“ Bayonets were necessary for the idea ; the idea became the régime which has been accepted by all the Italian people.

“ *Avanguardisti* !

“ On this glorious anniversary, with a solemn and suggestive celebration, the régime gives you an identity card and a musket. The first is the symbol of a trust, the second is the instrument of our force. Consider it the highest honour to put on the black shirt, the greatest privilege to enter the ranks of the Militia.

“ Black Shirts !

“ Go forward to meet this new generation with valiant arms, for they are those who assure us our future.

“ With the old war hymns salute the *Avanguardie* which comes to us, fresh as the dawn, immune to all contagion.

“ Against the attempts of the old world, which we have erased and dispersed, the ardent and disciplined youth of the Lottorio remains, anxious to work and to fight for the power of the Fascist Italy.

“ Black Shirts, to Us !

Mussolini.”

Eighty thousand *Avanguardie*, which are the youths from fifteen to eighteen, were enrolled as full-fledged Fascists on March 27th. In 1922, twenty-five thousand were enrolled. Each year brought an increase, of which the greatest is

from 1926 to 1927 ; thus in actual figures there is the proof of the growth in Fascist sentiments in five years.

Now every school has its Fascio, and every child who is old enough to attend public school may join a company, somewhat similar to the Boy Scouts in England. Even girls, of all ages, known as the *Ballilia*, are Fascists. They have their uniforms, and at all celebrations march in line, company by company, the same as the boys.

To-day Mussolini is Fascism, and Fascism is Italy, and every Italian worthy of the name is with him. The sentiments of the fathers are being handed down to the sons and daughters, perhaps even unto the third and fourth generations ; and the principles of Fascism are being instilled into children almost from birth. And be it remembered that in Italy there is no race suicide.

Still there are people who maintain that Fascism cannot endure ; it may be three months, or three years, but it must fall ! As the régime is to-day, it may not last indefinitely, but the idea, the real truth of Fascism will stand for many centuries, for it will be innate in the coming generation of Italians, and as much a part of them as their religion.

This is a prophecy.

A stupendous amount has been spent on changing and beautifying Rome. Streets have been widened and, where possible, tramways suppressed. There are new omnibus routes, and real traffic regulations, managed by a new police force called the Metropolitan, have been established in all the important cities. Mussolini would make Rome the grandest and most beautiful capital in the world. From the Campigoglio looking down on the ancient beauties, the relics of a bygone age, one is apt to feel that the city of the Cæsars is already, and has been for centuries, the most fascinatingly beautiful city in existence ; and

that even a touch of modernism would spoil it, make it like all capitols, which, while beautiful, lack individuality.

When the streets of Rome were being widened, a boot-black, war mutilated, was ordered to move his stand from the corner he had occupied ever since he was discharged from hospital. He had worked hard to build up a business, and if he moved he would lose his customers. He asked the civil authorities for permission to remain on the corner where he was known. They refused, stating that a boot-black's stand was unsightly, and ruined the appearance of the newly widened street. It took courage and a long time to compose a proper letter for the Duce, but at length it was ready and despatched. A week of anxious waiting, then a letter came to the bootblack giving him permission to take his stand back to the old corner !

The plan for a National Theatre, something on the order of the *Comédie Française*, has been proposed by Luigi Pirandello, and a young manager by the name of Giordani. The National Theatre will be in three cities, Rome, Milan, and Turin, each with an established company of about fifteen actors for the lesser rôles, while the stars will change about according to the repertoire. There will be one management for the three theatres, and the plays given will be exclusively Italian. Two million lire are needed to start the scheme, after which it is believed that the theatre will pay, and be entirely self-supporting. Mussolini has been interested in the scheme from the outset, and it is believed that it will not be long before the necessary amount for the opening of the theatre will be appropriated.

In Italy there are many good actors and excellent playwrights, and Mussolini's desire is to further the plans for a National Theatre, which will give both the playwrights and the actors a chance to perfect their art to the point of making it international.

Four hundred and twenty million lire was recently set aside for educational purposes, and it is to be largely spent to make the Italians highly trained and efficient modern workmen. There is to be no repetition of the illiteracy of the past generation, which, while less than in Russia, reached an appalling number.

No, he does not speak now, except through his actions. Now he remains all the long day every day, except Sunday, seated at one of his massive desks. And his day begins not later than nine in the morning, and often, very often ten o'clock in the evening finds him still at the Chigi Palace.

“A man cannot become better if he does not enter within himself, if he does not meditate.” And only in the still watches of the night does Benito Mussolini ever have time for meditation. Yet never for a minute has he ceased to go forward in his march, never a day passes that he has not improved his mind in some way ; never a day that he has not rendered someone help, or performed some act of kindness.

One day in his car with a famous Roman prince, as they stopped before the door of his friend's palace, where they were lunching, he noticed a pale, thin man leaning against a column. Without a word, with a quick movement, he drew a bank note from his pocket, and pressed it into the man's hand ; to the friend who marvelled at the spontaneous act towards a person who had not asked for anything, he said : “ You're mistaken when you say he did not ask me for anything, but it's not your fault. Only those who have suffered from hunger can understand the supplicating glance of another hungry man.”

He sympathizes with those who are hungry, for he has known the horror of their suffering, yet he hates meals of any kind, and cannot tolerate long dinners ; for some time past he has not attended banquets, as it irritates him to



see people eat and drink a great deal, then become drowsy from the effects. But then, Mussolini has never enjoyed company at meals, not even that of his own family, and much as he cares for his brother, he never lunches with him if he can avoid it.

Benito Mussolini, the Prime Minister of Italy, six Ministers in One, as Jo Davidson, the American sculptor, spoke of him, is honorary citizen of every city in Italy, for the Italy that is rising anew recognizes herself in him.

"Cure yourselves of me!" he said at a Fascist reunion after several attempts had been made on his life. "The idea does not die with the passing of a man: it is divine and immortal. The approbation that comes to us and our work is determined by the fact that Fascism is a spiritual force and a religion to all. My ambition, O Signori! I have one, and only one, and for it, it does not matter if I work fourteen to sixteen hours a day, nor would it make the slightest change in my work to-day, if I knew I had to leave life to-morrow; nor would I esteem it the greatest sacrifice to die—we all have to sooner or later. My ambition is this: I want to render the Italian people strong, prosperous, grand, and free!"

Perhaps they are not quite as free as they or he would wish them to be, but if there are restrictions regarding the public life, at least the people are quite as free in Italy as they are in many other countries. Apart from the second and third-rate night clubs being closed this winter, second and third-rate judged from the Montmartre standard, with which Italy has never tried to compete, life in every city and town is exactly as it was before and after the war. Men and women sit outside, or inside, the innumerable cafés over coffee, or a long drink until midnight: they go to the cinema, or the play; they ride about in taxis when they do not have their own cars, and they wear good

clothes. They dine and wine, when and as they wish, and in the smart hotels there is dancing at tea-time, and after dinner until midnight, while the hotel bars are open until one a.m. From seven o'clock in the morning until nine o'clock in the evening one can order anything alcoholic—there is no restriction as to quantity, though in order to prevent drunkenness a law limits the licences for the selling of alcoholic beverages to one for every thousand inhabitants. There is nothing even suggestive of dryness in Italy, but Mussolini himself is absolutely abstemious. What more can be demanded in a country that never pretended to offer night life to its visitors?

There are superb new cinema theatres in all cities, where the world's best films are shown. The operatic productions, known to all music lovers, at the Scala in Milan, rival those of the Metropolitan and Covent Garden. And the greatest living operatic conductor, Toscanini, until this past season, has conducted all the new presentations. Also Chaliapine, the finest living baritone, was first heard in *Boris Goudonoff*, at the Scala.

In all the arts: music, literature, sculpture, etc., in aviation, automobile racing, exploring, boxing, fencing, the Italians of this new generation take many first places; the possibilities for all this being provided by their energetic, up-to-date Prime Minister.

More than six centuries before Mussolini, Dante described Italy as “rudderless in a storm.” And that was what Italy was in 1922; now in the fifth year of Fascism, there is one national state, which is natively Italian. Always, before, Italians thought of the State as something superimposed from without, something smacking of tyranny. Mussolini set himself the task of giving Italians a purely Italian National Government, and winning their passionate loyalty to that Government. Political skill, economic knowledge, and sagacious dexterity were the equipment

needed, and all those have been commanded to a remarkable degree by Mussolini and his associates.

Italy's basic problem, as in all other countries, was economic. Only by the inauguration of sound and rigid economic measures has the Fascist régime been able to endure.

The Italians are being pretty heavily taxed, for it seems that wherever it is possible to levy a tax it is levied ; but someone has to pay for the national improvements, and who should pay if not the Italians themselves ? The foreigners in Italy are treated with great consideration, and, unless residents in Italy, they are exempt from all taxation. All Italians, both men and women, must have identity cards, but the foreigners have none of that difficulty, as in France ; their passport is all the identification they need. The French Government has a revenue of several millions a year from the foreign identity cards, yet in order to make life as easy as possible for foreigners, Italy has done away with the cards, and the revenue.

An Italian who lives in Italy cannot get a room in an hotel in any city without presenting his identity card. By this system undesirable people are to a certain extent kept out of the country. A false passport sometimes gets a person across the frontier, but it will not get him an identity card. All this is part of the new and remarkable police system.

From an obscure fighter to a world power, Mussolini, the Socialist, was not widely different from Mussolini, the Fascist, and Chief of the Government. The political career of the man has not been difficult to follow, but to represent the personality of the Duce is another story. There is too much light and colour for one to be able to present him in all of those lights and colours, and each person who sees him, sees him in a different light, knows him in a different way. . . .

He is the personality that is the new Italy, he is the man whose one aim has been to make his people great, and to restore to them the glory that was theirs ; and his aim stands before him a powerful exhortation prevailing on him to achieve. His spirit loves simplicity, the fact that he lives in a huge palace with a maid-of-all-work proves that. He loves honesty and sacrifice. Coming from a humble home he has never exaggerated in his new grandeur. He is generous, and does not understand the underhand dealings of almost all political workers. He does not permit intrigue, nor useless vanity. No one has ever been able to attack or besmirch him for any personal interests.

Between the past and the future, the perfection of Mussolini's life is in his understanding of modern life, and the part he is able to take in the mechanical aspects without ever losing the sense of the most ancient traditions of Italian life.

Roman Duce, and Signor of the *Rinascimento*, he leans equally towards strength, beauty, and justice, and in the equilibrium of this tendency he reaches the classic virile perfection. Classic, but not cold, for the Duce's life is a passionate creation of ardent love. He loves his children, he loves the combatants, the peasants, all those who work, produce, and live a life of force and strength ; and above all he honours the memory of those who fell in the war, and in the days of so-called peace before the revolution.

He has no humours, yet he has dozens. He is of irresistibly sweet temperament—the men who work with him say that—and he has terrific moments of nervous strain when he is violent and brutal in his words.

What he promised at the beginning of his reign Mussolini has translated into acts. This spirit of doing and not talking has permeated not only the Government, but the ranks of the people high and low, and it runs deepest of all in the affairs of the Fascist party.

Officially he works from nine in the morning until ten at night ; then he is free to play, to indulge in the amusements he loves best, to read and to play the violin.

In the Duce's bedroom, a huge room with severe, massive antique furniture, there is a big writing-table. All the most urgent papers which could not be attended to during the day are placed on that table. Many times there are very difficult matters to attend to, matters which an ordinary man would normally do in a couple of days. In the morning, at no matter what hour his secretary may call, the work is finished and ready to be taken away. And yet he says he sleeps seven hours each night, and only three times during four years has he been wakened from that sleep.

Mussolini is undeniably a great man, the greatest man of his age ; but he is not a saint. He is not omniscient, nor omnipotent, but he has within him an endless, potent love for the Patria—and the power, as well as the courage to make history that will some day become legendary. So judge him not by what the unknowing, easily prejudiced outside world may think of him, judge him not by what his enemies say and write of him—rather go to Italy and see what he has done for his country ; then render unto Cæsar that which is Cæsar's !

## AN IMPRESSION

**T**HIS biography, Benito Mussolini—The Man, ends at the beginning, with a first impression: the man, as seen by the author.

The clock in the Piazza Colonna struck six, as with trembling knees she entered the wide-open doorway leading to the hall of mystery, the Palazzo Chigi, where, a letter sent through her Ambassador in Paris advised her, His Excellency Benito Mussolini, Chief of the Italian Government, would expect her on Monday, January 10th, at eighteen o'clock. . . .

The immense courtyard gaped appallingly at her, as for a moment she stood near the great door undecided which way to turn. Then a very tall man—gigantic, he seemed to her, in a much brass-buttoned uniform—appeared. Raising his hand high in the Roman salute, with a kindly smile he asked her what she wanted.

“Which way do I go to find His Excellency?”

“The Chief of the Government?” He gave a condescending glance in her direction.

“Yes.”

“Have you an appointment?”

“Yes.” She took out the precious letter, with the Embassy stamp, and boldly handed it to him. He read it carefully, then with a profound bow returned it, and instructed her to take the stairway opposite.

She hurried across the court, and when about to put her foot on the first step, a man suddenly confronted her. Second Roman salute. . . . She faced the longest and

widest stairway in the world—at least that was what she thought, as very slowly and with great dignity she started to ascend. With each step the staircase seemed to become longer, wider, and she smaller, until she had the sensation of being invisible to the human eye, like an ant. . . . At last, after several hours, there came a turn, a few more steps, and a man in a frock coat confronted her. Third salute.

“Which way do I go now?”

The opening questions and answers were repeated, the letter again read carefully. She was shown into a very beautiful antichamber. Fourth salute. Another series of questions and answers, and a further inspection of her letter. A second antichamber, more intimate and less imposing, where several men were seated with tired, bored expressions on their faces, as though they had been waiting for hours. . . . She sat down and began to look about. A door opened opposite the one she had entered. Another frock-coated man. Fifth salute. . . . He approached her, evidently having been informed of her arrival, or else curious to know what she was doing there.

“You have an appointment with His Excellency, the Chief of the Government?”

“Yes, for six o’clock.”

“Signora——?”

She gave him her card, and carefully studying it he disappeared, after having saluted those present.

Hours, or perhaps only seconds passed. Another man entered briskly from the outer door, others came from the inner to take a look at her. The appointment of five o’clock was called. She sighed. It was going to be a long wait, and she was nervous, for, after all, being received by Mussolini was not an everyday event!

She began reviewing the things she had heard of him, for as soon as it was known that she was to write a book about him, people pounced on her with any and all kinds of

information. They had told her that he was a tyrant, a great man, perhaps, but a very wicked one. He lived on other people's blood, thrived only on the misery and unhappiness of those about him ; in fact, he lay awake at nights planning ways to hurt his people and his country. He was robbing the Government of a million or so a day. Then she recalled a story told about him in 1922, when he was returning from a Conference at Lausanne. Before arriving at Milan he suddenly remembered that his children were anxiously and joyously awaiting his homecoming, and that he must take them some sort of a present. He searched in his pockets and wallet : "*Diammini !*" he exclaimed, " I have only twenty lire ! I'm as much of a spendthrift as ever ! " So in order to get them something he had to borrow money from one of his secretaries. Well, a man who appropriates millions does not travel about with only twenty lire in his pocket—so that story was no good. . . .

Some books say he is vulgar, worse than Napoleon in his most lurid moments. Hm ! what difference does that make ? And it is not true, for no woman has ever accused him of being other than refined and gentle in his speech. One person says he has too little character to have moods, and another tells wild stories of his caprices, but that he always keeps people in their places. Another tells how he goes into the most violent fits of rage at the slightest provocation. He is hard-hearted, cruel, and delights in making people suffer, as a revenge for his own early suffering. He snaps at interviewers, and announces before they have crossed the threshold of the " holy of holies " that they have just ten minutes, as thirty Ministers and forty secretaries are waiting upon him. He is an infidel, an atheist. . . . Other great men have been atheists ; why should he be forced to proclaim a religious faith if he does not believe in it ? After all——



"Madame Bordeaux !"

She was rudely awakened from her reverie, and somehow on her feet, and following the Sixth salute through a third antichamber, across a square hall ; then a massive door opened, and closed, leaving her on the threshold of the largest room she had ever seen. At the far corner, behind a desk, that at so great a distance appeared small, a man was standing.

Mussolini !

She wondered how, with trembling knees, she was ever to reach the desk, behind which, she had been told, he received all but very great personages. . . .

Not even the knowledge that she was looking her best gave her assurance then, for, for the first time in many years, she was frankly scared. She was scared, yet she managed to keep on walking. . . . And then the unexpected happened : he was coming to meet her. But that only made it worse, for the thousand and one opening speeches prepared on the long trip from Paris to Rome had gone completely from her mind !

He was close to her, a cordial hand took hers, and she was looking into a pair of exceedingly kind eyes, that were on an exact level with her own.

"*Ho paura !*" the voice was hers, but quite unrecognizable.

"*Paura, signora ? Perche paura ?*" (You are frightened, signora ? Why are you frightened ?) The firm hand-clasp had left hers, the notes of the gentle, musical voice rang in her ears, as side by side they walked to the great oblong writing-table, and he indicated a big armchair. She sat down, and he took the chair facing her. A few nothings, then :

"So you want to write a book about me ?"

"Yes."

"But what do you know about me ?"

" Nothing ! That's why I came to Rome."

" And do you think, now that you have seen me, you will know more than you did before ? " He smiled indulgently.

" Yes, for you will talk to me, and I shall have my impressions. My impressions will tell me whether your enemies or your friends are right. I do not believe what I hear, I believe only what I see."

" Hm ! " he smiled enigmatically.

Many seemingly unimportant questions were asked and answered, satisfactorily. They talked of various things. He told her of his love for his mother, of his wife and children. His opinions of women in general, and human nature in particular. . . . He spoke of his unending work, and smiled often at her remarks, yet always she noticed a wistfulness about the corners of the firm mouth. . . .

" You are an intelligent woman," Mussolini said at length, " a refined woman, and I am convinced that you will write an interesting book, a fine book, as fine a book as a woman can write. But you know that the soul of man is so complicated, so mysterious a thing, that no one can ever understand it. So how can you write of me, the man ? "

" I shall do my best," she said earnestly. " I know only too well that the soul of man is impenetrable, and the greater the man the more intricate and mysterious his soul, and the lonelier his life. . . . A man of limited intelligence has limited desires, and a soul which has never presented any great mystery to him ; he understands himself, and in his naive candour expects others to understand him—while you——"

There was a moment's pause when she felt that the man before her was returning within himself, perhaps to question his soul.

One does not interrupt a silence when with Mussolini ; instead, one takes advantage of the pause to concentrate on the man.

She watched the rugged face with intense interest ; undoubtedly it was true that no one had ever really known him, or conceived of the tremendous weakness of the man, who, from boyhood, had been training his will, until in his forty-fourth year it had become the thing of iron that the world praised or condemned.

Force, power, and nervous resistance were given him at birth, but he had developed them to the point of supremacy. There was everything about his pose, as well as the expression, that suggested a man capable of forcing himself to the utmost, of giving his all each day, and demanding that those around him follow his example. He knew, how well he knew, that he was burning the candle at both ends, and in the middle——

“ And when the ends meet ? ” he answered the question in her mind, with a shrug. “ I shan’t give that—— ” he snapped his fingers, “ for they won’t meet until the allotted time—so why add the thought of death to my real worries ? The affairs of State are so much more important than my life. Death and old age are two things we all have to look forward to ; one is certain, the other inevitable, unless death comes before old age has had a chance to lay hold on its victim. . . . ”

He continued to talk, but his expression more than his words had hold of her. In the midst of the crowds that surround him, she saw him living alone. Adored, hated, for what he represents, alone, unloved for what he, the man, is. . . . The great soul overflowing with love for his country, and the good of his people, a good that posterity will appreciate even more than the present generation can. His heart and mind burning with unsatisfied ambition for that country, a new and greater power since his coming . . . alone in his beautiful palaces he sits a solitary and sorrowing figure. . . .

Napoleon, to whom Mussolini is always being compared,



THE PRIME MINISTER



started a new era in France, and in the end was sacrificed to insatiable ambition. Abraham Lincoln sought the betterment of humanity by liberating the slaves, and died a martyr's death. Mussolini, like every hero in history, has worked, and is still working, for an ideal.

In the twentieth century men have more open minds than in other epochs, are more easily convinced ; yet his work for the regeneration of Italy has been no less difficult than that of all those who preceded him. In his exile on the Island of Corsica, Napoleon suffered no more from loneliness than Mussolini in his magnificent study in the Chigi Palace.

He is not what is known as a sad man, a melancholy figure, for so well does he wear his outer mask that, of all the people who surround him, there are few who have ever suspected that the man who never failed to think of the right thing at the right moment, the man of the super-mind, the man of the low gentle voice, the kind word, and penetrating glance, warm hand-clasp : the man, absolutely calm in the face of whatsoever danger, was after all not the real man. . . .

To a close, very close, observer (and the woman watching the Prime Minister was that) in the ready, sympathetic smile there was a touch of wistfulness ; in the penetrating glance a faint appeal for understanding of the human needs, of the companionship he can never have—for greatness forces a man to live alone, to have no intimate friendships, and no confidences that come spontaneously from his heart. And in an unguarded moment, behind the penetrating glance, the eyes are tender—bright with the unshed tears of many, many years.

Mussolini, the man, the human enigma, to whose word the world Powers must listen, who when love is powerless rules by violence, behind the mask is—just a human man like other men, a little more human than most, and often

tender ; a man who loves children and animals, and who suffers with and for all humanity ; and in his mental, moral, and spiritual loneliness, in rare moments of acute realization, sorrows for himself ; mourns perhaps for the loss of a private life, a mourning that must be perpetual, for never so long as he lives can he obliterate his glorious past, or be other than Mussolini.

" Words," the reflective pause was over . . . " Words," he repeated, " the power of speech is what makes us superior to the animals, gives us the possibility of revealing the immortality of our souls. And the knowledge of the immortality of the soul is what makes me believe in God, and I do believe firmly in God, the Supreme Being watching over our destiny. . . ."

Behind the deep armchair where he sat, a woman was modelling a portrait bust. The sounds of the city were deadened by the draperies at the windows. At the far side of the room the " gift table " may have sighed under the weight of the day's presents. Despite the immensity of the room the depressing sensation of barred windows and locked doors came to the woman, while the sculptress seemed a clay figure like the bust she was working on. . . .

The short, thickset man, in the striped trousers and black coat, slipped down slightly in the big armchair, the massive head rested wearily against the chair back. The wide-open eyes looked intently into hers . . . and in the intense, vibrant silence, from the pallid mask that is his face, it was as though a curtain had been raised.

With both hands she held tightly to the arms of her chair, leaning forward to catch the thought that in that moment came from his naked soul.

Instinctively she knew that it was only for a moment, and that never again, in any of their interviews, would he reveal himself to her other than superficially. That when the moment had passed he would lower the curtain, and

be as genial and kindly sympathetic as at the moment of their meeting. That he would tell her to come again, see her half-way across the room, and perhaps kiss her hand ; but never by look or word would she ever be permitted to refer to the moment that was hers.

The firmly closed lips did not move, no sound broke the stillness of the vast room, yet as distinctly as though he had spoken she heard : “ Tell them, they are not true, all the vile things they impute to me.

“ Tell them I am just a man, a man who has never been afraid to go out into the light for his fight ; a man who has the courage of his convictions, and that if I have erred it is because I am human. Tell them that I have my likes and dislikes, my joys and sorrows, just as they have—or rather I did have them when time was left me for play. Tell them that if my people, or country, are being judged wrongly the fault is mine, and that the judgment must be turned on me. Tell them, too, that I am a man who is living on his nerves—no, do not tell them that, for they may think I am asking for sympathy ; but tell them, that I am a poor lonely being seeking only for peace. . . .

“ Tell them that my silence is my defence for all the wrongs I am accused of, for the good I have done speaks for itself.

“ Tell them that I have been guilty of one great sin, I have loved my country with an idolatrous love. Tell them, also, that my soul is pure, for it has been faithful to one name—Rome, to one love—Italy. . . .”

PARIS

*Easter, 1927*

THE END









