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Sforza

Italy and Italians.

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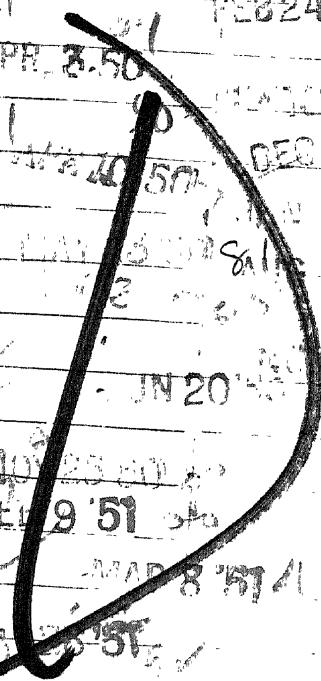
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# ITALY AND ITALIANS

*By Count Carlo Sforza*

CONTEMPORARY ITALY:  
ITS INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL ORIGINS

ITALY AND ITALIANS

# ITALY AND ITALIANS

BY  
COUNT CARLO SFORZA

TRANSLATED BY  
EDWARD HUTTON



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JUN 23 1949



## PREFACE

**I**N the summer of 1942 I received in New York a letter from the President of the University of California, to which I must now refer because it shows the origin of the present book. The consequence perhaps matters little ; but the letter is important, as I think it explains, even to one who is still suffering from the poison of nationalistic propaganda, what far-sighted nobility of mind reigns in America, where no one even thought of praising the decision of the President, so natural did it appear.

I reproduce the letter, only suppressing a couple of phrases too courteous to myself.

“ We have in our University a Chair of Italian Culture that was founded with the purpose that every year there should come here from Italy some scientific or literary person of distinction who would give for a half-year a course of lectures on some Italian subject chosen by himself. Against our will we are now at war with your country and it is therefore impossible for us to apply to Rome ; but just because we are at war we want to preserve, so far as possible, our intellectual relations with Italy ; for it must not be taken that there is war between our two peoples. Would you come and give the next course in Italian culture ? If you will, the merit will be yours that a tradition we value has not been interrupted.”

I replied at once that as an Italian I was touched and grateful ; but I feared they had been mistaken in applying to me and I named certain learned Italians who were in America.

The University insisted ; and I ended by accepting. The title of the forty lectures was “ Contemporary Italy and its Intellectual and Moral Origins ”. I carried my hearers from the Counter-Reformation to the French Revolution and then on to the Risorgimento, to United Italy, to the War of 1914-18, and to the high hopes then permissible to an Italy that might have been the herald of European solidarity, instead of rushing down into Fascism.

The public was so much interested in these studies that I had to prolong them, as is sometimes done there, in sittings and discussions at which Professors and students together we evoked, free from the ceremony of the University Chair, Italy herself, and for my part I tried to show them what Italy is, Italy which it is so difficult to find

in books and so difficult to discover in one's travels ; above all, I tried to make sympathy and admiration spring from facts, and never from my comments or from my " pathos ".

But not for nothing was one in America : all I said was taken down in shorthand, even when I spoke in what were jestingly called the new *Orti Oricellari*<sup>1</sup> in the noble Park of Berkeley. And I was astonished when friends in Rome wanted me to make a book out of these fugitive papers. I protested, saying, " But these are things that everyone knows " ; still I felt that Umberto Morra was not wrong when he answered : " A book sometimes teaches things that are not written in it ; your book would teach how our people ought to be considered, without having the air of putting them unduly forward." And so it was that in spite of absorbing political business, I have thought it my duty to go through my old notes and to draw these pages from them ; even the most modest instruments are useful when it is a question of wringing the neck of our two most deadly enemies : nationalistic vanity and literary over-emphasis.

The reader now knows, if he desires to know, what to do when he meets certain allusions, which may seem to him too obvious ; it is true I might have eliminated even more than I have done, but if I had I might have written a successful work of criticism, but I should not have explained us so well to foreigners ; and then a sincere and honest conversation, covering a wide field, would be deceptive if there did not come into it a little of what is said to be obvious. I should wish my readers not to be astonished at certain too evident *lacunae* : when I had finished the book, on reading it over, I noted them myself, but I have not had for a single moment the professorial temptation to fill them. They seem to me to be part of the absolute sincerity of these pages ; as I spoke at the time, so have I written now, my only object has been to express my own ideas and impressions, without reducing them into a manual, or enlarging them to form an encyclopaedia. Nothing is more vain than to write a book out of other books ; whatever my book may be, even with its *lacunae*, it is a testimony : I should have said above all with its *lacunae*, because it is the *lacunae* and the lack of proportion

<sup>1</sup> The Orti Oricellari, the gardens made by Bernardo Rucellai and now attached to the Ginori Venturi palace at Florence, where the Platonic Academy, founded by Cosimo il Vecchio, used to hold its meetings. The Academy was transferred there in 1498 after the death of Lorenzo il Magnifico, when the Medici were banished from Florence. There Machiavelli read his famous discourses on Livy.



that make the autobiographical element of a book. It is not difficult to learn to compose a well-constructed and well-balanced volume ; but with it all, it is only something from the literary kitchen. Niccolò Machiavelli declared that he only wrote of that “ which he had learnt through long acquaintance with and constant attention to the affairs of the world ”. With the Florentine Secretary this was just pride ; in my case it is modesty. Modesty it is, in spite of appearances, that has caused me sometimes to speak in the first person. It is the first person that makes one feel—when it is not too insistent—that what one has to say is a personal testimony.

Now at the moment of bidding goodbye to this small work and of thinking no more about it, one ironical doubt assails me : that some Italian—among the few who, because they abominate our native rhetoric, end by fashioning a worse—might observe that I have lingered longer over the qualities than the defects of our people. Well, yes ; it is only with love that a people can be understood ; never with Puritanical thanks to God for being “ better ”. Let those who criticize, travel a little, and they will realize, wherever they go, the absolute truth of that very ancient and tolerant Tuscan proverb : “ Tutto il mondo è paese ”—all the world is someone’s country.

And if foreign critics should wish to impart to me lessons of “ objectivity ”, I warn them now that I should only excuse myself as the *vetturino* did who was exalting the beauty of Cape Miseno to the young Goethe :

—“ Che vulite, signorì, chiste è ’o paese mio.”<sup>1</sup>

SFORZA.

<sup>1</sup> “ What would you, Signorino, this is my own country.”



# I

## HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF THE ITALIANS

PASSING over the uncertain mysteries of the Stone Age and the Age of Bronze, it is no exaggeration to assert that already in the Greek civilization of Southern Italy one can divine the origin of some of the essential characteristics of the Italian of today.

Three or four centuries before Christ the way of life and of thought of the Siciliots and the Italic peoples, descendants of those Greeks who long before them had passed into Sicily and into the south of the peninsula, was entirely analogous to that of Hellas itself. The *Polis*, the city state, constituted the sole base of every political and social organism. One might say the same of Etruria, where between the Arno and the Tiber there was, until the Roman conquests, just a federation of twelve cities, a federation with extremely strict religious ties, but with a wide autonomy for each city.

When the dominion of Rome was extended over all Italy, things changed but little morally and socially; the *civitas* continued to be the base and the key to the life of all Italians.) There is no other nation whose traditions, legends and popular epic are compelled so constantly to look to the city for their origin. Even in the Middle Ages while in France they sang the deeds of Roland, Italian poetry sang that Rome came from Alba Longa, Alba Longa from Lavinium and Lavinium from Troy through Aeneas. The perennial popular glory of Virgil among the Italians has depended upon this fact, that he sang the origins of their country in the one and only manner that they delighted in, that is, as the genealogy of the city state.

Even today the names of the Italian regions that we think so real, Piedmont, Lombardy, Liguria . . . do not belong to the natural use of the people. The native of a town, for instance, of that Ligurian bow that is bent from the French frontier along the sea to Genoa, and from Genoa to the south as far as the Magra, will never call his region Liguria, he will call it rather Genoa or perhaps Genovesato. It was always thus, contrary to what obtained in Gaul, where most often the name of the city is lost and that of the region has taken its place. Lutetia, the capital of the Parisii,

became Paris, Avaricum of the Biturgi, Bourges, and so it is with Amiens, Reims, Rennes, and many other cities of France.

This voluntary binding of the peasant to the city, that exists almost everywhere in Italy, is one of the permanent strands of the Italian social fabric. In no other country is patriotism in its normal, healthy and fruitful form—not in the baseness of racialism and nationalism—so fundamentally bound to the city, to the town, as in Italy. Francesco De Sanctis in a speech to the Neapolitans in 1874 declared: "Italy is not an abstraction. She is the home (*casa*), the family, the commune, the province, the region. They who feel themselves bound to these, are the best Italians . . . I say to you: If you want to be good Italians begin by being good Neapolitans. Woe to those who only see an Italy of the Academies or Schools."

Thus, fifty years before the Fascist adventure, De Sanctis condemned one of the most widespread, trumped-up and artful of Fascist devices: the attack on the ancient tradition of local patriotism. That attack ought to have been enough to expose how contrary all Fascist action was to the Italian character.

The secular bonds which bind our Italian generations were created by the city and the town. The history of the Italian cities is so long and tenacious that it often leads us back not only to Rome but to pre-Roman Italy. The small jealousies still alive today between Milan and Pavia, between Crema and Cremona, and the differences in the dialects, go back to traditions beyond the Roman Empire. When Rome succeeded in imposing her dominion upon all Italy, almost every *municipium* from the Alps to Sicily had to cede a part of its territory to a Latin colony which created around itself a circle of influences, imposing its own customs, its own manners, its own language, in such a way that the majority of the natives learned to speak in Latin, although they preserved their native accent. And even today, if you go from Rome to Florence, to Piacenza and on to Milan, you will find, in dialects very different, the notes never obliterated of ancient *Gentes* differing one from another.

This is not so north of the Alps in the Germanic countries. The frequent immigration of tribes without cities, the absence of precise frontiers between the regions they occupied, did not allow the formation of countrysides with characteristics of their own.

Under Republican Rome, Italy in reality was only an immense federation of cities, each free to administer itself in its own way within its own territory; something which reminds us of the

British Empire in its most recent form, when the democratic term *Commonwealth* has been substituted for the haughty term *Empire*.

✓ The beginning of the decadence of the cities appeared in the Roman Empire in the time of Hadrian. Until then the *municipia* and *coloniae* had been governed by that wealthy and active citizen class out of which came the Fabii. The *decemviri* elected from among the notables (people with very large incomes) carried out the administration from the Tribunal—the high court of Justice. But with Hadrian the officers of the Imperial administration progressively made themselves masters of all local affairs; and under Diocletian the Totalitarian State (as one might say today) was completely established. The ancient courts, freely elected by the citizens, became corporations bound by numerous restrictions; they quickly lost all vitality; even the *defensor civitatis* became no more than a functionary to whom men looked—though it was but a pretence—for a denunciation of the errors of his superiors. And soon, whether by encroachment of the military or by reason of the distrust of the citizens, there remained only prefectures entrusted to *comites* sent from the Capital. Under the Emperors of the East these *comites*, become even more corrupt, were called *duces*, whence came the title *Doge* which was for centuries the name of the head of the aristocratic Republics of Venice and Genoa.

Thus, already under Diocletian, the Barbarians had invaded Italy; a work of the military anarchy of the third century rather than of certain starving tribes descending from Germany; out of which German vanity, and the desire of the Italians to attribute their ills to a foreign cause, have later made “the invaders” and their uncontrollable onrush.

The old and empty German boast became an official dogma under Nazism, which imposed on the schools of the Reich that to the new generation they should insist on the “fundamental part which the German emigrations had in diffusing the new civilization of the Middle Age, in northern Italy, in France and in England”.

One might well ask what the few young Germans who seriously studied history thought, if they thought at all, when they discovered:

1. That the Goths did not know how to make their dominion in Italy last more than sixty years.
2. That in Spain they were defeated by those Semites who were the Arabs, and lost everything in a single day.
3. That the Lombards, although invited into Italy by a part of the population, never succeeded in occupying the coasts,

never dared to measure themselves with the young and growing defences of Venice, nor with the ancient walls of Rome, and that their dominion ended in confusion and contempt.

Without the decomposition provoked by the Empire when fallen on the one hand into a military anarchy and on the other into a bureaucratic despotism, the German tribes would never have succeeded in establishing themselves here at all. The Italian cities would have opposed a sufficient resistance if the Empire had not broken their vitality.

Under Constantine, on the eve of the catastrophe, one might believe for a moment that the overflowing barbarism could have been dammed. The cities appeared about to renew themselves with fresh life, since they had acquired under other forms a certain autonomy chiefly through the action of the Bishops, elected, as they were, by the citizens; indeed, the nomination of a Bishop by acclamation was generally the result of an authentic popular movement. But it was too late. With their suffocating taxation and with foreign military chiefs, the Emperors had taken away every possibility of hope from the Italian cities. They had become indeed Dead Cities, as the great capitals of the East appeared to our fathers of the nineteenth century, those for example of Turkey and of Persia; Istanbul and Teheran were once metropolises not less rich and not less fair than Milan and Naples in the Middle Age. There was a Turkish art and even more surely a Persian art. But the cities were without municipal liberty, without autonomous life and therefore servile. If Byzantium before becoming Istanbul succeeded in conserving a little of its life, it was because under its *Basileus* the municipal tradition was not utterly destroyed, as was that of the Italian cities by the Caesars. The *demi*—comparable to the “*contrade*” of Siena—remained in Byzantium the focal points of municipal life as corporations, such as they are described to us in the *Libro del Prefetto* of the tenth century, with their relative freedom. The *demi* and the autonomous corporations offer us the keys of the real life of Byzantium, of its unexpected resistance and of its revolutions. But Byzantium remains an unique case, in the East; all the other metropolises, notwithstanding their occasional splendours, have been, if not inert masses, over disciplined, without an atom of the vitality that animated the anarchic Athens of Aristophanes even in its worst moments.

As for the Germanic dominations in Italy, if they were brief, and

—except the Lombard—left no impression, it is owing to the fact that they ignored the force of the municipal life in Italy; it was a kind of inferiority complex that held the Germans back from the Italian cities, where we shall see, on the one hand the splendour of the Imperial régime, and on the other the marvellous, and for them mysterious, beginnings of the new Italian life. The wretched Germans, ignoring the cities, ingenuously applied their tribal and rural conceptions to a country where the city was everything, and it was because of this that they have left not a trace of themselves save in a type of battlements in the castles and walled cities, and a few words of military jargon.

Do the Italian cities then live? Much more: each is a world. The foreign historians who are moved to pity on account of the persistent hatreds between Italian cities, have not seen that they are concerned with the sort of passions about which they do not marvel when they break out between different nations.

Every Italian city is still a nation: the province that surrounds it has constituted itself organically in the course of the centuries without any intervention of artificial or rational cuts or divisions such as were made in France in 1790. With the exception of the various prefectures invented by Fascism (for reasons of policing), all the Italian provinces perpetuate a territorial unity, already in existence in the Roman epoch; we might say of them that they are a part of the intimate manner of existence of every Italian, together with the supreme unwritten law of federation, which already made their unity at the time of the original *Libertas Romana*. It is interesting to note besides that the limits of the Italian provinces (apart from the few made by the Fascist régime to which I have already made allusion) correspond still with the limits of the Roman *civitates*.

✓ In truth, of all the great peoples of Europe the Italians are the most particularist; but they know how to be so without risk, because time, sorrow and glory have made their unity indestructible.

## II

### WHY THEIR HISTORY HAS BROUGHT THEM INTERNATIONALIST DISCONTENT

PARTICULARISTS without doubt; a unified people without doubt, but above all the Italians are the most universalist people of Europe. There lies the secret of the profound humanity of the great Italians from Dante and St. Thomas to Mazzini; and there also is the key to a certain looseness in Italian political thought. Some among us thought ingenuously but honestly in the beginning of Fascism that that régime might heal certain of our defects. Instead of that the inevitable happened; the rhetoricians who tried to fire nationalist passions in the hearts of Italians in order to kill our universalism, only succeeded in obscuring one of the most noble aspects of our character, without substituting anything concrete or sound.

Certainly the universalist character of Italian political thought has often been a defect in the field of action. To begin with Dante, how can one explain the fact that the author of the *Divine Comedy* lived in the most vigorous and most splendid century of our history and that his poem only expresses laments, regret for the past and maledictions on the present?

Florence then dominated Europe with her bankers, from Flanders to Constantinople. Genoa and Venice were the queens of all the known seas; it was then were upreared to Heaven in every Italian city cathedrals and bell-towers that still remain the marvel of the world; our religious enthusiasm then gave St. Francis of Assisi to Christianity; Italian poetry at a leap had overwhelmed the Provençal; Guido Guinizelli and Guido Cavalcanti had proved it . . . But all that counted nothing for Dante. He saw but one thing: that the political unity of Christian society was broken; that the Roman Emperor lived beyond the Alps and that Italy had ceased to be "*il giardin dell'Impero*", the garden of the Empire.

And as he thought so did others, less lofty in spirit but equally sincere.



Giovanni Villani living in the luminous life of Florence only knew that one must "greatly fear the judgement of God". Another Villani saw nothing about him but "grave dangers and destruction", and the anonymous chroniclers echo them: the *Chronica Astensis* deplors that "*semper Lombardia in malo statu fuit*".

Two centuries later, in full sixteenth century, this discontent, which almost recalls that of the prophets of Israel, deepened even more, not without reason, since the "*italiane tempeste*"—to use the expression of one of the Villani—had become more miserable with the invasion of the foreigners; but above all because all the great writers of the sixteenth century were children of the Renaissance and in consequence felt even more profoundly, if it is possible, than the generation of the time of Dante and Petrarch, the distance which separated their fallen Italy from the ideal times of the *Pax Romana*.

Not one of the historians who, like Machiavelli, loved Italy so ardently, deigned to bring into the light from the pages of the old chronicles, the marvellous day in 1170 on which the Italians, all of them, except the priests, the blind and the dumb, swore on their baptismal fonts this oath:

"In the name of the Lord, Amen. I swear on the Gospel that neither directly nor indirectly will I make peace or treaty or pact with the Emperor Frederick or his son or his wife, nor with any other person of his family; in good faith, with all my means, I will try to prevent any army, little or great, of Germany or of any other land of the Emperor's beyond the Alps, from entering Italy; and if an army should enter, I swear to make war upon the Emperor and on all his, until the said army goes forth from Italy; and I will cause my sons to swear the same as soon as they reach the age of fourteen years."

This oath was carried out and became history at the battle of Legnano,<sup>1</sup> one of the most shining pages of the struggle for liberty among the young peoples of Europe. Battle and victory, but truth to tell without definite consequence; but this too was due to our universalist character: all Italians maintained the oath, they fought the German King who attempted to violate their liberty and their privileges, but their efforts drooped when the German who was

<sup>1</sup> Legnano, 17 miles north-west of Milan. Near by the Lombard League defeated Frederick Barbarossa in 1176. A monument erected in 1876 on the battlefield commemorates the victory.

also Roman Emperor spoke in his decrees of the splendour of Rome of which he called himself the heir.

Thus is explained the character of the wars waged by the Italians; they were all defensive: never did the Lombard League decide to prevent an Emperor from crossing the Alps, or to follow him beyond the Brenner after having defeated him. Therefore the Germans always chose a favourable moment to cross the Alps, "*cum omni pace*", and to fall in surprise on the rich plains of the Po; then beaten, they saved themselves retreating beyond the Alps. The danger, immense for the Italian cities, was almost non-existent for the Germans, who had learnt that the Italians only claimed the right to defend themselves.

Such a history might seem a miserable business, and one might indeed think it such since it is the basis of the stupid assertions which have placed Italian valour in doubt. In reality, however, such a history bears witness to a collective moral superiority, which would be enough, if it were generally spread through the world, to prepare a Europe less unhealthy and less quarrelsome.

Some years after Legnano, in 1179, in the same plains which were the site of that battle, was begun the work, gigantic for that time, of the canal of the Ticino. And the canal of the Muzza too—the greatest in Europe until the end of the nineteenth century—was begun after another battle, that of Casorate, with another Emperor, Frederick II, in 1239.

It was then that a hundred cities of Italy inscribed in their Statutes the right of free transit even across the property of the nobles, for water for irrigation, to bring water to the fields of the most humble village; a right which, outside Italy, landowners, staunch in the idea of the absolute rights of property, have fought successfully even till yesterday.

It was about the same time, in 1236, that Bologna, first in Europe, gave freedom to all the serfs of her glebe; the elected representatives of the people decreed, "on pain of death", that no longer should any man be kept as a serf; and all the serfs, men and women, were redeemed by the Commune and set free, the nobles retaining their lands alone.

No Italian historian has ever thought to bring into the light facts of this kind with which the old chronicles are filled, except one, Carlo Cattaneo; but that sovereign independent spirit was a republican federalist, between Cavour, monarchist and unificator, and Mazzini, unificator and republican.

The Italian historians of the sixteenth century overlooked even military actions which took place under their eyes. What did they mean to them since Italy saw

*Il sommo Imperio suo caduto al fondo*

as Giovanni Guidiccioni lamented in the sonnet that everyone knew by heart?

The principal artificer of the French victories in Italy was Trivulzio<sup>1</sup>; it was he who discovered a new passage across the Alps, and for the first time brought artillery over them; while, on the other hand, it was Prospero Colonna who, at the head of an army, surprised Lautrec asleep at Milan.

Brescia rose against the French; nine Knights took oath on the altar to fight to the death to give back their city to Venice and liberty; the French overcame the revolt, but the nine Knights died in the combats in the streets; one only, Fenaroli, wounded, was hidden in a sepulchre, was discovered, plunged his dagger into his throat, and carried to the Castle was offered pardon if he would speak; he tore open his wound with his hands and died.

And again at Brescia, a little later, the day being lost for the Venetians, two brothers, Ludovico and Lorenzo Porcellaga, hurled themselves on horseback on the French captains; Ludovico was instantly killed; Lorenzo continued to fight alone and fell wounded on the corpse of his brother; the chivalrous Gaston de Foix, seized with admiration, ordered his people not to finish him, but Lorenzo, continuing to resist, was killed like his brother. That evening Gaston de Foix accompanied the bodies of the two Porcellaga to the Cathedral and invited his Knights surrounding the two coffins to keep in remembrance such pure valour.

Siena sustained the longest siege of the sixteenth century; the fire of the artillery of Charles V, famine and pest, made of the most exquisite city of Tuscany, the shadow of itself. Monluc writes of the Sienese whom Dante had described as *light*, that they defended their liberty with the courage of Knights of the Round Table and says that they were as full of valour as the most valorous

<sup>1</sup> Gian Giacomo Trivulzio, called *il Magno*, famous for the glory he won in numerous campaigns. Born Milan 1441. After falling into disgrace with Ludovico il Moro, he entered the service of the Aragonesi of Naples, and when the kingdom fell before Charles VIII, he went to France, and with Louis XII entered Milan in 1499, was named Marshal of France and Governor of the Duchy.

Knights. After the capitulation, the few Sieneſe who maintained themſelves on their feet went forth from the city and withdrew to the city of Montalcino, an ancient poſſeſſion of Siena. Pursued even there after a brief reſpite, they reſiſted the Imperialiſts for long months and the women fought beſide their men. The day the city was taken, they burnt the Standard of the Republic and deſtroyed the money punches that had ſerved them to ſtrike the coins of free Siena.

A volume would not be enough to record deeds of the kind, hidden in the chronicles and documents of the time, and that today are only known to thoſe learned in the hiſtory of their province. "To what end?" the ſolemn hiſtorians might ſay. It was the century of invaſion and of our ſhame. And generations have repeated the famous quatrain of Michelangelo :

Grato m'è 'l ſonno, e più l'eſſer di ſaſſo ;  
Mentre che il danno e la vergogna dura,  
Non veder, non ſentir m'è gran ventura ;  
Però non mi deſtar ; deh ! parla baſſo.<sup>1</sup>

After the Spaniſh decadence of the ſeventeenth century, Italy offered during all the eighteenth century a movement of political and ſocial ideas which are a prelude—and long before the outbreak of the French Revolution—to the nineteenth century. Beccaria<sup>2</sup> at Milan, for inſtance, with his immortal work *Dei Delitti e delle Pene* ; but from Lombardy to Naples we ſee a ſeries of reforms, half of which would have ſufficed Turgot to ſave the French monarchy (ſuppreſſion of torture, taxes extended to all property, fetid mediæval priſons transformed into houſes of correction . . .).

But the generation of the Risorgimento, rich though it was and generous, imitated at leaſt in this the claſſics of the ſixteenth century : it did not deign to celebrate the work of its predeceſſors of

<sup>1</sup> Sweet is my ſleep, but more to be mere ſtone,  
So long as ruin and diſhonour reign ;  
To ſee naught, to feel naught is my great gain ;  
Then wake me not, ſpeak in an undertone.

<sup>2</sup> Ceſare, Marcheſe Beccaria, born Milan 1735. The reading of Montesquieu directed his mind to economics. He began a literary journal in imitation of *The Spectator*, called *Il Caffè*. In 1761 he published the juſtly celebrated work mentioned in the text "*On Crimes and Punishments*", which paſſed through ſix editions in eighteen months. An Engliſh translation appeared in 1768. Many reforms in European penal codes are traceable to this work. He died in Milan in 1794.

the eighteenth century. The thought of the eighteenth century was remarkable but not miraculous ; hence one passed it by.

The heroic epoch of the Risorgimento was crowned in 1860 by the unification of Italy. When one considers the long road that free Italy had to tread to bring herself to the cultural and economic level that France and England had reached in the previous fifty years, during which we were divided and invaded, no one can deny that the effort of our country was not only tenacious but fruitful. Even so, Italians remained discontented and dissatisfied with themselves. As usual, they had hoped too much ; they had expected and dreamed too much.

### III

## WHY THIS DISCONTENT BRINGS FORTH OUR GREATEST DEFECT: RHETORICAL EMPHASIS

SUCH feelings of discontent, noble and disinterested among the best of us, have always produced in Italy among the common sort a tendency to emphasis, to an empty phraseology about the greatness of the Roman Empire. When this tendency becomes general one perceives at once what is its significance : it announces an epoch of intellectual and political depression. Certain appeals are made to recall our *Romanità*, our millennial civilization, even the monuments of Rome are cited as though the world were in our debt for them, and finally we are moved to the same regret we might feel for the splendours of a festival the morning after. As for foreigners, they only smile, as one would do in a puppet theatre at the sound of a drum which imitates thunder behind the scenes.

There was certainly a memory of Rome which animated many noble spirits in Italy ; but these—Dante first among them—dreamed not of conquests but of that universal idea of the Empire with Rome and Italy as the centres of a universal *societas* with equal rights for all.

Leibniz has written in the Preface to the *Codex Diplomaticus*, that in the Middle Age the Emperor and the Pope were the two heads of the Christian Republic. The Italians were the first from the twelfth to the fourteenth century to feel themselves united in this idea. It was their first political idea, national and supra-national at the same time. They will never give it up, but ancient Rome itself and its cruel glory contributed little to the formation of the Italian spirit.

In the Middle Age, the most living of all the Romans, for the Italians, was Virgil ; but they transformed the poet half into a magician and half into a Christian. The only name of an Emperor which remained popular was that of Trajan, but because he was " the just ", and with him was Justinian because he gave the world universal laws.

In the epoch, more formalist than earnest, which in Italy followed the Counter-Reformation, all Italian schools were modelled to the same form in the hands of the Jesuits, and Rome became the inspirer of current literature, but, it must be understood, a "mannerist" Rome, like the ruins in the pictures of Pannini. The fact that the heroes of the literature and schools of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were looked for among the ancient Romans rather than in the Middle Age, proves that those in control considered ancient Rome less dangerous; the exception was Tacitus, whose love of liberty was suspect; and the pompous Roman *mise en scène* that the schools of the seventeenth century inaugurated shows their suspicion of the natural; it was at this time that the head of the class in many schools was given a crown and the title of Emperor.

The last and the most eloquent of the Italians to be blinded by that Rome of mannerists was Carlo Botta, whose ponderous *Storia d'Italia*, famous at the beginning of the nineteenth century, is to be found even today in all our old country-houses, where it sleeps between the *Primato* of Gioberti and *Le Consulat et l'Empire* of Thiers.

For Botta, the golden age of Italy and of the world is the Roman Empire: the Middle Age seems to him "a desolate age, especially in Italy", an age in which only ignorance, force and barbarism dominated.

Botta was the last of the sincere worshippers of Imperial Rome. The Risorgimento began to make itself felt, first in the political struggle with an array of notable scholars from all parts of Italy, from Piedmont to Sicily; many among them were excellent historians; all these had cast off the Roman vanity which belonged to the generations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; they were too proud to dress up in old costumes of the theatre. One of these writers, Micali, went so far as to maintain in his best work, *L'Italia avanti il dominio dei Romani*, that Rome had been nothing but brute force, suffocating the spontaneous impulses of the Italian spirit, which would have come from the happy union of the diverse peoples of the peninsula, from the Etruscans to the Siciliots.

The supervening romanticism contributed to turn the mind of the time to the Middle Age, as the sacred and dolorous epoch whence sprang the authentic life of the Italian people.

The citizen class and the best among the Italian working classes

that the preaching of Mazzini had moved, recognized themselves in the Communes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and in their struggles against the German Emperors.

It is also true that at the same time another current—corresponding to the ancient Italian anti-clerical tradition—drew its *epos* from the Ghibellines, from the epoch in which the court of Frederick II, the heretic, more Sicilian than German, had produced the earliest Italian poets. But precisely because it was Ghibelline this tradition too was medieval.

The nineteenth century was, in Italy as in the rest of Europe, the age of Liberalism and then of democracy, and it appeared, more or less clearly, that the Roman Empire had only been, at least from the artistic point of view, a triumph of anonymous and uneducated masses. In Imperial Rome one was occupied with the *kolossal*, as in the Germany of Kaiser Wilhelm II. One noted that the immense edifices of Rome—so heavy when one confronted them with the supreme grace of the tiny Acropolis of Athens—were the symbol and the fruit of the impoverishment and depopulation that was already appearing in Italy: impoverishment and depopulation whose ruinous effects opened the way later on for the barbarian invasions.

Eloquent parallel with that stupid satisfaction which appears always in Italy in epochs of decadence, with the glories of Imperial Rome, the first rumour of which can be traced back to Rome itself, for example under Hadrian, whose coins bear the inscription: *Italia felix* or *Temporum felicitas*, and the like.

Such complacency only manifests itself when corruption is upon one; thus it befell in Venice, in China, in Persia and in Spain; wherever the corruption becomes *gloriosus*.

At bottom, the history of Italy offers to the world this disconcerting message: that it is during the struggle between rich and poor, during the periods troubled by bitter factions that the poets, the painters, the sculptors and the architects most filled with genius have expressed themselves among us; and that it is during these same periods that the great achievements of our navigators, our bankers and our merchants have dominated the world.

Of all Machiavelli has written, these words remain the truest for all time: "The multitude is more constant and more wise than any monarch."<sup>1</sup> And "It appears to me that they who condemn the tumults between the nobles and the plebs are condemning just those things which were the first cause of Rome winning any

<sup>1</sup> *Deche*, I, 57.



freedom; and that they give more weight to the rumours and noise which sprang from such tumults than to the good effects they brought to pass".<sup>1</sup>

The last Italian author who felt our *romanità*, but did not make of it an instrument of rhetoric, was Carducci, the poet of the generation of 1870-90.

Like Machiavelli in his histories,<sup>2</sup> Carducci found his deepest lyrical inspiration in love of country; and he drew the symbols of his ideal from Republican Rome.

Leopardi, too, was not insensible to the same ideal; but he soon dropped his "*vedo le mura e gli archi*"<sup>3</sup>; universal poet as he was, his love for his country was fused ever more profoundly into a sentiment that did not deny but rather amplified his love for Italy.

This explains why Carducci, notwithstanding the force and beauty of his poetry, is not better known outside Italy. There is a kind of justice in the radius of the fame of poets.

The fate of Carducci as an old man was cruel: he had been the most loyal and honest heart of the Italy of his time; he had thought to serve his country by offering it, above all its divisions, the unique ideal of "*romanità*". And he did not foresee that his art, utilized by men less disinterested, would serve to hide and disguise the sterility and drought of the sources of the country's life, and that his very patriotism—in him so true, so pure and disinterested—would become the mask of literary degeneration behind which were hidden the sterile faces of rhetoricians capable of nothing but the effect of musical words and the tricks of the theatre. Did not D'Annunzio dare to call himself "*figlio suo*"? And Heaven knows that the work of D'Annunzio is the complete antithesis of all that the good and loyal Carducci had revered.

At the beginning of the long years of the Fascist tragi-comedy more was due to D'Annunzian inventions than to the contrivances of Mussolini and his accomplices.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as we have seen, there was many a master in the Jesuit Colleges and many a facile versifier of those times, who sought an artificial inspiration in the history of Rome.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 4.

<sup>2</sup> I must be allowed to refer to my *Machiavelli* (New York, Longmans, 1940).

<sup>3</sup> "I see the walls and the triumphal arches."

In the moral crisis that struck middle-class Italy after the first world war, the displaced and the failures of the schools, of the liberal professions and the civil service were victims of a new access of that rhetorical emphasis of which D'Annunzio had been the herald. The war had already shown, notwithstanding its tragic atmosphere, how much harm the rhetoric of D'Annunzio had done to weak minds; then, fortunately it was only a malady that declared itself on days of *fiesta*; but ten years later, with the advent of Fascism, the disease raged daily. I still have letters of the Italian Generals on the Albanian and Macedonian fronts where I happened to be. Always short and sober, often caustic, they were mirrors of those honest, simple and modest men; but if they had to draw up an order-of-the-day after a battle, they suddenly felt themselves obliged to produce an ornate and swelling prose, thinking it was the appropriate style for the occasion. They were the unlettered victims of D'Annunzio. Let me recall, for our consolation, that this also happened in France during the Revolution. Almost all the members of the Convention and the most ardent Jacobins, having been educated by the Jesuits, had been stuffed full of the heroes of Rome. They could get rid of a King, but not of the "*stil nobile*" taught them in the schools; if they wrote to their families, their letters were simple and lively like those of my Generals in Macedonia; but as soon as they were writing for the public, Roman reminiscences crowded upon them directing their pens, and they became insupportable. Indeed, this matter was more serious in France than it was in Italy: the pseudo-Roman style became popular there among all the "patriots"; every tavern-keeper became Brutus. At least in Italy the common people remained untouched by this pompous over-emphasis—even under Fascism. In the troubled years between the two world wars, between 1918 and 1939-40, the victims of a magniloquence that had its roots in something racial in the North and in the South was rooted in the Roman Empire, were not the common people, but rather the small bourgeois, the proletariats of the white collar; those who from the beginning furnished Fascism and Nazism with their blindest and most enthusiastic followers and relatively the most sincere.

For these wretched victims, drunk with the Roman Empire, the marvellous beauty of the Italian Middle Age, in which all is variety, disorder and life, was simply incomprehensible, and so too was the humane generosity of the generations of the Risorgimento. If we wish to seek their precursors we must go back to Cola di Rienzo,

the wretched orator of the moribund Rome of the fourteenth century, whose morbid vanity—did it not lead him finally to bathe in the great porphyry basin which, so he was informed, the Roman Emperors had used?—is the opposite of true pride.

But, at bottom, it is difficult not to find excuses for the half-educated Italian classes who allowed dead histories to go to their heads. Foreigners must perhaps leave to the numerous Italians whose patriotism has remained clear-sighted and humane, the right to smile at those modest brothers of ours, who assumed as an ideal of their own force and glory that Roman period which was in fact the decadence of a world and a civilization; and who did not perceive that it was the ruin of the Caesars which opened the way for an Italy, vital, rich and sure of itself.

And after all let us picture to ourselves what other European peoples would have done, had they been able to boast, like ourselves, of the legacy of Imperial Rome. Probably their bragging would have mounted to the sky in an even more intolerable style—if we may judge from the pretensions that every German draws from that Holy Roman Empire which was never Holy, or Roman, or an Empire. . . .

## IV

### ITALIANS AND THEIR LITERATURE

ITALIAN literature presents this singular character, that it reached from its beginning complete formal perfection. Hardly had it taken its first steps when it produced Dante, its most universal genius; and with him Petrarch and Boccaccio. Shakespeare, Racine and Goethe only flourished after many generations of English, French and German poets; in Italy instead, Guido Guinizelli and Guido Cavalcanti had scarce time to astonish the Italians of the thirteenth century with *canzoni* and *ballate* which made one forget the old *troubadours*, when they were overtaken by the master, as he himself says,

Che l'uno e l'altro caccerà di nido.

But Dante is Dante, unique. And unique also after him are Petrarch and Boccaccio. Boccaccio with his *novelle*, his stories, will emancipate the Italian spirit of his time and probably of all time.

But poets like Dante and Petrarch, and—after the period of learning, of the Renaissance—like Ariosto and Tasso, represent only themselves, and through themselves, the universal consciousness, so Leopardi in the nineteenth century.

Dante is moved by Italian passions; Petrarch thanks God that he was born Italian<sup>1</sup>; but they do not represent Italy more than Racine represents France or Cervantes Spain, or Whitman the United States. For every authentic poet, the fatherland, while it remains a vivid element in his intimate life, is melted and fused into a more ample world. A poet of whom it can be said that he is entirely national is not truly a poet. Manzoni, who was a poet and who loved Italy so much, doubtless alludes to himself when, singing of Homer of whom

Argo ed Atene  
e Rodi e Smirne cittadin contende,

adds:

E patria ei non conosce altro che il cielo.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Epist. fam.*, I, i.

<sup>2</sup> Whom Argos and Athens, Rhodes and Smyrna disputed as citizen—but “he knew no other fatherland than the heavens”.

Dante himself, intensely Italian though he was, declared that his fatherland was "the world in general", and to those who would have made peace for him, who worked to bring his exile to an end, but on humiliating conditions, he replied: "Cannot I then perchance contemplate wherever I may be the light of the sun and of the stars? Cannot I meditate anywhere on Supreme Truths?"<sup>1</sup>

Let us then disregard the literary game of finding the soul of a people in its poets; and equally vain is it to speak of a Dantesque Italy, of a Racinian France or of a Shakespearian England. Rather the very opposite is true. It is for the universal poets to exercise an influence on successive generations and to mould their sentiments and aspirations. All Italians are brought up in the Dantesque religion; Dante has exercised a greater influence over them than Shakespeare over the English and Racine over the French. Even the most dense Italian will have been moved at least once in his life by some of those hendecasyllables in which the thought and the images are more swift and clear than in any other poetry. Certain American ladies, nurses in the armies of the United States in 1917, have told me that the convalescent soldiers of Italian origin asked very often to have Dante to read, so that it was necessary to buy many dozen copies of the poet. Neither the English nor the French possess anything comparable to this cult of Dante, and as for the Germans, too many of them have only sought in Goethe a motive of pride "vom deutschen Standpunkt"; faithless to the spirit of Goethe who so often recommended them in vain to rise to a universal spirit. Dante has become in Italy a national altar at which all are communicants—or pretend to be. The fact is that Dante has been utilized in every age as a measure of national feeling; in the *Divine Comedy* we find described those "natural frontiers" that France has sought in her geography and history, but never found in her poets. When in the Parliament of 1920 I fought for a policy of friendly understanding with our Slav neighbours, finally liberated from the Austro-Hungarian chains, but at the same time maintained that Trieste and Istria were Italy, the argument purely literary and Dantesque which I found it natural to use, had a definite weight and not only with the masses; for has not Dante written that it is the Quarnero (the gulf to the east of Istria)

Ch'Italia chiude e i suoi termini bagna?<sup>2</sup>

In the most unhappy moments of her history, in the seventeenth

<sup>1</sup> *De vulgari Eloquentia*, I, 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Inferno*, IX.

and eighteenth centuries, Italy abandoned Dante. There were more editions published of the *Divine Comedy* from 1818 to 1860, in the era of the Risorgimento, than during the two previous centuries.

All know that the unequalled perfection of Dante at the very origins of our literature, and with it, the art of Petrarch whose lyrics are still so near to our hearts, are at the roots of the exclusively literary formation of the greater number of Italian poets, perhaps less free to take their own way by reason of those formidable exemplars. It was simpler and more natural for a Villon to find his inspiration in his own anarchical spirit, and for an English poet to seek it in nature; for the Italian knew by heart all the *canti* of the *Inferno* and almost all the *canzoni* of Petrarch. Was this an obstacle? For us Italians our classics have meant for long something more than simple masterpieces of literature. They were the ideal fatherland, the only fatherland free from foreign domination; they were a promise of glory and of future independence.

Only for the Chinese have their classics constituted such an essential base of national consciousness; but while with the Chinese there has never been more than a passive resistance (the ball of rubber which receives and accepts all impressions and immediately after obliterates them), for our fathers the Italian classics were at the same time national consciousness and resistance. In China, behind the lettered whose pen reproduces most ably thousands of exquisite literary images—in appearance renewed but in reality three thousand years old—there was almost never a heart that thrilled and suffered. The veneration for a poetic past of august antiquity made all the sons of Han believe that literary style was a sort of privilege reserved from generation to generation to a caste; all became formula; even today the generals, whether they be loyal communists or anti-communists, launch their proclamations to the people in almost the same forms as of old, and reproduce the hemistiches of some poet of the Sung dynasty. . . .

Guido Vitale, Chinese Secretary of the Italian Legation in China, published, when I was Minister there, a collection of delightful popular Chinese poems. The *literati* of Peking asked one another if he was mad; and the noble and powerful prince Pu-Lung who honoured me with his friendship, put me on guard against the mental state of my secretary. Prince Pu-Lung must have seen in him incarnate and alive the spirit of those Italian humanists of the fifteenth century who deplored that Dante, "so great a genius",

had lowered himself to write in the vulgar tongue, while he might have written masterpieces in Latin.

In Italy the main stream of our literature is composed of two currents which combine without mixing, without being confounded: the writer who, like Dante, composes "when love inspires him"—this is the current that flows down to Leopardi and Manzoni; and, on the other hand, those writers whose ability only produces formal or exterior results, prodigious sometimes, it is true, like those of Vincenzo Monti, but too often deprived of that real inspiration which the young Manzoni promised himself "never to betray".

It is in the epochs when liberty is lost, when an artificial order reigns in the street and in books, that all originality disappears from Italian literature; it cedes its place to clever and able writers whose arsenal is composed either of arches of Constantine and Roman eagles, or of women who please for a moment but do not remain in our hearts: the Dori, the Filli, the Ebi of the long Spanish epoch; gracious shades, but neither Italian nor universal, excepting those of Metastasio.

It is at the beginning of the heroic epoch of the Risorgimento, with Manzoni and Leopardi, that the spark of our national poetry glowed again. The unrestrained passion and the excess of sorrow in Leopardi repeat, for the first time, what we find in Dante. The same Leopardi writes—and it is in harmony with his genius—that from the sixteenth century to his own time Italy had known only "verses without poetry".

Manzoni and Leopardi left behind them not merely Manzonians and Leopardians; they left Italians converted to simplicity and sincerity; that is to say, to true poetry.

I have said that our classical literature reached at its birth a formal perfection, because it was born of the perfection of the Latin tongue and in the shadow of the genius of Dante. It was this very perfection, perhaps, that soon detached it from the people, exception being made, I repeat, for the *Divine Comedy*, and later, during many generations, for Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*.

The true life of Italy—from Dante to our own time—is much nearer to the turbulence of Greece than to the official discipline of Rome. Our municipal life is clamorous and agitated, we are full of the daring of the navigators and merchants who find or rediscover the roads of the world (a daring which is renewed today in a more anonymous manner by our emigrants), the spirit of party,

the originality of individual temperaments, all this reminds us rather of the turbulent Ionic cities than of the solemn scenes of collective life described by Livy.

Yet of this so agitated Italian life the classics of the sixteenth century only speak to deplore it; almost as though they were ashamed of it. Only the *novellieri*—the story-tellers—delight in it with tranquil serenity.

When one talks of the *novellieri* one thinks before all of Boccaccio; the *Decamerone* is even today crowded with Italians of every age. In Boccaccio's own fourteenth century the pomp of the Church is superb, but faith is very weak; it might seem to have exhausted itself in the pure and sacred flame of St. Francis of Assisi in the preceding century; Dante thunders against the "new men and sudden wealth", but Boccaccio belongs to these "new men", he represents them, and moves among them at his ease. Like all Italians, he has learned as a child, the legends and visions that followed the year one thousand, but the Tuscan smile has not left his lips; his serene equilibrium gives him a sovereign indulgence for all human misery and this indulgence he applies with equal impartiality to the market-place and the church, to the cottage and the palace.

Dante sometimes describes with a simple stroke certain types of daily life like the old tailor who struggles with the eye of his needle,<sup>1</sup> but we feel that all his lyrical power really reserves itself for tragic lovers such as Paolo and Francesca, or for a stubborn hero like Farinata. Boccaccio, instead, is all for the common people. If he describes princes, or knights and ladies, his world becomes pale and conventional. But when he brings on the scene merchants, artists or peasants, his prose is always bubbling with life. And then especially in Boccaccio—notwithstanding the latinized rhythm of his style—and, with him, in the anonymous stories that preceded him like the *Novellino*, and in all the succeeding collections of stories in Italian and in dialect, we may follow the long and authentic thread of Italian sentiment.

French story-tellers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are not more inventive and realist than their predecessors, the *Trouvères*: almost always it is the usual deceived husband, the same sly wife who makes fools of her husband and her lover. . . . And so on down to La Fontaine: but the serene genius of this poet is concerned rather with human nature than with such typical French scenes.

<sup>1</sup> "Come vecchio sartor fa nella cruna." *Inferno*, XIV.



The art of the Italian *novellieri* is a counterweight to the tone, sometimes too solemn and abstract, of literature of the highest order. In the *novellieri* all is a direct echo of the life of the people; just as it is in popular poetry, whether it is the Tuscan “*rispetto*”, the Neapolitan “*arietta*”, or the Sicilian “*canzona*”.

And like the Sicilian *ottava* with alternating rhymes—spontaneous as the life of the people—the Italian *novella* is rarely brilliant; only in Boccaccio these stories often present a final phrase that illuminates and wittily illustrates the whole.

French and German tales have a semi-mythological origin. In Italy, stories were very early written with contemporary human types as characters; for instance, in the fifteenth century, Arlotto, a parish priest of the neighbourhood of Florence, famous even today, or Gonnella, the buffoon of the court of Ferrara. Another difference between the Italian *novella* and that of other countries, is revealed in its essentially national character. In French and German fables—as today in the Norman stories of Maupassant—the humour has as its unique end some material advantage or some material pleasure. But behind the humour of Arlotto, as behind that of his successors, such personal ends are altogether lacking; it is indeed art for art’s sake. These authors often injure themselves with their devices; they know it, but cannot resist it; what they aim at is a satisfaction of their self-respect. This is still today one of the most vivid traits of the Italian character.

A sceptical tolerance inspires our *novellieri* and chroniclers in almost all psychological problems. In one instance only are they all without exception unjust and even in this ultra-Italian. They have a double patriotism: love and pride in Italy, and a profound and secret tenderness for their native city. Even Boccaccio, whenever he brings a robber on the scene, a hypocrite or forger, never presents him as a Florentine, but makes him by birth Milanese or Neapolitan.

Four centuries later, we may note a similar love for Venice on the part of Goldoni; his typical liar comes from Naples, the braggart and the miser from other parts of Italy—never from Venice.

It is only in the *novellieri* that we find faithfully described one of the most profound characteristics of the Italian people, one which centuries of silent struggles against the powerful and against nature have formed in them: a kind of philosophy, good-natured and resigned, that might appear to a superficial observer to be an almost oriental fatalism, while in fact it is only bitter experience of history,

combined with daily practical attempts, silent and untiring, to eliminate the effects of evil and misfortune.

Here is one example among a thousand, drawn from Franco Sacchetti. A peasant from Dicomano went to complain to Messer Francesco de' Medici that one of his associates wanted to steal his vineyard. And he said: "Voi dovete sapere, che siete molto vissuto, che questo mondo corre per andazzi, e quando corre un andazzo di vaiuolo, quando di pestilenze mortali, quando è andazzo che si guastano tutti i vini, quando è andazzo che in poco tempo si uccideranno, quando è andazzo d'una cosa e quando d'un' altra . . . Quello di che io al presente vi vo'pregare per l'amor di Dio è questo: che s'egli è andazzo di tor vigne, che il vostro consorto s'abbia la mia . . . : ma se non fusse andazzo di tor vigne, io vi prego caramente che la vigna mia non mi sia tolta."<sup>1</sup>

Throughout all the course of Italian history one can find not only stories but authentic tales with similar cutting and striking characteristics. But the grand style of the great poets on the one hand and the bombast of mediocre purists on the other have obscured all this.

Almost every city has had its chronicle, exquisitely fresh and spontaneous: for instance, that of Fra Salimbene at Parma. But there is none to be found to praise them; glory and fame are reserved for the Latinists like Varchi and Davanzati; it was only in the nineteenth century that the simple beauty of the *Cronaca* of Dino Compagni was recognized as a national inheritance.

The life of the first of the great Italian prose writers, Boccaccio, is also the earliest example of the eternal misunderstanding. He consumed the best years of his youth in composing poems and treatises full of mythology and of Roman history; dismayed and attracted at the same time by the great shadow of Dante, he attempted to imitate him, as he attempted to imitate Virgil. And he only wrote an immortal book, the *Decameron*, when he had forgotten all his learned *impedimenta* and dreams of glory.

<sup>1</sup> "You must know, you who have lived long, that this world runs in waves and in cycles and epidemics; sometimes there comes an epidemic of small-pox, sometimes of some mortal pestilence, sometimes one which ruins all the vines, sometimes there is a craze which in a brief time kills many people, sometimes one thing, sometimes another. What I beg of you now for the love of God is this: that if there is come a craze for taking away vineyards, your relation should have mine, but if there is no such craze, I earnestly beg that my vineyard may not be taken away from me."

The fate of the work of art in Italy has too often been that of Boccaccio, and it is for this reason that the Italian spirit—the sincere and simple spirit of daily life—is more intensely felt and expressed by the *novellieri* and chroniclers of relatively obscure fame, than in the pages of the famous writers. This too is why—after the long sleep of the seventeenth century—there is a fracture between literature and the people. The Italian mind, literature being separated from life, expressed itself best in the pages of the popular *novellieri*, whether they wrote in Italian or in one of our great dialects—Milanese or Neapolitan, Romagnuol or Venetian. . . .

I myself as a child, devoured in country cottages, by the fire-side, the stories about Bertoldo that the *contadini* had bought for three *soldi* on a market-day in the neighbouring city. The author, Giulio Cesare della Croce, was a locksmith of Bologna, and father of fourteen children; he wrote in the evening to add something to his earnings. His hero was a buffoon of the Longobard king Alboin. We owe it to Giulio Cesare della Croce that the mischievous deeds of Bertoldo have become part of our folk-lore. . . . Here are some specimens of these roguish tricks that would certainly still be enjoyed by our peasantry if the cinema had not killed all such ingenuous pleasures.

When Bertoldo was banished from the lands of the Longobards, he returned immediately in a cart covered with the soil of another State; when the King forbade him to appear at court, he presented himself hidden behind a sieve; being condemned to death, he asked but one grace: to choose himself the tree on which he should be hanged; and he travelled for twenty years at the King's expense without being able to find a tree that suited him. . . .

In Tuscany—a land refined beyond any other—our great poets remained as living as the popular *novellieri*; even today, on winter evenings, there are hearths where the *contadino* reads for hours to an attentive little audience the cantos of Ariosto and Tasso.

In the fourteenth century it was thus too with the *Divine Comedy*: all read it without need of glosses or notes, at least for the human episodes. One knew in those days by instinct what Francesco De Sanctis was bold enough to tell his pupils of the University of Naples, between 1871 and 1877: "Where Dante is not clear, where the sense does not jump to the eye and the ear—that is not Dante."

If the poets and prose writers of the "Spanish" epoch in Italy fell out of favour with the people, it was their own fault. Pompous and frigid, they were only read by the Don Ferrantes of the time.

They only wrote verses in honour of the victories of the Catholic powers at war with the Turks, or of the rather feeble fights of the Knights of the Order of Santo Stefano against some lateen sail of the Moslem pirates; or again, poems on the Virgin, on Mary Magdalen and her tresses; patriotic songs without a *patria*, religious verses without any true sentiment of religion; love songs without tenderness or passion; in fact, an admirable repertoire so far as technical achievement went, but absolutely arid with regard to love, to Christian faith or to patriotism.

Let us take, for example, apropos of patriotism, a sonnet of Filicaia's, that our ancestors all knew by heart, especially this too famous verse:

Deh, fossi tu men bella o almen più forte.<sup>1</sup>

This was pure convention and looked to an Italy which was as much a literary convention as was the "*candido seno*" of a non-existent mistress. The more Filicaia reproached Italy for being weak, the more he spoke of foreigners as enemies who were long since our slaves, so much the more we feel that it is all a literary exercise; the good Filicaia works himself up with just the same emotions when he hymns the glories of the King of Poland and the King of Sardinia.

Even the language, earlier so bare and straightforward, grew remote from the people, and did not avoid bombast and fustian even in the common things of daily life.

Until the sixteenth century every letter ended with a simple "*state sano*" (wishing you well), and if one wanted to exaggerate a little, one added "*tutto vostro*", or as one might say in English, "yours ever". After the coming of the Spaniards and the change of customs that followed, the simple *tu* and *voi* were transformed into a pompous *Lei* and *Ella*, referring to a *Vostra Signoria* (*Usted*) expressed or implicit. The *Signoria*, on the other hand, was soon added to, in official style, by *Eccellenza* and *Magnificenza*. . . . One ended letters by kissing the hands of a lady to whom for centuries

<sup>1</sup> "Would that thou [Italy] wert less beautiful or at least more strong." Vincenzo Filicaia: lyrical poet, born in Florence in 1642, and died in 1707. He was of noble birth and his literary eminence and his membership of the Accademia della Crusca brought him into the circle of such men of letters as Magalotti, Gori, Redi and Menzini. He was befriended in his poverty by Christina of Sweden and later by the Grand Duke Cosimo III of Tuscany, and he died as a Senator of Florence.

one had only ended with a simple “*state sano*”. It is true that in Spain one went further still; there one kissed the feet, whence come the initials at the end of letters, used even today in Spain: Q.B.S.P.

But we shall fall into the same state of narrow nationalism as Filicaia if we try to make Spain solely responsible for the *spagnolismo* which infested Italy for two centuries. In reality, both Italy and Spain were subject to a common fate in a common period of decadence, which among us appeared more suddenly and openly, only because Spain, being a strong and unified state, was able to hide the evil longer. The two corruptions were the same and the two nations were victims of a medieval refusal of all those ideas of political reform which, active in the north of Europe, secured to the Northern peoples a long period, not so much of intellectual superiority, as of social and moral leadership.

## V

## ARCADIA AND MUSIC

THE Italy of the eighteenth century—"good society", music, return to nature, after the suffocating pomp of the seventeenth—an Italy that I myself have glimpsed as a boy in cities of Emilia, of the Lunigiana and in Tuscany—lives still, more than one might think. In Rome, though it may be dead in the modernized quarter of the Parioli, at the golf-links of Via Appia and among the rich middle-classes devoted to fox-hunting, it still lives or at least vegetates, in the smaller, quiet old palaces and houses between Piazza Campitelli and Via Giulia. And most certainly it vegetates still in the *castelli* of the Piacentino, in the eighteenth-century houses of Lecce and in a hundred other places.

In order to understand a good part of Italy today, it is necessary therefore to take into account the Italy of the eighteenth century.

In the preceding century our social life had lost every old Italian characteristic. All had become Spanish: the ceremonies at Court, the receptions in the convents, in aristocratic houses, and families of the minor nobility which copied them; it was then that the titles of *Don* and *Donna* became the rage, that the addresses of letters began to swell with a series of adjectives ending in the superlatives of *issimo* and *issima*.

In face of the Spanish formalism only the violence and blood remained Italian in the seventeenth century; but even there Spanish procedure was adopted. I think I have read in a book of Croce's of an incident which befell Modena in that century and that did not arouse much surprise at the time. A certain Cavaliere annoyed with his servant, began to beat him with his Indian cane and its ball of ivory—this is often found in Goldoni. But this Cavaliere of Modena went further and fired his pistol at the poor devil who, suddenly wounded, ceased to be a servant; and having a pistol fired it: both being in agony, a Capuchin friar arrives and confesses them; he gives them absolution and both find that they have strength enough left to rise, to embrace and pardon one another before falling dead in each other's arms.

Such a world was quite foreign to Italy; it could not long

endure. A reaction began at the end of the century and continued into the eighteenth century. That reaction was Arcadia.<sup>1</sup>

De Sanctis was unjust to Arcadia in his *History of Italian Literature*.

“What was Italy doing? . . . Italy was creating Arcadia. It was the true production of her individual and moral existence. Her poets wrote of the Golden Age and in the nullity of the life of the time they fabricated abstract themes and insipid loves of shepherd and shepherdess.”

No, modest though the art of Arcadia was, it was a great advance on the epoch of Marino,<sup>2</sup> on the preciousness and flowery style of the seventeenth century; it was a return to nature. But De Sanctis was a typical man of the Risorgimento; he had fought for Italy, he had been in prison and in exile for Italy, and even he, the most clear-sighted of our literary critics, was unable to see how unjust was the disdain of so many of the valiant men of the Risorgimento for the modest and humane voices of the Italy of the past which could not be expected to produce an Alfieri or a Parini before the great awakening of the French Revolution.

With all its defects and mawkishness the long-continued manner of the pastoral art that Arcadia gave us, represented the most complete break with unnatural Spaniardism; and the happy consequence of that break was that minds were opened to artistic and literary influences of French origin, of which nothing had been heard in Italy during the seventeenth century. If Italians now again became Italian, if a century later the Risorgimento was possible, it was solely because we had had Arcadia—a necessary and fortunate moment in our evolution.

The movement, a unique accident in our literary and artistic history, had its origin in Rome and its first successes there. It was on a fine morning in the spring of 1692 that Arcadia was born.

<sup>1</sup> From 1680 to 1790 Italian literature is represented by Filicaja, Vico, Metastasio, Goldoni, Parini, Gozzi, Monti and Alfieri, but the intellectual life of the nation is found in the innumerable Academies, all of which were local except one, the Academy of the Arcadians, whose glory resounded from Sicily to Trent. It formed by means of colonies in all Italian towns a spider's web in which everyone at all distinguished was caught, even women.

<sup>2</sup> Giambattista Marino, poet, born 1569 in Naples, chief of the school of the *Secentisti*. His extravagant pen drove him out of Italy to Paris, where he was well received by Marie de Medicis between 1615 and 1622. He died in Naples in 1625.

Like all really vital things, it was born without a pre-established plan. About fifteen *litterati* met, as was their habit at the time, to read and admire one another's newest sonnets and verses. Generally such meetings took place in the garden or in the saloons of Queen Christina of Sweden, the exiled sovereign then in fashion. But that day they met in the fields of Castello which, though today one of the most dreary quarters of Rome, was then really all fields and orchards. The country scene made a great impression on that lettered company, and one of them exclaimed: "It would seem almost as though Arcadia had come to life again among us." The thing must have been in the air, for that day Arcadia was born. But not for nothing was it born in Italy; it became an Academy of which the President took the pastoral name of Shepherd; and all the rest, prelates, knights, jurists, abbés, poets and poetasters, assumed the names of Greek shepherds; and it was under these names that henceforth they published their verses.

The thing lasted a century—until the French Revolution. It was the epoch of Cardinals' nephews, of the rise to wealth of such families as the Altieri, Rospigliosi, Corsini and Borghese, who, having built palaces and villas, wished to appear as Maecenas in their new *saloni*. Among all these people—Maecenas and clients—Arcadia created a counterfeit but agreeable atmosphere of democratic equality; in Arcadia, all, from princes to abbés, were equal; only talent counted. Certainly, with rare exceptions, it was only the talent of makers of verses, but without Arcadia, Goldoni, Gozzi, Verri and Baretti would not have arrived so soon.

From Rome the fashion imposed itself upon all Italy; at Milan there were the *Trasformati*, at Bologna the *Gelidi*, at Massa Lunense the *Rinnovati*, at Lucca the *Oscuri*, at Siena the *Intronati*, elsewhere the *Fervidi*, the *Rozzi*, the *Flemmatici* . . .

If the negative work of all these was notable in that it broke up the anti-Italian seventeenth-century crust, their positive production was little more than a number of madrigals, sonnets, odes "*per monaca*" for a nun when entering a convent, "*per nozze*" on the occasion of a wedding, "*per elevazione alla sacra porpora*" in honour of a new Cardinal, and "*per laurea*" to honour some fellow poet. When my great-great-grandfather presented his thesis for the doctorate at Parma, on certain propositions of Galileo (science was then in fashion) he published a collection of sonnets by his Arcadian friends, which celebrated the genius of the young doctor—who never did anything else worth noting all the rest of his life.



Arcadia did not perhaps originate, but it ennobled another activity that disappeared with it: the *improvisatori*, the improvisers, without whom no grand reception, no evening entertainment was considered complete, or even conceivable. It was better than Bridge. One of these *improvisatori*, Bernardino Perfetti, appeared so marvellous that he was crowned on the Capitol, with the same ceremonies that were used in the fourteenth century for Petrarch. These *improvisatori* recited, accompanied softly on a spinet. At the end of a recital they were often exhausted, and no one therefore was astonished if the verses sometimes halted. One evening a bad-tempered Cardinal observed aloud: "Too many syllables in that verse"; but the improviser, stung to the quick, conquered his exhaustion and turning to the Cardinal:

Chi ferra inchioda; e chi cammina inciampa;  
s'improvvisa, Eminenza; non si stampa.

All laughed behind His Eminence's back and the *improvisatore* found his poetic fire again and kept it to the end.

It was Arcadia and the craft or gift of the *improvisatore* that gave to Italy—one may even say to Europe, which adored him—the most famous poet of the eighteenth century, Pietro Metastasio, the man who better than any other interpreted the "sensibility" of his time.

One warm evening of the Roman summer of 1709, a grave citizen wearing the black habit of an abbé or a lawyer, stopped in Piazza dei Cesarini to listen to a boy who, standing on a bench, was improvising some charming verses in a sweet voice to a group of people. The little *improvisatore* had no sooner become aware of his exceptional listener than he immediately devoted some verses to him, expressing his respectful excuses for the poor value of his verse. The grave citizen was no less a person than Gian Vincenzo Gravina,<sup>1</sup> the famous hellenist and jurist, and one of the little company that sixteen years earlier had founded the Arcadia. Scarcely had the small group dispersed when Gravina asked the boy who he was.

"I am Pietro Trapassi, son of Felice who keeps the grocer's shop

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Vincenzo Gravina, born near Cosenza in Calabria in 1664 of a distinguished family. He came to Rome in 1689 and there in 1695 helped to found the Arcadia. His fame as a man of letters and jurisconsult was pre-eminent in his day. He refused ecclesiastical honours, being disinclined for the ecclesiastical profession. From 1699 he held the Chair of Civil Law in the Sapienza, and in 1703 that of Canon Law. He died in Rome in 1718.

in Via dei Cappellari, close by. I am eleven years old; I have a brother and a sister . . . Yes, my father sends me to school and I know how to read and to write." . . .

And Gravina :

"Come tomorrow to my house in Via Giulia. I am the Abate Gravina."

Everyone in Rome knew who that personage was. And when the same evening a parcel of books arrived at the Trapassi house as a gift for young Pietro, the joy must have been great and the hopes towering. In fact, a little later, Gravina, who led a melancholy life alone in his vast palace, offered the Trapassi to take Pietro into his house and to have him instructed. The Trapassi accepted the proposal and the transformation began with the change of the vulgar surname into the equivalent but sonorous *Metastasio*.

The life of young *Metastasio* was that of many young boys of the Italian middle-class then and now; a mixture of ardent imagination and cold good sense. He studied the classics and law under Gravina himself. But before his studies were finished, his protector died, leaving him a good part of his fortune. *Metastasio* then did the only irregular—I mean unconventional—thing of his whole long life. He wasted this legacy very happily in a Rome that admired him. But no sooner was complete ruin in sight than the good sense of Pietro Trapassi got the upper hand. He carried himself off to Naples with the few *scudi* which remained and entered the office of the famous lawyer Castagnola to complete his legal training. Castagnola made but one condition: "No poetry." And when he heard that Pietro was writing verses for a little *innamorata*, he turned him out and left him to his own resources. It was a piece of luck for *Metastasio*, for the famous prima donna Marianna Bulgarelli, called "*la Romanina*", divined the genius of the young man at a loss; she received him in her house, revealed him to himself and loved him, as a lover and a son, just as later Madame de Warens treated the youthful Rousseau on the other side of the Alps.

The first of the famous dramas of *Metastasio*, *Didone abbandonata*, was probably written under the guidance, though hidden, of the *Romanina*, a woman of talent rare even among the actors and singers of the time, who certainly did not lack talent.

The singer of the time, whether man or woman, was in the Italy of the eighteenth century a much more important personage than had been the case earlier or was to be later. The singers were not

merely wheels in the musical system, they were the very pivot and axis of it; when one wrote music, one always thought of the *divo* or *diva* who would sing it. Fanny Burney—who became Madame d'Arblay, composed novels that had a great vogue—wrote apropos of a celebrated singer of the eighteenth century, Gaspere Pacchierotti, that if he had not been a tenor, he would have been a poet. Pacchierotti had so much respect for his art that as an old man he said to the young singer Rubini: "Our art is so difficult . . . when we are young we have the voice but we do not know how to sing; when we are old we begin to learn how to sing, but we no longer have the voice."

It was in this atmosphere of profound respect for musical art that Metastasio lived with the Bulgarelli.

The *Didone abbandonata* made him famous in a night, throughout Europe; afterwards came *Catone in Utica*, *Adriano* and a hundred other tragedies, to call them what the author called them and wished them to be; in reality they are all melodramas—verses transformed and penetrated with music. Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot, queens and princesses (to go lower) used to learn them by heart and for many years sang fragments of them.

When Metastasio, having been crowned Poet Laureate, died in Vienna, eighty-six years old, they struck a medal in his memory with the inscription *Sophocli italo*—the Italian Sophocles. But adulation made no impression on his Roman good sense. Writing from Vienna a few years before he died, to an Italian friend, he sent him an ironical biographical notice of himself which began: "In the eighteenth century lived a certain Abate Metastasio, a tolerable poet among many bad versifiers. . . ."

One reads him much less today than heretofore, but he divides with Dante and Manzoni a glory rare in the Italy of today, so indifferent to her literature. Some of his verses have entered into the language of several generations. Even today one says:

Passato è il tempo, Enea,  
che Dido a te pensò<sup>1</sup>

when one wishes to chaff a lover who has been abandoned; or for other amorous troubles:

Ne' giorni tuoi felici  
ricordati di me,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "That time has gone, Aeneas, when Dido thought of you."

<sup>2</sup> "When you are enjoying happiness, think of me."

and there are many other passages of the sort. That is perhaps in Italy the best way to remain alive.

It was with Metastasio, under Metastasio, that Italian opera reached its greatest perfection. Opera, indeed, could only have been born Italian, under the influences of our literary culture on the one hand and popular instinct on the other. Opera was born among us, in fact, for the same reasons that Italy always remained a sterile soil for tragedy. The Italians wrote and produced innumerable tragedies in the course of centuries, from Albertino Mussato and his *Ezzelino* to Scipione Maffei and his *Merope* and Alfieri and his *Saul*. But these tragedies did not come like a natural force from the hearts of their authors—save perhaps in the case of Alfieri. They were the result of an eternal mania of our men of letters to draw their inspiration from the forms of the past.

The people did not understand or feel these things, but then they only rarely understood or felt anything of our literature.

No theatrical production before Metastasio had a hundredth part of the vogue of the *Commedia dell'Arte*<sup>1</sup> among the citizens or of the *Maggi* among the peasantry. The *Maggi* were sung on improvised stages in the piazzas before the churches. As a child, overcome by emotion, I perhaps assisted at the last *Maggi* in the mountain villages of my archaic Lunigiana, where they used to say of certain village ancients with respect, "He has the book of the *Maggio*"—an old manuscript scrap-book where the adventures of the saints and the paladins were summarily traced, only the principal tirades of the first actor being given in their entirety.

The Opera was the meeting-point of the nobles and middle classes on the one hand, with the *popolo* on the other, the *popolo* from whom it had originally come by instinct, only in a rudimentary form.

As perfected by Metastasio, the opera was a pre-romantic product of the same kind as the dramas of Shakespeare or Calderon, with three equally essential elements: music, action and scenery. The action was rapid and violent, with the consequence that the heroes

<sup>1</sup> The *Commedia dell'Arte* appeared about the middle of the sixteenth century and lasted till the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was an organization of actors by profession, musicians, singers and even acrobats. These actors performed works more or less of a regular sort and written tragedies and pastoral plays, but their true speciality was comedy, usually unwritten, which they would improvise on a given subject.

of tragedies in the French fashion—Augustus who harangues like Bossuet and Athalie who declaims like Bourdaloue—were no longer possible, hence the chance so rare in Italy, which gave us Metastasio, who wrote in a language that never grows old, because it is living and true.

As a writer of texts of opera—I will not say *libretti*—Metastasio never had any of the difficulties of other librettists. He, like Arrigo Boito alone after him, being a musician, loved to write for music. Goldoni, Gaspare Gozzi and Parini often made fun of the singers; the old friend of the Bulgarelli never. Often in his dramas he made the hero like the singer for whom he destined the part; and in this he was truer and more realistic than other poets of a more impetuous genius.

Metastasio was neither pseudo-classical like Voltaire nor artificial like Alfieri; his was that spontaneous form which a whole nation desired; and his heroes and heroines are neither Greeks and Romans of the theatre nor even the powdered cavaliers of his own time: they are Italian music incarnate.

Metastasio died on April 14th, 1782, at Vienna, where he was always regretting Naples and Rome, but he felt his responsibility as Poet Laureate too keenly to abandon a capital that, as the years went by, was ceasing to be Italianate and had begun to remember that it was German.

Seven years later came the French Revolution. This it was that gave us Alfieri and his republican tragedies which chased Metastasio's dramas from the Italian stage. But when we come to study the eighteenth century as a phenomenon not very dissimilar though infinitely smaller than the period of the Renaissance, we realize that not only the modest Arcadia but also the serene Metastasio were precious and necessary links in the formation of the Italians of today. It is not for nothing that in certain regions our *contadini*, those authentic Italians, still read both Metastasio and Tasso: the only two poets, with a little of Ariosto, that they do read.

And it is for this reason, wishing to describe the Italians of today, we must pause for a moment in that serene oasis which was the eighteenth century and its poet.

## VI

### ITALIAN ROMANTICISM

THE poets that Alfieri<sup>1</sup> in part inspired—from Foscolo and Leopardi to Carducci—had in common with him a supreme aspiration for Liberty. But fanatical individualist as he was, far more than they, he had no respect for phantasms, and he did not hesitate to call such the pretended liberties of our last two Republics; Venice and her “obscene and factitious liberty”, and Genoa and her “sixty idiotic periwigs”. He conceived the same horror later for the “*liberté*” of the French Convention; and libertarian as he was, he was not always enthusiastic over the American Revolution: he grew disgusted with it when it seemed to him that the Americans of the thirteen revolted colonies had mingled certain economic considerations with the moral reasons that had inspired Jefferson.

Alfieri hated kings with a hatred and contempt more bitter than those which inspired professional revolutionaries, because, descended as he was from a long line of feudal ancestors, his love of liberty was instinctively mixed with scepticism in regard to “crowned heads”, which is more often found among aristocrats than among the middle classes or the people. There was only one exception for Alfieri: Frederick King of Prussia; he dedicated to him a sonnet of which the last line ran:

Ma di non nascer re forse era degno.<sup>2</sup>

Without the passion of Alfieri, many great ministers of blue blood have shared his scepticism about the moral value of their “august

<sup>1</sup> Vittorio, Count Alfieri, born at Asti, in Piedmont, 1749. At Florence in 1777 he met the Countess of Albany, daughter of Prince Gustav Adolf of Stolberg, who married Prince Charles Edward Stuart (Bonny Prince Charlie), now old and dissipated, to escape whom she entered a nunnery in 1780. Alfieri was her lover, both before and after her husband's death, chiefly in France, but the Revolution drove them first to England and then back to Florence, where Alfieri died in 1803. Alfieri published 21 tragedies, 6 comedies and other works, including lyrical poems, satires and an autobiography.

<sup>2</sup> “Perhaps you were worthy not to be born a king.”

masters"; to realize this, it is enough to mention, if you may read between the lines, Bismarck (whose family was much older than that of the Hohenzollern), Cavour and Palmerston. . . .

The tragedies of Alfieri, all drawn from history, made history at least for a couple of generations. His *Timoleone* was given at Naples for long during the Republic of 1799.

It is a proof of the potential unity of Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century, that we find an almost perfect analogy of sentiment between Alfieri and the *Sturm und Drang* of Germany; the German romantics and the proto-romantic Italian were especially in accord in not recognizing either life or imagination in the intellectualism of Voltaire or in the optimism of the French *illuminati*.

The poets who followed Alfieri were all—from Pellico to Niccolini—very different from him; neither they nor any other of our poets had anything of his Dantesque disdain—which in literary Italy was always the basis of a moral sense.

One other poet, and one only, Vincenzo Monti,<sup>1</sup> had, like Alfieri, certain Dantesque traits. But Alfieri was Dantesque because his soul was as proud as that of Alighieri; Monti had something of Dante because he was endowed with prodigious gifts for poetic form, reaching a style almost worthy of Dante himself, perfect as sound—but exterior, decorative. At the beginning of a century enriched by the vehemence of Alfieri and the profound truth of Manzoni, Monti only reproduced the type of the lettered Italian of the sixteenth century, as a century later was the case with D'Annunzio. With Monti all was grist for his mill, everything could be turned into beautiful verses, an Emperor of Austria, a Napoleon, a popular revolution or the election of a Pope.

Leopardi was a good judge when he wrote of Monti that he was "a poet for the ear and the imagination but never for the heart".

Shall we then censure Vincenzo Monti? Assuredly not, because for him there was only one really important thing in the world, the beauty and purity of literary form; nor did he, like D'Annunzio, ever wish to assume the rôle of a politician. Probably Monti must often have wondered why so many Italians who might have devoted themselves to formal Beauty, should waste their time in discussing passing superstitions like liberty, the fatherland and political progress.

<sup>1</sup> Vincenzo Monti, 1754–1828, born near Ferrara.

On the arrival of the Revolutionary French in Rome, an agent of the Republic, Basseville, was killed. Monti, a born court poet, wrote the *Bassvilliana*, a furious invective against those Frenchmen who had come as a menace to the legitimate rulers. But when Napoleon and his French armies became masters of Italy, he wrote to his friend Salfi to excuse himself, "obliged as I am to sacrifice my opinions, I try my utmost to save my reputation as a writer". As Croce has written somewhere, Monti never spoke or wrote against his conscience; the most diverse events and the most contrary doctrines stirred impartially in turn his imagination; but he remained always faithful to a single loyalty: that of fine literature.

For the rest, in the Italy of that day many still thought as he did. . . .

One of his contemporaries, known only in the Lunigiana and in the Duchies, an old Minister of State and uncle of my grandfather, had been successively in power under an aristocratic Republic, under the Jacobins, under Napoleon and under the Bourbons of Parma: in his Memoirs, written in his eightieth year, I found this final phrase (which I quote from memory, as the Germans destroyed or looted everything in my country house situated as it was on the "Gothic Line"): "One must work for the well-being of the people and of the State; it was irksome to pass from one régime to another, but what could I do? Besides, the more I saw things change, the more they seemed to me to differ very little the one from the other."

On two intellectual planes, so different, we have there the Italian character before the Risorgimento, and as it was afterwards reproduced under Fascism: a character developing through able forces of inertia as it defended itself successively against native tyrant, Spaniard and German. A whole series of generations remained cold, sceptical and distrustful of every exaltation (save the poetic in the manner of Monti), resigned to every sort of transaction—at least to such as were not condemned by Christian morals—and determined never to risk any sort of martyrdom. The political revival of the Italians in the nineteenth century was due to one fact: the French Revolution. And never did the hired writers of Fascism lie more blunderingly than when they claimed that the Risorgimento had its origins, not in the doctrines that had come from France, but in our own reformers of the eighteenth century, much to be respected and well inspired though they had been.



On the other hand, our spiritual and internal renaissance was all our own work. It coincided with the rise of Romanticism, which with us was uniquely Italian, because—unlike what happened among the French and Germans—it was not an iconoclastic adventure against all the past; and for this reason its fruits ripened better with us.

This Italian Romanticism was essentially the work of Alessandro Manzoni.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, even before him, there had been some pre-romantics and even some romantics. The Romantics wanted to forget the ancient classical themes? But Italy was enamoured of Ossian. The Romantics wanted literature to present human beings that were simple and sober? But Goldoni had already created in his hundred comedies the freshest and most living types of our daily life. The Romantics did not wish for forms without content? But Parini, Alfieri and Foscolo were the very thing.

Manzoni alone renewed at once both form and content. When one talks of 1815 one thinks of the fall of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna; but for the artistic and moral life of Italy, 1815 should be remembered as the year in which a shabby little book of a few short poems appeared at Milan—the *Inni Sacri*. Few paid attention at the time to the verses of the young Manzoni who, thanks to the influence of some Jansenist priests, had five years previously, in 1810, again become a Christian and a Catholic, after a long rationalistic youth passed in Paris. His *Inni Sacri*, of which one, *La Pentecoste*, is immortal, attain the highest form which religious lyric reached in Italy; they were lyrics based on the love of the humble. His novel, *I Promessi Sposi*, is the first novel of any importance to have just ordinary peasants for its hero and heroine. For us Italians it is a masterpiece that has no equal. Why has it not been equally appreciated abroad?

He who writes these lines was for long so much surprised at what seemed to him to be an inexplicable injustice that if he wished to set up as a literary critic, he would perhaps bring forward and comment on all the answers that he received to his prudent questions in conversation with many very various men of letters—all acute critics, such as André Gide, Paul Valéry, Stefan Zweig, and others,

<sup>1</sup> Alessandro Manzoni, born of a noble family at Milan, 1785. Published first poems in 1806, happily married 1810. *I Promessi Sposi*, a Milanese story of the seventeenth century, appeared 1825-7. Died at Milan 1873.

who all admitted that they had read the book, but also that they had not understood it. Recovering from my first astonishment, I ended by telling myself that there must be some reason for this. An examination of conscience forced me to admit that in reading Shakespeare I felt all the joyous intoxication of swimming in a sunlit sea—so completely did I feel one with nature, without restriction or limit, while Manzoni drew me in a manner almost invisible but inexorable, towards a final moral truth. With Shakespeare one is under the limitless sky, with Manzoni in the most marvellous of temples but yet a temple with a roof and walls.

How can one expect foreigners to understand, if Italians themselves do not see how often Manzoni himself sacrifices his art to his will, as when he says of Renzo in Milan in convulsion, that he “found so little to admire in the ordinary course of events that he was inclined to welcome any sort of change”; and when he puts into the mouth of Renzo (who is being pursued) as soon as he had crossed the Adda and reached Venetian territory, “Stay there, accursed country,” so much more true than “Farewell, ye hills, rising from the waters”.

At least we Italians ought to know that this submission that Manzoni made of his art, to a supreme moral duty, was not due to any lack of ability, but because he heroically willed it. We have stupendous pages of his first draught of the *Promessi Sposi* which he had at first entitled *Gli Sposi Promessi*. But those pages seemed to him too little disciplined by the moral law which he had imposed upon himself, and in 1825 in the act of printing the book he suppressed them without hesitation. My father published them seventy-five years later in his work “*Scritti postumi di A. Manzoni*”. Our men of letters of today ought to study that volume and read there the suppressed pages on the illicit love of Geltrude, every time that they hesitate to cut out some of their own elucubrations.

Manzoni was the first Italian of the nineteenth century in whom was gathered all that had become most indispensable to our country: a profound knowledge of foreign thought, and at the same time complete independence of his own specific Italian thought. No one knew French literature as he did, from Racine to Chateaubriand, yet no one was less French than he. It is only of Manzoni, and in a certain sense of Cavour, that this can be said. How many others at that time were either too provincial or too evidently drenched in foreign influences.

The most mysterious problem of the long life of Manzoni—

a life without the exterior adventures of a Byron or a Lamartine—was his conversion to Catholicism. Immediately upon his conversion, the poet made his whole life bear witness to his religion, but he always covered with a veil of silence the steps of his road to Damascus. Public explanations such as those of Paul Claudel would have seemed incomprehensible to him and even perhaps indecent. In his book, *Morale Cattolica*, there is not a single personal note.

At one time the “zealots” distrusted this conversion; it appeared to them too “Italian”. Perhaps also—and surely in good faith—certain Catholic publicists felt vaguely that the moral world of Manzoni, the source of his poetic feeling, was intimately connected with the Jansenist origins of his conversion. One knows that theological hatreds are among the most tenacious. But these doubts disappeared at last, and the centenary of the publication of the *Promessi Sposi* was celebrated during the reign of a Pope—Pius XI—who often cited verses and phrases of Manzoni, with almost the same reverence with which he would have cited a Father of the Church.

As a youth I saw every day for many years the son-in-law of the poet: Giambattista Giorgini. A very old man, he had retired to a property running with ours; our two families had been related for centuries; and it was of him that Ruggero Bonghi said: “Only Giorgini could have described the soul of Manzoni; but his talent is only less than his indolence.” Giambattista Giorgini died in 1906 in his eighty-seventh year; contrary to his father-in-law, he never truly returned to the faith of his childhood, but as he was expiring, he said slowly in Latin: “*Domine, commendo Tibi animam meam.*”

More optimistic than Ruggero Bonghi, I—boy as I was, and already worried by religious problems—questioned Giorgini a hundred times and in a hundred different ways about the conversion of Manzoni. I can see him still, looking at me with a smile and each time answering in the same way: “Carlino, I can only repeat to you the one word that he used: ‘Grace.’”

## VII

### UNITY: THOUGHT AND ACTION

**T**HAT the unity of Italy had existed already, in its own way, since the fifteenth century, is shown by the unanimous reprobation which Lodovico Sforza aroused when he invited the French to descend into our peninsula—a road they opened only too well, for our misfortune, but also for their own.

Unity and independence remained during four centuries of servitude and invasion, the dream of all hearts. The miracle only became reality in the nineteenth century because that was the century of nationality, but perhaps the fatal law of necessity would not have sufficed if from the leaven of the eighteenth century and the shock of the French Revolution, there had not come forth two men: Mazzini and Cavour. These two men believed they hated one another; in reality they were the closest collaborators, for each in his own sphere of action knew how to canalize for the service of the Italian cause the two sovereign principles of the century: the principle of liberty and the principle of nationality.

Before them, Metternich had been a statesman, much more important than our official books on the Risorgimento have accustomed Italians to admit. I bless a fall from a horse that, when I was twenty, kept me stretched at full length for two months with my left leg in plaster, for in those eight weeks I discovered a new Metternich in the ten volumes of his Memoirs, a Metternich who was not only an exceptional diplomat (no small thing in itself) but a statesman with a profound conception of his duties to Europe, and sometimes too with the prescience of a Briand and a Roosevelt as to the future of the world. A strong man, but without the vulgar brutality of Bismarck, Metternich was the master of the Europe that came out of the Treaty of Vienna. What was it then that was wanting in this man of the Rhine Provinces, who had become an Austrian? How was it he deceived himself or deluded himself in the most essential problem, that of the hegemony of the Hapsburg Empire in Italy? Metternich never understood that the century of liberty and national independence was also the century of the middle classes: and that the Italian middle classes

had come to feel themselves economically impoverished behind the old customs barriers of a divided Italy.

It is of course undeniable that the movement for Italian unity was above all spiritual. A proof of it is—a rare thing in history—the serene cheerfulness with which first Turin and then Florence agreed and accepted no longer to be capitals when the capital was to be Rome. Metternich, certainly, should have been able to understand that it was not only the dangerous Mazzini who spoke of Italy, but that the Economic Congresses that had the habit of meeting periodically in different Italian cities before 1848, showed very clearly that the economic life of the country felt more and more the need of unity. (The histories of Italy that filled the heads of two generations of students, my own included, with all their *Conti Rossi* and *Conti Verdi* <sup>1</sup> would have done better and would have cleared our ideas more if they had also spoken of the Economic Congresses and had explained their importance to us.)

Austria insisted on her own dominion in Italy, first to affirm the power of the Empire in the Mediterranean where Napoleon at Campofornio had given her Venetia, and secondly because the prestige of her shining Italian provinces—so saturated with history—made all the German, Hungarian and Slav populations deeply respectful to the Hapsburg crown. The Emperor of Vienna not only possessed Lombardy, Venetia, the Trentino and Istria; through minor dynasties which regarded him as their head or patron, he also possessed the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the Duchy of Lucca, the Duchies of Modena and Parma, and held under a hidden but solid influence the Papal States, as Pius IX discovered very soon to his cost, when, in 1848, he attempted to act as an Italian, and as an Italian prince.

Hence the superhuman courage of a Mazzini and later of a Cavour when they undertook the struggle; their greatest glory was that all the conventionally right-minded people in Europe took them for madmen.

It is not possible to begin to study Italians as in fact they are without pausing a moment before the man Mazzini; his political and social philosophy counts just because his life was a sublime example of absolute devotion to one single idea: the resurrection

<sup>1</sup> Amedeo VI (1334-83) and Amedeo VII, his son (1360-91), were two Princes of the House of Savoy, named respectively "Conte Verde" and "Conte Rosso" from their partiality for these colours.

of Italy. And to study the man we must, above all, study the exile, this tragic and constant figure of Italian political history. In exile, many veils fall; only the man remains, alone with his own conscience; and thus we have the exiles who become purified—I might place Don Sturzo among them—and the exiles in whom their native mediocrity becomes accentuated.

We all have some memory of our childhood that later seemed like an omen. This happened to Mazzini when he was sixteen years old. Born at Genoa in 1805, fragile and delicate, but with a dreamy and precocious intelligence, the boy was walking with his mother—always his most intimate friend—down one of the dark little alleys of Genoa, when he met a group of men, obviously not Genoese, whose expressions were firm yet sad. One of them suddenly drew near to the boy's mother, held out a white handkerchief and said with a natural dignity: "I ask you to help the proscribed of Italy." Maria Mazzini understood: she silently poured all the money she had with her into the handkerchief. These gentlemen mendicants were the defeated in the Piedmontese insurrection of 1821, men who had trusted in Carlo Alberto di Carignano when he had promised to lead them in the rising against Austria. They had come to Genoa in the hope of being able to embark for Spain that had remained liberal, and so escape from the trial at which many of them later were condemned to death.

"That day", wrote Mazzini many years later, when he began the series of biographical notes that preceded each volume of his works in the Daelli edition, "that day was the first on which a confused vision presented itself to my mind—I will not say the thought of a Fatherland and of Liberty, but the feeling that one could and that therefore one must fight for the liberty of one's country.

"The sight of those proscribed men, some of whom later became my friends, followed me everywhere for days and even came to me in my dreams. I would have given anything to go after them. I tried to find out their names and their deeds. I studied as well as I could, the story of their generous attempt and the causes of their defeat. They had been betrayed and abandoned by those who had sworn to devote all their efforts to the attempt; the new King had called in the Austrians; part of the Piedmontese militia had preceded them in Novara; the heads of the movement had allowed themselves to be overcome at the first encounter and had made no attempt to resist. All these things, as I learnt them, sufficed to

make me think: if everyone had done his duty, they *could* have won; why not try again? This idea took hold of me more and more, and the impossibility of seeing how one might attempt to carry it into effect overshadowed my heart. On the benches of the University—there was then a faculty of *Belles Lettres* that preceded the course of Law and Medicine, and to which the younger students were admitted—in the midst of a noisy tumult of student life, I was filled with longing and entirely absorbed by this desire. Childishly I dressed myself always in black; I considered myself in mourning for my country. The *Ortis*<sup>1</sup> that at that time came into my hands, fascinated me; I learnt it by heart. Indeed, my fanaticism went so far that my poor mother feared my suicide.”

Romantic all this certainly was, but it was the style of his generation and a sincere style. Mazzini never lied. Such thoughts—his parents confirmed it later—continued to dominate the young student.

Mazzini wrote later, speaking of those days: “At that time my mind was occupied with visions of dramas and historical romances without end. The tendency of my life was quite other than that to which those days and the shame of our abjectness constrained me.”

In 1829, choosing action from his formula *Pensiero e Azione*, he joined the Carboneria; he was initiated into its mysteries, with the dramatic ritual of the Secret Societies; he swore to obey, he had the will to believe and to work, but his soul was not satisfied. Concerning this period, he wrote: “I did not admire the complex symbolism, the hieratic mysteries and the faith—or rather the lack of political faith—of the Carboneria, as the deeds and facts of 1820 and 1821 which I studied as best I could during those years, showed it to be. But I was then powerless to attempt anything of my own, and I was faced by a company of men who, inferior probably to their conceptions, in any case made thought and action one, and defying excommunication and death, persisted, when one plot was destroyed, to weave another. That was enough to cause me to feel it my duty to lend them my name and give them my co-operation. Even today when I am grey-headed, I believe that after the gift of leadership, the highest is that of knowing how to follow; to follow, I mean, a good leader.”

Naturally the Government had its spies among the Carbonari;

<sup>1</sup> *Jacopo Ortis*, a famous novel by Ugo Foscolo, written in 1802.

one of them, a Frenchman, betrayed Mazzini and he was arrested; the police had suspected him for some time.

“What the devil is your son thinking of?” asked the Governour of Genoa of Professor Mazzini, who, uneasy, had asked him about his Pippo, now in prison. “Do you know what this young man of genius who likes solitary walks and keeps his thoughts generally to himself, is thinking about? The Government does not like young men about whose thoughts it knows nothing.”

Mazzini was confined in the fortress of Savona, where he consoled himself in reading the *Divine Comedy*, the Bible, Tacitus, Byron, and in taming the sparrows that came into his cell through the bars. His case came before the Senate of Turin; in the eyes of that Tribunal he was certainly guilty, but the Public Prosecutor had only one witness and the law required two: this was enough to cause the Senate to let Mazzini go. I only cite this fact in order to note how ignorant and badly counselled were so many anti-Fascists when, during the twenty years of Mussolini, they thought to annoy the régime by declaring it worthy of the time of Austria. Would to God it had been! At Turin the Savoys, at Naples and Parma the Bourbons, at Modena the Hapsburg-Este were certainly intolerably cruel, but cruel in accordance with the law, which they hardly ever violated. Certainly both the Savoys and the Bourbons violated their institutional oaths; but this is for Sovereigns a natural right; it is the fault of the people if they believe in such oaths.

Mazzini being free, the Savoy police committed the grossest of their errors; they allowed the young conspirator to go into exile. Perhaps in Turin they considered him a little mad and were content and glad to get rid of him; they thought he might join several other politicians *da caffè* at Lugano or Marseilles.

The detention in Savona and his exile immediately after allowed Mazzini to see clearly; he was the first to understand that the Carbonari would never succeed in doing anything in Italy. The Carbonari were honest, they loved Italy, but had no moral root in our soil; in a certain sense they were something foreign, almost French in their admiration of Napoleon and Murat; they trusted in princes, in diplomacy, in foreign aid. Lafayette in France, was he not an ardent Carbonaro? What they lacked was a religious inspiration.

It was considerations of this sort which decided Mazzini to substitute for the Carbonari, “*Giovane Italia*”, Young Italy, a system both moral and religious.



The moral generosity of Mazzini—rarest of gifts among political leaders—allowed him to discover that the only way to get men to risk their lives is to appeal to disinterested motives. One dies only for ideas; and Mazzini offered the Italians “a religion, a faith and an apostolate”. And often he was even more definite: “As individuals and as a nation you have a mission which has been given you by God.”

Did he really believe in “the primacy of Italy”, in the watchword of “Italian mission”? I have myself always discerned between the lines of his writings that—contrary to the bombastic and childish Gioberti—this “primacy” was for him a necessary myth for the encouragement of a nation the victim of a long period of servitude; and at the same time a means of doing away with the hopes that existed not only among the Carbonari but also among the neo-Guelphs of a French “initiative” in which he, always diffident of the philosophy of the other side of the Alps, feared a French hegemony.

Indeed, of French intellectual currents he only used the social ideas of Saint-Simon. But Saint-Simon and all the others were only writers—and remained just writers.

Instead, Mazzini believed, wrote, acted. And it was this which put him above all the rest. And this was why Metternich wrote of him and of him alone, while he was still the most powerful statesman in Europe: “I have united armies which fought bravely though made up of different races; I have reconciled kings and emperors and sultans; but nothing and no one has created greater difficulties for me than a devil of an Italian, thin, pale, poor and as eloquent as a hurricane, as able as a thief, as indefatigable as a lover, in short, that Mazzini.”

The period of practical activity of Mazzini in Italy was closed with the events of 1848-9. After that his fame did not increase; it was not only that Cavour was in power at Turin where he was busy creating a new prestige for the House of Savoy; but Louis Napoleon, the man whom Mazzini most despised, had become Emperor of the French; and many in Italy began to hope that the old Carbonaro of the revolution in Romagna in 1831 would remember one day his Italian oath of that time.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In 1823 Louis Napoleon accompanied his mother to Italy, visiting his father in Florence and his grandmother Letizia in Rome. In 1830, in Italy again, he learned of the July Revolution. He could not return to France whence his family was banished by the law of 1816, but he

Thus it is that we have two Mazzinis; him who worked for Italy, and him who worked for an organized Europe.

Cavour wrote a little before 1859: "I am content; there are on this continent three Powers interested in the destruction of the *status quo*: France, Prussia, Russia; and two that are interested in maintaining it: Austria and England. I am sorry that the first are not more liberal, but what can I do about it? I dare not depend for support on the other two."

Mazzini instead counted immediate success as very little, and on the first triumphs of Cavour, wrote to Daniel Stern: "It matters little to me that Italy, a territory of so many square kilometres, eats its corn or its cabbages cheaply; Rome matters little to me unless a great European initiative should result. What does matter to me is that Italy should be great and good, moral and virtuous, and that she should fulfil a mission in the world."

Not only Italy but the whole of Europe for whose union he had written and agitated so often, deluded Mazzini: Hungary was reconciled with the Hapsburgs and became in its turn an oppressor of the Croats, of the Slovaks and of the Serbs; Germany unified by the cruel genius of Bismarck, and the old German Liberals becoming his lackeys; Poles and Czechs oppressed as always; oppressed and divided under various régimes the Jugo-Slavs for whom he had written the first and most eloquent defence—a defence that resounded throughout Europe . . .

Even his Socialist-moral creed had been held in contempt by the masses and by their new leaders. In this position Mazzini mistakenly refused to accept advice offered him by Bakunin<sup>1</sup>: to gain over our *contadini* for a cause at once Italian and moral. Instead Mazzini replied to him: "For the moment there is nothing to be done in rural Italy." He was wrong, but the later Italian Socialist movements were wrong in the same way.

Towards the end of his long second exile begun in 1849 Mazzini came to admire profoundly the manner of life of the English; he felt himself "at home" in London. But as soon as he realized that his end was drawing near he wished to return to Italy. Death found him on the 10th of March 1872 at Pisa, a few weeks after his found a field of action during the Italian revolution of 1831, when he joined the Carboneria and then risings in Romagna.

<sup>1</sup> Michel Bakunin, the anarchist, was born near Moscow of noble family in 1814. In 1865 he was in Italy. In "The International" he was the opponent of Karl Marx. He died at Berne in 1876.

return, as guest of the Rosselli family which in our day has given two martyrs under Fascism, Carlo and Nello Rosselli.

On his iron bedstead, surrounded by a few faithful friends, the great spirit breathed its last. It was impossible to understand his words, but at the last moment the voice of Mazzini became clear. Suddenly he sat up in bed, looked fixedly on his friends and exclaimed: "Yes, yes, I believe in God", and falling back he expired.

## VIII

### ITALIANS AND THEIR DIALECTS

**M**AZZINI was too bookish to care for dialects ; the Genoese that risked imprisonment to seek him out at Marseilles or in Switzerland were always a little surprised to hear him answer them in pure Italian.

Manzoni, on the other hand, delighted in his own Milanese, Giambattista Giorgini has told us (and perhaps confessed to us, so well he knew the intimate thoughts of his father-in-law) : “ What labour it was to wash the *Promessi Sposi* in the Arno ; and how it would have been more easy reading if he had been able to wash it in the Naviglio.”<sup>1</sup> . . . Even that master had felt the weight of a tongue that had been drenched for centuries by the Latinization of the official literature.

When so many Italians let themselves go in obsolete rhetorical phrases on our past, they would serve our future better if they asked themselves : how is it that of the masterpieces of our prose of the sixteenth century—whose pages all have turned but that few have read or reflected on—the most living, the freshest, that which one turns to again and again with enjoyment—is the Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini, who was a genius half illiterate ? And how is it that the French books whose dramatic interest increases with the centuries, such as the *Mémoires* of Cardinal de Retz, and later the *Mémoires* of Saint-Simon, are numbered in dozens on the other side of the Alps, whereas the greater part of our literature from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century is respected, it is true, but at a distance, because, as Bonghi said, it is not “ *popolare* ”.

Such questions and others which I have already implicitly formulated in this book<sup>2</sup> will find an answer when we cease to be too much the sons of Rome in our literature. Let us limit ourselves here to establishing what was this lack of vital fluid in our literature, so that our dialects remained instruments of art much

<sup>1</sup> It would have been easier reading (*più fluido*) if he had written it in Milanese dialect, than it was when he had put it in Tuscan, i.e. in pure Italian.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter IV.

longer with us than in France where the Provençal could flatter itself on a glorious past.

The Italian people avoiding our boring official literature made their songs, disputed, made love and laughed in their various dialects, just as in a time of political oppression a secret language is used by the conspirators.

So long as Italian preserved its fourteenth-century freshness there was no dialect literature except on the outskirts, in Venice and in Sicily. When our poetry declined even to Filicaja and Chiabrera,<sup>1</sup> the dialects flourished as in revenge. In all our cities, with thirty different accents there arose as by enchantment a crowd of poets; poetry and the theatre of the people eagerly took over the expression of the real life of Italy—its customs, its traditions, its hates and its loves—all that the official men of letters had disdained.

One of the paradoxes of Italian life is this: in all Europe beside, dialect literature is only the earliest attempt of a national literature, which overpowered and suppressed it when it realized itself, as in France with the splendour of Bossuet and the genius of Racine. In Italy alone it happened that her dialects follow a literary epoch of great renown, and as though in revenge for its tyranny, scarcely had it grown drowsy when the sentiments of our ancient *gentes* burst forth. Pulcinella, who became master of the Neapolitan theatre,<sup>2</sup> chasing out the Italian authors who had now become too mannered, should probably be identified with the antique Maccus, as he appears in so many Roman bas-reliefs. In Pulcinella one discerns a people behind which stand the Greeks and the Romans, the Byzantines, the Normans and the Spaniards.—A mere servant, then?—Possibly. But a servant as in the *Commedia dell'Arte*, one of

<sup>1</sup> Gabriele Chiabrera, born of noble family in Savona 1552, died 1638; in a short autobiography he gives an admirable portrait of himself.

<sup>2</sup> Pulcinella, represented by a masked actor, is a brother of Harlequin (Arlecchino), born forty or so years later, the son of the old Zani of the *Commedia dell'Arte*. The Polichinelle of France was introduced into that country by the Neapolitan comic actors and from France came to England as Punch. The tremendous vogue of Pulcinella in Naples at the end of the seventeenth century is borne witness to by the large number of unpublished *scenari* in the Biblioteca Nazionale of Naples. At that time Pulcinella began to be the *magna pars* of drama and musical plays in Naples and one cannot ignore the great part the author-actors Pasquale Altavita and Antonio Petilo have had in this extraordinary vogue which lasted right up to our own time.

whose heroes is Pulcinella, "servant of two masters", contriving very skilfully between the two to find his liberty.

The learned and Italian men of letters have too often spoken of the *Commedia dell'Arte* as a vulgar episode in our artistic life. In reality, Pulcinella at Naples, Harlequin in Venice, and with them, Brighella, Pantaleone, Captain Fracassa, deliver to us the secrets of popular life and custom much better than the classicist exercises of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which noble and beautiful sentiments appear, but hardly ever come from the heart.

In the *Commedia dell'Arte*, as in the greater part of dialect poetry, one only finds the vulgar aspects of life, those that make one laugh. The dreams, the self-respect, the loyalties that are within are never told, but make themselves felt at times all the same in the depths of the heart.

Voltaire, whose judgment was often superficial, replied (in Italian) to Goldoni, who had sent him from Venice one of his comedies (not one of those in dialect): "Oh! what purity! You have rescued your country from the hands of the Harlequins." Voltaire was often a flatterer when he had himself been flattered. Goldoni knew well what he owed to Harlequin. And indeed he continued throughout his life to write both comedies in Italian and comedies in dialect with Harlequin, his smiling and intelligent assistant.

If Italy produced her greatest geniuses almost at the birth of literature, in dialect, she alone, when dialect poetry was at the end of its vogue, produced its two best poets, Carlo Porta at Milan and Gioacchino Belli<sup>1</sup> at Rome.

With that earthquake which was the arrival of the French armies of Napoleon in Milan, Porta appeared and made himself master. He was a little *employé*, unknown: one day, suddenly, Lombardy knew his verses by heart; even today the types invented by him are the patrimony of all Italy, almost like certain characters of the *Divine Comedy* or Don Abbondio. When one meets an old *Grande Dame* forgotten by time, who thanks the *Bon Dieu* for the blue blood which flows in her veins, she is described for us all in one word: La Marchesa Travasa. And the popular hero of Porta, Giovannin Bongee, Italians recognize him as Spaniards recognize the squire of *Don Quixote*.

<sup>1</sup> Carlo Porta, born at Milan 1776; died there 1821. Among his best works are the *Desgrazi* and *Oltre desgrazi de Giovannin Bongee*.

Gioacchino Belli, born at Rome 1791, died 1863.

If Porta appeared in Milan with the French Revolution, Belli arrived in Rome with the Restoration that lifted up its head after Waterloo.

The Roman dialect is so close to Italian that "*lingua toscana in bocca romana*" is accepted everywhere as indicating a perfect pronunciation of our language.

Belli is a poet, in appearance serene and impassable, whilst Porta hid his indignation less olympically in face of the French invaders, the nobles, the gallant abbés and the men of the people already become bourgeois, like Giovannin Bongee and *Marchionn di gamb avert*. If one must admit that Porta is untranslatable, one must on the other hand ask why Belli has never been translated into French, German, English or Spanish.

Like the Europe of today, the Rome of Belli did not even suspect the power of his poetry. Only the Italy after 1870 discovered and consecrated Belli. The Rome of his time was indifferent and asked him the same question as the Cardinal Ippolito d'Este asked of Ariosto: "But you, Messer Ludovico, where have you found such rubbish?"

The "rubbish" of Belli, like the "rubbish" of Porta, was the very genius of the Italian people, which has so often sought in dialect expressions which have enriched the language. For example, as to verse: the French language, and even more the English, possess thousands of very short words and easy rhymes, almost veiled. The Italian language is neater and harder; admirable for its thought, it is less musical, notwithstanding a legend, that Metastasio explains and excuses, which says the contrary. Our dialects, on the other hand, possess the short words of English and French, from which comes the greater lightness of their verses.

If I had intended these pages to be a short history of our dialect literature, I should have felt obliged to cite the Piedmontese, the Genoese, with their most difficult of all Italian dialects (Dante said that if you could take away the X from the Genoese they would be dumb), the Sicilians with Meli<sup>1</sup> whose poetry is as pure as that of Theocritus . . . and if I had not felt obliged to cite the too-wordy Basile and Cortese<sup>2</sup> who at Naples preceded Porta and Belli

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Meli, born at Palermo 1740, died there 1815.

<sup>2</sup> Giambattista Basile, born at Naples 1575, died 1632, author of the *Cunto de li Cunte*.

Giulio Cesare Cortese, father of Neapolitan dialect literature, inspirer of Basile, born at Naples about 1575, died after 1621.

by two centuries, I should at least have had to cite some exquisite verses of anonymous Neapolitans who showed how Greek the Parthenopean soul remained. Here are four verses written at the request of a host, about 1750 :

Magnammo, amice micie, e po' vevimmo  
 Nfino che ce sta ll'oglio a la lucerna.  
 Chi sa si all'auto munno ce vedimmo,  
 Chi sa si all'auto munno c'è taverna . . .

Would not one suppose that these verses had been written by one of those lyrical Athenians of whom Meleager has transmitted us the names? But in a classical tongue, this Hellenic perfume would easily become bookish.

All the Italian dialects possess infinite riches; in some, a plebeian impetuosity, in others a curious ingenuity; in all a delicacy that often alternates with violence and with irony.

But as I have said in the Preface to this volume, I wish to speak here only of what I know directly. Besides, I should not have known to what books to turn if I had wanted to complete with their help this chapter. Probably, as with so many other aspects of our cultural patrimony, the most original observations on our dialect literature will be found in the volumes of criticism of Benedetto Croce. They who wish to be informed on this subject should go to the hundred volumes of Croce.

Certain foreign writers—those who know so many things of Italian life but are ignorant of its deeper spirit—have made rapid generalizations on the vitality of our dialects; and have formed the opinion that our national sentiment is more fictitious than real. In truth, the history of our dialects, if properly understood, proves the contrary.

Dialects produce poets when the language begins to crystallize into artificiality and mannerism; that with us was the period when we lost intellectual and political liberty. And so it was with the Risorgimento and the great writers of that time that the dialects began to decline. They were no longer necessary; they grew silent. It was only after ten years of liberty and unity that the dialects again began to lift up their heads, almost as though they felt that in the unity now consecrated there was room for them too. Testoni at Bologna, Pascarella yesterday, Trilussa today at Rome, Di Giacomo at Naples, have given us now and then perfect verses. A new fact in the literary life of Italy was this, that the writers



who have recently enjoyed the greatest vogue and who were richest in spirit, began to incorporate in their novels, from the end of the nineteenth century to the war years of 1914-18, dialogues in dialect; some directly enriched the language itself—in spite of their mastery of it—with words drawn from the dialects. Fogazzaro has made some of his characters in *Piccolo Mondo Antico* speak in Venetian; Verga in the *Cavalleria Rusticana* which Mascagni has made famous throughout the world, makes his *contadini* speak in Sicilian; Matilde Serao has often made her little *employées* and her pathetic types *alla Maupassant*, speak in Neapolitan.

And all the time the Italian language was never so mature, never so rich; the ancient polemic on the nature and laws of the language had spent itself; what Manzoni had failed to impose as a precept, custom in a free Italy had instinctively adopted. There were no more “purists”, neither “classical purists” nor “Tuscan purists”; the Italian language, with or without the “Tuscan use”, had conquered the Italians who, without the D’Annunzian pestilence, would all soon have possessed a tongue agile, ductile and full of freshness.

In this new atmosphere there could be no fear of the dialects; it was as though they had decided to meet one another, to leave off playing at hiding, to know one another, and to share their most secret riches.

The dialects, besides, enriched not only literature but the language of conversation, the language of every day. It is by reason of their strength, and the richness of their blood, that Italians have never been the slaves of fixed phrases; words with them circulate freely, with a constant freshness of expression that has already begun to become less among the French of medium culture whose vocabulary is full of crystallized phrases and *clichés*. But what foreigner even among those who know Italy best, is capable of appreciating this pleasant individualism of our daily life, in which the very spirit of Italy beats and pulses?

Even the dialects in Italy repeat for us the secular law of the country: unity in essentials, at Rome; profound variety of sentiment in every province.

## IX

### ITALIANS AND THEIR ROOTS IN THE SOIL

IT has been maintained that one can modify the essential character of a people. It is possible; the English rejoicing in "merry England" have disappeared in the complacent stiffness of the Victorian era. Even our bodies can be changed: a century of infatuation for Swedish exercises has transformed the small Scandinavians aforesaid into grenadiers.

But it seems certain that the characteristics of the land, of a province, never change. They do not depend on a *grand siècle*, nor on a series of revolutions, nor on a genius like Bonaparte or Bismarck; more, indeed, than on common glories and misfortunes, these characteristics depend on the thousand-year-old customs and secrets of life and of habits, which are almost physical memories.

A King of Hungary asserted once upon a time that every nation that spoke a single tongue "*imbecillis est*".

If this were true—and within certain limits without doubt it is true—the Italians are more fortunate than any other European people. An Italian, by the mere fact of being Italian and Piedmontese, Italian and Ligurian, Italian and Sicilian, etc., is even richer than an Englishman who is English and Scottish, English and Welsh. . . . Our country enriches an Italian with an intimate heredity at once more various and more ancient than that poetical Welsh sentiment or the mysticism of the realist Scotsman.

Every Italian is profoundly Italian by the common heredity of thought and language; but in his innermost self he is in even greater measure Venetian, Lombard, Apulian, without ceasing at the same time to belong to the common fatherland. There is profound reason in the fact that we Italians experience an unpleasant embarrassment whenever we meet a fellow-countryman whose accent does not reveal his province; he seems to us an actor or a voice on the radio; we prefer even the accent of the Levantine by which at least we can tell that the speaker comes from Pera or Galata, from Alexandria or Cairo.

The small attraction that the theatre exercises over Italians

—except the dialect theatre—finds in this one of its principal explanations.

It is the same with books. The books in which traces are preserved of the ties maintained by the author with his native province have a better chance of survival than those in which we find only a nationalized Rome or Milan. Manzoni would not be Manzoni if one did not feel the Milanese in him, and if Giusti is still so much alive it is because of his Tuscanism. Even a spirit so universal as Benedetto Croce reveals, and very happily, his Neapolitan character.

And how much persistence there is in one's native blood, even if one has been absent from one's province for many years. I knew Verga very well as an old man; he was my colleague in the Senate. He had lived then for thirty years in Milan; he was cold, reserved, like so many Sicilians; but what a youthful flame burned in the countenance of the magnificent old man so soon as he felt that his interlocutor was sincerely interested in Sicily. In the same way Borgese has passed his life in Milan, and after the rise of Fascism in the United States as Professor in the University of Chicago, and yet the best pages in his *Rubé* are inspired by visions of his native Sicily.

There is only one Italian poet who is not rooted in the soil of his own particular region: it is Leopardi, but he is the poet of Sorrow.

D'Annunzio, too, escapes his native province; the influence of certain great poets from Baudelaire to Claudel, from Whitman to Tolstoi, is more profound in him than that of his native Abruzzo; and this was one of the reasons why, notwithstanding his gifts, he is neglected in Italy; the same is true of Chiabrera, Achillini, Frugoni, famous poets while they lived, but now no one can any longer bear their artificiality and over-emphasis.

True theorists of Fascism who wished, despising our Provincial traditions, to centralize, with the object, so they said, of strengthening and reinforcing, showed—given that they were sincere—very little faith in the profound unity of Italy. In reality, in every land, behind the formulas of unity are hidden almost always reasons of police. The words of Bonaparte are always repeating themselves: "France is one and indivisible." But what the Corsican meant was the creation of a police state and the destruction of the old French provinces, spies everywhere to control even sighs and groans; and everywhere the bureaucratic machine with its centre

in Paris to facilitate the harvest of cannon-fodder necessary to the sterile wars of the Napoleonic period.

But nevertheless France was the most perfect hexagonal crystal that existed; for centuries her marvellous Romanesque churches both in the north and at Moissac and at Carcassonne had united the whole country in an identical cult of beauty. In Italy, on the other hand, even the monuments bear witness to gradual modifications of conception and taste; in a century and a half, the pointed arch rose to heaven in all north and central Italy and yet the Cathedral of Milan is not identically repeated at Piacenza, where it becomes more squat and massive; and from place to place the church constantly alters, from Genoa to Sarzana, from Lucca to Florence, from Florence to Siena. . . . At Orvieto a different idea is realized; the shadow of neighbouring Rome has there killed the pointed arch.

On the other side of the country along the Adriatic, Ravenna preserves the perfection of Byzantine art. At Ravenna every foreign writer never fails on his arrival to discover the aesthetic origin of Venice.

The truth is that Venice, like all other Italian lands, expressed her art in her own way, from her own soil, if it is permissible to speak of soil in Venice. If the architecture of the Venetians is unique in the world, it is because they contrived an architecture of a city founded in the waters whence every element must rise light and fluid.

Marco Polo, who visited all Europe and all Asia in his time, compared Venice alone to the only Chinese city, Fu-Kien, whose streets are canals; nothing in Roman Europe recalled Venice to him. Barrès wrote that the Orient began at the Riva degli Schiavoni; but no, it is rather Trieste that reminds one of the East, as the streets of Marseilles about the Vieux Port evoke Galata and Pera.

Every country has its own South. Liège, materially of the north, is really more southern than Lyon; the Provençal Marseilles and Toulon are to be found on the same Riviera as Genoa and Savona: but they are cities of the south as much as is Athens, for the rest the atmosphere in Provence is more Hellenic than Latin. There is only one thing in common between Genoa and maritime Provence: the smell of their cooking. The Venetians are more southerners than the Genoese who, hard and silent, seem to belong to the north of Europe. The Genoese are in fact more obstinate

than the Scots, more able in making money than the Jews. There is an Italian proverb which says that it takes "three Jews to make a Genoese". Stout fellows on the sea, as in their little counting-houses in which they do their business for hundreds of millions—they live in the *mezganini*<sup>1</sup> of their palaces which make one of the proudest streets in the world; there are no evening receptions in the noble salons of these mansions with too many Van Dycks on the walls, but among the patricians and the lower orders alike a kind of "humour", plebeian and acid, more vitriolic in fact, than in any other part of Italy.

It is one of the Italian mysteries that it is precisely this people, so bitter of speech and so sombre, which has given us universal spirits like Mazzini and his mother, the most tender and heroic of Italian mothers; and like the angelic Goffredo Mameli, whom a Bonapartist bullet killed under the walls of Rome in 1849, after the young poet had written for the generations to come his prophetic

Fratelli d'Italia,  
l'Italia s'è desta . . .<sup>2</sup>

which still vibrates in the heart, an eternal trumpet-call to youth. Genoese too were the intimate friends of the young Mazzini, the brothers Ruffini, of whom one killed himself in prison in order not to reveal his accomplices in the struggle for liberty: Genoese finally was Christopher Columbus, whose whole existence was a romance of restless research.

What the Channel is to the English, their dialect is to the Genoese; everyone can quickly understand Piedmontese and Venetian, Romagnuol and Sicilian, but what can we make of words like *bandeta*, *macramé*, *mandillo*, *mugugno*?

As for the difference between Genoa and Tuscany, it is so deep that their immediate contiguity seems inconceivable, and so indeed it is. The official atlases pretend that it is so, but in reality between the Genoese territory and Tuscany there is wedged a small region with a very distinct physiognomy; the Lunigiana.

The people of the Lunigiana—the province that touches the sea at Spezia and at the mouth of the Magra and whose precipitous mountains are starred with little towns—are descended from the

<sup>1</sup> The *mezganino* is a low floor between the ground floor and the first floor, the *piano nobile*.

<sup>2</sup> "Brothers of Italy, Italy is awakening"—Goffredo Mameli, 1828-49.

Apuans whom the Romans after a long struggle reduced to servitude and carried off to Samnium. But some must have remained because my childhood is full of stories of rebellions against the Austrian Archdukes who ruled over the Duchy of Modena and the Lunigiana. The dialect of the Lunigiana is mixed Ligurian and Lombard. It is the speech of quarrymen who extract marble from the bowels of the Apuan Alps.

When we leave Sarzana, Massa Lunense, Carrara—the little cities of the Lunigiana—we become aware of a sharp division before we come to the first Tuscan city, Pietrasanta, and after an hour, to Pisa. What force these mysterious Etruscans must have had: the Tuscans of today have no ties with other regions, the division between Lunigiana, Emilia and Latium on one side and Tuscany on the other, is sharper than that between the other regions of Italy. The Florentine, if he is stout, seems a reproduction of the *obesus Etruscus* whom we see on the ancient Etruscan vases. Just as the Parisian feels himself lost at Avignon or at Orléans, so the Tuscan feels a stranger at Milan, at Naples, even in Rome. Other Italians admire his exact argument, his subtle irony, his secure mastery of our language. Courteous, ready, ironical, rarely enthusiastic, refined by a long acquaintance with civilized habits, the Tuscan is sometimes overtaken by accesses of the cold cruelty that of old Titus Livy observed among the Etruscan and other ancient peoples, whose names ended in *a*. The friends of the “French” at the end of the eighteenth century were ferociously massacred only in Tuscany; as it was in Tuscany occurred the few cases of bloody violence in 1919 and 1920.

I have said that the Tuscan is rarely capable of enthusiasm. I know how dangerous such generalizations can be, perhaps it is a question with me of my memories as a child in the Lunigiana; as when my grandfather told us how having enrolled himself as a volunteer, with other young men of the Duchies of Parma and Modena, in the army of Carlo Alberto, an adjutant of General Bava had employed him, seeing that he had a good horse, to find the Tuscans towards Curtatone; after about an hour he found a patrol: “Excuse me, are you Tuscans?” And they, pointing to the brass badge on their belts: “Don’t you see? *Lire due* (Two lire).” It was thus they translated the initial and the Grand-ducal number of their regiment—Leopoldo II.

In the past, Florence has been, after Athens, of all countries, the most happy in intelligence, and one still feels this today in

her streets and piazzas, notwithstanding the lesser fruitfulness of the new generations.

The eighteenth century was the most cosmopolitan of centuries : from Catherine of Russia to Tanucci at Naples, all cultivated minds thought in the same manner, as all " sensitive " natures wept the same tears ; never were the frontiers of Europe less visible. Nevertheless, we have only to let the two great adventurers of the time confront one another, Casanova and Cagliostro, to realize the enormous differences between them : Casanova, the Venetian, incarnates the ardent lover—if a rather vulgar lover—of life ; in the Sicilian Cagliostro one feels the turbulent, though silent violence of his Island, where men are at once nordic and oriental, more silent than the Scotch, prouder than the English ; while a little further north, in Naples, men are—or seem to be—happy and careless.

The same Italian tongue would appear alone to be spoken in a uniform manner by all cultivated Italians everywhere. Without doubt, its essential characteristics are the same from the Alps to Sicily ; for example, the absence of certain words, such as the terms that correspond to the feudal and aristocratic *château* of the French, *manor* of the English, *hof* of the Germans, which can be explained by the fact that at the time when the language was developing, our Communes had already compelled the nobles to live within the walls of the city, with the other citizens. In another sphere one cannot but be fascinated by the delightful freshness that words like *gentile* have preserved ; they sound even today as in the immortal "*latin sangue gentile*", or the word *vago* which, contrary to what has happened in French, where the word now means little more than something that is indeterminable, with us still expresses something that is beautiful with a disturbing beauty ; or again there are the words *leggiadro* and *leggiadria*, words untranslatable into another tongue, but of which sixty million Italians still feel the same significance as when Agnolo Firenzuola defined them in 1548 in his treatise *Della Bellezza delle donne*.

And what foreigner could understand—even if he has lived long years in Italy—the thousand *sfumature* that are given to the most learned and subtle discourse, as to the most current speech, by the monosyllabic exclamations such as "*già!*" meaning a careless approval, the "*ma*" doubtful and sceptical, the "*che vuoi?*" of the weary and resigned, and all with a diverse and particular savour in Milan, in Naples and in Florence, where, for example, that word "*pazienza*" which one hears hundreds of times every day, is like the

seal of the storied wisdom of a people that carries on its shoulders the far-off civilization of the Etruscans. . . . “*Pazienza!*” a little word tranquillizing and secret, that one hears repeated everywhere in the villages and in the cities, whenever some hope is disappointed, as when some *contadino* has seen his crops destroyed by hail or storm, or some fisherman has been prevented from casting his nets by the weather, or some workman loses a job. . . . A Christian moralist might maintain that the constant use of this word, on all lips, at all times in ancient Tuscany, is a proof that the principles of Christianity have become the flesh and blood of this people. But then at the corner of a street the same individual who has just exclaimed “*pazienza*” gives tongue to a blasphemy against the Virgin and the saints—only no doubt to make things hum—which would make a German infantryman blush.

The attachment of the Italian to the land of his birth, and its landscape, cannot be explained except as the result of a millennial heredity. The Virgilian Georgic, the country accents of the Latin poets are to be found with a new vitality in Petrarch, in the *Ninfale Fiesolano* of Boccaccio, in the verses of Poliziano, in the *Epistole* of Ariosto and even in the perhaps too sweet *Pastor Fido* of Guarini. Today too, this sentiment for nature has inspired Carducci with his finest verses and has made of Pascoli a poet; and with Pascoli, others whom fate has not allowed to become famous, the Abruzzese Antonio Della Porta and the Lunigianese, Ceccardo Roccatagliata.

How is it that the German writers—from Humboldt on, I think—have with their accustomed solemnity affirmed that the Latins in general and the Italians in particular do not possess a feeling for nature? In truth, this is not a typical case of German arrogance, reserving a love of nature to Germany alone; rather these worthy Professors have committed an error, sincerely but ingenuously, by identifying the feeling for nature, variable according to diverse cultures, with that particular form that it assumes with the Germans. They do not realize that in Italy—an Italy from time everlasting divided into innumerable squared fields—the poetry and the love of the country have necessarily developed in ways quite different from those that have moved a people accustomed to the infinity of the forest.

The German is even today, in the face of nature, the direct heir of those Germans who felt the vertigo of solitude in the forests with their mysterious rumours and whisperings; trees, rocks and streams awaken in them a nostalgia and ancestral instincts; and



from these memories in the blood, the *Sturm und Drang* draws the most genuine of those elements contained in their romantic expressions, so moving if not used as arguments for the invasion and oppression of other nations.

The Italians, on the other hand, are descended from those "*Italiae cultores primi aborigines*" who had already transformed the shores of the lakes and the Po into fields at a time when the Greeks were still convinced that the amber which they came to buy at the mouth of the great river was an Italian product, so hidden in the mists and fog of the unknown remained the Germanic and Baltic world.

The Italy of three thousand years ago venerated, in the cult of Saturn, a land already rich in grain, in pastures and the vines of its hillsides.

If the marks and the confines of those far-off epochs have disappeared, how many farms and lands still keep the direct memory of that age in which great Roman families gave them their form and being: Isola-Balba, Balbiano, Corneliano, Villa Pompeiana . . .

The nostalgic elements that are still alive today in the German heart can only appear much attenuated in the Italian spirit: in which the feeling for nature is one with rural and territorial existence now three millenniums old: but the grave regard, almost emotional, which a Piedmontese fixes on his hillsides clothed with those vines from which will come his Barolo, and the long look of a Tuscan under the shade of his olives—are in part those of conquest and dominion, of a carnal love for the land whose face man has succeeded in changing. There is in us a profound feeling for nature, but idyllic, the opposite of the Wagnerian restless wandering that masters the German at the sight of a nature he has never succeeded in completely dominating. The contrast is eternal between the park of the Italian (that one came to call French after the gardens of Versailles) and the pathless forest—marvellous but inhuman—of Germany.

But what can those foreigners know of the Italian soul in its relation to nature, who after documenting themselves in the libraries, dedicate to Lombardy or Tuscany a tour starred by Baedeker? I must myself confess—though I passed my whole childhood and adolescence in the country-side—I did not altogether understand the significance of the long silences, the long gaze of the Italian *contadini*, until I compared them with the same silence, the same long regard I had seen in China, where the love of the culti-

vated land assumes sometimes a tenderness almost religious. It is easy certainly to fall into an ecstasy in Japan, at the sight of the crowds who go in pilgrimage to the valleys where the cherries are in blossom, or when in summer they climb the stony hills of Fujiyama. Certainly even the least imaginative are capable of feeling for a moment the beauty of such spectacles; and how easy it is to understand the exaltation of the German for all that something in nature which is still primitive—something not subdued by man.

But the Chinese finds in his fields a beauty of which he never wearies—he who places before the ritual Confucian tablets of his ancestors bread made with grain ripened in furrows traced before him by his father; who prefers the rustic image of some god sheltered under a poor arch in ruin near his own fields, to the gold-painted statue in the temple of his city, when rarely he feels moved to make an earnest prayer to heaven.

It is very much like what the Italian feels about the limpid oil of his olive garden, the wine, red or white, of his little vineyard: they are for him trophies of his profound union with an earth with which he has consummated a sort of secret marriage. It is a solemn and silent love that knows nothing of the romanticism of the German; less individual, such a love is latent in all Italian hearts; it can instil domestic and patriotic tenderness, not certainly the desires and agonies of unquiet spirits looking longingly for a return to a life merely instinctive.

The immensity of their forests, the tumultuous course of their rivers inspire in the Nordic man a disgust of fixed bounds; the Italian country-side has for thousands of years been wedded to the cycle of Italian agriculture, which changes with the moon. Of these sentiments, collective rather than individual and as profound then as today, Horace was perhaps thinking when he wrote his *Inveni portum*.

May not the reason of the restlessness of the German spirit consist in this, that it has not succeeded in finding that *portum* which the Italian has made the serene ideal of his life.

## X

### ITALIANS AND THE FAMILY

**T**HE only real discovery made by the Fascist and Nazi Dictators, that which powerfully aided them to reach power and to maintain themselves there for so long, was the following: a lie is a lie if you tell it once or twice, but it becomes an indisputable truth if you repeat it a thousand times, in one thousand newspapers, for six months on end.

It was thus that even people hostile to Fascism ended ingenuously by believing in it; so often was it repeated, that before the Fascist Dictatorship Italy was continually disturbed by social and political disorders of a most dangerous nature.

As for Fascism, it was an affair of money. The more the régime humiliated and calumniated Italy, the more it justified the dictatorship and its violences.

No one then remembered that a certain unrest and disorder were common to all Europe after the war of 1914-18; that at the same time that the occupation of the factories occurred in Italy, there were veritable revolts and strikes in various parts of France where those in control succeeded in hushing them up; and that in England in the same period there were more strikes than in Italy.

At the most critical moment of the Italian strikes, the British Ambassador, Sir George Buchanan, called on me one day to ask what he was to think of our affairs. Buchanan had come to Rome from Petersburg; he had seen the Soviet Revolution and his mind constantly returned to it: his colleagues called him "the scalded cat". Personally I liked the old man, who talked to me freely of the intolerable life Lloyd George led English Ambassadors, with his habit of sending them instructions, in contrast with the practice of Lord Curzon. I replied to Buchanan casually and without formality:

"By definition, dear Sir George, foreign Ministers are optimists. Therefore I will say nothing. Only let us go out together without our automobiles and without our chauffeurs. You will make up your own mind."

It was a Saturday evening. We got into a taxi and went down to Via Giulia, the old and long street between Piazza Farnese and the Tiber, that was the centre of Rome in the sixteenth century; its palaces have today been turned into working-class dwellings and the ground floors have become *osterie* where a green branch over the portal often hides the coat-of-arms of some forgotten Cardinal. We went on, free from the annoying guardianship of a detective ten paces behind. I explained nothing to Buchanan, but the atmosphere of the Saturday evening itself spoke to him. On the threshold of every *osteria* were tables loaded with litres of golden and dry Frascati; but instead of a company shouting over their glasses there was almost always a man of proud aspect with an urchin on his knee and beside him his wife with two or three babies that she kept happy with *bianco asciutto*.

“You are right”, said Buchanan, “a nation with the sentiment of the family so profoundly established in their blood, is held together by bonds much stronger than by any doctrinal political rubbish.”

A few months later, at an International Conference, Lloyd George, who was by no means hostile to us, told the story of Buchanan’s little walk, and added that Latin diplomatists with their general ideas, would not be capable of such observations, so simple and so “illuminating”, as those of the British Ambassador, all which I at once admitted.

To understand the place that the home and the family occupy in the hearts of Italians it would be enough to read the long series of letters from soldiers who fell in the war, published between 1930 and 1933 in the “*Critica*” of Croce, with a sober comment by Adolfo Omedeo; it is a collection admirable for the simplicity of its family feeling, for its appeals, the same in thousands of letters, to mothers for the sacrifice which duty to the country demanded, but also full of hopes that the world might find, after the horrors of the years of bloodshed, a true peace; a sentiment at once dignified and religious, the only one which these sons felt to be worthy of their mothers.

The sentiment of the family, the burning desire that their old parents, their wives, their children, should be saved from the sufferings of hunger—this is another thought common to the millions of *contadini*—soldiers that faced the Austro-German armies on the Alps from 1915 to 1918. When in 1917 that resistance bent, as it bent elsewhere among the French and English who were

wise enough to talk less about their reverses—it was the assistance organized for the families of the combatants by the new Commander-in-Chief Diaz, that encouraged the rise of a new spirit among the troops. Diaz's predecessor Cadorna was a soldier of the *ancien régime* who had worked miracles at the time when soldiers were driven to fight with whips; Cadorna never seemed to understand that the four million Italians in arms were citizens and often fathers of families. Diaz on the contrary won their confidence by establishing that in case a man fell a sum of money should at once, without delay, be sent for the relief of his family; the Government too decreed other measures of assistance, and the combatants who knew how much their wives and children were suffering, above all in the South, were satisfied.

In the Italian family the most pathetic figure is the mother. In France she is a strong figure, the real administrator of the house, of her husband and of her children. In Italy she has no other authority but that which is accorded to her by the sentiment and love of her children. Her influence is due to her own tenderness and sweetness; she only possesses what she gives, she who is always ready to give.

Love of the home, the birthplace, is mixed up with that of the mother. If one loves one's home in Italy it is not for itself, but as a symbol of the continuity of the family. Even the cottage of the most humble *contadino* is a little island among hundreds of other little islands and only on the occasion of a family festival—a birth, a marriage—are bridges thrown from house to house, to be broken down immediately afterwards. This however does not imply at all a seclusion of the oriental sort. The Italians, like the ancient Greeks, feel themselves children of the market-place. They are never bound by that desire for solitude that often awakes in the hearts of the English and the Scotch. Thousands of years of life in common in the city have taught every Italian the art of remaining alone in the midst of the noisy crowd; alone, naturally, in the Italian fashion, with his wife and children. Hence, in parenthesis, that particular Italian art in which the families of three or four brothers succeed in living together without quarrelling under the roof of the same palace or the same farm.

Among Italians of ancient stock, the affection for the "villa"—whether it be a half-ruined farm or a marvellous piece of Palladian architecture—is far greater than for the palace in the city. The "villa" has nothing in common with the French *château*, nor

with the English *cottage* ; less still with the French *villa*. Even when it has the appearance of a towering castle, one only calls it a villa. In Italy the *castello* of Versailles would be the Villa of Versailles. The Italian of ancient family does not feel that he is lowered if he sells to some bank his palace in Milan, in Piacenza or Genoa ; but he thinks he has committed the crime of treason to his name if he sells, unless in extreme necessity, his most ancient villa, where in the old chests are preserved the costumes of the eighteenth century, where the library still possesses the *Encyclopédie* that an ancestor *éclairé* got from Paris, and the marvellous editions of Italian classics printed by Bodoni just a generation later ; the villa that an ordinary tourist might mistake for an ancient building without grace or merit, though the hidden gardens possess fountains not too unworthy of Bernini, and the *saloni* are hung with Flemish and Italian tapestries of the seventeenth century ; where for some ten miles around, the proprietors are not addressed by the empty titles of *Marchese* or *Conte*, but simply—with an affectionate respect that excludes servility—Signor Cesare, Signor Carlo, Signor Ascanio. . . .

And then—and it is a thing unknown to foreigners who come to the luxury hotels—there are in Italy entire regions where a title is used on an envelope but never in conversation, even by an inferior to a superior. Such is Italian life as history has formed it, a true democracy, or at least something that can easily become a true democracy.

## XI

### ITALIANS AND RELIGION

**A**N opinion widespread outside Italy will have it that our people have no religious feeling, or at least no mystical sense.

The truth is that few European peoples have passed through such profound religious enthusiasm as we.

A generation before St. Francis of Assisi, Joachim da Flora influenced the mind of half Italy. Dante places him in Paradise :

Il calavrese abate Gioachino  
Di spirito profetico dotato.

Even today his cult endures in the churches of Calabria, where on his feast day they sing an ancient text of which it is impossible to say whether it inspired Dante or whether it is an echo of Dante : “ *Beatus Joachim spiritu dotatus propheticus, decoratus intelligentia, dixit futura et praesentia.*”

Like Francis of Assisi later, Joachim was born of rich parents : like the *Poverello*, he abandoned everything. Joachim went on foot to Jerusalem and on his return took refuge as a lay brother with the Cistercian monks of Sambucina ; there, unlike Francis, he devoted himself for many years to the study of the Bible, composed works in which we already feel the spirit of Savonarola ; in his writings the condemnation of the temporal power of the Church seems implicit ; but Joachim was not puffed up with pride and he bowed before the verdict of the Bishops and the Pope : the Church first tolerated and then adopted the pure ascetic whose doctrines had been condemned by the Lateran Council of 1212.

Europe was now torn by heretic sects and their violent hatreds ; but Italy was not a propitious country for them ; the message of Joachim satisfied us, with its teaching of a Christianity aspiring again to the purity of the evangelic era, and all this to be brought about without revolts and without heresy.

If certain heretical movements seemed at times to establish themselves among us in the thirteenth century, it was only politics :

an affair organized by the Emperor Frederick II in his struggle with the Popes.

Joachim da Flora was scarcely dead when what he had begun was taken up in Umbria by Francis of Assisi; but lightened of its Apocalyptic vision. The message of the *Poverello* was the first message of a human being of which one would dare to say that on some sides it approached that of Jesus.

Francis of Assisi may be found in his completeness in his *Cantico di Frate Sole* whose true title was in the thirteenth century *Laudes creaturarum*.<sup>1</sup>

Since things which everyone thinks they know are often only known vaguely, here is the text of that poem which throbs with the sublime inspiration of the *Te Deum*, but it is softer, sweeter, less superhuman:

Altissimu, onnipotente, bon Signore,  
 tue so' le laude, la gloria e l'onore et onne benediczione.  
 Ad te solo, Altissimo, se confano  
 et nullu omu ène dighu te mentovare.  
 Laudato sie, mi Signore, cum tucte le tue creature,  
 spezialmente messer lo frate sole,  
 lo quale jorna, et allumini per lui;  
 et ellu è bellu e radiante cum grande splendore;  
 de te, Altissimo, porta significazione.  
 Laudato si, mi Signore, per sora luna e le stelle;  
 in celu l'hai formate clarite et preziose et belle.  
 Laudato si, mi Signore, per frate vento  
 et per aere et nubilo et sereno et onne tempo,  
 per le quale a le tue creature dai sustentamento.  
 Laudato si, mi Signore, per sor' acqua,  
 la quale è molto utile et omele et preziosa et casta.  
 Laudato si, mi Signore, per frate focu,  
 per lo quale ennallumini la nocte,  
 et ello è bellu, et jucundo, et robustoso et forte.  
 Laudato si, mi Signore, per sora nostra matre terra,  
 la quale ne sustenta et governa  
 et produce diversi fructi, con coloriti fiori et erba.  
 Laudato si, mi Signore, per quilli che perdonano per lo tuo amore  
 et sostengo infirmitate et tribulazione.

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<sup>1</sup> For Matthew Arnold's translation of this *Cantico*, see *Essays in Criticism* (Macmillan), pp. 212-13. Arnold contrasts it with an idyll of Theocritus and Renan considered it "le plus beau morceau de poésie religieuse depuis les Évangiles". It has been translated many times.



Beati quilli che sosterrano in pace,  
 ca de te, Altissimo, sirano incoronati,  
 Laudato si, mi Signore, per sora nostra morte corporale,  
 da la quale nullu omo vivente pò scappare.  
 Guai a quilli, che morrano ne le peccata mortali.  
 Beati quilli che se trovarà ne le tue sanctissime voluntati,  
 ca la morte secunda no'l farrà male.  
 Laudate et benedicete, mi Signore, et reingraziate,  
 et serviteli cum grande umiltate.

For those who remember Dante it is useless to comment on the third line from the end: "*la morte secunda*" is damnation.<sup>1</sup>

Francesco always worshipped a God of love and mercy. And all his disciples continued to think that this world was not merely a *lacrimarum vallis*. They obeyed the Rule that he had written for them: "*Estote gaudentes in Domino, hilares.*" But when the moment came, in generations that immediately followed him, these simple ones, these *hilares*, often revealed the heroic souls of martyrs.

If the heresies of the Middle Age made little impression on the Italians it was chiefly because of the atmosphere of moral liberty that one breathed more largely in Italy than in any other country of Europe. The *pataria* of the Lombards and the *catari*, come from the Orient, only established themselves among us as tentative social revolutionaries; they were to us what the *jacqueries* were to the French.

After the Council of Trent new forms of individual religious fervour appeared in Italy; with St. Luigi Gonzaga we have again the Ascetics; and we have the last Saint in whom was to be seen again the joyous serenity of Francis in St. Philip Neri; the last at least unless we wish to count the late nineteenth century and remember Don Bosco, whose smile the writer will never forget, when, as a child, he was presented to him by a mad nurse who begged the Saint to exorcise "this little boy who is always running off into the woods". Don Bosco asked the woman nothing; he looked fixedly at the boy, put his hand on his head and whispered in his ear: "Do you love your mother?"—"Oh, yes."—"Do you obey God?"—"Oh, yes." Then he kissed the child and said to the woman: "All is done. Be tranquil."

From the political point of view, one of the constant traits in the Italian spirit has been all along the centuries the search for an

<sup>1</sup> The famous verse "*Che la seconda morte ciascun grida*" is in the first canto of the *Inferno*, 115.

equilibrium between the two powers: the State, that in the time of the Guelphs and Ghibellines was the Emperor, and the Church. We have there the first and most refined exercise of that most Italian thing, the "*combinazione*" of which we will talk later on.

Even the most fanatical Ghibellines never got rid, not only of respect for the Church, but even of a kind of secret attachment for an organism that they felt to be so Italian, yes, in its universality. The Commune of Rome seldom lost the opportunity of threatening the temporal lordship of the Popes at least till the fourteenth century; the writers of *novelle* and the chroniclers of the fourteenth century described with pleasure the injuries inflicted on the Popes in their political undertakings, but not once do the Italians take the side of the anti-Popes; for the Italians the anti-Popes were only marionettes in the hands of the German Emperors; not only was their creation foreign, but even for those who were without the Catholic faith, they represented the fracture of the equilibrium and the danger that Italy might become German.

On her side the Church rarely—in Italy perhaps never—opposed sentiments or expressions that possibly would have been forbidden by the clergy in Spain. Thus it happened that the Church never opposed the circulation of Italian masterpieces in which she was sometimes maltreated, as in the *Divine Comedy*, for example, or the *Canzoniere* of Petrarch. When she did prohibit a book of Dante's, the *De Monarchia*, it was one that was written in Latin and no one read.

The same tolerance showed itself two centuries later towards Ariosto, whose satires and comedies often attacked the clergy and the traffic in indulgences, the open sore of the time.

Nor did this tradition of tolerance cease with the Counter-Reformation. In 1617, and again in 1667, the Spanish Inquisition included Dante and Petrarch in its index of prohibited books. At Madrid they wished Rome to take action, but the Popes did nothing; indeed it is certain they even smiled at those fanatical Spaniards. For the Popes were Italian; they knew these poets by heart; how could they proscribe Dante and Petrarch who were part of their spiritual experience?

Foreigners—especially those of Catholic countries—have understood with difficulty in the past, how complex and subtle were the political relations between the Italian people and the Church. In order to understand it one must never forget that Dante, the greatest Catholic poet of the world, did not hesitate to fling Popes into the

third *bolgia* of his *Inferno*—that of the Simoniacs. It is there that the poet, meeting Pope Nicholas III, turned upon the evil Popes in an apostrophe that every Italian has known by heart for five hundred years; in spite of his reverence for “*le somme chiavi*”, he cries:

Fatto v'avete Dio d'oro e d'argento :  
e che altro è da voi all'idolatre,  
se non ch'elli uno, e voi n'orate cento ?

Ahi, Costantin, di quanto mal fu matre,  
non la tua conversion, ma quella dote  
che da te prese il primo ricco patre !<sup>1</sup>

What appeared at the time of the Risorgimento too often to French and Belgian Catholics like Italian anti-clericalism was in reality only anti-temporalism, a tradition that went back to the most loyal of Catholic poets—to Dante himself. As for the scandalous and pretended religiosity of the Fascists, as most acute Catholic writers—and first perhaps among them the Irishman Binchy—have explained and confirmed, it was not the Fascists but almost all the statesmen of the Risorgimento and of Liberal Italy who were practising Catholics, living with their families who were also practising.<sup>2</sup> Many old “*giolittiani*”<sup>3</sup>—if any remain among us—will learn with stupefaction (so secret and private was Giolitti) that almost every evening in his bed, he used to read, before sleeping, some pages of the Gospel or the Acts of the Apostles. They used to call him the cynical Piedmontese, did certain scribes, who thought they were critics. It was thus his custom to cleanse his spirit, so his best-loved daughter and confidante, Enrichetta Chiavariglio—whom the violences of Fascism forced to take asylum in

<sup>1</sup> “Of gold and silver ye have made your God  
Differing wherein from the idolater,  
But that he worships one, and hundred ye ?  
Ah, Constantine ! To how much ill gave birth  
Not thy conversion, but that plenteous dower  
Which the first wealthy Father gained from thee.”

(Trs. Cary)

<sup>2</sup> Cf. D. A. Binchy, *Church and State in Fascist Italy* (Oxford University Press, 1941). Consult also Carlo Sforza: *L'Italia dal 1914 al 1944 quale io la vidi*, Chap. XIX.

<sup>3</sup> Followers and colleagues of Giolitti, Prime Minister of Italy from 1892 onwards.

the Argentine—confided to me as though violating a secret, at Buenos Aires in 1942.

Manzoni himself voted for the suppression of the Temporal Power, for that is what the decision taken to transfer the Capital from Turin to Florence—as a step on the road to Rome—meant in his time to all Italians.

To some of his friends who urged the old veteran of eighty not to risk his health by a journey to Turin in mid-winter to vote that law “which would much displease the Pope”, the poet who under a modest courtesy hid, in things essential, a will of iron, replied: “But close as I am to death, how should I dare to present myself to God if I hesitated to render this service to the Church?”

At the moment of Manzoni’s departure for Turin to give his vote in the Senate, his son-in-law Giambattista Giorgini thus described to his wife Vittoria, the state of mind of the poet:

“They ought to know (those who wanted to induce Manzoni not to go to Turin) that he is very clear and very firm in his ideas and in his proposals, and that he has few ideas clearer and more firm than that he wishes the Government to go to Rome. To him it is evident that going now to Florence means an advance on the path to Rome, and we shall certainly not be able, neither I nor Massimo<sup>1</sup> nor Donna Costanza<sup>2</sup> nor others, to make him change his mind; he is full of faith that to Rome we shall go with full consent of the Catholic conscience. He expects nothing from Pius IX, but hopes for much from the Papacy, and dreams still what he dreamt when he wrote the ‘*Adelchi*’,<sup>3</sup> to see on the Chair of St. Peter a Pope *re delle preci*—a King of Prayer.”

In the problem of the relations between Italy and the Papacy, Manzoni never followed any of the currents that agitated Italy in the first half of the nineteenth century, neither the Ghibelline current nor the Guelph, nor even the neo-Guelph that might seem for a moment nearer his ideas. Manzoni ignored all these divisions; his policy was simple; he wanted the independence and the unity of Italy; he believed profoundly in the necessity of a moral law even in politics; but, ardent Catholic as he was, one cannot quote a single word of his in which he is sympathetic to a thesis like that of Gioberti, wherein that versatile *abbé* thought to have found the solution of the Italian problem in a federation under the Presidency of the Pope.

<sup>1</sup> Massimo d’Azeglio.

<sup>2</sup> Costanza Arconati.

<sup>3</sup> A tragedy published in Milan in 1822.

Not a few of the neo-Guelphs, intimate friends of Manzoni, hesitated when faced with Gioberti's ideas, almost foreseeing that he himself would repudiate them, as in fact he did. The neo-Guelphs were noble spirits; they wished above all to demonstrate that fidelity to the Church could and must be reconciled with love for the independence of Italy. In books that had a moment of celebrity they showed that Dante had been wrong, that the poet's Ghibelline ideas were contrary to the reality of Italian history as it developed in the Communes, and that they were contrary to the profound and internal destiny of the people and of Italian civilization. How can one believe them wrong? The Holy Roman Empire, dear to Dante, would probably have made of Florence a sterile city, without commerce and perhaps without beauty. Who knows if Dante himself might not have been nothing more than a rancorous *nobil-astro*? Carducci even, anti-clerical though he was, divined this when two generations after Gioberti he wrote in a sonnet on Dante:

Odio il tuo santo Impero e la corona  
divelta con la spada avrei di testa  
al tuo buon Federico in val d'Olona.

The neo-Guelphs of Manzoni's time were in fact only Catholic Liberals; they were of a character essentially different from that of analogous groups in France, in Belgium and elsewhere. It is enough to cite the names of their leaders: outside Italy there was de Maistre—though he was half Italian—de Bonald, Günther, Görres, all of them reactionaries who had not an atom of the love for liberty, which, though with some timidity, a Balbo, a Gioberti and even a Rosmini<sup>1</sup> felt; I say "even" because Rosmini's writings show him as extremely suspicious of the idea of the progress of the humbler classes, a thing one does not find in the others. Not a few Italian Catholics had, like Manzoni, felt the influence of Jansenism, sometimes without knowing it; some of them indeed did not hesitate to say openly that the Temporal Power was injuring the spiritual prestige of the Pope; even Rosmini came near this in his work: *Of the Five Wounds of the Holy Church*,<sup>2</sup> which cost him many an annoyance.

<sup>1</sup> Cesare Balbo (Piedmontese, 1789-1853), Vincenzo Gioberti (Piedmontese, 1801-52), Antonio Rosmini (born in Trentino 1797, died 1855).

<sup>2</sup> *Of the Five Wounds of the Holy Church* was translated into English in 1883.

The group of neo-Guelphs that very nearly became powerful on the elevation of Pius IX rendered a great service to the moral unity of Italy by being a group of thinkers and moralists rather than politicians. To understand their value and their faith it is enough to recall the reactionary violence which beat upon Europe after 1815, and with what imprudence certain bishops and preachers identified themselves with it.

In France the reaction was violent; it was almost natural; the Revolution had begun there, in 1789. But the French reaction went far beyond Louis XVIII, who, as a man of the eighteenth century, prided himself on being a *bel esprit*, and one day bored by his partisans, called them "*Jacobins blancs*". In a country like France, which in spite of its revolutions, is essentially well balanced, the consequences were inevitable: nothing was more detested than what was called "*le parti prêtre*", and even the Catholics who were not of the legitimist party, suffered from it.

In Italy the reaction was in a certain sense even more bitter, because inspired by the blind pride of the Austrian Empire and the bestial vulgarity of the Neapolitan Bourbons; but while in France the Revolution of 1830 and the fall of Charles X were certainly anti-clerical movements, in Italy the battle did not develop on that line; within the Catholic citadels themselves there were always forces that supported the struggle for liberty. These forces glorified like titles of nobility the memory of the Popes that in the far-off Middle Age protected Italy and the Latin world against the Longobard invaders, and later protected and blessed the League of the Italian cities against the German Emperors.

These forces and these movements of ideas were of an importance much greater than perhaps appeared in the nineteenth century, because it was thanks to them that many millions of Christian minds accepted the fact of the liberty and independence of Italy; natural aspirations certainly for every Italian heart, but it must be admitted that after more than two centuries while Italy slept, they had been brought into the light again by the armies of the *sansculottes* whom pious souls had considered misbelievers and devils. It is therefore, let us say again, to the meteor of neo-Guelph literature and thought that we owe the miracle that multitudes, sincerely Catholic, were able to accept the struggle for the liberty and unity of Italy which otherwise would have risked misunderstanding, if for no other reason because among its champions there appeared anti-Catholic Deists like Mazzini and frenzied anti-clericals like Garibaldi.

When in 1929 came the Conciliation, even according to law,<sup>1</sup> between the State and the Church, the enormous majority of Italians were satisfied with it ; in such a way the historical tradition of our people was carried out. I have explained elsewhere<sup>2</sup> that the Conciliation was ripe among us all, long before Fascism saw in it a means of acquiring a little moral prestige. It is important that Italians should know in outline the description that Binchy gives us in the excellent book which I have already quoted, the description of the real position of the Church in Italy before Fascism appeared :

“ The relations between Church and State were always improving ; the old anti-clerical hostility had in great part disappeared ; even the Socialists would no longer hear it mentioned ; only the Fascists continued to raise the old standard. . . . And what counted even more, was that a powerful and increasing group of Catholics had risen to overlook the interests of religion both in Parliament and out of it. The war had brought about an awakening of spiritual values among the masses which was expressed in imposing public religious ceremonies ; only the Fascists showed themselves hostile to them. A grand procession through the streets of Rome, lined by ten thousand Italian soldiers in token of respect, marked the close of the sixteenth National Eucharistic Congress ; it is strange to hear Catholic writers asserting today that all such demonstrations were forbidden until Mussolini arrived to ‘ protect ’ religion. . . . ”

Never were the relations between State and Church so humiliating and dangerous for the religious life of Italians as under Fascism ; Fascism pretended to give the Church an appearance of lustre, while in reality it wished to enslave and compromise her. Pius XI, though he had desired the Lateran Treaties, well understood this and in the last months of his life declared it to be so. In one of his last audiences, in receiving a group of the faithful, he told them : “ Late, too late in my life, I have discovered that the dangers that threaten religion do not come only from one side ; they come from the other side as well ; from now on I consecrate what remains to me of life to aid my children to share with me my discovery.”

Coming from a Pope, such an act of contrition was a moving and noble gesture of Christian humility. The *Osservatore Romano* faithfully printed the words of the Pope, but no foreign Catholic

<sup>1</sup> The Treaty between Church and State in Italy was signed in 1929.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Italia dal 1914 al 1944 quale io la vidi*, Chap. XIX.

journal reproduced them. In too many Catholic circles through baseness or indolence Fascism was applauded as an instrument of social reaction ; and they have not cared to admit the error they committed.

History will tell one day that the Holy See spoke openly and decisively when it was necessary, even against triumphant Fascism ; but too many devoted Catholics believing they were serving the Church, pretended not to understand certain severe warnings which came from the Vatican. It was they who gave arms to many who from partisan passion wished to represent the Church as the protector of Fascism.



## XII

### ITALIANS AND POLITICS

UNTIL the formation of a Socialist Party in Italy, and much later, in 1919, of a Democratic Christian Party, our Parliament was unique in the world in this respect that it was composed of men of the same intellectual and moral formation—the Liberal. The old word had preserved at Turin, at Florence and then at Rome, the old sense given it by the Spaniards who invented it: *liberal* in contrast to *servile*; and the two parties into which the Italian deputies were divided, were divided rather by passions and temperaments than by doctrines.

Italian liberalism was not exactly the same thing as in England, France and Belgium. It was, of course, something like it, but in reality was above all this: a watchword obeyed by all the governing classes from Piedmont to Sicily in order to make the cause of the liberty and independence of Italy triumphant.

When the first Italian Parliament met in Turin in 1861 all Europe recognized how false it was to say that our unity was the fruit of a happy concurrence of circumstances, as certain writers had maintained through that mania for blackening one's own country, which I have already said is the most typical trait of our *genus literatorum*. The deputies, whether Left or Right, showed a profound unity of essential ideas, such as certainly had not existed in the old sub-alpine Parliament where a Solaro della Marguerita<sup>1</sup>—a good Piedmontese and a good administrator—had maintained that it was folly to compromise the prudent old Sardinian Kingdom in an uncertain Italian adventure.

Why had liberalism—rather one should say democracy—more solid bases in France than in Italy? Because it had the silent but entire support of the French peasant, who saw in it a sure defence against the nostalgia of the *château* for domination; where Monsieur le Comte and Monsieur le Marquis cast longing glances at the past, and still had means of securing to themselves a certain influence.

<sup>1</sup> Clemente Count Solaro della Marguerita, born at Cuneo 1792, died at Turin 1869.

Also the vague suspicion that in many regions of France (especially Provence, Dauphiné, Languedoc and Bourgogne) the peasants felt for the *curé* a suspicion deriving from the old habit of the parish priests of maintaining relations of too respectful deference for the "*châtelains*" of the parish. Behind all this was an instinctive memory that had only recently begun to fade, that the fields and farms of the peasants had been, generations before, bought at auction as "*biens du clergé*" when the Revolution was in its vigour. The French peasant had his children baptized certainly, and their first Communion was a tremendous family feast and festival, but he frequented the church very little; he left that to the women, seeing in their going to Mass a guarantee of their modesty.

Nothing like this happened among us. The Gospel of the Risorgimento was Mazzini's "*I Doveri degli Uomini*"—the Duties of Man; Berchet gave it its poetry; Silvio Pellico its Christian emphasis; it found the highest dignity of national thought in Manzoni's "*Adelchi*"; generous good sense and honesty in the writings and discourses of D'Azeglio; the boldest international views in the speeches of Cavour; but all this, noble though it was, did not reach beyond the cultivated middle class in whose heart for centuries love of country and love of good literature were one. The anonymous masses who laboured and suffered in silence in fields not their own, were not moved, save rare exceptional temperaments, by appeals which were above their heads and left them bending over the soil. If they did hear anything they said it was not their affair; that they would remain

"Un volgo disperso, che nome non ha,"

as when the Franks succeeded the Lombards in the valley of the Po.

Even Pisacane's<sup>1</sup> appeal at Sapri in 1857 remained without response though it was addressed both to Italians and to *contadini*, and Pisacane consecrated it in vain with his own death.

I have already said that the supreme error of Mazzini was, in my opinion, to have ignored the *contadini*.

In the Italy of the Risorgimento there was too much good sense, or what wrongly passes for it: a voice to repeat the message of Saint-Just to the French was lacking: "The era of happiness is

<sup>1</sup> Carlo Pisacane, Duke of S. Giovanni (1818-57), born at Naples. It was Pisacane who sailed from Genoa with a few followers in June 1857, but after landing in Ponja and at Sapri they found little support from the inhabitants and Pisacane was killed.

come ; it is a new thing in the history of the world." Unfortunately the youthful friend of Robespierre made his announcement at the height of the Terror, while he was sending thousands of Frenchmen to the guillotine, a fact which might seem to have given his good news a savour of mad sarcasm.

But at times I ask myself if the leaders of Italian liberalism were any more Christianly human. One might doubt it, when one remembers that the French Revolution with all its bloody but episodic horrors ended by transforming the peasants of France into one of the most healthy social groups in Europe, while under Louis XIV La Bruyère had described them as "*certaines animaux farouches, répandus par la campagne, livides et tout brûlés du soleil, attachés à la terre qu'ils fouillent et qu'ils remuent avec une opiniâtreté invincible. . . . Ils se retirent la nuit dans des tanières où ils vivent de pain noir, d'eau et de racines. . . .*"

The one moving idea of the Italian political class from 1848 to 1922 was—albeit of divers shades—Liberalism. In the first decades independence and unity were not to be hoped for except by way of Liberalism, and so all became Liberals, even those who were philosophically least Liberal, as for example the friends of Rosmini. But not one of them ever thought of the necessity of social reforms as happened in England.

In Italy that was presently united in Rome, the division between Right and Left owed its origin much more—I have already pointed it out—to traditions and to memories of the heroic epoch than to doctrines. On the Right sat those who as young men had believed that timid reforms were enough, just as their fathers had trusted in understandings with sovereigns ; on the left were all those who, having struggled with Mazzini and Garibaldi in secret societies, in popular revolts and among the Red Shirts, trusted rather in the action of the masses or, at least, were not afraid of such action.

How did they work, what did they do, those Parliaments of people honest enough but not too generous on one side, and more generous but without political experience on the other ?

In order to judge the work of our Parliamentary Governments, it must not be forgotten what sort of Italy they had inherited in 1860 : not a single railway connected the peninsula as a whole, there was not a single elementary school in the South, no great industry was established either in the North or in the South, and three-quarters of the population could neither read nor write. . . . And yet what progress was made even from the first ! In 1849

Turin spent 50,000 lire on her schools; this rose to 700,000 lire in 1869 and that was a mere cipher in comparison with what Italy was spending on schools after the first world war. Naples, which in 1861 spent 50,000 lire on her schools, was spending more than one million lire in 1871. After fifteen years of unity all our most modest rural Communes possessed their schools.

What remains a mystery for many, what I will try to explain in the chapter that follows, is how it ever came about that Italian thought which had expressed itself so powerfully under the Austrian and Bourbon despotisms, seemed to be struck with inertia for thirty years or more after the Unity. Certainly there were even then notable men in science and letters, but it would have been difficult to name men of European fame except Secchi in astronomy, De Rossi in archaeology, the acid and unequal Cantù in history, the young Lombroso for certain of his genial intuitions, and more than any other, Francesco De Sanctis who even men as valid as Spaventa treated as a dangerous madman solely because as deputy he sat with the Left. Such is the power of political prejudice!

The successive Chambers reflected the general mediocrity; few deputies seemed to be able to take the place of Sella, Lanza, Minghetti or Ricasoli. But on the other hand, the anonymous work of unification was always in progress: there was only one example of an egoistic group, the *Permanente*, which for a moment represented the nostalgic desire for hegemony of some dozen Piedmontese deputies.

But even if mediocrities, all these Italian deputies were completely honest, in contrast with the French, among whom finance has been as powerful a corrupter under the Third Republic as under the Second Empire. Italian political honesty was perhaps encouraged by the simplicity of customs and the modesty of life in Rome where almost all the deputies had been accustomed for forty years to take their meals for two lire from Valiani at the Termini station, and only when they wanted to commit a folly entered the Fagiano, in Piazza Colonna, or Ranieri's in Via Mario de' Fiori. "Power has not yet enriched anyone in Italy," a Minister declared one day; and nothing more true was ever said, until Fascism came and the Duce wanted his Ministers to be thieves in order the better to dominate them.

No Parliament in western Europe had suddenly to face such complex problems as the Italian. Our representatives had to deal with the arrears of four centuries. They did away with those

arrears. A large liberty of speech throughout the country guaranteed rather by custom than by law ; a foreign policy, correct, loyal and not ungenerous ; public works on a large scale ; a bureaucracy honest and scrupulous, even though on account of concentrated Piedmontese traditions less practised and autonomous than the Austrian, then the best in all Europe : such was the outstanding character of the liberal and democratic governments until the time of Giolitti.

The principal fault of our old parliaments and governments was, in my opinion, not having taken into account that Italy would never become an organism whole in all her parts until the *contadini* came to feel that the free country of which they had been told at school, meant for them too a more worthy and happier life. But of this, more later.

Besides the psychology of ministers and representatives, there is a psychology of the governed and the mass of men. It must not be forgotten that we did not develop as in France, about a Court, nor was our civilization more and more centralized, as in England, about an elastic but unshakable pyramid of social relations. There is only one country in the world where the political and moral formation of the people is analogous to ours ; it is China. This holds for the antiquity and variety of historical roots existing in the two countries, where the splendour of past glories weighs like a shadow on the originality of the present, in which the chisel of the sculptor and the brushes of the painter are often rather clever than profound ; in which the religious tradition and religious indifference neutralize one another and scarcely count in daily life ; in which the speeches of politicians are often more an empty music of words than effectual reality ; in which a thousand years of history has made people a little too sceptical. . . .

But this scepticism did not save China—after centuries of somnolence—from a revolution that he who writes this saw break out before his eyes in 1911 ; that he saw again in its bloodshed in 1928 when he went back to China to write a book, and that still goes on, though smouldering beneath the ashes.

He who has seen a formidable phenomenon of this sort is tempted to ask himself if something of the same kind might not happen some day in Italy, unless someone is found capable of bringing order to the country, with productive reforms, instead of allowing discontent to rise until the first chance demagogue appears and makes discontent an excuse for a new charlatan's career.

The false conservatives for whom the poor security of their time and generation suffices—they almost repeat the cynical “*après moi le déluge*” of one of the last kings of France—count on the old deposit of Italian scepticism as an antidote to waves of revolution.

If an Italian scepticism exists it has two aspects like all that is Italian and, perhaps, like all that is human.

The foreigners who deplore the political indifference of a large part of our people forget that politics are a luxury for the unfortunates who struggle with the worst difficulties of life; one cannot be surprised if their poor and humble philosophy is the *non te ne incarica*—don't worry yourself about it—of Neapolitan pessimism. If this phenomenon is really more visible in Italy than elsewhere, even in the middle and lower middle classes, it is to be explained by causes not very dissimilar from those I have pointed out in the earlier pages of this book; they exaggerate the scepticism, the absenteeism, perhaps even the opportunism, just because they are ashamed of them. Vanity, pride? Yes, but also the bitterness of feeling weak, victims of a legacy of pompous words and genuine miseries; as in the dolorous quartrain of a little-known poet of the fourteenth century, Bindo Bonichi:

Un modo c'è a viver fra le genti  
e in ogni altro tu ti perdi i passi.  
Cessa da' magri ed accostati a' grassi,  
odi ed ascolta e di tutto consenti.

As to the nobler Italian minds—and there were a number of them in politics even among the less celebrated—who, for instance, could forget Sacchi, Tedesco, Peppino de Nava?—that accent of scepticism frequent as it was on their lips, often seemed to me the result of bitter knowledge of history and of life; a knowledge and a bitterness not strange to find even among the greater minds of a nation where history is a series of atrocious trials.

The complete emancipation from all respect for the official phraseology, that exists among the best of us, is only the reaction from that rhetorical emphasis that flourishes in Italy like a poisonous plant in periods of intellectual and moral abasement; as happened with the fetid pseudo-heroic jargon of Fascism.

Among all those Italians whom I, as a young man, most esteemed and loved, a superficial observer would have noticed a scepticism which in reality hid a lofty dignity. And it is this dignity which explains why with us memoirs of Italian statesmen are so rare in

comparison with France and England. D'Azeglio only wrote the record of his youth; La Marmora only wrote against the King who calumniated him, a defence of his own conduct in 1866; of other famous Prime Ministers, neither Rattazzi nor Minghetti, nor Lanza nor Sella nor Depretis nor Cairoli nor Crispi nor Rudini nor Zanardelli nor Sonnino wrote their memoirs; I do not mention Cavour, struck down in full maturity and in mid-battle. The only exception is Giolitti; but even he would have written nothing but for the constant insistence and precious help of Olindo Malagodi. Why didn't they write? Because they felt the mediocrity of the work they had accomplished in face of that which they had dreamed of doing.

The legend of the political scepticism of Italians has made popular in the world the attribution to us of this quality or defect: the *combinazione*—arrangement or compromise. I took part in not a few international conferences after the first world war; all my colleagues from Lloyd George to Briand were all the time doing nothing else but seeking arrangements, *combinazioni*—as I was. They are the necessary substratum of any normal political life whatever. The civil greatness of England only appeared when she naturalized this Italian art and called it *compromise*.

Why then is our *combinazione* so much criticized among us and whenever it is attempted, by the French, while “*compromise*” is often pointed out to us as the supreme proof of English political wisdom? Because the English talk rarely in politics of moral values, contenting themselves with concrete reasons; therefore even their least worthy compromises do not shock us and there rarely appears any contradiction between what they say and what they do.

In Italy instead, and even more in France, one immediately brings forward general ideas, but life is more exigent than formulas and it ends in opponents coming to an understanding; and it is well that it should be so. But meanwhile what a noise has been made about the unsurmountable antitheses of the two programmes under discussion. . . .

For thirty years Italy and Europe have pointed to Giolitti as the prototype of a political sceptic.

One day an opponent criticized Giolitti in the Chamber for certain legal provisions concerning those provinces where the public life was not exemplary. And he, in a low voice, turning to me, said: “They are right; one would justly blame a tailor who

had cut a coat only fit for a hunchback." Then, rising, he replied in a cold official tone that did not hide his sarcasm. He despised any who made a show of wit.

It was the same Giolitti who at eighty-two years of age, having lost his wife at Cavour, left his modest house at two in the morning to go and pray in the village church beside the coffin of his life-long companion. I saw him a few days later. He only said to me: "Do you know what I have found in my wife's prayer-book? A letter that I had written her from Rome thirty years ago, during a ministerial crisis, in which I told her of my disgust at being obliged to live among the low jealousies of aspirants to office." And then he never spoke to me of his wife again.

Such was the real Giolitti. But if the historians and pretended historians wish to give us in their poor books evidence of another, I think there is nothing to be done.

After I had negotiated an essential treaty with our Jugo-Slav neighbours, the nationalists asked me at the Commission of Foreign Affairs, what had been my chief object. I replied: "I desired that the causes of discontent should be equally shared and divided between the two nations. It is the only way of making a treaty that will endure." The reply was so Italian that for a moment—oh! only a moment—it pleased even my adversaries.

It may well be that the mediocrity of the governing classes that are passing away, and the hatreds left among the masses by neo-Fascism and its brutalities, will one day provoke in the Italian people a wave of action that will sweep away the remains of the old passivity and scepticism. But the important thing would be for a general movement of renovation to spring up, such as appeared in France in 1789 when it was a member of the privileged class, the Vicomte de Noailles who on the night of August 4th proposed the abolition of privileges, "*restes odieux de la féodalité*".

In Italy such a communion is not yet in sight. In the seventeenth century at Naples, it was the humblest who rose with Masaniello<sup>1</sup> against the Spanish abuses; in the eighteenth century it was the plebeian Balilla<sup>2</sup> and his friends who revolted against the Germans; neither the middle classes nor the nobility moved. In the nineteenth century it was the contrary that happened, but the division remained:

<sup>1</sup> Masaniello Tommaso Aniello, 1622-47, an Amalfi fisherman who became leader of the revolt against Spanish rule in Naples in 1647.

<sup>2</sup> Traditional name of the boy who struck the spark of rebellion against the Austrians at Genoa in 1746.



it was the middle classes and the aristocracy that fought against the Germans and the Bourbons; the common people remained apathetic—with the rare exceptions whom the words of Mazzini had roused.

But perhaps the sufferings of the Fascist domination and the shame of monarchical neo-Fascism that appeared after July 25th, 1943, were necessary in order to make possible an Italy united in action as she was united in sorrow and in anger. When it is considered coldly, the reasons for progress are not to be seen; nevertheless they exist.

Even though many still hesitate to confess it openly there is no doubt that all have now understood, even though they do not wish to admit it, how historically true was Niccolò Machiavelli when he observed that hostility between the nobles and the people was in the long run the essential cause of progress.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For the text of the quotation cf. Chapter III, pp. 14-15.

### XIII

## HEIGHTS AND DEPRESSIONS OF CULTURE

**T**HE three generations of the Risorgimento, including the Napoleonic, had with their wars and conspiracies lived more feverishly than all Italy had done in the three preceding centuries. Even intellectual and artistic work had been much more intense; in the nineteenth century it would have been impossible for a Vico<sup>1</sup> to write pages that are immortal and no one recognize them. It was this intensity of life that provoked as reaction the lower vitality that we have experienced in Parliament when it ceased to be Subalpine and became Italian. The country gave the impression of a thoroughbred which had won the race, only to fall exhausted at the winning-post. There was indeed more than one crisis of fatigue; there was a numb astonishment at having to say goodbye to old dreams and illusions rooted in the heart; something like what happened much later abroad, among certain old anti-Fascists after the fall of Fascism; men who remained bewildered and bitter so much were they immersed in an *anti* emotion. The crisis of uncertainty which struck our governing classes after 1860 was also in great part provoked by the difficulty of being obliged to fuse into a national synthesis the traditional forces of the old States and in the necessity of bringing themselves into a more intimate contact with the intellectual life of France, of Germany and of England, a contact which many Italians felt it was not possible to begin on an equal footing.

The Italians of the Risorgimento and even of the preceding generations were at the same time in advance of and yet behind the two nations, France and England, that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries found in the advance-guard of the European awakening. Italy was in advance because her Catholicity and Renaissance had instilled in her an instinctive Universal sentiment far stronger than was to be found anywhere else: so much so that in the Legal sciences and in International Law then nascent, she was at the head of all other peoples; no one has ever denied us the Universalism

<sup>1</sup> Giambattista Vico, born at Naples in 1668, died 1744.

which permitted St. Thomas Aquinas to define and foretell a *Societas Nationum* six centuries before Wilson. We have seen too, alas! in the first chapters of this book, how much time and talent were lost in writing verses that were not true poetry, and in other vain diversions of the mind, all exotic flowers that the mighty wind of liberty reduced to nothing, leaving a sense of emptiness among the mediocre who are the most numerous.

Other elements, some exterior and some interior and unhealthy, helped to create a wave of sterile discontent. For example, all the Eastern and African shores of the Mediterranean, all the Red Sea and Black Sea had used Italian as a *lingua franca* for culture and commerce until halfway through the nineteenth century; and it was precisely after our unification that our tongue began to lose ground, which surprised and disturbed our people. It was then and only then that French took the place in many parts of Italian, especially in Turkey, in Greece and in Egypt. It is true that this was due to outside things, for which we were not responsible: the construction of the Oriental Railways that brought the Levant nearer to France, and estranged it from Brindisi and Naples; the unlooked-for suspicion of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy of the language of a new and independent great nation, whereas previously Italian had been the official language of the Austro-Hungarian bureaucracy throughout the Levant, so much so that even the seals of the Imperial and Royal Embassy at Constantinople had been engraved in Italian; and then there was the peaceful invasion of the Levant by the French Catholic Congregations who were anxious to escape the secularizing atmosphere of the Republic. . . . But the fact remained.

What increased the discouragement and consequently the sterility, was the absurd comparison the Italians made of themselves with the gigantic fortunes of Germany, which—they thought, but it was only true in appearance—was unified at the same time as themselves. The whole world—the Americans had then no part in Europe—was lost in admiration of Germany; her army, her universities, her scientific discoveries, her industrial efficiency, her banking systems and her commerce, her social policy and agricultural progress.

Those Italians, sons of other Italians who had believed in the Giobertian *Primato*, began to ask themselves, humiliated and astounded, “Are we not too old? Is it not now the fated turn of the young and fresh German race?” And the most knowledge-

able sought even in the pages of the French *savant*, Renan, for new proofs of German superiority.

With a little more serenity, with a little less of that self-denigration that alternates in us with an outrageous boastfulness, the Italy of that time might have discovered a simple truth : that the points of departure of the two people were not analogous save in appearance ; that Italy had been made with a powder of states, while German unity was nothing other than a progressive enlargement of Prussia, already by herself one of the most powerful kingdoms of Europe ; and that in an industrial period Germany had found herself rich from the start, in coal and in iron, both of which we lacked.

But there was something more : what seemed to us Italians a sudden impoverishment was in fact an intellectual impoverishment common to all Europe : in England, which had fallen from the discoveries of Darwin to the facile generalizations of Spencer ; in France, where the chilly streams of the realist novel had succeeded the great voice of Hugo ; in Germany herself where all the scientists had ended like Faust, by selling their soul to the devil for material power.

The most mediocre among the learned Germans, quite incapable of following in the footsteps of a Mommsen or a Gregorovius, had invented a gigantic game : a philology, mean and shabby under the name of historical method, which became the rage in all Europe and especially in Italy where one no longer spoke of the " literature of reason " but persecuted as crazy anyone who dared to write of letters or of history with a little originality and imagination.

The worst was reached when in an atmosphere so lifeless the dogma of positivism was discovered, which became in Italy one of the most humiliating phenomena of the intellectual life of our people : there was a time in which Achille Loria was taken seriously as an economist and Enrico Ferri as a criminologist. He who like myself at eighteen, has assisted at the lectures of the Sapienza at Pisa, can boast of having seen one of the most vulgar spectacles of the intellectual life of Italy at the end of the nineteenth century.

Not at the Sapienza, the seat of the Faculty of Law, but at the Normal School near the Tower where for Ugolino "*più che il dolor potè il digiuno*", pontificated another representative of Italian learning of the period, Alessandro D'Ancona, not a mere charlatan like Ferri but so imprisoned within the arid circle of his historical method, that he laid down the law about our *poesia popolare* for

forty years without ever making the students feel the essential poetry of this lovely thing; in fact, the Normal School paralysed its pupils for life. I can still see two of them who used to come to me sometimes at home and whom I saved by obliging them to read *Candide* and—alas! in Italian—the *Julius Caesar* of Shakespeare. During three years at Normal School they had never heard of Voltaire or of Shakespeare.

Yet in that Italy there existed at the time two ugly volumes in yellow covers, published by Morano of Naples. The titles were simple: *Saggi Critici*, and *Nuovi Saggi Critici*: the author was Francesco De Sanctis. Even the students of the Normal School might have been upset by them—but they were prohibited books. Recollecting that as a boy I felt the delight of having discovered a new world when I read these two volumes, I ask myself whether there does not necessarily exist a mysterious solidarity among those who feel in this way and perhaps it is so. In the Fascist years when the great Universities of the United States offered me an unforgettably generous hospitality, I was always being asked for the title of some book that would be a real key to Italian thought: I always answered: “De Sanctis, but take care: you will not find there a single date; you must know it all first, but he will illuminate it for you.”

A strange book indeed is his *Storia della letteratura Italiana*, according to the method followed by D’Ancona. When did Dante die, when was Petrarch born? You will not find these facts in the chapter on the two poets. Further on in the book, De Sanctis quotes by chance the year of Boccaccio’s birth and only then, calculating laboriously on one’s fingers, can one manage to find out that Petrarch was born nine years before and that eight years afterwards Dante died.

All the world knows the lofty merits of Benedetto Croce for the widening and renewing of Italian culture; but perhaps it is not his least merit to have obliged even the most intractable at last to understand and appreciate De Sanctis.

Croce is a philosopher whose influence has been supreme in the manner of thought of all Italians—and on more than they. Even those who do not like Croce, who would be offended if they were called *Crociani*—Croce has added this new word to our dictionary—have been profoundly influenced by his doctrines; since (I am quoting from his own famous book) all are Christians, even those who deny that they are Christians.

Universal spirit as he is, Croce is profoundly Italian, too, in his love for the history of his natal South. Philosophies follow on philosophies, but his books on the history of Naples will long remain the surest keys to an understanding of the destiny and the issues in the history of our South.

If Croce is not destined to leave behind him a philosophical school—what an honour to him! It is because his ideas and his way of understanding life and history have become schools in themselves; they have infiltrated into the minds of all those who think.

Then came the long, confused years, the childhood and the brigand manhood of Fascism.

For Italian intelligence and culture it was a zone of silence—as were the Consulate and the First Empire for the French, and Bismarckism and Hitlerism for the Germans.

Dictatorial régimes only live by myths—and myths drive out original thought; as political economists say that bad money drives out good.

It is difficult to say whether the dictatorial and totalitarian myths did more harm to Germany or to Italy. Intellectually they did more harm to Germany because in great part the Germans were stupid and servile enough to take them seriously. Morally they did more harm to Italy because too many Italian workers made a show of believing what they were told, while making fun of it in secret. Bad faith destroys more than does stupidity. And the intimate connection between the last years of Fascism and the pre-Bourbon régime that the fatal and false 25th of July 1943 imposed on Italy, had only one name—the double game.

There are things that have to be paid for within ourselves or outside ourselves, more than the bestial furies of the Germans. For though the German madness degraded a collectivity, the Fascist falseness degraded the individual, and that is worse.

This being so, at the cost of passing for Puritans and Jansenists, one must never weary of repeating that of all Italian problems the most grave and the most urgent is the moral problem.

## XIV

### NORTH AND SOUTH

UNTIL the victory of the Left in 1876 the Ministers who governed Italy were almost all Northerners, who considered the Southerners as lively, witty and eloquent beings but politically immature. In truth, the only immaturity was to be found in the heads of the "Piedmontese", as was said at Naples after 1860, when they sat themselves down to serve out judgments on their brothers of the South. Only Cavour had foreseen the importance of an understanding with the South, but he died too soon.

After 1876 many of the most important Ministers were often from the South, but they belonged to the Left whose habit and rôle had been to criticize, not to govern, and that remained for long the victim of a reverential respect for high functionaries, who were honest but incapable of understanding new problems; people for whom going to the South as prefects or magistrates was worse than a punishment, almost a dishonour. The few Ministers of the Left who took office, like Nicotera, violated the law; and this increased the diffidence of the *Direttori generali* in regard to them.

For the rest, never in our history has there been a constant passing to and fro between the North and the South, nor do Northerners go to live in the South and vice versa. Only one of our ancient classical writers knew and loved the South: Boccaccio. One of our delights in reading Dante is to discover at every moment a verse which describes with an unforgettable touch the most varied aspects and landscapes of our country; but there is not a single one of the South; for Dante never described what he had not seen.

Petrarch never went to the South, nor Ariosto, Machiavelli nor Manzoni. Leopardi was in Naples, but he was ill; Mazzini was there as a prisoner.

Why such a separation? The difference between North and South is not greater in Italy than in France or in the United States; and it is less than in Germany. But in Italy the actual division is perhaps more clear cut; which would explain how the French of Charles VIII could sing: "*Nous conquerons les Italies . . .*" But if

the division is sharper it has nothing to do with pretended differences of "race", that is to say, of Greek influences in the South and Germanic or Celtic in the North. The reasons are historical and incidental: namely, that the States of the Church dividing the peninsula in two, separated the Neapolitan Kingdom from the rest of Italy in a more radical way than the division between Piedmont and Lombardy or between Liguria and Tuscany.

The full material reunion of the whole peninsula was the result of the railways. One day, in a dream *à la Rousseau*, Napoleon imagined that Calabria, Sicily and Sardinia were moved towards the coasts of Latium and Tuscany, swelling out an Italy too elongated for his taste as a collector of cannon-fodder. One of the principal merits of the Liberal governments from 1860 to 1890 was the creation of a vast net of rapid communications from the Cenis to Trapani, and they did this with a series of bridges, galleries and other engineering feats more complicated and costly than in any other country of Europe.

It was probably the long period of the isolation of the "Kingdom"—as the country from Velletri southward is called—that made of our South an island of philosophers and thinkers, from Giordano Bruno and Campanella to Vico and Benedetto Croce. Among the philosophers of Northern Italy in the first half of the nineteenth century, such as Rosmini or Gioberti, foreign influences are very visible. It is not so in the South, where Benedetto Croce himself has only taken from Hegel a certain amount of material for the elaboration of a new way of thought.

Those who, half astonished and half disgusted, are saddened by the haughty attitude that certain Northerners assume towards the Southerners, ought to feel rather pity than anger. It is everywhere thus; a stupid industrial of Flanders thinks that he is better than the most intelligent Provençal; a merchant of Barcelona laughs at the poetical vein that makes life in Andalusia so charming; a fat Prussian grumbles at the beer-house: "The Bavarians are the link between a man and an Austrian. . . ."

It is for us Italians of the North to remember and to cause to be remembered that it is the South which has given to Italy the purest champions of the things of the mind—to begin with the anatomists of the School of Salerno, who first in Europe braved the fury of the ignorant by going in the darkness of the night to the cemetery to steal the corpses by which they might learn the secrets of life; that it is the South which has given us the earliest and most



devoted martyrs of our Risorgimento, among them those who were hanged under the Republic of 1799; that from their ashes arose, as avengers, the Spaventa, the Settembrini,<sup>1</sup> the De Sanctis and all the rest. For my part, if it were not that my stay between Bari, Salerno and Naples in 1943 was made longer by a far too slow military tactic for which Italy had to pay with cities destroyed, due to the blindness and fixed ideas of certain foreign governments, I could bless heaven that I remained for two years in the midst of a civilization far more refined than our own. I do not believe that there was in 1943-4 in any other spot in Italy a refuge like that of my house at San Pasquale a Chiaia, a refuge from which, through idleness, I did not descend into the shelters even during the most violent bombardment, but in which I had to pass a night in which I had the responsibility of the life of Croce, for two days my guest at Naples; we went down, the shelter was full of people—doctors, professors, lawyers, the typical Neapolitan middle classes—and Croce began to tell anecdotes of the time of Ferdinand II and then to discourse on Belli and Porta, of whom his hearers knew little; and when the alert ceased, all said: "What a pity! Let us hope for tomorrow evening. . . ."

The Italian of the middle class in the South is to the Italian of the rest of Italy as the latter is to the European of the North: the accentuation of qualities and defects is identical, and there is also analogy in the legends and fictions by which we try to explain this. Amongst us Italians of the North too the old picture of the "inefficient" Southerner sometimes obtains.

One might say that for a visitor who is content with the Museum, Vesuvius, Pompeii and Capri at Naples, the small middle-class citizen, well dressed and badly nourished, who idles in the Chiaia and the Toledo, gives the impression of a man who will never accomplish anything anywhere but will pass his life in idleness: one is surprised to learn that he cares less for music than the Northerners and is content with the facile Neapolitan melodies which one takes—and how mistakenly—for a supposed Parthenopean light-hearted happiness. Very few "foreigners" have really intruded into the nights of Piedigrotta—it is always night at Piedigrotta—to discover that the *gioia* is confined to drunken Germans and lusty Slavs, while the Neapolitan masses, mournful, hidden in

<sup>1</sup> Silvio Spaventa, born 1822 at Bomba (Chieti), died 1893. Luigi Settembrini, born at Naples 1813, died 1877.

the darkness, have discarded the smile assumed for the Toledo and the Via Partenope, to bewail the mediocrity of their lives, rendered more cruel by the fact that their sufferings too are mediocre.

The old stock portrait of the "idle Southerners" is no longer in fashion. It is enough to come in contact at Milan or Genoa—why not also in New York or Buenos Aires?—with business men and industrials from Apulia or the Basilicata: they are silent, obstinate, very hardworking, without wit: just, in fact, the reverse of the old model.

The struggle of the Lombards with the marshes of the Po valley lasted four or five centuries; but they ended in triumph and they have made of their lands one of the richest regions of Europe. In the South the work is more heroic because one has constantly to begin again; save in two or three privileged cases, it is almost everywhere something the same as on the slopes of Vesuvius where after every eruption new vines have to be planted, in a soil empty and virgin again. The struggle of the Southern Italian with his land is one of the most splendid and rare examples of human resistance, but one hears nothing of it, the newspapers are silent and there is no propaganda about it.

The Normans came to these Neapolitan Provinces; they were one of the most daring and adventurous peoples of their time: they proved it in England, where for centuries they imposed the French tongue as the current speech. But in South Italy they soon disappeared, swallowed up by the Neapolitans. The French and the Spaniards met later the same fate. Whoever saw the Naples of 1943-5 knows that in a certain sense it was the same and the English and Americans, laughing, admitted their defeat.

If we look to the reality of history, we find that nothing at all remains of the theory of an Hellenic South fatally different from a Germanic North. And races—if in this case one can speak of races—are like those rivers which disappear in a flash at the bottom of a valley and after a long journey underground suddenly appear again in the form of lakes or new sources.

The only real difference between North and South in Italy is of the economic order; the land south of Rome cannot be compared for richness to that to the north. Just as the civilization of Magna Grecia was probably less brilliant than we are told, so Rome was but a cruel step-mother to the little-known South whence came disagreeable rumours of agrarian revolts, and from which before the Roman conquest Carthage used to recruit her mercenaries.

The Southern Italians sometimes complain of the egoism of the industrial North. They ought, above all, to complain of the poets, both their own and others. Seven centuries before Christ, a Greek lyrical poet sang of Calabria as "the happiest and fairest country in the world", poor and tragic Calabria which will always be one of the most sterile countries of Europe. And it was thus for a thousand years from Virgil to Goethe. Literature was the involuntary instrument of the legend of the happy and fortunate South, which hardly troubled to move to gather the fruits of its fertile soil.

What is even more strange is that up to three generations ago the South itself believed this. It would be comic if it were not depressing to re-read today in the addresses that Naples sent to Victor Emanuel II in 1860, the description of the treasures that the ancient Kingdom of the Two Sicilies would, they said, put at the disposition of an Italy free and united. It was the result of the economic segregation in which the South had lived under the Bourbons, the result also of the extreme moderation of taxation, but above all, of the secular literary legend that had glorified various beautiful spots from Sorrento to the Conca d'Oro, but had ignored the fact that behind the orange groves and olive woods, hunger reigned; because the sun is only a deception for husbandmen without water, and in the South, in contrast with the rest of Italy, rain only falls in winter, and there is no river like the Po or even the meagre Arno, but only beds of torrents dried up in summer and deluging the plain in winter with disastrous floods. When one speaks of our South, one must never forget that the drought destroys three crops out of ten, with astronomical precision.

An historical fatality must be added to these natural conditions. The history of the North and of Central Italy is based essentially on the autonomous life of the Commune. The South, on the other hand, from the Abruzzi to Calabria, always accepted a single royal centre, first Benevento, then Naples. And this centre only managed to provide an organization that was feudal, the atmosphere of which remained, even when the system began to disappear, first politically and then legally.

It was the same in Sicily, in Sardinia, in Corsica; and the reason was always the same too: lack of industries and commerce, the only creators of that "*popolo minuto*" or "*grasso*", that from Florence to the cities of the Lombard League knew how to organize themselves against the "*grandi*" and against the feudatories of the

castles and strongholds, obliging them to live in the cities where they were quickly tamed.

The resurrection of the South is a problem of public works, of creating artificial lakes, of reforestation and of roads. These are essential before any agricultural reform can be undertaken with success. The misery is due to the drought. It is necessary to place at the disposal of the landless, land on which life can be supported, even though, for the first ten years, with hardship.

The problem is a difficult one, but it is the only one that really matters in Italy. An Italy, peaceful and serene, depends on a South that is happy and content. If I did not fear to seem paradoxical, I would add that one of my most profound reasons for optimism about the future of Italy is that all the great countries of Europe are full—but not Italy; we have within our own confines an Empire, in a certain sense colonial, but whose development and security do not depend on intimidating the natives, but rather on its own natives, our co-nationals who are among the most intelligent and wide-awake of the peoples of Europe.

But the transformation cannot be limited to something merely economic or social, it must be psychological. The stupid Mussolini and his nationalists thought the only rich countries were those with coal and mines. If this were true, how is it that sandy Denmark and mountainous Switzerland have become rich? If the Italians of the North and of the South so will it, our South can multiply by a hundredfold the export of our fruits, and our wines such as vermouth and marsala, of our tunny; it can in fact become one of the richest countries of Europe. It will perhaps surprise some in the North to know that even the metallurgical Corporations of Naples and Castellamare di Stabia are in the first class for technical ability and hard work; in the last months of the German occupation it was they who hid the most precious parts of their machinery for love and loyalty to their factories. The present writer was witness of their sorrow and their disillusion when the Allies—often because they were unable—did not give new life to industrial Naples. Thanks to the three years I passed in America, I saw at Chicago, at Cleveland, at New Haven and at San Francisco that some of our Southerners who had arrived there without a penny had succeeded in creating serious and solid industries.

Contrary to Cavour, the statesmen who succeeded him had always a horror of excessive expense. But after the follies of the Fascist régime one cannot but think that with a hundredth part of

what was dissipated in sterile wars in Ethiopia and Spain, and furtive annexations, the happy solution of the problem of the South might have become a reality, redoubling thus the moral and economic forces of our people.

## XV

### ITALY AND FOREIGN WRITERS AND VISITORS

I HAVE said in the preceding chapter that the railways powerfully contributed to the fusion of North and South, after the historical dissolution, so long resisted, of the Pontifical State. But it was easy for the Italians to find one another; the obstacle had been there a long time, it is true, but it was artificial. For foreigners, however, the result was the very opposite; the railways—and later, the rapidity of the automobile—made it less easy for them to enter into any real relation with Italian life, with the mental and spiritual life of ideas not only in the great cities, but in the quiet smaller cities of the country-side, and the provinces. After the advent of the railways, books appeared by foreigners, often full of beauty, on the Greek ruins in Calabria, on Milan or on Venice, on art in Sicily or in the Uffizi at Florence; but we no longer found among us a Goethe, a Stendhal, a Browning, a Shelley, wandering about among the *contadini* and humble folk.

In boyhood I had discovered at home, to my delight, some old guide-books of Italy of the eighteenth century, and I have never forgotten the emotion that I received from a *Guida di Viaggio in Italia per un Gentiluomo Polacco*, and its appendix, in four columns, of *Conversazione in italiano, latino, francese e polacco*. There was a little of everything, both in the book and in the “*Conversazione*”, and almost everything was dealt with together as in life: archaeology and cookery, music and women, high roads and receptions. It is a great contrast to those famous *Sensations d'Italie* in which Paul Bourget goes into ecstasies before Sienese pictures of the second class, and which seems like a cemetery of ideas that have been embalmed. One feels that authors of this kind can never really have lived in Italy, that, driven by the contracts with the publishers, they are only thinking of the magnificent pages they will build up from the notes scribbled in their pocket-books, and for this very reason there utterly escapes them that integration of the ancient and the actual which alone allows us to understand a living nation.

The Italian—and above all, the Italian of the people—is so complex and yet at the same time so simple that one can only smile at the foreigners who think they have discovered the key to the Italian character after passing a year or two in the peninsula.

It seems like a paradox, but I believe it is easier to understand the complexity of the Italian than his simplicity. How can a *contadino* or an Italian artisan be anything but complex when he is such an infallible judge of the moral character of the “foreigner”, of the “*signore*” with whom he has to deal? Woe to the new proprietor of a *podere* or of a *villa*, woe to the foreigner who has rented a house or apartment for three years, if the people around him sum him up as “proud” or “overbearing”; very soon there will be an emptiness about him and he will obtain nothing from anyone, even though he is ready to pay double what other foreigners are paying—“*forestieri*” and “*signori*” who are recognized as “*gentile*” and “*alla mano*”.

To understand a people, a foreign nation: that is a business in which intelligence and culture only serve if they are enlivened by human sympathy.

When at times I venture to maintain that I know China, the only subjective reason that I can furnish is that, when I saw again after twelve years the crooked carved roofs of the Yung-ting-men beneath the dusty sky of Chili, my heart beat almost as fast as though I had returned to my own country; and yet China, which has everything to offer and has been my mistress in relativity, knows nothing of sentimental emotion.

What makes the traveller is not the distance of the country visited but the capacity to see, to immerse himself in the spirit of the country to which he has travelled. I have seen the standardized traveller in Mongolia, and real travellers on the Lombard plain and in the villages of the Var. The capacity to understand is not to be acquired by literary experience, it is bought with our very life. The French who, wishing to penetrate beyond the museums, come to Italy saturated with Stendhal, and the Germans who come down with a Goethe in their hands, remind me of certain Oriental converts to Catholicism, who read in one of our Cathedrals the same Mass-book as the ordinary crowd of the faithful: they read, but their emotion is not the same.

Goethe himself only saw a fragment of Italy; he put aside the Middle Age with disgust, out of contempt for Germany perhaps, and Pagan—or unconsciously Protestant—he exaggerated his antipathy

for the contribution of the Church to Italian life from the origin of the Communes onward.

Stendhal without doubt loved all Italy, the Italy of Dante and that of the eighteenth century, the Italy of the churches and the palaces and that of the by-ways and taverns. But it is not only the Italy of Stendhal that is the true and real Italy, it is Stendhal himself who is essentially an Italian character; and it is necessary, in face of the problem of Stendhal, that Italians should see things as they really are, and hold to the reality—which is in itself fair and noble enough—and have nothing to do with dithyrambs. Among the many moral miseries of the Fascists there was this, that they exacted dithyrambs and not for our art: they looked for them anxiously, for our industries, magnificent certainly, but which had appeared in the world half a century before them, yet which they represented in their propaganda as creations of the régime. The same phenomenon of ingenuous vanity appeared four generations earlier in Japan; the Japanese in the earlier years of the Meji epoch hid and destroyed their lacquers and porcelains in order to show Europeans how “modern” they were. All this is even more ridiculous than it is odious; but if one desires the truth and not mere lyricism, one must not forget that the “Italianism” of Stendhal, intense though it was, was above all due to reaction from, and disgust of, the France of the “*enrichissez-vous*”; what we ought to admire most in Stendhal is the fact that he felt that the natural dignity of any man of the commonalty or of a *contadino* was the purest gem in the nobility of our people.

If Stendhal felt the profundity and the contrasts of our character it was because he lived in Italy as a man and not as a writer. And—as a Stendhalian might add—he lived in loneliness. Barrès was wrong to make Stendhal a “professor of energy”, in the sense of success in life; he might rather have said this of Balzac, who was ever in search of social success. The energy of Stendhal was concerned with the interior passions, not with external action.

Action never seemed worthy to him except when it did not make itself mediocre by looking for a reward. This explains perhaps the small success Stendhal had with women. He envied a man who knew how to love but not one who might have simply numerous adventures. He would have held Valmont of the *Liaisons dangereuses* in horror.

Byron and Chateaubriand, Lamartine and Ruskin, unlike Stendhal, never penetrated into the Italy of the mind, the heart and



the spirit. Their Italy was simply a pretext for their art. Stendhal was saved by the fact that he wrote only for far-away readers; a poor Consul of France at Cività Vecchia, he was fortunate enough not to find a publisher; while from the others, the celebrated writers, many in London and Paris, demanded Odes, Memoires d'Outre Tombe and books on Venice.

The conclusion, only apparently paradoxical, is: the more a people possess a literature rich and powerful, the more its artists have fixed its character on canvas and in frescoes famous everywhere, so much the more is this people crystallized for foreigners, enfolded in an asphyxiating mist of preconceived ideas whose prisoners they are, even when they believe themselves freed from it.

The *terribilità* of Dante is probably the origin of a whole series of psychological legends, as a whole side of Stendhal is only explained by his passionate love—almost the love of a collector—for Italian chronicles of the fifteenth century. I have known certain cultured Germans who maintained that the history of England was stained with blood, with violence and treason as that of no other European nation; when I showed my astonishment, they referred me to the plays of Shakespeare.

In conclusion: for us Italians it is above all the judgment which a foreign writer and visitor pronounces on our peasants and *contadini* whose roots are in the soil, that is the test with us of his psychological understanding; it is not that we look for nothing but praise of our artisans and peasants: the English novels of Ouida, so much in fashion in the time of our grandparents, romances in which every piping goatherd was a hero and every gondolier a poet, sound to us as false as when in idiotic hatred of Italy some English tourist only records of all his journey that some antiquarian of the Ponte Vecchio or the Via Costantinopoli offered him a false antique and succeeded in sticking him with it.

It would be better that foreigners should resign themselves to admitting that the Italian people, in spite of all their apparent cordiality, are a closed book to them; at least until they have lived for ten years in some Italian country-side. Perhaps they would get nearer the truth if they only knew how to observe, how to look at the vintagers on the Roman hillsides, the shepherds among the Abruzzi mountains, the proprietors of half an hectare of land in Liguria and in the Lunigiana. One cannot do less than admire the perfect equilibrium of their bearing, an equilibrium quite unconscious that is not affected even when they come down into the city

or have to wear the ugly *cappotto* of the conscript. If you look at a regiment of infantry passing down the street of some Italian city, you will receive an impression of neatness and general refinement such as you will get in no other country. He who—like myself—has lived beside these men in the relative liberty of wartime, will not have forgotten their marvellous ability to take advantage of even the rarest and most casual expedient, and even before orders have been issued, know how to judge and sum up with an astonishing exactness the real value of their leaders. Those Lombard peasants, gigantic and gay, or the Apulians, stumpy and melancholy, with whom I have passed so many days, miserable or fortunate, on the Eastern front from 1915 to 1918, seem to me the living illustrations of a phrase of Palladio's: "that man ought to look to four things, that is, the air, the water, the land and their mastery; for of these three exist by nature, and the fourth by the will and the might of man."

Our regiments in Albania had no contact with our Allies; but the fifty thousand Italians on the Macedonian front fought alongside the Serbs, the French and the English. All were fighting against the same enemy; whose units were so placed that Germans, Austrians, Hungarians and Bulgarians were accurately mixed and interlocked by orders from Berlin.

Writing these pages in a period of tension between Italy and Jugo-Slavia, it is my duty to recall and record that the fraternity and instinctive sympathy between Italians and Serbs on the old Eastern front were the admiration and envy of all there, including veteran sceptics like Guillaumat and Franchet d'Esperey, successively commanding the Allies at Salonica. After the Armistice of November 1918 Franchet d'Esperey came to Constantinople, whither I had preceded him, as one of the three High Commissioners of the Entente charged with governing Turkey *pro tempore*. He spoke to me again of that Italo-Jugo-Slav understanding established on the field of battle that was in such contrast with the mean political business of *divide et impera* which Sonnino was carrying out at the time at the Consulta, and to which I put an end in 1920 when I succeeded him.

I replied to the French General:

"It is a pity, dear General, that you foreign personages do not see when you are in Italy what others see. If you could take into notice and account the good sense and generosity of the Italian of the people, you would be deeply struck and full of admiration. It

is on this fundamental quality of our people that I count to disperse one of these days the vanity and prejudice which menace our future in the East and in the Balkans."

Just as nationalism is in Italy the worst enemy of patriotism, so rhetoric with its eternal repetitions about our "millenary civilization" is one of the worst and most direct of the obstacles that prevent foreign writers and visitors from recognizing and expressing spontaneously the splendid qualities of our people.

## WE AND OUR NEIGHBOURS THE FRENCH

I HAVE insisted many times in these pages on the distance that separates Italian popular sentiment from our literature. And that is equally true of what is written on the relations between the French and ourselves. A new proof of a certain fundamental likeness between the two peoples may be found in the fact that the same happens more or less in France; there too one finds a kind of literature permeated with rancour against and a scorn of Italy; but it has no correspondence with the feelings of the mass of the nation.

A million Italians live in France. Those who have been able to observe them in the regions where they are most numerous, Savoy, Dauphiné, Provence, Languedoc, and further north in the ancient Ile-de-France—Paris and its wide environs—know that a real fraternity existed, until the Fascist invasion of 1940, between the Italians and the French in all the cities and villages. I lived for three years in maritime Provence in an old *mas*<sup>1</sup> that I possessed by the sea between Toulon and Hyères. I know the life of hundreds of towns and villages round about among the mountains or in the plain where often the population is half Italian, half French. There was never a dispute or a quarrel about national questions; it was the same in Savoy, in Dauphiné and elsewhere, and was evidence of the lofty civilization of the two peoples. And in consequence no one believed there that a Mussolini could make war against France. They used to say, stretching an arm towards the piazzas, the homes and the market-places there: "Never, mind you, it's impossible."

The same sense of security appeared, generally speaking, among the upper classes in Paris, but for reasons in which sentiment went for nothing. Even when Mussolini spat insults and reproaches at France, what did they matter to France of the *front populaire*, in face of an Italy in which a strike was unknown? The French would think and say: Mussolini well knows what services we have

<sup>1</sup> An isolated peasant's house of an old Provençal type.

rendered him, from Stresa to Munich, and what further services we are ready to render him; why should he attack us?

But the relations between two peoples, each with a long history, have roots in a complex past in which benefits and wrongs, reasons for sympathy and reasons for rancour tend to reactions, often enough unconscious.

Leaving Catherine de' Medici to the rare Italophobes of France, and the Sicilian Vespers to the still more antiquated haters of France in Italy, it is impossible to deny that the French Revolution, although the happy leaven of liberty, was also a cause of dread and of rancour such as always happens with a foreign military occupation.

One of the most popular songs in France at that period in which the Revolutionary armies invaded us, runs thus in two of its verses:

Enfin de Paris au Japon,  
De l'Africain au Lapon,  
L'Egalité se fonde.

Tyrans, le sort en est jeté  
le bonnet de la Liberté  
fera le tour du monde.

The French people, feeling themselves to be the "pattern of the world", as André Chenier wrote,<sup>1</sup> believed that their conquests were "acts of philanthropy" towards peoples still immersed in the darkness of "reaction".

But many Italians were singing quite other songs. I still know by heart—so tenacious are the memories of childhood—a long *cantilena* that an old domestic servant, who had it from her grandmother, used to sing to me of an evening to send me to sleep in that isolated Lunigiana where, when Depretis reigned, they still sang of an evening recounting the robberies of the *Cisalpini* and the violence of the Russians. Here are a few lines:

Selle, stoffe, morsi, briglie,  
copertine, sproni, striglie,  
i lenzuoli, i materaggi,  
le fettucce pei sellaggi,  
panno blù, panno scarlatto;  
poverini, ch'hanno fatto?

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<sup>1</sup> "l'exemple du monde" (Avis aux Français, 1790).

Le coperte per i letti,  
 gli stivali, i fazzoletti,  
 le camicie, le calzette,  
 i calzoni, le berrette,  
 la marmitta, il tondo, il piatto ;  
 poverini, ch'hanno fatto ?

The lament continued, naming dozens of household articles carried off to France : with them had also departed, in a long line of official wagons, cases containing the most famous pictures and statues of Italy. An Italian chronicler of the time, G. A. Sala, recorded that "an invasion of Goths and Huns would have done less damage than these liberators of the human race". But perhaps the explanations that came from France were more irritating :

"N'est-ce pas dans le pays où il y a les meilleures lois et le plus de lumières, chez le peuple le plus puissant et le plus industriel, chez la seule nation qui ait une école, que seront le mieux placés et conservés les plus beaux ouvrages de la Grèce et de Rome ?" <sup>1</sup> Of the three terms of the Republican formula "*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*", the Italians had probably known better than the French, and for a long time, "fraternity and equality", and it could not have been otherwise since the feudal castle had long since been domesticated by our general good nature even before the Arcadia made equality the fashion. The diffusion of the love of liberty, of political liberty, that is, was, on the other hand, the effect of French ideas, and it was so noble a gift that the remembrance of old complaints seemed worse than contemptible, almost unworthy, even though the complaints were natural enough at the time.

So it will be, in the end, with our criticism, after 1945, of certain errors of the Allied governors and generals towards Italy ; the day will come when our children will only remember the supreme benefit of the liberation of Italy from the Germans, that is to say, if this liberation is indeed a reality and not the ephemeral fruit of a second armistice, as happened in 1919.

There was a French general at the end of the eighteenth century but before the nineteenth, who, in spite of all his mistakes in regard to us, our fathers could not but love : Napoleon. Perhaps they felt in him the crowned Italian, the Emperor of the Ghibelline tradition. Taine was wrong—owing to his hatred of the Revolu-

<sup>1</sup> *La Décade*, 30 Messidor, An. IV.

tion—when in order to lower Bonaparte he saw in him the Italian *condottiere* of the fifteenth century. No, Napoleon appeared Italian to our great-grandfathers because they felt in their blood the fixed idea of Dante: the monarchy of the world.

The idea of the union of all nations under the sceptre of a feudal Caesar does not belong to the spirit of the French Revolution. Napoleon must have got it from his far-off ancestors of the Lunigiana. One recalls Dante's ideal of the Emperor: the master of a single state that "every day enlarges its frontiers and never consents even to consider the ocean as its limit". That is Napoleon on all his battlefields and in intention, also at Boulogne.

Even though he did not succeed in being Emperor in the Italian fashion, Napoleon rendered the most precious service to Italy by destroying the Holy Roman Empire, the most dangerous of all our musty illusions of the past.

He destroyed with it every antiquated dream, whether Ghibelline or Guelph. Italy became at last what Machiavelli had wished, a nation belonging to itself, not an imperial dream; the ancient shadow of the crown of the Caesars was dispersed for ever; that shadow which had at times struck Italians to silence and respect in the very moment when they had defeated the Germans: as when in the night of Holy Saturday, 1175, they had encircled the German army, Frederick Barbarossa saved himself and his followers ordering the imperial heralds:

Tu intima, o Araldo, passa l'imperator romano,  
del divo Giulio erede, successor di Traiano.

and Carducci re-evoking the scene, continues:

Deh come allegri e rapidi si sparsero gli squilli  
De le trombe teutoniche fra il Tanaro e il Po,  
quando in cospetto all'aquila gli animi e i vessilli  
d'Italia s'inchinarono e Cesare passò.

When Napoleon swept away the old Italian mists by destroying the Caesarian throne, his decision was the origin of dangers and sorrows for France.

It was the end of the Holy Roman Empire that opened the way for the rapacious Prussian conquest of all Germany, Austria included, if one may so say, under the cover of the Triple Alliance. For Napoleon did not feel as a Frenchman would do, even though he loved France as the instrument of his own glory. It is strange

that anyone should question that; and even more strange as he confessed it himself (without realizing it, that is, without calculation), when in his Testament of St. Helena he declared his desire to be buried "on the banks of the Seine in the midst of the French people whom I have loved so much". One only speaks thus of a people which is not one's own.

The Italians pardoned Napoleon everything: exactions, corrupt and presumptuous envoys (except the honest Eugène de Beauharnais), artificially established principalities for the Bourbons of Spain and his sister Elisa. He had created a noble symbol, the Kingdom of Italy; and when he had been crowned with the Iron Crown, he had exclaimed in Italian: "Guai a chi la tocca!" That was enough for our fathers.

Italian literature of the nineteenth century—whatever was to be asserted later during the Fascist period—rose to a new life through the fortunate influence of France, and to begin with there was Giuseppe Parini who sang:

Forse vero non è, ma un giorno è fama  
che fûr gli uomini eguali, e ignoti nomi  
fûr plebe e nobiltà.

Parini, who loyally served the Cisalpine Republic and only retired into private life when the French tore down the Crucifix from the great Hall of the Commune of Milan, thereupon declared: "Where the citizen Christ cannot enter, how should I remain?"

The few French writers who have wished to discover in our literature of the nineteenth century a pretended hatred or rancour against France have never been able to find more than two names of real men of letters: Alfieri and his *Misogallo*,<sup>1</sup> Gioberti and his *Primato*,<sup>2</sup> and a third, sacred to Italy and to the world: Mazzini. Authors are representative of their time, even in spite of themselves: when Bernardin de Saint-Pierre asked Rousseau whether Saint-Preux was he, Jean Jacques replied: "No, Saint-Preux is not altogether what I have been, but rather what I should wish to have been." Still more profoundly true therefore of their personal reality.

Alfieri wrote the *Misogallo*, a collection of virulent epigrams

<sup>1</sup> The *Misogallo* (1793-8) is a collection of verse and prose against the French Revolutionists.

<sup>2</sup> *Del Primato morale e civile degli Italiani* (1843).



against the men of the Revolution rather than against the principles of the Revolution, for the poet had sung with enthusiasm the Fourteenth of July, 1789, and the fall of the Bastille.

Alfieri was an ardent republican; but perhaps he was even more Count Alfieri than he knew; he had as mistress the wife of the Earl of Albany, the head of the ancient Stuart dynasty.

These titles meant nothing good to the *comites* of 1793 which expelled Alfieri from Paris, where he had established himself in order to look after an edition of his Republican tragedies which Didot was publishing. Alfieri's anti-French hatred was hatred of the injustice done him and even more the result of disillusion.

Since no one was more Italian than Vittorio Alfieri, one might say that for him at least the old foreign saying about "revenge, being a dish that the Italians eat cold", was true. But after writing the *Misogallo*, Alfieri thought no more about it; he established himself in Florence, and pursued with sarcasms even more bitter the ephemeral Austro-Russian success, and confounded in a common and equal contempt Napoleon (whom the journalists represented as an antique hero) and the Legitimists and their impotent fury. France had the luck to be able to wreak a magnificent revenge on the author of the *Misogallo*; when he died, all his manuscripts came to the Public Library of Montpellier, where they are still piously preserved. The poor but proud country squire would not have appreciated the reason for this exodus of his manuscripts; all the more since the reason was that his royal but ageing mistress, whom he had watched over for many years, fell in love with a young and good-looking painter of Montpellier who in his turn left to his birth-place the manuscripts of his predecessor in the bed of the Countess of Albany.

The French who know the *Misogallo*—most of them have only heard of its existence—ought also to know that it has fallen into complete oblivion in Italy.

The most just and the most complete anthology of Italian poetry is, in my opinion, the *Golden Book of Italian Poetry* published at Oxford by Lauro de Bosis, the young poet who was drowned at sea in 1931 after a daring flight over Rome where he dropped manifestos to recall the King to his duty—in vain. In this truly golden volume there does not appear a single one of the *misogallic* verses of Alfieri.

The case of Vincenzo Gioberti is different.

The restless little Piedmontese *abate* was suffocating in the police-

ridden Turin of Carlo Alberto ; his head was bursting with too much reading which prevented him from having any original ideas of his own. At last he succeeded in having one during his long exile—from 1833 to 1845—in France and in the then very French city of Brussels. But he felt no gratitude to France ; irascible like nearly all philosophers who are full of certainties, he resented that France should have been the cradle of Sensismo<sup>1</sup> ; in his mind Condillac appeared as a personal enemy ; he discovered or thought he had discovered a new philosophy, and ended by believing that this philosophy belonged of right to Italy and that he, Vincenzo Gioberti, had the mission of defending Italy's right to it ; whence arose the idea of writing that *Primato morale e civile degli Italiani* that was so immensely popular and that brought both good and evil to our people ; good because it dissipated our feeling of inferiority ; evil, much evil, because it made many believe that instead of advancing proudly but modestly and with tenacity in making good three centuries of time lost, it was enough to present to the world our genealogical tree.

The book, which appeared five years before the great revolutionary movement of 1848, met the fate that it could not but have ; it incited the Italians to rise from the dead and echoed profoundly among all those breathlessly longing for the liberty of our country : but all the rest of the book was ignored : both its system of philosophy and the pretentious and vulgar attacks on our neighbours. The name of Gioberti remains among those that helped to create the atmosphere of '48 and it is right that it should be so. But his intellectual work is dead, without leaving a trace on our minds. Francesco De Sanctis was probably thinking of the attacks of the Turin *abate* against France and the French when he wrote : " In Gioberti there was uppermost just a fiery imagination. When he piles up his injurious epithets you take two steps backward fearing to encounter a raging madman : do not be afraid : all that heat is exterior, not a profound impetus of the imagination. Gioberti at home was a man placid and serene, nervous and excitable, it is true, and capable of suddenly raising his voice and as suddenly lowering it. He was often distraught, even in conversation. A serious man having begun a discourse, carries it to its end. Gioberti was often turned aside and distracted. It was so even in his writings ; he often leaves one idea to follow another. Behind

<sup>1</sup> Sensism ; a doctrine that all the operations of the mind and understanding are derived from the senses.

the splendid imaginative writer, often original in form, according to the Italian genius, you do not find a profound thinker nor a statesman."

More strange is it that sometimes it has been thought in France to attach the qualification "Francophobe" to such a sovereign name as that of Mazzini; the most serious review in France, the *Revue des deux Mondes*, that on the death of Mazzini in 1872 spoke of him as fifty years later Lenin was spoken of, so long as he lived never named him without adding, "*dangereux révolutionnaire haïssait la France*".

The contrary is the truth. In 1849 Mazzini saw his dearest friends struck down on the bastions of Rome by French bullets; but from the Campidoglio where he sat as Triumvir of the Roman Republic, he decreed on March 7th:

"Whereas between the French people and Rome there is not nor can be a state of war; that Rome is defending, as is her right and duty, her own individuality; and deprecating as a crime against their common faith any cause of quarrel between the two Republics; and whereas the Roman people do not hold soldiers accountable for deeds committed in obeying the orders of a deceived government; The Triumvirate decrees: Art. I—The French made prisoners on April 30th are free, and will be sent to the French camp."

Was this merely a clever piece of politics towards an invader a hundred times more numerous and better armed? It might be argued that it was. Mazzini indeed showed during the whole duration of the Roman Republic that it was not necessary to be a cynic in order to govern with a shrewd prudence. But the decree certainly expressed too his most intimate feelings. Here is what he had written seventeen years earlier in 1832 in a message to German youth:

"Men of Germany, you are establishing truly and honourably your nationality and no one will rise to threaten it. Then only will you have the right not to reckon among your obstacles a people which has worked with so much energy for the whole of Europe. This people dragged on by a despot has invaded you, but even so France brought you and has left you very considerable blessings."

These phrases do not, it is true, conform very certainly with the tradition of the Treaty of Westphalia, but is it then so certain that the policy of Westphalia was in the long run useful and fruitful for France?

In 1871, after the victories of Prussia, Mazzini gave an explanation of these victories that produced a profound impression both in Italy and in England.

“In France the Empire, by reason of the conditions inherent in that system and especially because of the necessity it was under to make the army a weapon not of the nation, but of a party in peril, has diminished in the soldier, naturally bold, the conscience and enthusiasm of a citizen, and has weakened, where that conscience remained, the link between the soldier and the leader without which victory is impossible. . . . The leaders were chosen not for merit or character but for their devotion, true or presumptive, to Bonapartism; the generals expressly chosen for their experience of war in Algeria. . . . These men . . . had acquired unrebuked the habits and vices of Pretorians . . .; depredations were committed as in the Russian army . . . tradition. . . .

“The soldier, acute observer as he is and quick to find fault, especially in France, guessed all this and lost faith in his officers and so lost the spirit of discipline. Founded in corruption, the Empire perished of itself. The reports that reached Louis Napoleon on the preparations for war and on the state of the army were deceptive; the truth would have revealed the havoc brought about by cupidity. The reports that reached him that South Germany was ready to rise against Prussia were equally false.”

And further on, in a passage that might have been written fifty years later at the time when Poincaré believed that a separatist movement in the Ruhr and Palatinate could be provoked from without :

“The money poured out among the Catholics of these regions to encourage them to work for France, which in view of German patriotism would always have been wasted, has swollen the purses of the secret agents employed in the work.”

And lastly :

“The unfaithful copyist of his uncle, Louis Napoleon never verified, always trusted; a deceiver, he was deceived. When after he arrived on the field the truth broke upon him, it was late and he found himself, after having declared war and chosen the moment for his attack, condemned to the defensive, as incapable of marching on Mayence, as of operating from Strasburg against South Germany; incapable too of destroying the neighbouring centres where the German railways met. Inert and unable to move, he awaited the attack and was exposed to it. The traditional valour of

the French soldier was not enough, in the unfavourable conditions prepared by corruption and the incapacity of the leaders."

These pages of Mazzini's, severe as they are on dictatorship, were, in 1870 when they were published, even more eloquent in favour of France in neutral countries. At the end of this work, turning to Germany and to France, Mazzini added :

" Guided by a greedy monarchy, Germany in her turn has strayed from the right way that respect for her conscience should have taught her not to leave, and has substituted for the right to defend herself a conception of revenge that will sow the seeds of new wars. May God and the people prevent it. And may France rise again to the influence we look for from her."

In all he wrote of France Mazzini was prophetic. The loftiest spirits in France spoke with the same frankness, after the ephemeral diplomatic triumphs of 1919 and after the lightning defeats of 1940, due as were those of September 1943 in Italy to the mental insufficiency and moral cowardice of the generals, not to any failure of courage on the part of the soldier.

There is another name, this time that of a mere politician, Crispi, which has at times been cited in France as a proof of anti-French prejudice in Italy, at least during the period of the Triple Alliance. There can be no doubt that contrary to his predecessors and successors, Crispi often seemed to wish to give the Triple Alliance an aggressive twist against France. In reality, the old Sicilian conspirator had only one fault: to be the opposite of a statesman, being too emotional and too bound up in negative traditions. I can still see the ironical expression of Giolitti when he told me that when he was Minister at the Treasury with Crispi, the latter called him one morning at dawn to confide to him a terrible secret: it was this, that France had decided on a surprise attack on Spezia, but that he by a rapid movement was countering the danger. Nothing of the sort had ever been dreamt of; Crispi had accepted one of the usual reports of secret agents that are almost always quite worthless; but that did not prevent Crispi from congratulating himself to his last days that a man of his temper had been at the head of the Government in such a risky moment.

For Crispi, a Sicilian, the French occupation of Tunisia in 1881 was an unhealable wound; and it was then there began in him a latent distrust of French diplomacy. But let us be just: was it not a President of the Republic who replied to Bismarck when he

offered at the Congress of Berlin to help France to seize Tunis : “ *Est-ce que ce bougre-là veut nous brouiller à tout jamais avec les Italiens ?* ” The trouble is that in politics it is so much easier to remember the faults of others than our own. . . .

The period of Crispi apart, the truth is that the Triple Alliance was always considered and used in Italy as a simple security for peace and as a guarantee of territorial integrity and of the *status quo* in the Mediterranean.

There is a despatch of Visconti-Venosta, one of the most clear-sighted precursors of Crispi at the Consulta (it is a secret despatch setting out the whole mind of the Italian Minister), in which one finds defined with perfect exactness the motive with which Italy later entered the Triplice :

“ If war should be provoked by the folly or imprudence of France or if it should result from the clerical problem, our position would be clear and we should have the same interests directly in common with the Germans. But if war should come as the result of a German decision to make aggression against France, Italy would not be in a position to take part in the war alongside Germany ; for we should seem to be not an ally but a paid assassin. Besides, the result of a war between France and Germany would in any case be dangerous and harmful for Italy. If Germany must again crush France, she would end by dismembering her in a way that she would think, quite wrongly, definite—one of those plans both excessive and artificial, and therefore ephemeral, in the manner of those adopted by Napoleon to make and break his treaties of peace. Now Italy could have neither power nor future in a Europe that had lost its balance.”

If I have quoted this document it is because in spite of the difference of the times and the situation, the words of the old Italian statesman are unfortunately applicable to the mad policy that seventy years later Mussolini adopted against France, whose military power had already been destroyed by the German armies. Not a few Italians were angered when Roosevelt defined the Fascist aggression as “ a stab in the back ” ; they see now that a great patriot, a disciple of Mazzini and Cavour, defined as “ paid assassin ” the nation which would have consented to do what the Fascist leader did.

Fascism is now dead, as Pétainism is dead in France. It is the duty of the two peoples to look forward, not back.

It is the duty of the two peoples to pause for a moment before

reality and to get rid of the legends and the myths which a miserable nationalism has created on this side and on that.

Where is the Italian or the Englishman who is not ready with a whole string of stereotyped phrases about those damned Frenchmen, so intellectual and consequential? He who would paint a France after this fashion forgets that her written constitution and her geometrical division date from the Constituent Assembly and after from the will of a man who wished to make of France a gigantic barracks—Bonaparte. The gradual and spontaneous evolution of French history before the Revolution shows us through the centuries a political organization not less empirical and irrational than that of the arch-empirical organization of England.

Again, one talks too much about French nationalism. Apart from those who have made “patriotism” a monopoly or a career—and in Italy they are not lacking—the idea of one’s country is in France a synonym for a certain sort of life freely accepted by all. France considers herself a family of which all its members are happy to form a part. If there be any people of whom the definition of Renan’s corresponds to the truth, that people is the French: “The desire of living together and of maintaining undivided the inheritance they have received.” Inheritance, inheritance undivided: the French master work is solid because it has been slowly built; the French would be wrong to take umbrage if someone were to remind them that not long before 1870 two Archdukes of Hapsburg-Lorraine were received in Nancy with the cry: “Long live our Dukes.” For it was only after 1870 in the misery of defeat that Nancy felt herself entirely French. It is not always that the intoxicating nectar of victory is the best chain of national unity; rather it is sorrow and defeat that will sometimes create in a people the noblest moral union: so it was with us in 1917 when we learnt a salutary lesson from the misfortunes which had befallen us.

The exaggerated myth of French militarism is still going about, and this is not only a result of the imperialistic tradition, humanitarian in character, of the year II, but also of the flashy and inconsistent phraseology of certain pseudo-men of letters, such as Déroulède and of such pseudo-heroes as Boulanger. But if we study the essence of the French people and disregard ephemeral appearances, we cannot but discover a passionate love of peace: a hundred times under the monarchical régime the States General tried to prevent their sovereigns from launching into war, so that

under Louis XIV the people, then powerless, stamped his wars with the name of "*guerres de magnificence*". Of the first great French adventure of invasion, that of Charles VIII in Italy—an adventure for which an Italian, Lodovico Sforza was largely responsible—a contemporary, Commines, wrote that "every wise and reasonable man condemned it".

If in 1851 and '52 the French people willingly received Louis Napoleon, it was out of fear of reckless social movements; but the weak adventurer, to make himself acceptable, had to turn to the peasant of France and declare to them: "The Empire is Peace." The French people were in fact indifferent to the "shame of the Treaties of 1815". They were right, because the Treaties—too much vilified in France in the Romantic period—had had the wisdom not to wound the dignity of France, leaving her frontiers inviolate: a precedent that the Allies would have done well not to forget in regard to Italy, victim as she was of a Fascism that they had imprudently caressed. It would in fact be dangerous to forget that the only wars which troubled the world for half a century after 1815 were the Italian wars of 1848, 1849, 1859 and 1866, all born from the fact that the obvious necessity for the territorial integrity of Italy had been misunderstood in the Treaty of Vienna.

If in 1871 all the French voted in favour of Thiers it was because the little Provençal lawyer represented peace in spite of his too numerous volumes on the first Bonaparte. If the greatest statesman of the Third Republic, Ferry, was so unpopular, the cause of his unpopularity was the colonial war which he imposed on the country; he was abandoned by all because he was "*le tonkinois*". It might almost be said that the great French colonial Empire was created by the Republic without the electors knowing anything about it; the French conquest of Central Africa was the idea and the work of an Italian, Brazzà.

Again: saving the case of the two Bonapartes, both accepted at the start as internal peacemakers—the French people that has the reputation of being militaristic, never tolerated soldiers or militarists at the head of the government. The victorious generals after 1918 had no influence, and this corresponds to the rule. The popularity of Charles de Gaulle on his return to France after the liberation was certainly not due to his *képi* and its oak leaves, but rather to his having been, during the years of servitude and shame, the true interpreter, from his exile in London, of the hopes and the honour of France.



Face to face with France, we Italians ought not to try to attenuate or to deny the horrible crime committed by Fascism towards the French people; but rather we ought to remember, for it is the truth, that there were many Italians who warned the Minister in Paris of the danger; and there were very many Frenchmen who were willingly blind to it and refused to believe it.

If I am allowed to cite myself as witness, I can truly say that I sounded the alarm from the first day; ambassador as I was in Paris when Mussolini came to power, one hour after I learnt that he, under the illusion that he was winning my favour, named me with many compliments as plenipotentiary at Lausanne for the peace with Turkey, I sent him a categorical telegram of my resignation which upset people for the moment, but which they presently wished to forget.

What happened next in France?

When Mussolini embarked on the half-infantile, half-criminal enterprise of Corfù, Poincaré was one of the principal saviours of the Duce, though that adventure was the first betrayal of the League of Nations and in consequence the first open breach in the only system that might have guaranteed the independence of France. "Why did you not take into account," I asked Poincaré once, in the last year of his life when he was abandoned by all and my rare visits were among the few that broke his solitude, "why did you not realize that to aid Mussolini to save himself after the crime of Corfù was equivalent to creating a precedent for further illegal actions that might have been mortal for France?"

And he, free at last from any political calculation, conscious as he was of approaching the tomb:

"You are right," he replied; "but it was impossible to do anything else: almost all my majority were enthusiastic for Mussolini, 'the saviour of the west', as they called him. They would have accused me of wishing to repeat the episodes of the *Carthage* and the *Manouba*<sup>1</sup>; and might have brought again the odious accusation that I was anti-Italian."

I have wished to repeat textually the words of a dying man, which are of special importance as the key to a long misunder-

<sup>1</sup> When Italy at war with Turkey had begun the conquest of Libya, on January 16 and 19, 1912 two French ships, the *Carthage* and the *Manouba*, were stopped by Italy, the first because it was carrying a French aviator with his plane certainly destined for the Turks, the second because it had on board 16 Turks destined for the seat of war.

standing about which those Italians who, like myself, profoundly love their country must not let themselves be deceived, but, just for this reason I wish and have always wished for an active and profound Franco-Italian *entente*. Scarcely had Mussolini begun to deny, even in his speeches, with phrases *à la* Edouard Drumont, the loftiest and purest traditions of our Risorgimento, when this extraordinary thing befell: that those few in France who hated in secret and defamed in public a free Italy, all the descendants of those who under Mac-Mahon had shouted for the rupture of relations with Italy, the grandsons of those who, with the Spanish woman Eugénie, had in 1870 preferred the defeat of France to the recall of the French troops that in Rome represented the betrayal of Italian Unity, all these suddenly became admirers of Italy, all rushed to Rome to be received by the Duce, by the "man we want ourselves at the Elysée"; by instinct they knew that Italy was no longer Italy. Today we can say to them: "What you loved in Fascism was your old spite as reactionaries; in Mussolini you saw a man who might help you to strike down the Republic, and it mattered little to you if France herself suffered in the adventure; if you hated the Italians faithful to the thought of Mazzini so much, it was because they meant for you a regret or an accusation."

At the time of the Ethiopian war it was even worse than at the time of Corfù; if Poincaré had helped Mussolini to "save his face", Laval now became his official accomplice. The same thing happened in the war against Republican Spain.

On the eve of the second world war, in August 1939, certain Italians put the French on their guard against the danger and later against Mussolini's lie of non-belligerency, but in Paris they tried continually, almost everywhere, to silence these Italians. The lofty courage of Maurice Sarraut was necessary to ignore these high-placed "appeasers" who wanted to soften down and censure my articles in the *Dépêche de Toulouse*. In regard to these articles and to those which appeared in *Ordre* and in *Œuvre* (not yet fallen into the hands of Déat), the *Gringoire* wrote that they proved that I was one of the three worst enemies of France, and named them: Churchill, Benes, Sforza: I was flattered by this.

Mussolini had always, even in the early months of 1940, two men devoted to him in the Council of French Ministers. Traitors? Bought? No, worse.

There will always be traitors, but with negligible exceptions, one knows who they are. But these men were bad Frenchmen

out of cowardice and snobbishness, because to believe in Mussolini was the fashion in "good society" until May 1940. One day when a clear-sighted minister during a meeting of the Council of Ministers deplored that so many exports of war material had been authorized for Italy, one of these bad Frenchmen, feeling himself inculpated, replied: "I did not know that Count Sforza had the right to speak here." During that tragic period in which perhaps the situation might still have been saved, at least as regards Italy, many Italians, frightened by such voluntary blindness, did not cease to warn their French friends: Don Sturzo in London, Guglielmo Ferrero at Geneva, Silone in Zurich and all our friends in France, and first among them Carlo Rosselli, until Mussolini had him assassinated by the *Cagouards*, the more directly responsible of whom was given the Legion of Honour by that "noble old man" of Vichy, Pétain, a clear confession this, that the *Cagouards* were his creatures. But the most frequent reply that my friends received was this: "You are people infected with party passions."

For some of the definite and precise steps which Italians took to save France, let me refer to what I have said in another book of mine, *L'Italia dal 1914 al 1944 quale io la vidi*.<sup>1</sup>

But I have already said that what matters is to look forward; woe to those who lose themselves in recriminations.

The French and the Italians will not forget it: these last years have provided the touchstone to discover imbeciles. How was one to know if someone in France was a traitor, or just wanting, just a fool? Bring the conversation round to Italy and you could judge him at once if he spoke of Italy like certain horrible convict guards of the Italian prisoners in Tunisia and Algeria used to speak, gentry who after years of collaboration with the Germans were trying to "make good" in this fashion. And the same in Italy; one knows in Italy what to think of a man who in a Europe and a world which impose new duties on us if they are to be saved, chatters the old anti-French stupidities.

By good luck—at least if we are not bent on suicide—sane and generous Frenchmen and well-balanced and loyal Italians form the immense majority of the two peoples.

After such ruin—not only material—the same tremendous task is imposed on all; if they wish to get "*fuor dal pelago alla riva*" both Frenchmen and Italians must find the way not only to respect

<sup>1</sup> Chapter XX.

but to admire one another. How is this to be done? It is enough not to oppose the laws of the future.

They oppose the laws of the future who think of the nations of Europe as isolated compartments. In the Europe of tomorrow one will breathe infinitely more largely than that. Arch-Italian as I am, I hope with all my heart that these marvellous flowers of the civilization of our world, which are Italy and France, England and Russia, Holland and Portugal, Spain and Bohemia, and so on, may continue to enrich humanity with their art, their thought, and the respective traditions which spring from the mysterious roots in their soil. For tomorrow no one will be able to claim that he belongs to a single nation. We shall certainly be good Italians, good French and good Poles, but we must at the same time feel that we are members of a European—perhaps of a world-organization. The peoples who do not understand this will perhaps not perish, but they will vegetate. And tomorrow—as indeed always even in the past—to vegetate will mean to count for nothing in the world. History is a cemetery of peoples who were content to vegetate: Persia in Asia, Venice in Europe were once two great States, but when they thought they could live on their past, very soon—in one or two centuries—they were only two famous relics.

The French and the Italians are too intelligent to go against history. They will know how to show to the world a principle of union, even rudimental, and the world will admire them as pioneers of humanity; an achievement which many times they accomplished in the past. But this time they will be admired even more because deeds have this about them which is formidable, that they strike more forcibly and inspire respect more quickly than ideas.

I hate generalizations, and therefore I will offer none here. Already in the time of Briand I had observed, with a friendship which permitted a criticism, that what seemed to me harmful in the project for a European union was the formal label that had been stuck on it precisely like a postage stamp: United States of Europe. Briand erred because, ardent Frenchman as he was and a passionate patriot, he was all the time thinking, above all, about the salvation of France; he had not first and foremost thought of Europe; hence this cold, theoretical plan.

The French and the Italians of tomorrow must think and feel like Mazzini, who said: "I love my country because I love all countries." If far-sighted French and Italian statesmen are capable

of an accomplished fact—whether it be an alliance or an understanding open to all and first of all to a democratic Spain whose international spirit is extraordinarily mature—the world will first of all be astonished and then will imitate: and in any case everywhere it will win respect.

## XVII

### WE AND OUR NEIGHBOURS THE SWISS

**M**ANY were the underground intrigues of Fascism against Switzerland; and a lot of money was spent to invent "unredeemed" Italians of the Ticino valley. Who knows but what all that will come out sooner or later and create a halo of pity rather than of horror against the inept Mussolini and his hierarchy. Nothing, in fact, could have been more harmful to Italy than a policy whose object was to upset the Swiss Confederation; but one must have been blind to have imagined that Switzerland could continue to live, composed only of Swiss speaking French and some speaking German, minus the third essential element, the Ticinese confederates who are infinitely more useful to Italy as the tenacious representatives of our language and our culture in the most central and cosmopolitan of European States than if they had become one more Italian prefecture. (The same might be said for Fiume, which as a Free State, such as I created it at Rapallo, completely Italian in speech and culture, would have been far more serviceable to Italy than the vaingloriously annexed and hence the bloodless state which Fascism made of it.)

Switzerland has always offered Italy this incomparable advantage: she gives us a long line of frontier which is absolutely secure; such a security as one could not find, I think, in any other part of the world before 1939, save, perhaps, that between Norway and Sweden or, on the other side of the Atlantic, that between Canada and the United States.

Switzerland is the living proof that the miracle of a happy national life is more the work of the free will of a people than a community of language or of religion. In Switzerland the people of Geneva, Lausanne and the neighbouring towns hold tenaciously to the French culture as the German Swiss to the German, and those of the Ticino to the Italian; but all of them wish with equal firmness the maintenance of the Confederation, their common laws, their Federal Parliament at Berne and, above all, the secular atmosphere of true everyday liberty.

What distinguishes the Swiss from their three great neighbours

is that they not only believe but feel that their bureaucracy and the State itself both belong to the citizens. There is not a shadow of the servility of the German before the feeblest and vainest *Beamte* of the Reich; nor is there a shadow of the sceptical passivity of the French to the *Administration*, nor of the irritation of the Italian for our own centralized bureaucracy. The Swiss citizen never thinks for a moment that "our" civil servants can be guilty of an abuse, in which he is aided by the smallness of the country where everyone is known, where all can be received both in the capital of the Canton or in Berne.

Each Canton is a nation. If you ask a stranger where he is from, he will not reply that he is a Swiss but that he is from Zürich or Geneva or the Ticino. And this is a happy state of affairs that is not found in France or even in England: in France all the talents flow to Paris, impoverishing Dijon and Bordeaux, Marseilles and Toulouse, once so fruitful in talent; in England every fortune depends on London and everyone finds himself there at last, above all, the Scots. In Switzerland, on the other hand, every city still keeps its own strong municipal vitality; just as it used to be and as we must hope it will be again, in Italy. In Italian Switzerland the ideas and expressions of Lugano differ from those of Bellinzona; even tiny Locarno is a little world in itself. The same differences used to exist between Parma and Modena, between Lucca and Pisa, between Lecce and Taranto; in some ways the Italy of our grandfathers still lives in the Ticino, pulsing though it is with modern energy—and perhaps nowhere else.

The Swiss are numerous in Italy, especially in Milan, Turin and Genoa. They meet together for their festivals, but ordinarily they mix so well with the Italians that no one thinks of them as foreigners. And this was so in Rome, even for the Swiss Minister. When as Foreign Minister I used to receive foreign representatives I never forgot to what nationality my visitor belonged, even though we were conversing in Italian. But with the Swiss Minister I found it natural to discuss Italian problems sometimes of a most intimate nature as though he were an old Italian friend. As for us Italians, there is no other country in the world than Switzerland in regard to which we ought with so much reason to repeat an old phrase coined in 1870-80 about Austria-Hungary: "If she did not exist it would be necessary to invent her."

The more we speak of European solidarity, the more we aspire to an organized Europe, the more we must take Switzerland as our

ideal, for Switzerland more than any other State has found the way to marry federal rights with a lively Cantonal independence.

Napoleon, the winner of sterile battles, showed also in Switzerland his incapacity to understand the soul of a conquered people: he imposed on the Swiss a Republic "one and indivisible", as for France, which had become his own. The thing could not have lasted, even though Napoleon had lasted. For Swiss centralization meant slavery. Certainly the less recent history of the Swiss Cantons proves that it was necessary—as it will be one day for Europe—to subject certain local particularisms to a superior law; that happened with the Federal Constitution of 1848; but at the same time the rights and the independence of the Cantons were safeguarded.

The same political balance was confirmed in 1874, the year in which (after the fears of 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War) a revision of the constitution strengthened the authority of the Federal Council. I have been able to examine a number of the Ticino newspapers of the time. The articles published then on this difficult subject would have done honour to the greatest European journals. And the Ticinese had more merit than other Switzers in accepting an increase in the powers of Berne, because, less numerous as they were, they risked more; but they had faith in themselves, which is the only way not to be oppressed.

I wish Italians would go every now and again to learn very salutary lessons of political wisdom and Italian dignity from the Ticinese, their brothers in language and culture, faithful friends too of a united Italy towards whom they only felt a sorrowful astonishment when the amateur régime of Palazzo Venezia attempted to make "subjects" of them.



## XVIII

### WE AND OUR NEIGHBOURS THE GERMANS

IN the world of European cultures it is well known that it was the tradition of the ancient Italian Universities, as of the more famous *Atenei* of free Italy, after 1860, to offer Professorships to learned foreigners, and that even in those subjects in which it was generally admitted that Italy was *facile princeps*.

It was one of the well-known characteristics of the Italian spirit of the Risorgimento that the struggle against the Austrians—a struggle the moral centre of which was often in the University—did not in the least diminish the interest of masters and students in German culture, and especially in the Hegelian philosophy.

Students and readers of history, of philology and of philosophy, in 1821, '31, '48, '59 and '60, only interrupted their studies of the thought of those who were the great professors and masters of Germany, to go and fight the Austrian armies then in the field against us. It was in the prison of Castel dell'Ovo, at Naples, that De Sanctis translated the works of Hegel into Italian. It was at the same time that Alessandro Poerio, killed by an Austrian bullet during the war of '48, boasted of "cosmopolitanism of the mind" as the ideal of Italian thought of his generation.

The people did not feel differently. Giambattista Niccolini would be a forgotten poet if the Italians had not made their own, as a war song, a verse from his tragedy: "*Ripassin l'Alpe e tornerem fratelli*."

I have already told how during the war of 1914-18 the letters of our volunteers in France and later of our soldiers and officers from the Grappa to the Piave, showed how profound was their humanity in spite of the decision not to lay down their arms until the enemy was beaten. The "*Critica*" of Benedetto Croce rendered a service to our moral reputation in the world, when it published, immediately after the war, many of these letters. One volunteer whose name is sacred to me <sup>1</sup> wrote me from near Gorizia: "Send me a Giusti

<sup>1</sup> My elder brother, Cesare; perhaps the only one (there were certainly but few) who refused a medal for valour because he said volunteers ought to win nothing for themselves in war.

with his *Sant' Ambrogio* ; I want to read it to my men. I am sure it will please them."

Giuseppe Giusti<sup>1</sup> wrote the *Sant' Ambrogio* in 1846 when the Austrians were absolute masters of Italy. All will remember the description of the "*cantico tedesco lento lento*", of the "*dolcezza amara*" of the poet who ends by saying :

. . . quest'odio che mai non avvicina  
 il popolo lombardo all'alemanno,  
 giova a chi regna dividendo e teme  
 popoli avversi affratellati insieme.

The years of the bestial Nazi-Fascist war have produced no *Sant' Ambrogio* ; as no one can think of a gesture like that of Alessandro Manzoni who, when he composed his hymn of March 1821 for the Italian crusade against the Germans, dedicated it : " To the illustrious memory of Theodore Koerner—poet and soldier of German Independence—dead on the field of Leipzig—October 18th, 1813—a name dear to all who fight to defend or conquer back—a fatherland."

It is not remembered enough in Italy that the legions of Garibaldi and the handful of Mazzinian heroes had among them Englishmen, Hungarians, Frenchmen (one Frenchman died on the walls of Rome where he was killed by the soldiers of Oudinot), Americans too and Poles, but not a single German.

The abyss between Italians and Germans was always profound, save during the German intellectual awakening of the first half of the nineteenth century.

Italians were only interested in the German people as such during the most serious crisis of German history : the Reformation ; a crisis in comparison with which Nazism itself will only appear as a bloody carnival.

Scrupulously respectful of every religious sentiment as I am, I should be sorry to offend even the most humble follower of Luther. But how can it be denied that the Lutheran revolt threw the German people into a dangerous isolation and into a blind servitude to the temporal ruler ? And so, Hitler appeared ; and one cannot understand the mad Austrian without remembering that before him there was Luther. The racialism of Hitler finds its prototype in Luther, not only when he wrote, " We Germans are Germans and wish to remain Germans ", a formula which is understandable for a people

<sup>1</sup> Giuseppe Giusti, born in Tuscany 1809, died 1850.

without definite geographical frontiers, but also when he adds that there is such a thing as "German nature" that alone possesses "force of character, perseverance in work, moderation in its habits, loyalty and generosity"; in fact—I am still quoting Luther—"the best people of all time, the nation *par excellence*". As for other nations, it appears to readers of Hitler that the Italians, as Luther said, "have nothing but grace", the French possess no other gift at all save "eloquence"; as for the Muscovites, the contempt is the same in both prophets: "they are scarcely on a level with the Turks", according to Luther.

*Mein Kampf* is close to Luther where the latter claims that power in the service of "justice" ought to know no limits; there already set forth is the Hitlerian formula of March 1936, according to which the German people has itself the right to decide whether or not it has violated a treaty.

It is easy to understand why a chosen people recognizes in Luther its very own nature, *ihre potenziertes Selbst*, as Dollinger says; and that Fichte, Hegel, Treitschke are spiritually among its foremost sons. Professors of Treitschke's school are the worst of those who are guilty of the poisoning of minds in Germany, of the betrayal of Goethe's thought. There would have been nothing strange in that if having fought to establish Prussianism in a more humane *Deutschtum*, they were loyally busy after the victories of the Hohenzollern in 1866, accepting the Prussian solution of the German question; facts are facts! But they did not stop there; with Treitschke at their head they worshipped what they had once severely criticized. They only now believed in *Macht*, symbol and soul of the Bismarckian and Wilhelmian period and the Hitlerian fever that followed. Perhaps if they had remained, I do not say hostile, but in dignified silence, they might have been able to render some service to the mental balance of their contemporaries. Instead, they thought that to become courtiers and liars was politics and statesmanship. And they did it with such barefaced stupidity that at last their hero, Bismarck, made cruel fun of them—and they fell to being "experts" of science and philology, just as the true and genuine politicians became mere clerks in the government routine.

All forgot—the scientists like the politicians—that nothing sound and enduring can happen to a people suffering from a diseased nationalism; and that those countries alone are great which have a human message for the whole world, like the United States with

their *Declaration of Independence*. France with the *Droits de l'Homme*, Germany herself for a moment with Kant and Goethe, and Italy with Mazzini.

All this the Italian people felt by instinct even during the long marriage of convenience and reason that was the Triple Alliance.

It is sometimes said that we hate the Austrians—because they were tyrannical invaders of our soil after the Treaty of Vienna—and that we felt no hostility to the Germans of the North, at least until 1915. But the contrary is the truth. Our fathers thought indeed that the Imperial Habsburg system was a mortal danger to us, and still more so during the period in which Vienna attempted to deal softly with us, as in the time of Maximilian, the able younger brother of Franz Joseph; whilst in the periods of brutal repression *à la* Radetski there was no Cantù who yielded or ventured to yield. But as a people, especially after 1866, we have felt no real hatred for those Austrians who had experienced so much Italian influence from the time of Metastasio.

All the more a certain antiquated seventeenth-century formalism displeased us, as being too much in contrast with our freer manners. Our invincible antipathy has turned instead against the Germans of the Reich. Even though we recognized their notable qualities as technicians and researchers, we felt instinctively that they were completely wanting in that fraternal humanity without which it is impossible to reach Italian hearts.

## WE AND OUR NEIGHBOURS THE SLAVS

**T**wo types of men often appear in Italy in the course of our history. The two types seem dissimilar but are not: the one is the man of measured and profound thought drawing his philosophy from a cold observation of social life: this is Machiavelli, who opens among us the era of modern political study, and Cavour, the most complete statesman of the nineteenth century, and Giolitti, the least Giolittian of men (since rightly or wrongly a bad sense has been given to that adjective), Giolitti who fought and hated even more than Cavour the stupid corruption of our political life and its theatrical over-emphasis. The other type is that of the saint and ascetic from St. Francis of Assisi to St. Philip Neri, from Mazzini to Mameli, from Garibaldi to Battisti, that hero from the Trentino who so much despised a third statesman type fortunately less frequent, the demagogue and swindler full of sterile grudges and morbid vanity—such was Mussolini.

It is not without significance that the latter of the two diverse types have found themselves at one in regard to the problem of our relations with the Southern Slavs from the first moment when it appeared in the nineteenth century.

It was at the very dawn of their national awakening that the Southern Slavs found in Mazzini the first and most eloquent defender in Europe of their ideals. It was he who in his *Lettere Slave* brought the Jugo-Slav problem to the attention of Europe. Mazzini wrote in 1857 in one of his *Lettere*, "If in our resurrection of 1848 the Southern Slavs had been able to see the rise of a Nation that would rend the old map of Europe and call the new peoples to rise up and establish themselves according to natural tendencies; if the deceptions to which we patiently submitted had not given to Austria the opportunity to say to these ignorant men: 'this is a war of royal rivalries which, if they could, would trample you down', perhaps those first symptoms of brotherhood would have ripened into deeds. But who could hope that any European ideas would manage to appear when we trembled to send to the field,

for fear of displeasing the Tsar, the two hundred Poles that the great Michiewicz meant for us.

“And do not accuse me of unreasonable conjecture. A little before 1848 the Slav agitation had assumed in Croatia and elsewhere a character openly political and menacing. The educated remained as usual uncertain, lost in thought, but the people went forward adopting methods of action and rebellion. The German language, till then almost generally used in Illyria among the women of the middle class, disappeared before the Slav tongue. One saw return to honour in public gatherings the national dress. The line of separation, so distinct in the Lombardo-Veneto between Austrians and Italians, began to appear in the Slav provinces, the German officers of the troops stationed in Zagreb did not dare to set foot in the Caffè Nazionale. And in Zagreb the Assembly boldly asked the Emperor in '45 for an independent local government for Croatia and Slavonia and a similar new administration for Dalmatia, Zara and Ragusa. These were frightening indications from which Italy under another leader might have certainly been able to profit.

“Today the movement is apparently suspended. The word Illyria is forbidden to the Press. A series of immediate repressions threatens the organizer of every public manifestation. But who can believe that a movement such as I have described is wholly spent?

“The difficulties that trouble its development are certainly sufficiently grave among the Slavs themselves and Austria profits by them as much as she can. First there is the religious question, a cause of mistrust between the Austrian Slavs and the subjects or tributaries of the Turks: since the majority of the first are Catholics and most of the second belong to the Greek rite. Then the Slav Croatian aristocracy inspires fear in the Serbs and Bulgarians who have a more equal social structure. Add to all this the political diversity between Serbia nearly independent, free Montenegro and the Slav provinces of Austria. Lastly, there is the name of Illyria given by Craj and his adherents to the whole of Southern Slavdom, which is not accepted by Serbians. The Croats maintain that that name represents the aboriginal Slavs; the Serbs hold it in contempt, because of its Roman origin, proud as they are of their medieval memories and eager to believe that they are descended from a separate tribe that came down from the Carpathians to occupy Illyria.

“These, however, are difficulties that time, the intellectual progress which is being achieved, and above all a common servitude,

embittered by the disenchantments poured out after 1848 with both hands by the Austrians to their subjects, are quickly wearing away. And if Italy rose today in the name of all the peoples that are panting to make themselves into a nation; if she rose fighting and conquering but at the same time offering a pact at every victory of equal peace and liberty to those enemies on the other side of the Alps who can become her brothers; if she rose teaching by her example broad, just and tolerant views to the Magyars, for their movement must follow infallibly the Italians; if she rose indeed with a challenge of war against Austria, 'Liberty for those oppressed by Austria!' perhaps these difficulties would be dissipated in a moment and the break-up of the empire would be the prize of a first campaign."

Fourteen years later, on the eve almost of his death, Mazzini added:

"The true objective of the international life of Italy, the most direct road to her future greatness, lies on a higher plane, where today the most vital European problem is thrashed out, it lies in the union with the vast and powerful element which is destined to infuse a new spirit into the brotherhood of Italians, or, if it is allowed to lose its direction as a result of short-sighted distrust, to disturb the Nations with long wars and grave dangers: it lies in the alliance with the Slav family. Today, I say, the most vital European problem is on the horizon, namely, whether there is to be a brotherhood and communion of the Nations or a future of ruinous quarrels, of long wars and grave perils.

"The Eastern frontiers of Italy were named when Dante wrote

. . . a Pola presso del Carnaro  
che Italia chiude e suoi termini bagna

*Inf.*, IX, 113.

Istria is ours. But from Fiume, along the eastern shore of the Adriatic, as far as the river Boyana where is the Albanian frontier, there lies a zone in which among the relics of our colonies the Slav element predominates. This Slav zone, that on the Adriatic shore beyond Cattaro contains Dalmatia and the Montenegrin region, extends on two sides beyond the Balkan mountains towards the East as far as the Black Sea, towards the north across the Danube and the Drave to Hungary, which it enters; from year to year it is rapidly encroaching upon the Magyar element."

And then in conclusion:

“The Turkish Empire and the Austrian are irrevocably condemned to perish. The international life of Italy must tend to accelerate their death. And the hilt of the sword that must kill them is in the hand of Slavs.”

The opinion of Mazzini was known to Italians. And Fascism feared it so much that it had recourse to absurd measures of suppression of the books concerned.<sup>1</sup>

Not so well known is the fact that Cavour, an opposite type to Mazzini, wrote even before the latter pages inspired by an equally living sympathy for the independence of our neighbours. It was at a time when we were at war with the Austria of Radetzki : Croatian troops were fighting in the Lombard plain with an absolute loyalty to the Austrian Emperor who rewarded them with a dynastic ingratitude “that astonished the world”—even the world of his fellow sovereigns which is saying a good deal, indeed everything. Nevertheless Cavour advised the Italians in the columns of his newspaper that was so displeasing to the “moderates” at that time : “It is futile and vain”—I abbreviate—“that you should continue to hate the Croats ; they are like yourselves victims of an egoistical power that drives its people of eleven different tongues the one against the other ; these Croats must one day become, with their brother Slavs of the South, the close friends and allies of a free Italy.”

More important still, because more typical of Cavour (that is to say of a mind where idealism and realism are always at one) is a speech on relations with the Slavs which Cavour made in the Chamber of Deputies on October the 20th, 1848.

“There exists within the territory of the (Austrian) Empire a numerous race, energetic and courageous but for many centuries oppressed, the Slav race. This race extends through all the Eastern parts of the Empire, from the banks of the Danube to the mountains of Bohemia and desires to obtain complete emancipation and to reconquer its own nationality and independence. Its cause is just, it is a noble cause. It is defended by clans still rude and unpolished, but full of courage and energy ; it is therefore destined to triumph in a non-distant future.

<sup>1</sup> Fascism forced the publishing house of Treves of Milan not only to withdraw my book on Mazzini in which I pointed out his ideas, but obliged the unhappy publishers to destroy the catalogues in which my book was described ; that was certainly not so much in hatred of my modest name as for fear of Mazzini’s ideas.



“The Slav movement, repressed by brute force in the North of the Empire, spread more vigorously and menacingly, more powerfully too, in the Southern Danubian provinces inhabited by Croatian Slavs.

“I am not going to undertake here an examination of the causes or the claims that have aroused the movement of Croatia against Hungary. I do not wish to go into the particulars of the great struggle between the Magyars and the Slavs. I will only remind the Chamber that the Magyars, noble and generous when it is a question of defending the rights of their nation against imperial arrogance, have nevertheless always shown themselves to be proud and tyrannical oppressors of the Slav race spread through the provinces of Hungary.

*Valerio* : That is not exact.

*Cavour* : Yes, gentlemen, no one can deny that in Hungary the aristocracy is of Magyar race, the people are Slavs ; nor can it be denied that in that kingdom the aristocracy has always oppressed the people.

“However, I do not purpose to defend the Croats or even their bold leader the Ban (Governor) Jellachich. I confine myself to observing that the standard they have unfurled is the Slav standard and not yet as others have supposed the standard of reaction and despotism. Jellachich has availed himself of the name of the Emperor and in that has shown himself a shrewd politician. But that does not prove that his principal aim, if not only one, is not the restoration of Slav nationality. What, then, is the Imperial power ? A vain simulacrum of which the parties that divide the Empire avail themselves. Jellachich, seeing the Emperor in contention with the Viennese, has declared for the central power ; but certainly not for the reconstitution of the Gothic political edifice overthrown by the revolution of March.

“To demonstrate that the movement of Jellachich is not a simple military reaction it is enough to observe that on his approach to Vienna the Slav deputies, specially those of Bohemia who represent the most enlightened part of the Slavs, left the Assembly with the intention of retiring to Prague, or to Brunn, there to set up a Slav parliament.

“I believe, then, that the struggle that is rising in Austria is not a political struggle like that of March, but rather the prelude of a terrible race war, of a war of Germanism against Slavism.”

The prophecy of Cavour came to pass with the war of 1914 that

saw Germanism and Slavism face to face : that war ended with the destruction of the Hapsburg monarchy, the great eastern bulwark of Germanism.

But in the fatal 1914-18 we had no Cavour. Croatian refugees had a warm welcome in Rome, desirous as they were to put themselves from the beginning under our guidance ; they were sent off —kicked out. The lack of understanding and the suspicions that were the inevitable result of the shortsighted Treaty of London did the rest. Later, in 1920, the Treaty of Rapallo opened the way to reconciliation, but precious time was lost and rancour had poisoned many minds,<sup>1</sup> and all this when between 1914 and 1920 we needed far more patience, prudence, persuasive force and historical imagination than was suspected even in the time of Mazzini and Cavour. It was in fact after Mazzini, in the last ten years of the Hapsburg monarchy, that Jugo-Slav nationalists invaded Venezia Giulia, and above all Istria, where they first fomented and then directed the struggle of the *contadini* (almost all Slovene) against the proprietors, rapidly transforming the struggle from a social to a national contest, Slavs against Italians. Such a contest found there a more congenial soil than in any other part of Europe because the Italians felt themselves to be citizens, as I have explained in the earlier pages of this book, while the Slavs were all countrymen. In no other place has the fact more meaning, than our tongue gives a depreciative sense to words like *villano* or *rustico*, while on the other hand it gives a significance of gentility to all words with the same root as *chitta* or *urbe* (*civile . . . urbano*). And this explains, perhaps, why so many Istrians and Dalmatians with surnames *ich* feel themselves so Italian (Italy for them is civilization) while others with surnames in *i* (one remembers the once famous political priest Binkini) are all Italophobe : the rich, the cultured and the citizens are those with names in *ich*, the sons of *contadini* those with names in *i*.

For centuries there has been in the blood of the Italians of Venezia Giulia the conviction that the city is the complete expression of the surrounding country and they are right, because an Italian city is not only a cross-roads for the exchange of goods as in the Orient, but a secular centre of influence, both intellectual and moral.

It was a great misfortune for Italy and for civilization that the Treaty of Rapallo was not able to develop its mission of peace and

<sup>1</sup> For all this period, see my *L'Italia dal 1914 al 1944 quale io la vidi*, Chapters V, VI, XII, and my *I Costruttori e i Distruttori*, where I speak of Sonnino, Bissolati, Giolitti and Pasich.

understanding. In the minds of those who made it, it was not an end but a beginning; a beginning of series of political acts of which the creation of a Consorzio Italo-Jugo-Slav for the Port of Fiume would necessarily have been the second step, to have been followed by many others.

Alas, the advent of Fascism destroyed every possibility of immediate understanding between the two nationalities and that in a period in which it is more and more inconceivable to obstruct the movement of the masses of peasants towards a legitimate social betterment and towards a participation in political power. If Fascism had not appeared on the scene to destroy the future of Italy, if a sane democracy had been established in our country, generous reforms in favour of the Slav peasantry might have perhaps secured for centuries the supremacy of Italian civilization among the masses who were not even united by a common language, some speaking Slovene, others Croatian. Instead, Fascist stupidity and vainglorious nationalism allied themselves with the object of breaking by violence—that is the most sterile method possible—populations that we could only bring within our orbit with affection and comprehension. And now the road we must follow is much longer and more difficult because for too many years the Slavs of Venezia Giulia have identified—wrongly certainly even for the youthfully immature mentality—the true Italy, that of Mazzini and Battista with the pseudo-Roman Italy of sterile nationalists and noisy Fascists. By paradox as it might appear more than as the fault of Fascism, the Italian cause collapsed, even in the minds of honest and moderate Jugo-Slavs in the unhappy period that followed July 25th, 1943. As for Fascism, they could say: “It is a dictatorship; we know perfectly well what King Alexander was in Belgrade.” But what must they have thought when they saw the military and civil agents of the monarchical and Badoglioian *comp d'état* arrest and imprison young Italian patriots at Trieste and Pola, youthful patriots who for years had collaborated with the Slavs in the fight against Fascism? What could they think when they saw the most perfidious Fascist persecutors of the Jugo-Slavs continued and considered and caressed as before? These functionaries, no longer Mussolini's creatures but the King's after July 25th, believed they could repeat on this flaming soil the formula so dear to Victor Emanuel III, “neither Fascism nor anti-Fascism”. The Slavs translated: “The Italians are trying to embroil us with the Allies.”

By good luck for the Italian cause the cruel violence of certain

Slavs, the monstrous military pretensions and the lack of any sort of loyalty towards real Italian anti-Fascists on the part of Tito's agents opened the eyes of many even among the Slovenes, though they were silent for fear of the dictatorial methods of the too easy victor ; without taking into account that the mass of Tito's troops was composed of Croat *contadini* which, partly drunk with patriotic joy at the idea of marching to the liberation of the cities of the littoral after twenty years of the Italian yoke, discovered with stupefaction that at Trieste, Pola and Gorizia, everywhere in fact, only Italian was spoken, not only among Italians.

The result of twenty years of Fascism and a few months of Badoglio is a gross sum of materialistic errors on both sides.

The tragedy is too pitiful to contemplate, or even to allow us to indulge in personal recriminations or apologies. But all the same, one cannot but remember—so significant is it—an episode which happened in 1925 at Lubiana where a Jugo-Slav Congress had met to denounce to the world the injustices and cruelties that the Fascists had begun to commit against the Slavs of Venezia Giulia. A violent nationalist orator interrupted the series of denunciations with this cry : “ Welcome these evils ! It was Sforza with his political conciliation that was our real enemy ; it is Mussolini who prepares our victory.”

Poisoned by the nationalistic spirit as frantic as it is parvenu, the Slav who spoke thus could not understand that while I wanted the well-being and development of my people I also wished the same for the Jugo-Slavs, knowing as I did, and do, that in the Europe that is now rising there is no longer a place for stagnant isolation.

I will repeat what I wrote at the time and what remains true today in spite of so many political errors of Italians and so many savage excesses of fanatical Slavs : “ If not for love, then for their common interests, the two nations must end by understanding one another and by working together.”

## XX

### WE AND OUR NEIGHBOURS THE ENGLISH

**T**HE Italians would remain neighbours of the English even if Voltaire's ancient anecdote should cease to be partially true : Milord in a gondola who dips a finger into the Grand Canal, sucks it and exclaims : " Oh, it is salt ; so we are in England. . . . "

The two peoples would remain neighbours because they are too mixed up, because their intellectual relations have been too intimate, and because even in a Europe organized and federated something of the old egoistic sympathy of neighbours for neighbours will always remain.

If the English and the Germans have never understood one another in the course of their history—the desire of Queen Victoria and of her Prince Consort having counted for very little—the principal reason is a precious anti-racial instinct : for if it is true that the English are for the most part of Teutonic and Scandinavian origin, it is equally true that the majority of the words and also the spirit of their literature are of Latin origin and in part even Italian. In England the spirit counts for more than the blood. Shakespeare—whom in an access of exasperated vanity the Germans have claimed often enough as a German poet—is penetrated by that Italian spirit which was in his time in London " the glass of fashion and the mould of form ".

A generation after Shakespeare, Milton wrote verses in Italian, even as Gladstone wrote Italian, the loftiest mind among English politicians of the nineteenth century. Gladstone, who used to read our poets and preferred above them all Giacomo Leopardi, was among the few foreigners who have penetrated the richness and naturalness of the *Zibaldone* from which he quoted passages by heart among friends the last time he came, a very old man, to Italy.

Gladstone was twelve years old when in 1821 Shelley wrote his *Ode to Naples* where the Austrians are called

. . . earth born forms,  
arrayed against the ever-living Gods.

At the same time Byron was conspiring with the Liberals at Ravenna and hoping that the Revolution would extend from Naples to the Romagna and Bologna. On February 18th, 1821, he wrote to a friend knowing well that he was in danger because his house had become a store of arms for the Liberals: “. . . To be sacrificed in case of accidents? It is no great matter, supposing that Italy could be liberated, who or what is sacrificed. It is a great object the very poetry of politics, only think—a free Italy!”

Italy could not be liberated in 1821 nor even in 1848; but the English poets and historians analysed and understood better than any other foreigner (apart from the clear-sighted and generous Quinet) the beauty, moral and intellectual, of the beginning and development of the Risorgimento; the great flame-up of 1848 so rich in noble vitality, even if so poor in political wisdom, found perhaps in *Vittoria*, Meredith's novel, its own poem, that is at the same time a living picture of the Italian people at that time. *Vittoria* is a book that ought to be better known by all Italians.

The events of 1859 found the English more reserved; the eagerness for Italian liberty remained, but Cavour's alliance with Napoleon III had aroused a good deal of distrust. It might almost be said that in 1859 the English, even the most clear-sighted among them, would have liked to see the victory of the Piedmontese and our volunteers, and at the same time the defeat of the French of Napoleon III. It was only when the latter for fear of Prussia were obliged to interrupt the war with Austria, that British public opinion became again unanimously pro-Italian. This was largely helped by the presence in power of far-sighted men like Lord John Russell, Palmerston and Gladstone who in their Italian policy experienced but one obstacle, Queen Victoria, with her unconscious pro-Germanism.

At this time London gave a cordial hospitality not only to Mazzini but to other Italian exiles equally worthy if less famous, like Saffi, Panizzi, Carlo Poerio, Lacaïta.<sup>1</sup> The growing favour of

<sup>1</sup> Count Aurelio Saffi, leader of the Romagnuol Liberals.

Sir Anthony Panizzi, Professor of Italian in London University, entered the Library of the British Museum 1831, appointed Keeper of Printed Books 1837, Principal Librarian 1856, K.C.B. 1869.

Carlo Poerio 1803-67, Neapolitan. He was chained in prison in 1849. Gladstone obtained his release in 1858. Died in Florence 1869.

Sir James Lacaïta (1813-95), born in Apulia, supplied Gladstone with information about Bourbon tyranny in Naples, was imprisoned but

the English for the Italian cause was also due to the esteem which the exiles had won in the highest political circles. Many misfortunes might have been spared England and all Europe if other Italians whom Fascism forced into exile and who repaired to London, had been listened to by the two Chamberlains while there was still time ; for example, a man of the lofty intellectual and moral character of Luigi Sturzo made many faithful friends among the learned, like Gilbert Murray and among internationalists like Lord Davies ; but it does not appear to me that he was ever listened to by the statesmen in power or by the diplomatists. They preferred to talk with the Fascist Ambassador Dino Grandi, who flattered the British to their face, while a Sturzo would perhaps have reproved their undoubtedly willing blindness. In every book and article of Sturzo's one feels a profound respect for and grateful sympathy with the British nation, whilst the Ambassador Grandi railed against the English in his secret correspondence with Mussolini, assuring him that they were now " a finished people ". Here is one example taken from many specimens of his secret letters to the Duce, at the time when the English wealthier classes were finding a thousand good qualities in Grandi and considered Sturzo a bore and perhaps a man with old scores to pay off. Here is the Fascist Ambassador's confidential description made to Mussolini of the England which became the heroic Britain of 1940 :

. . . " Confusion, in which nothing is stable even for the English conscience, a country retrograde and behind the times, that prefers the candle to the electric light (there are entire regions in England where the electric light is unknown) and houses without baths, and that is as much as to say that Democracy is a finished and foetid thing. The Tenth Anniversary of Fascism and the victory of Hitler have given the *coup de grâce* to their last illusions. Even this old English world begins to move. Read, for example, the weekly reviews of today that I have summed up in my phonogram to ' Stefani '. The reviews in this country are much more important than the daily papers. The dailies hardly ever give the state of public opinion that ' there is need of time ' to understand. The reviews almost always. The theme is the same ; the bell tolls for Democracy and the necessity for an intelligent revision of the Peace Treaties. How or when, in the course of what political released on British pressure and settled in Scotland. Private Secretary to Lord Lansdowne and accompanied Gladstone to Ionian Islands. K.C.M.G. 1859.

experiments, even this stupefied island will come at last to its Fascist Revolution, I do not know, nor is it possible yet to foresee. But everyone agrees that the old world is in ruins, and even England in one way or another, will come to a Fascist Revolution. Then for one who understands this people much better than it understands itself, the doings of the two pilgrims Macdonald-Simon, who are now on the way to Geneva—the tottering sanctuary of democratic paganism—appear still more an anachronism than the thing itself.”

This pretentious condemner of the free British people wants to make us believe after July 25th, 1943, that he never had anything but contempt for Mussolini. And yet it was from the Embassy in Grosvenor Square that he wrote letters like this to Mussolini, which I reproduce with his flood of capitals :

“ On Friday I had the good fortune to be able to remain for an hour in Thy presence, in the Sala del Mappamondo and I came out revived and with my spirit illuminated as by a flame. There is one thing to which I do not succeed in becoming accustomed, it is my greatest sacrifice, and that is to be forced to fight and work far from Thee, and without having, even if only for one moment, the magical direct influence of Thy glance as Captain of my spirit.”

And a few months later :

“ Always and everywhere, Thy figure, Thy face, Thy spirit, Thy name. This Italy, which Thou and only Thou in Thy loneliness of a giant hast built, beating it into shape with wind and fire as with wind and fire Thy Father caused iron to live, is now becoming a flower of iron. I have revisited it, alas ! only for a moment after nearly a year of absence. It appears to him who comes from afar like an immense army singing on the march.

“ From the Sala del Mappamondo where I have seen Thee at Thy post at the prow, with Thy smiling face, so human, yet of pure bronze, like the statue of Augustus, I went forth filled with intense desire and pride.”

It is clear that the weak head of the actor of Predappio, never satisfied with praise, could not resist adulation of this calibre.

It remains a mystery, however, how people capable of such vulgar tricks and phrases could have been taken seriously in England : it is true it was the England of Neville Chamberlain.

Apart from this period of vague Fascist sympathy mixed with not a little contempt, apart from the infamous war declared by Fascism on England, there is one fact that is unique in the relations between Italy and any neighbouring people : while in France of the



nineteenth century only the progressive minds loved Italy, and so true is this that Napoleon III decided on the war of 1859 against the sentiment of the greater part of the conservative classes; in England, on the other hand, the whole nation, from the Tories to the extreme Radicals, shared an ardent enthusiasm for the cause of the liberty and independence of our country: the sole exception perhaps being, as I have already pointed out, Queen Victoria who was influenced by the Prince Consort, Albert of Coburg, who, after all, was of a German dynasty, enlightened and honest, but entirely and wholly German. The English workmen of the Brewery who, a little after the war of 1848-9, spontaneously stoned Marshal Haynau, the "hyena" of heroic Brescia, represented England more nobly than "*dear Queen Victoria*".

Italy, the true Italy, will always respond to the feeling of the English, and Garibaldi truly interpreted the mind of our people, when in 1854, replying to a message from the workmen of Newcastle, he wrote: "England is a great nation in the advance guard of human progress, the enemy of despotism, the unique secure refuge for our exiles, friend of the oppressed. If ever England should find herself in need of an ally, cursed be the Italian who is not ready to rush to her defence."

## ITALIANS IN THE UNITED STATES

SOME ten years ago it was a fashion in the United States to talk of the Melting Pot, a phrase invented by I no longer remember which journalist or politician. The phrase was as unhappy as the programme. The souls of men, traditions, aspirations, are not absorbed by order especially if they come from very dissimilar countries.

Whatever American optimism may wish to think, the policy of the Melting Pot has been a success only in appearance and the phrase itself with its mechanical simplicity has done no good to the United States in world opinion.

If this great and wealthy people has not in its extension and growth approached the ideals that the Washingtons and Jeffersons gave it, the fault is above all due to this hasty conception of the Melting Pot. A day will come, I am convinced, when the North American people will form an harmonious whole, spiritually and intellectually at one; on that day the actual islands of population formed by the Italians in the State of New York, by the Germans in Pennsylvania, by the Scandinavians in Minnesota and by the Irish almost everywhere, will only be a picturesque record.

But that will come about by interior evolution, not by force or preaching and exterior pressure; it will have come about because almost in all these groups, the new ties have caused the old to be forgotten; because these groups have ended by realizing the moral duty of a nationality as it were with a larger breadth, but this will not happen till that nationality has taken up the mission of leading the world towards a civilization that knows neither hatred nor nationalistic egoism.

On that day too, but not before, another barrier will fall in America. From Florida to Maine, a barrier less visible than those of nationality, the difficult barrier that not in law but in fact still divides the Americans who have become citizens by passing through Ellis Island from the descendants of the Puritans of the *Mayflower* and the Cavaliers of Virginia.

The first Americans—those of New England and Virginia—

gave the world that noble and serene message of hope for mankind, which is the Declaration of Independence; but the humble Italians, Scandinavians, Balkan peoples who become citizens after passing through the quarantine of Ellis Island, have not given less to America, obliging her as they have to become conscious of her new international responsibilities which she formally acknowledged in 1943 when she signed the Charter of San Francisco.

It is not without reason that the Americans of the recent emigrations, who are in fact—in spite of their most modest origins—those who are most conscious of the problems of the Old World, have established themselves more especially in the cities (exception must be made for the Italians in California). Three-quarters of the citizens of New York were born abroad, or are the children of foreigners; in Chicago, Boston, Cleveland, San Francisco and Minneapolis, the proportion is over fifty per cent.; in Philadelphia it is just fifty per cent. It is in these places and by names that are or will be historical, that American political thought is formed. Even in the heroic days of the Revolution, the foreigners were not found wanting; eighteen of the signatories of the Declaration of Independence were not of British origin.

Generally when the immigrants in America say “we”, they mean their national group, especially if they be Italians, Slavs, Irish or Germans: the exceptions to these last are the descendants—almost all established in Wisconsin—of the German Liberals of 1848 who preferred expatriation to the domination of the Junker. But it is not always certain that when the Italian immigrants say “we” he is not really thinking of “us in America”. In that America where his sons have been born, where he knows they are destined to live even if he dreams of a Sunday with cards at *Tresette* in some *osteria* in the Abruzzi or the communal band with plumed hats playing in the *piazza* of some small Sicilian town. Who is more American—even with his profound Italian instincts—than a Fiorello La Guardia, the son of a music master of Foggia? Who more sympathetically American than Joe Di Maggio who, the son of Italian parents, has seen hundreds of thousands of Yankees acclaim him as champion, I forget whether of football or baseball?

These Americanized Italians look back into the history of their new country and are proud of being able to count more Italian names than one would think in the Pantheon of the creators of the United States. In 1941 President Roosevelt declared in an official message: “It is to Colonel Francesco Vigo that after Clark

the United States owes the liberation of the regions of the North-west. Buffalo, one of the great cities of America, was founded by an Italian, Paolo Busti. Three Italian generals, Palma di Cesnola, Ferrero and Spinola, were among the bravest in the war of Secession. But the figure that should be dearest to the Italians who have become loyal Americans is that of Dr. Mazzei who, born at Poggio a Caiano, near Florence, in 1730, a doctor of medicine, annoyed by the eighteenth-century calm of his own Tuscany, established himself first at Smyrna and then in London. In London a better psychologist than the ministers of George III, Mazzei felt the latent force then vibrating in the American colonies, and in 1773 went to Virginia where he became the friend of Thomas Jefferson. At Richmond, the capital of Virginia, he coined in a newspaper article a phrase that has become very famous: "All men have been by nature created free and independent." Jefferson adopted this phrase as he did some others taken from the writings of his Italian friend and gave them immortality in the Declaration of Independence. When after many years of intimate relations with Jefferson and other great Americans of the time he had to return to Europe, he wrote to Madison in Italian: "I am about to depart, but my heart remains behind. When I think what I felt in crossing the Potomac I am ashamed of my weakness. I do not know what may happen when Sandy Hook disappears from my sight. But I know that wherever I go I shall always work for the well-being and progress of the country of my adoption."

In 1932, invited to give a course of lectures in a great American University, I met a doctor who, having become rich, had bought a farm with some good shooting not far from the city. The man was charming and I used often to go shooting with him. We passed several evenings together without playing cards, without drinking, without music. I felt we had much in common in our way of considering life and one day I told him so. He was a little embarrassed. "My grandfather came from Tuscany," he said. "He was called Mazzei; but when my father became wealthy and came to this city, he changed his name to Matthews." (I have slightly modified the English name to avoid the possibility of annoying him.)

This was the moment for me to talk of Mazzei, the intimate of Jefferson. I told him too how Mazzei had brought with him not only the germs of the Liberal ideal which were beginning to spring up in France and Italy, but with them seeds of certain vegetables

that are now prized at the American table. My friend was even more perturbed than astonished. "You say that I am perhaps the descendant of the friend of Jefferson, and you see me, owing to the weakness of my father, one of the three hundred Matthews that figure in the telephone directory of this boring city."

The modest mania for transforming Italian surnames so that they appear to be Anglo-Saxon has faded out with a normal adoption into the language of many Italian names, especially since names like La Guardia and Di Maggio have become as American as that of the Thomases which was Tommasi, of White which was Bianchi, Pope which was Papa, Brown which was Bruni, or Abbot which was Abate.

There was a time when there was good reason to anglicize Italian names for the sake of the pronunciation. There was no intention of falsifying when a family called Caboto established in Boston changed its name to Cabot and became one of the most famous families of Massachusetts. But on the other hand, how many Americans of an origin less distant have had their Italian names transformed most artificially! The expert aeronaut Harry Woodhouse, arrived in America as Enrico Casalegno; Jim Flynn, who defeated the boxer Jack Dempsey, was baptized Andrea Chiariglione; the well-known baseball player Ping Bodie, was originally Francesco Pizzola; the actor Don Ameche was Amici; the singer Ponsella was Ponzillo; the famous football star Lou Little, Luigi Piccolo, and one might add thousands of names to the list.

All those gentlemen, presidents of universities, athletes, and so forth, must take a heavy responsibility for anti-Italian discrimination. Today it is gone, or almost gone, but it saturated with bitterness two generations of Italians. Perhaps one day an American author of Italian blood will do for the Italians of the "little Italys" of former days what no American author of Irish origin has ever done for the previous wave of immigration: and that is to give us a true description of the humble folk among whom so much ability was lost. Some traces of those miserable lives remain in Italo-American poetry, half-bitter, half-sweet, of the last two decades of the last century. This poetry was written in a jargon that was then the rule in the Italian part of the City of New York and in the suburb of Bronx. Here is a sonnet:

Vennero i bricchelieri a cento a cento  
tutta una ghenga coi calli alle mani,

per far la casa di quaranta piani  
 senza contare il ruffo e il basamento.  
 Adesso par che sfidi il firmamento,  
 a onore e gloria degli americani ;  
 ma chi pensa ai grignoni, ai paesani  
 morti di colpo renza sacramento ?  
 Che val, se per disgrazia o per mistecca  
 ti sfracelli la carne in fondo al floro ?  
 Poveri ghinni disgraziato dego,  
 avanti a mezzo ponte di bistecca,  
 il bosso ride e mostra il dente d'oro :  
 " Chi è morto, è morto. Io vivo e me ne frego."

The Americanization of Italian families has been the theme of a series of stories and novels that North American literary criticism has noted with much interest : this is another proof that the pretended anti-Italian discrimination is vanishing. Among these writers the most notable seem to me to be Giovanni Fante, son of an Abruzzo father and an Italo-American mother. He is the author of *Ask the Dusk*, *Bandini*, *Wait until Spring*, and *Dago Red*. Guido d'Agostino is another ; born in New York of Sicilian parents, he is the author of *Olives on the Apple Tree*. Then there is Maria Tommasi, the daughter of Piedmontese parents established in the dour and nordic Vermont ; she has written *Deep Grow the Roots* ; and there are not a few others among whom I must name at least Pietro di Donato and Joe Pagano. All of them, although brought up in an America where the better classes admired Fascism, abominated it and ignored it in their writings : only writers that possess nothing better than a little facility—that gift, the mark of Italian mediocrity—soiled themselves with Fascist phraseology.

The day will come in which a son of some Bianchi or some Bruni will do honour to America by some discovery or some work of art which will be famous all over the world ; on that day the Whites and Browns will deplore the want of faith in their grandparents who preferred to write their names like the pork butchers of the place. Lately the fame of Fermi, who became known in 1945 as one of the artificers of that atomic bomb, whose powers will one day be used for some good purpose, has brought a new pride to many Italians in these parts.

But what in reality was that discrimination, that for a considerable period was the object of so many laments with the Italian element in the United States and Canada ? The answer cannot but be

complex. First of all, one must note that this discrimination only appeared in the cities. Now, a discrimination against newcomers is the natural law of the life of cities in all parts of the world; it is one of the chief reasons of Italo-Slovene clashes in Venezia Giulia; in America it appeared against the Irish and the Germans, the two big immigrations preceding the Italians; and there were symptoms of it in Milan in 1945 against the *terroni*, as the Southerners who came up looking for small jobs in Milan were called. But no discrimination ever appeared in America in regard to the farmers or small Italian proprietors in the country-side. I have observed them with affection from Connecticut on the Atlantic to California on the Pacific. They are so serenely sure of themselves, so rich in the permanent wisdom of the Italian who lives by the land, that if at all it is they who feel a little amused pity for the too-mechanized American, like their neighbours the Yankees who are incapable of sowing more than one thing at a time and in the midst of their 50 hectares cultivated with grain or fruit eat on Sunday tinned chicken. How often accepting from these splendid folk a luncheon under their pergolas have I listened to their jokes about the rich neighbour who wanted to sow or to prune at the wrong season, convinced that the influence of the moon on the crops or the vintage was a superstition of the Italians!

I have seen these Italian *contadini* most in Connecticut; it used to amuse and interest me to assist on a Saturday at the return to the paternal farm of the sons employed in the neighbouring towns; well-dressed, shaved, solid people, they were happy to visit the old folks and to drink a glass of that golden moscatello that the Italians of New York and Boston have succeeded in producing with a flavour equal to the moscatello of Sicily. But outside such reunions the Americanized sons prefer a martini or a manhattan. The peasants are proud of having children who have "made good" and who speak correctly an English punctuated with "O.K." and "Yeah". But they are also a little thoughtful—not only because they know that while they are dreaming of returning as old people to their native village which distance has beautified, their sons are too American to follow them; but—though they don't speak of it—they are doubtful of the fate of their children in America. An old peasant who had come to the United States thirty years before from Calabria and had a vague plan for one day returning to Italy and spending his last years there, one day said to me: "My sons are happy here. If we return to Italy we shall lose them."

It is a law we must bow to. But in that case will they be happy? This country is fitted for a life of mechanical well-being. Everyone works to obtain that. These people are made like that. But my sons are Italians. They were born for a calm and happy life. If there should come new and longer crises, our sons will find themselves worse off than day labourers are in Italy when there is scarcity."

Such questioning and doubts (which an attentive reader will find in the books of Pearl Buck) annoy the sons. The young men are already Americans; optimistic at all costs. But life is not a thing always to be regarded with optimism.

A Liberal and democratic Italy had always insisted on an absolute loyalty from the Italo-Americans towards the country of their adoption while they maintained cultural and spiritual ties with their native land. With the latter recommendation free Italy certainly contributed to the well-being of the United States, assisting her to form good American citizens, for one cannot make a good citizen out of a man intellectually and spiritually impoverished, uprooted from the only path that has any meaning for him. *Disitalianizzato*, he does not become a good American; he becomes a savage, a bastard, a robot.

Fascism adopted the opposite programme. The Ambassador in Washington, the consuls in the great cities, the Fascist propagandist and pro-Fascist, all were mobilized, a number of most intelligent emissaries were even authorized to pretend that they were vaguely anti-Fascist and these were the vilest of all, the most perfidious. Altogether, they deafened the ears of the Italo-Americans with prayers intermingled with threats (against the parents and relations in Italy) on the duty of all to remain Italian citizens; only the rare frantic local Fascists were instead encouraged and paid to become American citizens: the same thing happened in France. The object was the same in the two countries: to have spies and *agents-provocateurs* in case of war, safe from an order of expulsion. Such were the aggressive Machiavellian ideas of the hierarchy in Rome.

There exists in the United States, and it may not be there alone, a curious and rare type of Italian who holds firmly and profoundly the anti-Fascist faith and for it will face without flinching every sort of persecution, but who, now that the Fascist régime has vanished, feels as though he had been deprived of his country. Fine people but distantly related to the Pharisee who thanked God for creating him better than other men. They were always upset



on the few occasions when I addressed a meeting of Italians, whether in France up to 1940 or in America up to 1943, when they heard me disadvise the use of the word "anti-Fascista". Fascism is condemned to die, therefore you should be something positive, not negative, as though one should be anti-plague, or anti-syphilis. Most of them were shocked, but not the Puritans, not the Inquisitors who even after the disappearance of Mussolini continued to discover Fascism everywhere. The thing would have been laughable if now and then it had not become damaging for Italy, as when, during the eager campaign of the Italo-Americans in September 1945 to force Truman to defend our interests at the London Conference, one of the best among the old anti-Fascists went so far as to say in an interview that went the round of America that the greater number of Italo-Americans "remained Fascist in the bottom of their hearts". I asked him to explain the reasons for this declaration, on which he said that the Italo-Americans hated both England and America because it was England and America who had prevented Hitler and Mussolini from winning the War. And then with somewhat heavy irony he added, "Even if the London Conference were to restore to Italy Ethiopia, the Dodecanese, all Venezia Giulia, and were to add the North and South Poles and a milliard of dollars as a free gift, the greater number of Italians in America would remain faithful to the memory of Mussolini and would follow him in hatred of England and America."

When it occurred to him that his words were damaging Italy, this old and respectable anti-Fascist, who loved Italy tenderly though he had asked for and obtained American citizenship, was distinctly upset; but it was too late. His error was a result of a didactic habit of formulating "clear ideas". It is so easy, isolated among one's books and determined not to assume any direct responsibility, to formulate "clear ideas"; but life teaches us that pontifical division between the clear and unclear are frequently in danger of being pharisaical.

From 1928 on, I had been invited ten times by great American Universities to hold courses of contemporary history in their halls; and at last I went to America for three years in 1940, escaping from Pétain and his protectors; I have certainly seen there many Fascists, almost all squalid and despicable, but all sent from Italy as propagandists or diplomatists or pretended professors. Have I never seen a true Fascist among the Italo-Americans? I should not dare to say, whatever the local old guard of anti-Fascists might insist

about it. Did they not enrich themselves, did not they gain by it? No. So they were not true Fascists. They were ingenuous Italians who little by little fell victims to something which influenced them much more than the paid propagandists of Palazzo Chigi. This something was the support, sometimes unconscious, that notable Americans who were certainly not paid to do it, gave to the Fascist cause. I have said they were not paid, more exactly they were paid with decorations and luxurious receptions and friendly words that issued from the lips of the pseudo-Roman mask of the Duce with a well-studied solemnity. Every time one of these wealthy Americans met an Italian—his barber or his doctor—he felt obliged to repeat his tirade: it was a kind of religious mania: as he began again for the thousandth time to talk of his last tour in Italy. Really it had been his first visit to us: Italian art and Italian thought had no attractions for gentry of this sort. These people had never wished to go to Italy until a strike-breaker had become Prime Minister. It was then they began their pilgrimages like Mussulmans to Mecca.

“What a great man you people have in Rome. We need a Mussolini here. Only a man like him can stop America going to the devil. In Italy he was very kind to me, we talked for half an hour. He explained everything to me. He gave me a signed photograph. I have had it put into a silver frame that cost three hundred dollars. It will be a fine remembrance to my children. He has really succeeded in making the Italians work. . . .” At this point the barber or doctor or architect, much flattered at being the fellow-countryman of such a genius, became somewhat sceptical; they knew that the Italians are and always have been the most tireless workers in the world. But the rich American continued to talk of the *autostrade*, the towns built in the Pontine Marshes, and the Apulian Aqueduct. . . .

To all this the Italians who heard it did not know what to say. For the rest, if certain Italians had succeeded in the old country in working miracles that won a good reputation for the whole Italian people, including the most recent immigrants who were not accustomed to being treated to so much benevolence, was not that all to the good? Why complain about it? And then, even though they had known and said that the Apulian Aqueduct had been thought of and created by the democratic governments and that Mussolini had only opened it, erecting some lying inscription at its source, the excellent American gentlemen would have glanced

at one another and said: "Of course, this fellow must be a Communist." In certain parts of free America, the insinuation was not free of a certain danger: the reader can laugh at it, but not a workman or small shopkeeper.

But you may say, however could sensible people like the learned and respectable anti-Fascist you spoke of before, not realize that the Fascist pretensions were something very different? Because the gentry concerned did not wish, were not able, and did not know how to get into contact with the Italo-American masses and never understood the truth about them, simple as it was. Honest men, persecuted by Fascism, certain as they were that it would bring our country to ruin, loved Italy better than the poor fools who looked for "the Empire"; but did not know how to show these deluded people the truth. There was only one way, to say and never to cease saying that you were against Fascism because you loved Italy: and to get them to listen; but one could not get them to listen without first breaking the ice. This was what the anti-Fascists who now are afraid of having nothing to hate never succeeded in doing, and perhaps we slander the Italo-Americans for not feeling more remorseful, for having failed in a sacred duty, that of enlightening their deceived brethren, enlightening them without appearing to think themselves superior. And yet with a little simplicity and modesty it would not have been so difficult.

Here is an example: one of my first visits in the United States was in answer to an invitation from the University of Florida: there I lectured for three weeks on Italian art and thought and their influence in the world, avoiding Fascist boasts and if only for that reason succeeding very well; that year there must have been little that was interesting elsewhere, seeing what a great crowd came to my lectures; the newspapers reproduced them, the Senate of Florida invited me as an Italian Senator to a sitting in my honour. One day I saw two big touring cars stop at my hotel, twelve Italians got out of them, all wearing the Fascist badge in the buttonhole. They asked to see me. I received them coldly, standing: what did they want? With a disarming smile they explained to me in Italo-Anglo-Calabrese that they had organized a grand banquet in my honour at Tampa, that the Governor would be present and would speak after me, that the affair would be a memorable event for their very large Italian colony. Even I smiled, "But you are Fascists. I instead believe that Fascism will bring Italy to ruin. Would you not do better to look for someone else?" They were

astonished. "What does that matter to us?" they said. "We were for Mussolini because everyone here was for Mussolini: now they are for you. . . ."

I did not go. I could not go; but perhaps I was wrong. Those Italians seem to me more moving, more deserving that I should stretch out to them a friendly hand than so many others who seem politically near to me. Were they not the latest victims of a long criminal detachment between "galantuomini" and "cafoni" in the South.

The last long series of lectures that I gave in the United States was in 1942-3 in the University of California. In the neighbouring San Francisco many Italians were or had been Fascists. I was invited to speak to them. I accepted on condition that all alike should come. And indeed a great crowd awaited me, in which I immediately perceived an internal uncertainty, almost amounting to suffering. The local anti-Fascists on the platform thought it their duty to form a guard about me. But I began: "Friends, I think I know what you are thinking of me at this moment. You are thinking that I despise you because you are Fascists. You are not Fascists, and I will prove it to you. They have told me that all the time of the Ethiopian war your colony surpassed all the others in America in offering its faith and trust to the Italian Fatherland. That shows that you are true anti-Fascists. Because the Fascists took gold but never gave it."

They felt themselves absolved, their faces became serene and the applause began.

That was more than anything else an allusion to the rumours then current in the Italian colonies in the United States about the mysterious disappearance of the money that had been collected, for which disappearance everyone accused the Fascist agents come from Rome. Proceeding, I explained to them that in Italy too there were fine people who had been Fascists like themselves, that was to say honest men deceived by the patriotic phrases that were the most successful piece of humbug worked by the "hierarchy".

This personal honesty of not a few Fascists was indisputable; but I admitted it with joy because there, as in Italy, it was necessary never to lose the occasion of making these people forgive one for having been right too soon.

## XXII

### CONCLUSION

THE housewife at times when she has finished her work heaps up the household rubbish outside the door of the house ; I too will do the like in order to get rid of the question I can foresee : " And Fascism ? Was it nothing according to you ? How is it you have scarcely spoken of it ? "

If these pages have shown that the Italian people is among the most particularist and individualistic in Europe, Fascism, that policed totalitarianism could not but have proved to be a way of life more contrary to our character than any other. Nothing is more intolerable to the Italian than the *Zusammenmarschieren* of the German. It is our history which has made us so, as it was with the Greeks before us, as it has been for the Belgians after us—all peoples whose dignity and whose love of independence grew up and matured in the free city. Never did Fascism know better what it was doing than when it suppressed our Communal Councils and our Syndics and substituted for them the *Podestà* of *quasi* noble and outlandish origin.

Had I written of Fascism at all I should have been obliged to explain how and why it was that the Italians put up with it for so long. For this there are more reasons than might be expected ; first among them being the bare harlequinlike astuteness of the " dictator " who stole one liberty after another, fearful each time that he had gone too far ; and then there was the baseness of those supporting him, of the Senators, of the Court and even, unfortunately, of many of the Aventine which took away the courage of a people that had resisted long and that, if well guided, would have moved. In Germany, on the other hand, Hitler dared everything in ten days.

And then I might cite too the gratuitous pro-Fascist propaganda of various authoritative foreigners like the two Chamberlains, like almost all the members of the *Académie Française*. . . . But our people ought not to seek excuses ; woe to them if this should make them forget their own errors.

It is enough merely to recall that long-drawn-out disgrace like ours has fallen—before us—on nations which the world supposed to be far more politically secure than the Italian. France of the First Empire is the most typical modern example of a Fascist régime; and the truth about the Napoleonic régime was clearly set forth by Chateaubriand in his almost forgotten work *De Bonaparte et des Bourbons* :

“ La France entière devient l’empire du mensonge ; journaux, pamphlets, discours, prose et vers, tout déguise la vérité. S’il a fait de la pluie on assure qu’il a fait du soleil ; si le tyran s’est promené au milieu du peuple muet, il s’est avancé, dit-on, au milieu des acclamations de la foule. Le but unique, c’est le Prince : la morale consiste à se dévouer à ses caprices, le devoir à le louer. Il faut surtout se récrier d’admiration lorsqu’il a fait une faute ou commis un crime . . . Aucun livre ne pouvait paraître sans être marqué de l’éloge de Bonaparte, comme du timbre de l’esclavage . . . Les crimes de notre révolution républicaine étaient l’ouvrage des passions qui laissent toujours des ressources ; il y avait du désordre et non pas de la destruction dans la société ; la morale était blessée, mais elle n’était pas anéantie . . . Mais comment guérir la plaie faite par un gouvernement qui posait en principe le despotisme ; qui, ne parlant que de morale et de religion, détruisait sans cesse la morale et la religion par ses institutions et ses mépris ; . . . qui prenait la stupeur de l’esclavage pour la paix d’une société bien organisée ? . . . Les révolutions les plus terribles sont préférables à un pareil état.”

Chateaubriand was a poet and poets often see further than politicians ; legitimist as he was, he found “ *les révolutions les plus terribles* ” preferable to the moral abasement of which we have seen a worse example.

If the French Conservatives had had a little of Chateaubriand’s daring they would have perhaps been saved two successive Revolutions, that of 1830 and that of 1848. But that is not their business ; the business of Conservatives is to prepare the revolutions of the future.

The Corsican having fallen—whose vile tricks we have learnt to know better in two later and cheaper editions—Mussolini and Hitler—France rapidly recovered ; it is indeed from Waterloo begins one of her richest epochs in thought and in life. Provided we wish it, the same can happen to us, and all the more because over that great neighbouring people we have only one advantage,

but that we have, that our long history is sown with wars, invasions, pestilence and scarcity ; and that our soil is a hard and hostile soil, which has first to be won and then to be bitterly defended ; our sterile mountains have to be transformed by millions of *podere* walls and on many a dry and narrow hillside we have thus triplicated our soil. One might almost say that we are only at home amid disasters, —even private disasters. For numerous with us, contrary to other countries, are old families of the nobility and the bourgeoisie that have known more than one generation of poverty, misery and misfortune, and then have recovered. It is a great pity that the monumental picture of Pompeo Litta <sup>1</sup> of *Le Grandi Famiglie d'Italia* is only read by specialists in genealogy. Let him who would have some little sense of history discover there the obscure periods in which younger branches of great families vanish in the struggle for daily bread and then rise again here and there to the light ; they are like symbols of our people without real classes, and perhaps for that reason a people that can never be beaten down.

So it will be after this most senseless of Italian wars. Bad treaties—in the long run worse for those who have imposed them, bitter and mean as they are—than for us ; social disorders, revolts, nothing can prevent our resurrection ; nothing except a little likely attack of moral weariness, which at times appears among the knowing, with a false air of philosophy : “ *What does it matter ? in any case the world is going on . . . what is the use of worrying ? . . .* ” A fine discovery ! Naturally the world always goes forward towards new economic forms, as well as to moral and technical ones ; and there is nothing to be alarmed about if the future economic life should be, for instance, communist or liberalist. The trouble would be if we sat down before these prospects in the same defeated frame of mind in which our famished “ displaced people ” of the seventeenth century cried, “ Long live France, long live Spain, so long as we have enough to eat ”.

The important thing is to know not whither the world is going, but whither each of us is going. In an Italy less disturbed than that of today, Mazzini said to our fathers : “ You will not create better conditions, if you do not yourselves become better men.”

<sup>1</sup> Pompeo Litta, born of noble family in Milan 1781, died 1852. His great work, the *Famiglie Celebri italiane*, began to appear in 1819. He had completed the history of 113 families when he died.

In none of these pages have I wanted to assume the rôle of mentor or guide ; but this book will not be altogether useless if, having allowed facts to speak for themselves, I have shown that there exist among us inexhaustible springs of vitality and youth. It is to these we must turn, breaking the mediocre limits of an Albertine Statute, now outmoded, and of an administrative and bureaucratic uniformity which denies our unity just when it makes a show of affirming it.

He who has watched for years our emigrants, winning a livelihood and making their way in the world, has the joy of stating that wherever they work seriously, wherever they firmly establish themselves, there is no need of talk for them to be appreciated. It is only in Italy, in the halls of Universities and political meetings, that we hear too often boasts of our " thousand years old civilization " without perceiving that by appealing to that alone we belittle it and ourselves.

The more we bleat about our past the more we confess our inferiority before the world. We are a living people, full of vitality, sure of our future ; why should we allow rhetoricians to represent us as noble decadents ? When shall we decide to stop their mouths ?

I have written these pages at a time when many among us are speaking and writing of radical reforms and of new Constitutions ; some even write thus with a secret hope that nothing will happen. But it has not been sufficiently emphasized that no reform or political transformation can be fruitful or enduring unless account is taken of the fact that we as a people are indivisible from our neighbours, and this is far truer than either they or we will admit.

Italy has given the world the great light of the Renaissance ; the United States first and then France opened with their Revolutions the way to reforms even more daring. Having come out of two world wars, due to the tribal conspiracies of various nationalisms, we Italians might perhaps contribute to the organized peace of Europe by offering an example of a courageous and original decentralization, that, if imitated elsewhere, would weaken the nationalistic rivalries, half savage and half mystic, that are still threatening our common European fatherland. It is only by looking ahead that we can prove to ourselves that sorrow has given us a new force ; and that we are capable of again taking the initiatives, the effect of which will be felt beyond our frontiers.

You will not save Italy except by thinking of Europe ; you will



not create a new Italy except by recognizing that she is part of the Continental Unity that must rise one day. It is only by thinking of the future shape of things that we can feel ourselves secure on the paths of today, disconnected and fragmentary as they are.



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## About the Author...

Count Carlo Sforza was born in Italy in 1873. He attended the University of Pisa and his life has been one of service to his country. The first Count Sforza received his title from the Duke of Milan in 1456 and the family has continued its tradition of action, decision and energy.

When Mussolini staged his March on Rome in October, 1922, Count Sforza held the portfolio of Italian Ambassador to France. This post had been preceded by a long career in the diplomatic service. When Mussolini came to power he sought to recall Sforza from Paris, offering him any post in the Cabinet. Sforza's reply was typical: "The one thing you could offer me, you cannot give me—my freedom." Forced to leave his homeland, the Count continued his struggle against Fascism first from Paris and then, with the fall of France, from the United States. On the fall of Mussolini he returned to Italy as the leading anti-Fascist statesman.

Count Sforza's part in the reorganization of his native land has been a leading one. He was Minister Secretary of State in the first Bonomi Cabinet from June to December 1944. In June 1944 he was also High Commissioner for Sanctions against Fascism, which job he resigned in January, 1945. He was already President of the Consulta Nazionale and later joined the Italian Republican Party and was elected to the Constituent Assembly in June 1946.

In February 1947 Count Sforza was nominated Minister of Foreign Affairs in the third cabinet of De Gasperi. He was designated by the Constituent Assembly a Senator of the Republic. He is still Minister of Foreign Affairs, and as such attended the meetings of the United Nations Assembly in Paris in the latter part of 1948.

Count Sforza is well known in the United States, where he has lectured and received many honors. He has published many books in this country, the most recent of which was Contemporary Italy.

In this brilliant book, one of the most eminent living Italians presents a comprehensive view of the history, culture, politics and life of the Italian people from the earliest times to the present.

Today it is more vital than ever that Americans should understand the Italians. Statesman and philosopher, Count Sforza, at present the Foreign Minister of Italy, brings to the subject both wide erudition and deep sympathetic insight, sharpened by his experience in Italian public life.

Emphasis is upon contemporary Italy. We cannot know a people, however, without knowing their past—the heritage of thought and attitudes handed down from older generations. Keenly analyzing the essential characteristics of the Italians as displayed in every phase of their national life and spirit, Count Sforza succeeds memorably in explaining the Italian people and nation.

Every student of Italian culture and history, every visitor to Italy, every American who hopes to understand these fascinating and complex people, should read this illuminating book.

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