TO THE ITALIAN ARMIES

BY

JULES DESTRÉE
AND
RICHARD DUPIERREUX

T. FISHER UNWIN, Ltd.,
1, ADELPHI TERRACE, LONDON.
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Chapter I.

A PEOPLE GATHERED ROUND A FLAG.

WE have seen the armies of Italy in the mountains of the Friuli, of the Cadora, of the Dolomites, and the Trentino. The atmosphere on those heights is bracing and invigorating. One breathes there a salubrious air, impregnated with the aroma of pines. The spirit there is free, the will unfettered, decision is stimulated, and hope is borne on wings. The body is healthy, the soul alert. And not only the mountains but the men who live among them renew one's energy.

We have seen them all—bold infantry men, Alpine troops or bersaglieri, rough artillery men, persevering miners, workmen, and soldiers—in the glorious scenery of their exploits. No war can present more difficulties and, at times, be more paradoxical than that which they wage. Their task seems impossible; but these men of the mountains are endowed with such lightness of heart and such great tenacity that they carry it out in the face of all obstacles. No praise can be too great for the troops which storm peaks, conquer glaciers, bayonet in hand, and hoist guns where never human foot has been set before.

Not only the first line, where men are engaged in hand-to-hand fighting, but also the lines of communication seem a miracle of organisation. In the rear of the soldier who attacks and defends himself, there were miles and miles of bare, arid country—deserts in the mountains—intersected by precarious roads. A powerful network of lines of communication had to be created in the worst atmospheric conditions. One realises what admirable self-denial, what sacrifices, what power of resistance and what *élan* has been shown by the soldiers of Italy—by the soldiers and their leaders. In Italy the officer is not to be seen behind the storming party ; he is in the front line, and his breast is the first target offered to the enemy. People who regard war as a purely practical business will call this Latin courage somewhat naïve. But it is lavish courage which constitutes the force of an army; this heroic bravado, the inheritance of a great people. It is too fine a thing to advise them to abandon it. Among such a people the soldier's spirit can never be the artificial creation of a caste. In truth, there is no military caste. The soldier as well as the officer of Italy feels himself to be a citizen in arms. With him militarism is fused in patriotism ; and this spirit is very strong. A regiment marching through one of the hamlets immediately behind the front has the same soldierly and orderly air that it would have in crossing through some peaceful Tuscan or Umbrian city. Their severe discipline is cheerfully accepted because, owing little to constraint and nothing to fear, it is

permeated throughout by a true spirit of friendliness.

Between the men and their officers there is an atmosphere of cordiality akin to fraternity. The officers are constantly concerned as to the means by which they may increase the comfort of their men, and they interest themselves in their family life. Many times have we heard officers asking infantrymen under their command for news of their wives or children. It was sufficient to see the joy with which these soldiers replied, to realise that under such leaders they have shrunk from no sacrifice.

The people of Italy had all the physical qualities necessary for a nation at war; enthusiasm in their work, the power to resist privation, and sobriety. Let us not forget that every year Italy lends to the world half a million workmen, ready for the hardest toil. At the front they have proved themselves to be the same energetic workers whom we used to see on the roads and in the factories of Europe and the New World. They have shown themselves to be more than this; the flame of idealism has lent power to their muscles.

The Italian soldier knows why he is fighting. From a proud and subtle people, loving criticism and argument, we cannot expect a blind submission to a Government's orders. A soldier submits, of course, to discipline; but, though soldier, he remains a citizen of a free country. This citizen not only answers the call of his country, but his conscience freely approves of this call. We were

very much struck by the frequency with which both officers and men called this war *la guerra giusta*. Had the war not been a righteous one in their eyes, discipline alone would not have sufficed to induce them to accept such full and heavy sacrifices. Seen, too, in this light, the Italian Army is assuredly the nation in arms.

Here every one is more or less a follower of Mazzini, and the spirit of Garibaldi animates the hearts of the humblest. Thus, apart from their patriotic aims, the Italians—and, above all, the lower classes—have a determination, as it were, that justice shall be done. Prompted by the same obscure impulses which made the ancient Romans the pioneers of right, they have refused to stand outside the conflict in which the honour of Europe is at stake. Nothing touched us more than to hear soldiers and officers say that the armies of Italy had gone to war for the redemption of Belgium. For nearly two years we have found similar expressions of sympathy for our country in every town and village from the valley of Aosta to Vittoria in Sicily. But nowhere had they the same meaning and the same value as they had on those steep rocks on which the blood of Italy had flowed.

Under the influence of a thought so noble in its unselfishness the union of Italy becomes daily more complete; first, territorial unity by the restitution of territory unjustly detained by the Hapsburgs of Vienna, and next, moral unity. We must remember that Italy is not, like France, a nation born long ago, of which all the constitutive

elements have become gradually blended in perfect harmony. Italy was born yesterday, as we count the days of the world.

Before 1870, races, languages, dialects, and political regimes deeply divided the country. Some of these divisions remain, as, for instance, provincial individuality. When we remember the long, narrow shape of Italy, it is easy to understand that the geography of the country is itself opposed to fusion. Frequent intercourse between the different provinces is hardly encouraged in a country so formed by nature.

The war has done what peace could not have accomplished except with the help of centuries. It has brought together all the Italians from Abruzzi and Piedmont, from Sicily and Venetia, uniting them in the same spirit of self-sacrifice; it has brought them all the same suffering; they all work painfully to the same end, and all have the same aspirations. It is thus that a nation is created and strengthened. From henceforth something is changed in the psychology of the people. The other day some soldiers were talking together: "Where do you come from?" "Naples," said one. "And you?" "Tuscany," said another. And a third replied: "I am an Italian. We are all Italians. We all have the same ideals!"

This is the new formula of Italian patriotism. It is a fruit of the war; in the army it becomes an incentive to victory. The armies of Italy represent a fervent nation grouped around its flag.

Chapter II.

UDINE.

THE train which brings us towards Udine runs through calm, green landscapes, through flat fields intersected by placid canals in which are reflected clumps of willows. This Venetia of the Friuli would remind one of a rustic Flanders ; and the leaden sky which to-day envelops everything in a rainy mist would give colour to the conception, if the dry beds of torrents did not, from time to time, reveal the proximity of the mountains.

It is in this fair plain that the Tagliamento, descending from the heights of the Cadore, forms the white network of its deltas. We cross its arid, stony bed over a huge bridge, and we come, 200 yards farther on, to another, the wooden platform of which bears the weight of a row of motor lorries. We are now in the war zone, and these convoys are not the only signs of it. All along the line we perceive the silhouettes of carabinieri—Italian gendarmes—on guard, clad in grey from foot to cocked hat. Close by, sheltered by a clump of trees, soldiers perform their morning toilet on the threshold of their bell-shaped tents. Everywhere gangs of workmen are digging the fields, widening the railroads, heaping up white and black ballast together, laying down sleepers, fixing rails ; others are putting up fresh telegraph poles, or are nailing together the planks

of a hut ; others, again, are putting the finishing touches to a row of white sheds with glass windows, as dainty and fresh in the green and damp meadows as the little pavilions in a world's fair. Elsewhere, their massive forms outlined against the cloudy sky, are to be seen huge sheds for dirigible balloons, with corrugated iron roofs on which the drops of water glisten. Further, we see more fields, where stand grey sentinels against trunks of trees amid clumps of acacias or at the edge of the tall maize, whose yellow flowers sway in the wind like a fringe. We pass troop-trains, from which half-dressed soldiers alight. They stride vigorously up and down the line to shake off the numbness of sleep. The newspaper-boy comes up, and is immediately deprived of his stock. Ten dark heads bend over the same sheet to read Cadorna's communiqué, whose few lines of concise prose bring, in these days of victory, a feverish light to the eyes.

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In the diffused sunlight we now perceive the outline of the castle of Udine.

"Do not expect," said our guide, "to experience in this town the strong warlike impression which so many objects have produced in your mind throughout the journey."

His warning was justified. In the streets it is less military activity than the quiet rustic civil life which strikes you at first. Women pass along peacefully, carrying at the two ends of a stick (*douintch*), or balanced obliquely on their

shoulders, or on their gracefully crossed arms, their freshly laden baskets of vegetables. With a yellow wall as a background, an ox with huge horns stands out like an antique bas-relief, and, seated on a low cart, which it draws, a peasant smokes obliviously. The further we advance the more soldiers we see; but they are idlers out of work, and their officers, in top-boots or leggings, seem to stroll along with no object in view. As we pass under the low arcades which border all the streets, we have the impression that within the narrow walls of a peaceful provincial town a garrison is boring itself to death.

But with what charming picturesqueness is this little town decked out! It has a large, elegant piazza where everything reminds us of Venice. At the summit of a column the lion of the Serene Republic rests his lordly paw on the Gospel of St. Mark. In the massive clock-tower two men in bronze strike the bell; under a dome of lead two giants with powerful muscles guard the entrance to the staircases leading to the centre of the piazza, and the Loggia Municipale, with its pointed windows and the delicate Gothic sculpture of its capitals, seems a small pink-and-white replica of the Doge's Palace. At the foot of the staircases, in front of the Statue of Peace (presented to the city by Napoleon as a memento of Campo-Formio), in front of the fine Florentine arcades of the Loggia San Giovanni, life, quiet and monotonous, ebbs and flows. Can war really be raging in all its fury only at a little distance from here? It is difficult to realise it, though, as

time passes, panting motor-cycles and cars turn at high speed round the angle of the piazza, and though, behind a palisade, one sees traces of an aerial bombardment.

We wanted to see the frescoes of Tiepolo in the Bishop's palace. The wonderful master who, in the eighteenth century, restored its splendour to the decayed Venetian decorative art, has worked marvels here. The ceilings, with their wonderful foreshortenings, the walls where float light draperies half-wrapped round the riotous grace of female figures, exhibit a bewildering skill in the service of an original conception. We stopped for a long time before a group of three young girls appearing to a prostrate old man. In regarding these scenes we seem to have escaped from the war; but, apart from the pleasure we derived from them, was not our lingering there a pious homage to the painter of the delightful ceiling—once the pride of the Venetian Scalzis, now shattered by the bombs of the Austrian aeroplanes? And are not the other Tiepolos in the city of the Doges more than ever in danger to-day when the Austrians are exasperated by their defeats?

"Gorizia perduta,
Venezia distrutta."

So ran the distich written on the papers thrown by aeroplanes on the Piazza San Marco at the time of the first Italian offensive on the Isonzo. Will they not by sacrilege and murder destroy the scenes of the feastings of the angels on the ceilings of the Gesuati or

those of the human feasts on the walls of the Labia palace?

***

We go outside. The silence is unbroken and life at a standstill. We pass along mournful, muddy streets. A church, a large palace closed up, intensify our impression of solitude and desertion. Such a provincial town is doubly depressing when it drizzles, as it does now, persistently.

Suddenly a carabinier calls out to us as we stop before a beautiful park, where drops of water tremble on the decorative branches of a large epicea. An iron railing, covered with straw matting, surrounds the garden. A silent palace, such as one sees only in an old clerical town, stands at the top of the garden. "*Non si può fermarsi*" ("You must not stop there"), shouts the carabinier.

And when we question him as to his orders he looks at us with an astonished and already suspicious air.

Here in this silent house, built it would seem for some archbishop, victory was prepared!

***

This victory is now no longer a vague dream. It has taken a definite form and name—Gorizia. It happened yesterday. But we must look closely at Udine before we can find any trace of it. Elsewhere, in all the villages and towns behind the front, the fluttering of flags, the mirth of the

people, the expression on their faces, the universal though half-suppressed cry of triumph, proclaim and joyously repeat the glad tidings. But here there is nothing of this. Here the tricolour is rarely seen and is kept in the background. On the great piazza the mean equestrian statue of the king *galant'uomo* carries still a few artificial flowers with the Italian colours which decked it at the time of the recent demonstration. Maybe those who win such triumphs with their own hands have no time left for commenting upon them. . . . But people are stopping before a shop window. The first photographs taken in Gorizia redenta have just been placed there. The newspapers which appear are read with a silent feverishness. For this population the victory of yesterday is the beginning. Like true conquerors, they dream of a triumph for to-morrow.

The long pink-vaulted gallery of the castle, with its pointed arches, brings us to the hill where, the legend says, Attila stood gazing at the burning Aquileia. To-day the belfry of Aquileia, the highest of the Friuli, is shrouded in the grey mists. To-day one sees only the pink roofs of Udine, a few fields, and some roads. A thick fog quickly blots out the landscape. Over there to the right the sea is hidden in this overwhelming whiteness. Monfalcone, conquered by the Italians only two days ago, rises in that direction. To the left is the road to Vienna—scarcely visible in the dense atmosphere. But straight in front of us, the sun, which has not ceased to struggle with the fog, exposes to view for a moment the outlines of

the massive grey mountains. Along a road of immense breadth a motor-car, like a climbing insect, hurries towards us. These mountains, or their sisters behind them, have names—Sabotino, Podgora—and at their feet the Italian Gorizia lies smoking from the furious bombardment of the retreating Austrians.

These lead-coloured forms, outlined against an horizon of quicksilver, are now covered with so much glory and enveloped in so much mystery that they cannot but give rise to many reflections. At our feet, with a flesh-coloured wall for background, the arabesque arches of the castle stand out in relief. Some idle soldiers sit along the wall, reading letters or newspapers.

In the middle of a vividly green lawn, which leads to the loggia, is a cluster of crimson flowers, like a blood-red star.

The dark mountains also have their blood-red stars.

Chapter III.

ON THE WAY TO THE BATTLE-FIELD.

Lucinico.

THE road which leads from Udine to Gorizia has no perceptible slope. It passes through well-tilled fields, the aspect of which recalls that of Flanders, reminding us that we are still in the same rich, flat country through which we passed yesterday in travelling from Messina to Udine. And yet, when we come to a little bridge over a narrow stream, the officer who acts as our guide exclaims :

"Here is the old frontier!"

The old frontier? We look for some natural justification for this political division. But there is none. The landscape and the earth's produce are the same on both sides of the arbitrary line traced off by Austria at a time when Italy was not sufficiently powerful to oppose her will. There are no mountains except on the horizon, far in the imperial territory. They end in the plain of the Friuli, the sister of the Venetian plain. They seem to have been placed there for one purpose only : to increase the spirit of the Army in occupation of the heights on the day when it descends into the Italian plain. The scene invites invasion. From her position there Austria threatens the security of Italy, and the very existence of the peninsula demands that these mountains on the horizon should be its boundary on the north-east.

But the rights of nationalities also make it necessary that the frontiers, of which Italy has such pressing need in order to protect her plains, should be restored to her. To convince oneself of this it is sufficient to look at the dwellings where the Venetian forms of architecture continue to subsist, or to listen to the language of the peasants settled there.

We cannot deny, of course, that here, as in Dalmatia and Istria, the slow influx of the Slavs has slightly adulterated the character of the Italian race, but wherever the two races have been left free to blend together, the superior civilising influence of the Italian absorbs the Slav as being of a less vigorous character. In spite of the opposition of the Austrian police, in spite of the seeds of division so constantly sown in accordance with the principles of the Hapsburg monarchy, in spite of the efforts made to instigate the Slav against them, the district of Gorizia has ceaselessly shown its desire to be united to the kingdom of Italy; valiantly, tenaciously, and cheerfully has it struggled, very much in the same way as the provinces of Alsace-Lorraine have struggled against Germany. As at Colmar and Mulhousen, the sporting associations became the nucleus of the resistance. Among them the Unione Ginnastica must be mentioned as having deserved the best thanks of Italy.

Let me tell you a little story—one which might be illustrated by a Gorizian Hansi if Gorizia were, like Mulhousen, the birthplace of a patriotic artist. One day a boy was passing through the

streets of Gorizia whistling the Italian hymn "Lega Nazionale." "Hullo, there," cried a policeman, "can't you whistle some other piggish tune than that?" "Certainly I can," replied the urchin, and, with his hands thrust in his pockets, he went his way whistling the Austrian national anthem!

Believe me, Gorizia deserves the name of "Gem of the Italian Friuli," and the song runs true that says: "Would Gorizia be Slav because four Slovine emigrants had arrived from Plava?" No, indeed, by that argument Trieste is Slav and Pisino is Slav. No, no:—

> "*A Gorizia benedetta*
> *Tutto, tutto e italian.*"
>
> "All, all are Italians
> In Gorizia the blest."

***

We now come to Cormons—the first town reconquered by the Italians. Here one feels that one is approaching the front. The whole of the little town is occupied by soldiers. One sees them at the windows, and in the sheds repairing motor-cars, and again in the lofts piling up fodder. On the little piazza they form a confused mass around the statue of Maximilian, the inscription on which is hidden under a placard bearing, in Italian, the words: "Memento of a barbaric past now abolished." From the early days of the war the soldiers have compelled the Emperor to enlist in the Italian Army, the staff of a tricolour flag has been placed in his hand, and he has been made to play the part of an ensign-bearer.

But we notice that it is not only the men of bronze who manifest their loyalty to the kingdom of Victor Emanuel III. From the frontier onwards the whole population exhibits an intensely patriotic enthusiasm. Great flags are floating from the windows of private houses and public buildings. Placards announce in glowing terms, and with that rhetoric peculiar to the Italian poster, the news of the victory, and touchingly invite the inhabitants to celebrate it by gifts to the Red Cross. Thus this extremely remote district of Italy gives proof of its union with all the other parts of the peninsula.

Other scenes illustrate the determination of all to act together in their country's interest: a score of Sicilian carts at the cross-roads are recognised by their naïvely painted panels vividly proclaiming the heroic exploits of the paladins of old. These carts seem unwilling to separate from one another like the soldiers themselves, natives of the same village, who flock together when off duty.

The mist is rising, and unveils the nearest mountains. The country now shows more conspicuous traces of war. In the fields bellowing oxen, destined for the slaughter-house, stand at the two sides of a manger, over which swing their long horns. On the road cavalry are passing along, their horses' shoes flashing in the sun. Motors full of stretchers pass now more often, their dark-brown hoods marked with the Red Cross. They are followed by carts drawn by six mules, heaped up with hay, on the top of which sits the driver.

Then ammunition convoys, keeping close to the ditches, with their green banks. Suddenly a splendid regiment of dragoons dashes past us, the royal ensign floating from their lances. Under their tall helmets, which bear the blue cross of Savoy on their peaks, they look like Roman soldiers of yore.

They, too, are making for Gorizia, for they say that General Cadorna's strategy has brought the cavalry into play again. We enter with them the little village of Mossa, where a few roofs have been knocked in by shells and the fronts of a few houses have been slightly damaged by shrapnel. But we soon leave them behind, and see the first gabled roofs of Lucinico appearing on the horizon.

Of Lucinico the name alone survives; nothing is left of the village. Of some of the houses no stones have been left standing, while others show only the skeleton of their framework. In the middle of what was once the square a little blazoned well is filled with debris. We pass over this accumulation of rubbish covering everywhere what once were streets or gardens, no longer distinguishable now were it not for the few remaining street-names; and these names are Italian—"Dante," and "Julius Cæsar," which the inhabitants proudly used to read when they were still under the Austrian yoke. Were not these name-plates signs of a popular vote taken before its time?

At the corner of one of these streets we stopped before a chapel which has been strangely spared by the bombardment. A crude wooden carving, coloured by some peasant artist, here recalls that

fine Christian type of victory—St. George trampling the dragon underfoot. And the irony of it! It is an Austrian shell which, by piercing the wall just behind the saint's head, has given him a halo of sunny sky.

Chapter IV.

THE GEM OF THE FRIULI.

Gorizia.

THE last houses of Lucinico climb up the slopes of Mount Podgora, which overlooks the Isonzo valley and the plain of Gorizia. We have to climb to the summit of this hill to see the redeemed city. Scarcely have we started when the ground begins to show traces of an appalling struggle. The earthworks prepared in the yellow ground show deep breaches or are choked up by falling sand-banks, some of which show the brown stains of blood. The indomitable will to advance, the furious onslaught, the obstinate resolve to cling to the battle-field, have left their marks behind. We think we can see traces of the knees, the hands, the nails, which gripped every bit of the ground in the determination to conquer.

The fighting still goes on round Gorizia, and near us Italian batteries boom and tear the air, and shells hiss and moan as they fly through space.

We now climb near the trenches of the Podgora, the conquest of which is so recent that there has not been more than enough time to carry away the wounded and bury the dead. Much of the booty is still lying about — cartridges, hand-grenades, and bombs—in indescribable confusion, so that we have to walk warily.

Heaps of black loaves, some of them half-eaten ;

torn sacks ; ragged clothes, soiled with mire and blood ; blue helmets, twisted guns, bent bayonets, breech-blocks, iron scraps, empty haversacks, broken planks, open packing cases, unrolled dressings, stones and linen stained with blood, leather straps, socks, soiled stretchers, the horrible sickening smell of corpses only half-buried. Rats and mice hurry away at our approach. And over the hill, torn, as it were, asunder, broods an oppressive silence, broken at intervals by the thunder of the guns.

Papers lie scattered everywhere, some printed in German, some in Hungarian. Letters and post cards bringing touching news from anxious parents to a *Carissimo figlio, caro fratello*, the last tender messages sent to those who were to die. It seems a sacrilege to tread them under foot as we do.

Four days ago the enemy was still here. In place of the Italian barbed wire fastened to wooden crosses of St. Andrew, we now see Austrian wire fixed to iron posts. How appalling the struggle must have been which dislodged the enemy from such well-protected trenches. On the shapeless ground lie steel shields, pierced through by the deadly bullet of the machine-gun. In caverns dug in the rock munitions are heaped up, protected in their cases, smeared with bitumen, against the damp. Everywhere, hundreds of packages of machine-gun and rifle cartridges and hand-grenades lie in the mud and dust. All the defensive works have been ploughed up by the terrible force of the shells. The mountain is pierced by yawning caverns ; the trees, stripped

of their branches and their leaves, stand like skeletons against the grey sky. The Podgora is like one vast cemetery. Infantrymen are picking up here and there clothes, weapons, and cartridges.

We had just left the trenches in order better to climb the hill when a soldier touched us on the arm and stopped us by a gesture, without saying a word. We look around us. At our feet the earth is somewhat swollen, but at first we see nothing strange about it. A moment later we understand the meaning of his movement as we distinguished the contorted outline of a body, lying on its side. We see the feet and nailed shoes piercing the thin layer of earth, then the whitened ribs, and next the head, which some one had wrapped up in a military cloak. But the sun and rain have corroded the material, and through a hole two pure-white teeth appear. We remove our hats; filled with horror, we think of this fallen soldier now crumbling away above the ground—one of so many sleeping their last sleep on this field of honour.

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We are now at the summit of this tragic hill. At our feet, in the plain, there winds a narrow stream, which becomes dry in the summer heat, but which now wreathes the green ribbon of its gentle waters around islands of white pebbles. This stream is the Isonzo, across which stretch several bridges. One of them is the railway bridge; there the twisted lines pass over a large gap

where the arch was blown up by the retreating Austrians.

On the left bank of the stream there are houses in ruins. This is the village of Podgora.

Lower down, on the right, the grey silhouette of the castle of Gorizia appears from out the mist which still veils the lower parts of the town. And from the castello itself arise puffs of smoke ; the Austrians are there, bombarding the Italian artillery, which replies shell for shell.

The little town is there, all white and pink. Its streets are deserted, but its houses are uninjured. To see it thus, looking so fresh in its valley, intersected with white paths, it is difficult to realise that it has been and still is the stake of this appalling conflict. One needs to look closely to see the holes made by the bombs on the railway banks, and farther on, in a suburb, the tall chimney of a factory broken like a tree.

Down below an Italian battery is hidden among the trees. There is a flash, a roar, a prolonged hiss, and then again deep silence.

The strangest thing about this battle of which we are the spectators is its silence—the silence and the solitude of the vast expanse before us. In the whole valley of Gorizia no human being is visible as far as the eye can stretch—no troops, no pedestrians, and no riders. From time to time a motor-car passes in a cloud of dust—the only moving thing in this still landscape. But on the left the artillery duel goes on. Little white puffs of smoke, like shreds of cotton-wool, mark the explosions. At frequent intervals the air is filled

with the moaning of shells. But that seems something apart from the silence. We have the same impression when, the distressing tac, tac, tac, of the machine-gun having stopped, presumably for an infantry action, silence reigns again.

On the right, in the direction of Doberdo also, the struggle goes on. To conquer Gorizia was a prodigious feat, but it is only half the battle. That the victory may be complete it is necessary to remain there, and therefore to expel the enemy from the surrounding heights whence he might still bombard the city. And this they are doing before our eyes, trying to reach the bridges and roads, hurling their shells on the town, and causing fires to break out there. But it is the rage of despair. Their efforts are continually frustrated by Italian energy. From the high place on which we stand we cannot realise to the full what is going on. Later, when we return to Udine in the evening, we shall have to read Cadorna's communiqué to understand that the action which we have been watching with such feverish excitement has ended in another success for the Italian arms.

We go down again past the earthworks to the spot where lie the dead. We pass before the shelters of yesterday. On the threshold we read: "He who takes off his mask is a dead man." Here a few days ago a furious struggle was raging. Now Nature reasserts itself on the shapeless earth. A grasshopper sings in a chink of the rock. The bind-weed grows around a roll of rusty barbed wire.

Chapter V.

AMONGST THE AUSTRIAN PRISONERS.

The Environs of Udine.

IF you leave Udine by the southern gate you see spread before you a beautiful road lined with tall plane trees. In time of peace this road was of little importance. It owes everything to the war. In the fields right and left, as far as it stretches, temporary barracks for the army have been built. It is covered with every kind of military vehicle, and it would become unbearably dusty but for the unceasing care of the workmen who water it.

But if you would have a truly impressive sight of Italian organisation you must leave behind you the picturesque little town of Palmanova, with its streets branching out like a star, its massive gates, its belt of grass-covered earthworks, and its deep moat, which show it to be an obsolete type of fortress.

Then, for many miles on both sides of the road, you see villages built of wooden huts covered with bitumen, which have a clean and almost dainty appearance. In front of some of these huts flower-beds have been laid out. The streets have their names. Here and there one sees recreation grounds, gymnasiums, and pavilions with flowers climbing round them. Truly, these Italian camps have no reason to be jealous of the English ones, which are reputed to be provided with every

comfort. But just now they are empty. The soldiers are all at the front. Only a few remain here and there. Soon they will be filled by a new population, for we have just come across companies of reservists on the road still without their equipment, and carrying on their backs their kit and new pairs of shoes.

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At a turn of the road, in the midst of fields of maize and clumps of poplars, there rises a clamour, and soon we are in the camp of the Austrian prisoners. A few soldiers are keeping guard outside a light wire railing, so light that, before we have passed through the gate of the camp, we have already entered into its life.

The officer who does the honours apologises for any want of order that we may notice: "We have been rushed since the victory," he said. "It has completely upset us. Only a few months ago we had no more than twelve prisoners. To-day we have a thousand times as many, and they do not cease to arrive."

These apologies are, of course, by way of polite speech. What strikes us, on entering the camp, is the complete order and cleanliness which prevail there. On each side of vast empty spaces are rows of wooden huts. In these it has been possible to place a great number of men, but, large as these huts are, they are by no means sufficient, and numerous tents have been erected under the canvas of which the latest new-comers are installed. They are everywhere, still stupefied after the protracted

fatigues of the campaign, lying in the sun or playing and chattering in groups ; some of them leaning by themselves against the balustrade or writing letters on their knees.

This mixed crowd is full of interest and picturesqueness, a swarm of men in grey, shabbily dressed, wandering idly and aimlessly about, reminding us of a great meeting of workmen on strike.

The encampment, we are told, as we traverse it in all its length, is only a provisional concentration ground. The prisoners rest there for a few days before they are distributed in the different districts of Italy. As they come directly from the front, it is necessary first of all to see to their cleanliness. In the department where they are immediately placed are douches and baths. They all have to go there, and whilst they are inside their clothes and linen are disinfected in the tubs which one sees close at hand. They then enter into the second division, where their state of health is looked into ; their intestines are submitted to a bacteriological examination. When that is done they are admitted to a third department, and there they await the day when the place of their internment will be finally fixed.

We were able to see the working of the system which the officer has just described to us. When they leave the douches the men put on clean linen and spotless clothes. Some of them gather around the chapel. These are those who are about to leave the encampment for the provinces. Others repair to the refectory, where they receive their

portion of "minestrone"—an appetising soup of rice, meat, and tomatoes.

"What kind of food do you give your prisoners?"

"When they arrive exhausted by the battle, we fortify them with a meat repast, after which they have exactly the same diet as the Italian soldier."

"And does that suit them?"

"Ask them," replies the officer, with a smile.

As we pass along, all the prisoners stand to attention with a correct and deferential air. We notice one who puts his plate on the ground, the better to salute us.

Our guide speaks to him in Italian.

"Does he understand you?"

"He is a pure Italian, as you will see."

And, turning towards him:

"Where do you come from, my man?"

"From Trieste, sir."

"Do you like the minestrone?"

"Oh, yes."

"Is it as good as you had at Sabotino?"

He makes a movement of astonishment as if it were impossible not to know the truth.

"One didn't eat over well there of late," he said.

"Then you are not sorry to be a prisoner?"

"On the contrary, I am only too well pleased."

We notice that this subject of the Austrian Empire pronounces his words in Italian with the purest Venetian lisp!

But, in spite of this statement of the soldier from Trieste, the Austrian prisoners have by no

means the appearance of men who have been badly fed. As a rule, their physical condition is excellent, which may be explained by the fact that the Austrian Staff has sent the finest regiments to oppose the Italians on the Isonzo.

They carry the proof of this on their breasts. A number of special little medals were sold to the *corps d'armée* of the Isonzo which many of the soldiers attach to their tunics; and those are not the only distinguishing marks which they bear. Some of them sew crosses on to their caps as evidence of their Catholic faith or in the belief that they will protect them against all danger. Others carry the portrait in bronze of Francis Joseph as a souvenir of the old Emperor's anniversary. Those who have been wounded have a red stripe on their cap.

An elderly man greets us with a smile.

"How old are you?"

"Fifty."

"What were you doing in the army?"

"I was working. I was made prisoner while I was digging a trench at Podgora."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Zara."

"Are you an Italian?"

"Half Italian and half Slav. We migrated to Zara from Montenegro, to carry on the profession of cultivators."

"Then you have relations in Montenegro and in Italy?"

"I have numerous relations in both armies."

By the side of these elderly men there are

others quite young; beardless, frail-looking soldiers of sixteen or seventeen. When you question them they reply that they are "volunteers." One of them says that he is a "volunteer in spite of himself." We try to learn what is this particular kind of voluntary service; but we get no answer. The non-commissioned officers who wander about near the prisoners whenever we question them seem to have maintained their authority over these poor men. When the latter perceive that they are near them they stop talking for fear of saying something wrong.

Generally speaking, while the men inspire deep sympathy, their superiors exhibit a supercilious arrogance. They maintain the spirit of caste, although misfortune, in equalising their situation with that of the other prisoners, has deprived them of all official authority over them. They still regard them with contempt.

"I speak French, sir," said a young man with shifty blue eyes.

"Have you lived in France?"

"Yes, at Paris. I was a painter."

"Did you like Paris?"

"Very much. It is the town I like above all others."

"You were sorry to leave it, then?"

"Oh, yes. I left it the day when Austria declared war on Serbia. I had an English friend. We wept like children when we bade one another farewell on the quay."

"You are an Austrian?"

"Yes, . . . that is to say . . . I am not a

German Austrian. I live in the district of the Danube."

"Are you pleased to be made a prisoner?"

He replies as if by rote:

"As a soldier, I am not pleased. As a man, I should be if ——"

"If what?"

"If I could reassure my relatives as to my fate."

"Well, you can write to them."

"I know that, sir; and I know that the letter will go from here. But will it reach its destination?"

This examination of the prisoners, to which they submit with a very good grace, is deeply interesting to us. The difference of language makes the conversation difficult at times; but the difficulty disappears, thanks to the goodwill of our guide, Major Cito,* who is a remarkable linguist. Sometimes when a dialect renders the conversation full of difficulties a prisoner voluntarily offers himself as an interpreter.

"Are you wounded?" we asked one of the Austrians.

"Yes, slightly."

"Are you being well looked after?"

"Very well."

Major Cito remarks to him that: "Our soldiers

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* Major F. Cito, Duke of Torrecuso, attached to the Foreign Missions at headquarters, was our obliging and well-informed guide during those days. We owe him our special thanks; and we must not forget also to thank all the officers and soldiers with whom we came into contact, and who showed us the greatest courtesy and were most eager to give us all the information we desired.

show greater attention to your wounded than you do to ours. I have seen the iron clubs with which you finish off those who fall."

"I have seen them, too."

"And what do you think of it?"

"When a soldier no longer holds a gun or a bayonet he ceases to be a soldier. He is only a man, and as such has a claim to mercy."

His statement is incomplete, but it is formal.

"Where do you come from?"

"From Galicia. I was born at Czernowitz."

"Do you know that the Russians are at Czernowitz?"

He looks up with astonishment. He knows nothing. No one has told him anything.

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We had now questioned several men, all of whom were satisfied with the regime to which the Italians subjected them. What struck us most was not only the difference of the national type, but the diversity of languages. Latins, Poles, Slavs, Rumanians, Bosniaks, Czechs, Magyars elbow one another in this strange babel of a camp —an army composed of ten nations. Austrians, properly so-called, we have not seen, and while it is true that we have heard German spoken, German was never the maternal speech of the person who made use of it. An army represents the State which it supports, and this motley crowd is a symbolic image of the Austrian Empire —an anomalous medley of nations prevented from fulfilling their natural destiny. The Italian

motto of "*Delenda est Austria*" is also the inevitable conclusion of our visit to these twelve thousand poor devils who defended, on the banks of the Isonzo, the wildest myth that ever sprang out of the vagaries of history or the ambitions of princes.

Chapter VI.

IN THE FRESHNESS OF THE MORNING.

Udine.

SILENT and fresh this morning is the little town of Udine, where the pulse of the war is beating, though some miles away from the front! Yesterday evening there was an unusual air of anxiety in the town. A crowd thronged under the arcades and on the piazza; but such a strange crowd! People of shadows in a city of darkness. Here and there a few blue-shaded lamps barely pierced the gloom, and were but points marking the way to the passer-by. The arcades had the appearance of black caverns. One felt that there was life in the houses, but it was hidden behind the heavy curtains hanging from the lintels which one raised furtively on going in or out. It seemed everywhere as if conspirators were working in an atmosphere of danger from spies.

But this morning there are no longer spectres wandering about. In the shade of the arcades graceful girls pass along, whose clear voices echo in the vaulted roofs. The air is brisk, and the New Market is filled with laughter and song. The Market Square is surrounded by arcades. At one end is a white church with the voluted capitals beloved of the Jesuits and a column supporting the slender statue of the Virgin, surrounded by four angels carrying black flags. A fountain

makes music in the centre, and around it and the Madonna white tents are unfolded. The gentle patter of wooden clogs is heard on the flagstones; baskets open, and the fresh smell of vegetables and fruits pervades the atmosphere.

But all the grace and sweetness of this peaceful morning is crowned by the scene of the flower-market, installed close by under the arcades. There is a single row of round baskets at the foot of the column, and in these baskets are dark-red dahlias, lilies, marguerites, and sunflowers, in the midst of which spring the bright, swordlike leaves of the gladioli, forming rich harmonies with the delicate green asparagus fern in the background.

The flower-sellers are even more charming than their flowers. They wear a kerchief round the head, and tie it under the chignon, which presses on the knot so that the two ends stand out. These kerchiefs—or *fazzoletti*, as they are prettily called in Italian—are either made of faded, printed calico or of red and blue material in bold combinations; some, of a severer tone, have a black ground strewn with tiny, vividly pink roses; others, also on a dark ground, show yellow designs like the brocades in fifteenth-century frescoes.

All these women seem to have stepped out of a wall painted by some skilful master of fresco. That one close by us, for instance, who stands, one hand on the pillar, with a bunch of purple cyclamens in the other, seems to have selected her flowers to harmonise with her deep red gown

and the blue kerchief which covers her hair. One would even say that she has chosen her surroundings less for the purpose of disposing of her stock than for effect. For she has taken up a position in front of an ochre-coloured wall, where the brown of the shutters completes the dainty symphony of colour. Others have a graceful way of raising armfuls of marguerites, blue as their own blue eyes, or of laying thick-petalled dahlias on a bed of green foliage, as on an altar in the procession of the Corpus Christi.

They are as unconscious of their beauty as are the flowers of theirs. They unintentionally produce poems of colour which no artist could surpass. They give evidence in this of the overpowering instinct of this race which has given us such brilliant colourists.

Look at that old woman sitting there and leaning against a column. She is in black from head to foot; she wears a black gown, a black apron with white spots, and a black kerchief, and in front of her are white and mauve flowers. She forms a picture which would delight a painter with an eye for harmonies of tone.

But it is not only a matter of colour; it is also one of pose. The old woman reminds us of Ursula's foster-mother in the painting by Carpaccio. The young one has the grace and elegance of some of the decorative figures of Paolo Veronese. All of them have easy movements, noble and natural attitudes. One of them bends with a delicious suppleness of limb towards a customer to whom she offers her flowers.

Another leans her elbow lazily on the pillar of the arcade. One of them stoops to take out carefully the dahlias piled in her basket, and all these movements are true and natural. They are like the notes of a piece of music where no discordant sound is heard; harmony of line is there, as well as a fanfare of colours. Most of these peasant women are far from being of a truly Italian type. Their skin is white, their hair is fair, their eyes blue, their lips thin; these clear blue eyes—at the same time naïve, proud, and dreamy—have something of the Slav charm. . . .

They are a lovely vision, these simple beauties of the rustic Friuli! But the woman who buys this bunch of gladioli, and who is dressed in black, with the silk-fringed shawl of the Venetian peasant covering her head, tells her story in these words: "It is a fortnight now since he died. Every Sunday I shall bring him flowers." This little grave, where sleeps an unknown soldier, covered with gladioli as with a blood-red dew, reminds us, as we stand before the peaceful New Market, how ardently though silently beats the pulse of the war in Udine.

Chapter VII.

THE MYSTERIOUS REGIONS OF THE ALPS.

The Dolomites.

OUR car follows the road by the side of the Tagliamento—the stream with the bed of rock into which the Fella flows from the direction of Vienna. We cross the Venetian city of Gemona, where, at the threshold of the church, is a large figure in stone of St. Christopher carrying the infant Jesus. We next come to Venzone, where we have a glimpse of the two angels with their wings closed on a Gothic gate, and see some fine loggias and the outer staircase of an artistic Town Hall. Then, avoiding Ampezzo, we reach, by way of the picturesque Passo della Mauria, the little town of Laurenzago.

It is Sunday, and the people of the little borough are coming out of church. Some of them collect on the piazza and discuss their affairs. Others, overcome with curiosity, gather around our car, which we have stopped. Suddenly a gun booms. Then another, and again another. Every one raises his head and stretches his neck, scanning the blue sky. An Austrian aeroplane is passing at a great height, pursued by the anti-aircraft guns. The incident causes intense excitement. When all is quiet again, the peasants, recognising the uniform worn by Colonel Morel, our Belgian Military Attaché, make an enthusiastic

demonstration in honour of Belgium. Was it not touching to find, even in this humble mountain village, the echo of the generous sympathy which Italy has so often shown us ?

Farther on, at a spot called "Tre Croci" (at an altitude of 1,825 metres) we suddenly discover the valley of Cortina d'Ampezzo. The site is surprisingly beautiful and calm. Before the war it was Austrian territory, and Cortina was a favourite resort of tourists. In the first days that it took the offensive the Italian Army restored this Italian soil to the Fatherland. Many of the inhabitants had fled to safer regions ; those who remained have now been placed under the authority of an Italian mayor. Cortina is still exposed to the fire of the Austrian guns, which have been placed in the fort of Saint-Pauses, and several houses bear traces of recent bombardment. A shell has made a hole in the zinc roof of the Municipio. Another has knocked down a house as far as the first floor, the interior of which it has laid open. Numerous window-panes are broken ; the hotels, of which there were about ten large ones in the town, are closed, including even the *Schwarzer Adler,* which is now the *Aquila Nera ;* but we manage to find one which consents to supply us with a frugal breakfast, and we walk for a few minutes along the only street which remains, to get a better view of the scenery.

It is easy to understand why Cortina is frequented by tourists and has become a holiday resort. Not only does one breathe an invigorating air in those high regions and experience a restful

feeling in the presence of the wide expanse before one, but one finds a special interest in gazing at the strange and fantastic shapes of the mountains around.

Geologists have given reasons for the peculiar formation of the Dolomites. The winds and rains, they say, have cut the rock into various shapes; but one would almost think that they had chiselled them with the care and deliberation of a human agent. The mountains, indeed, look like great buildings planned and constructed by giants for giants.

But the architects who designed them seem to have been possessed by some delusion. They have the aspect of huge fortresses bristling with towers and dungeons overlooking abysses, and the regular formation of the winding paths in the rocks makes them look like rows of windows lighting the galleries and passages of watch-towers. So it is with the pinnacle of the Cristallo on the one side, and on the other the three peaks of the Tofanas and the Cinque Torri.

Even in its days of peace and quietude one might have thought that the country was surrounded by fortresses, and what was an illusion before has become a reality in war. Soldiers have climbed to the top of peaks which seemed to reach the sky, and have hoisted their guns after them. How have they done this? How, indeed? It seems almost impossible. Without the distinct statement of our companions and the circumstantial details of the capture of the Tofana, we could not believe it. At the bottom of the valley,

towards the north, Mount Saint-Pauses, in the district occupied by the enemy, looks like an enormous hostile fortress, and above the green valley men are there watching intently, and the powerful voice of the cannon is ready to make itself heard. We feel a strange sensation as we gaze at the weird mountains before us, which at times recall the visions of Gustave Doré. The whole country speaks of death, of violence, and of desperate resistance; episodes of war have occurred here which one day the popular imagination will exaggerate into heroic legends. A new Homer will sing of the superhuman deeds performed in these mountains. The subjects of such themes are here already at hand, where the heroes are fighting. . . . But peace reigns in the little town.

Silent, too, are the woods, bathed in the sun of the azure sky. But it is a clear silence in which the least noise is quickly traced to a definite object, the silence which is not so deep that it eliminates every sign of life. It is the stillness of woodland scenery which one feels may at any moment be broken by the clear notes of a shepherd's flute.

Chapter VIII.

THE MIRROR OF ALLEGHE.

Cordevole.

THE green Cordevole has cut itself in the rocks of the Belluno Alps a narrow path called the canal of Agordo after the little town which this modest tributary of the Piave waters not far from its source. The country surrounding the Canale d'Agordo is picturesque throughout, whether it makes its way through rugged mountains or pleasant little valleys which draw in the horizon. Before the war it was rarely visited ; but it has now been called upon to serve as a means of communication with the Dolomite front, and it has been necessary to adapt it to its new calling. In a few months the engineers have performed a miracle. They have widened the way. Great rocks have been blown up at difficult turnings ; wooden bridges, supported by complicated and elegant structures, have been thrown across the torrent ; railings have been placed along the whole length of the track, so that it is now as easy to pass along it as on the best roads of the plain. In less than a year military necessity has achieved the realisation of works which, in time of peace, usually take a score of years.

It is this road we follow one grey, cold morning, which improves, however, as time goes on. As the valley broadens, we discover still higher peaks. Some military convoys, consisting of

columns of motor-cars and carts drawn by mules, travel in the same direction as ourselves. They bring with them barrels of wine, which will be tapped on the heights for the soldiers of the mountain. There is a train of carts, too, laden with fodder.

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How charming is the little lake of Alleghe, amid the dark fir-trees. As soon as we reach it we hurry to the *Comando* to pay our respects to General X., and consult him as to what we ought to see in the district. The General is away ; but the officers of his staff, immediately we are introduced to them, receive us with the greatest cordiality. They seem pleased, in their isolation on the Alps, to meet friendly faces, and proud to show how they, too, participate unceasingly in the national effort. As the question of luncheon plays an important part in the consideration of our proposed movements, they solve it by begging us to take seats at their table. They have taken up their quarters in a coquettish little villa, with a suggestion of the Venetian style, overlooking the lake, and while the meal is being prepared we gaze with ecstasy upon the scenery.

Even amongst the most vaunted views in Switzerland there are few that will compare with this ; rocky peaks of high mountains of picturesque shapes hem in forests of firs and green pastures. On the right is Mount Civetta. Towards the left is the Col di Lana—the scene of gigantic struggles. Here and there, in the dark foliage,

yellow tints, bright as little rays of light, betray the approach of autumn.

The lake is of a slightly sombre colour, like a mirror in the bottom of a large green chalice. A peaceful barque crosses the water, leaving trembling reflections in its wake. In it are mirrored pale green prairies, dark-green forests, yellow crops in neat squares, brown châlets with their broad wooden roofs, the white church and freshly built houses, red tiles, and the pink, pointed belfry of the village. All these colours are there, quivering on the dark surface. . . .

The road follows the lake, bringing us close to the village. Convoys of provisions pass incessantly. The sturdy, nimble mules carry bread and wine to the men on the heights, forage for the beasts of burden, and munitions to the artillery. Grey carts, grey-green soldiers, and dark-coloured mules are seen upside-down in the water as they pass along the paths, which have been lately renewed, as is shown by the newly turned white stones and brown soil which nature has not yet had time to bring into harmony with the surroundings. This incessant and picturesque movement on the new road is one aspect of the rough mountain warfare that Italy is waging.

Anyone who stoops over the mirror of Alleghe is all the more convinced of the importance of keeping up the communications with the front by the difficulty experienced in doing so. On other battle-fields a clever and far-sighted organisation has solved the problem by means of railways and motor-cars, and if one solution fails another is

found. One may choose between different routes, or combine two together, or vary them; but when one has to do with troops fighting on the tops of mountains or at the upper end of a valley, there is no choice outside the path of the valley itself, in which the torrent runs; and it often happens that these mountain paths are little frequented, and nothing better than uneven mule tracks, which barely meet the wants of the natives in ordinary times, and are impassable to motor-cars, lorries, or heavy transport carts. The roads already existing were narrow and scarcely permitted the few vehicles which used them to pass one another—and that only at a great loss of time. In war time the descending convoy became as important as the ascending one; therefore, to make war, it was necessary to make roads.

To construct new routes or improve the old ones, to study plans, calculate or level slopes, to widen the way and secure it along the edge of the precipice, and so ensure the regularity and rapidity of the traffic, is a work of formidable dimensions. And when we consider that this work was sometimes carried out under the enemy's fire from guns placed on dominating positions, we shall better understand what the armies of Italy have done. We shall understand what protracted labour such a work required, what months of patience and perseverance, what efforts—performed in silence and without glory, but indispensable to success. The utility of these works will last beyond the war, and when peace is made the roads will remain as the surest

means of bringing wealth and prosperity into these regions.

A general who, like Count Robilant, constructs such roads wins for his country noiseless but very fruitful victory. Without even speaking of the future, we may say that he has rendered possible this almost impossible mountain warfare—a warfare as strange and unprecedented as that of the trenches in the plains.

A network of roads is as necessary and useful to a country as is the network of veins and arteries to the human body.

And this road which runs along the edge of the lake, where we see the incidents of Italian warfare, is a model of the thousands of kilometres of other similar roads which now ascend the valleys, link them together, and unite mountain and plain without interval.

We obtain a better conception of the difficulties of this war watching the silhouettes of the mules réflected in the mirror of the lake. We understand and admire.

Here again the silence is vast. It is broken only by the murmur of the fountain in front of the villa of the Staff officers, or, at times, by a dog barking in the village on the other side of the water, a creaking wheel, a hooting motor, a snorting cycle, or a gun firing in the distance.

Yesterday the Austrians bombarded Alleghe. A 105 mm. shell bored a hole in a house near the Municipio; another fell in the cemetery, disturbing those long since dead. No one took any notice of them. The inhabitants have all

remained; the women, with handkerchiefs tied on their heads, are washing their linen, and the procession of soldiers and transports continues without interruption.

But it is time to take our places at table. Our glasses are emptied to the resurrection of Belgium, who "was the first to give the necessary example of heroism."

Raising my eyes to the ceiling, I see there graceful nude figures, in a style suggestive of the Venetian, like the villa itself, and I congratulate my hosts, saying:

"You have pretty women here."

A young lieutenant answers in a melancholy tone:

"Yes; but, alas, only in painting!"

The lieutenant's exclamation revealed to me yet another aspect of the mountain warfare. No nymph reflects her graceful form in the mirror of Alleghe; only Alpine and warlike scenes are pictured there.

Chapter IX.

THE CONQUEST OF THE ROCK.

Monte Marmolada.

THE two excursions which we planned have as their starting-point the village of Caprile.

It is there we have to betake ourselves first. The village of Caprile is very large in itself, but contains only a few civilian houses. The bulk of the population is composed of soldiers, and by far the greater part of the dwelling-places are military encampments. One sees here again, but to a greater degree than elsewhere, types of those vast concentrations which it was necessary to establish for the troops, and where cheerfulness and courage are the order of the day, though they are full of men who are threatened with death—men who are on their way at every moment to the scenes of desperate battles or returning from them. Here are workshops, military stores, parks of munitions; even shops, where civilians have stored their little wares. Here, also, are inns, in which congregate bersaglieri, with their red fezes; Alpini, with their embroidered yellow horns, and with pointed peacock feathers in their felt hats; and other soldiers from the front, with their blue helmets on their heads. There are little wooden barracks, roofed with the branches of fir trees—a city of dormitories. And the city has its streets, the names of which one reads on plates, and to each of these names is attached some

souvenir of Sardinia (the Sardinian Brigade is quartered here). In front of the city is a bright, well-kept garden, where coloured pebbles take the place of flowers, forming beds of mosaics put together with the traditional Italian taste—the style of mosaics of the churches for which this race is so famous. Here in the garden this ornamentation represents the horn of the Alpini or the Cross in the arms of Savoy. Soldiers, mules, lorries, commissariat convoys, and motor-cars pass along the streets of the village, a cheerful crowd, in which are pointed out to us with special admiration the mountain artillerymen. These brave fellows have carried their little guns on their backs to a height of three thousand metres. We must not forget that already in time of peace they were famed for their strength. It was they who used to present arms with their gun smartly raised to the shoulder like a rifle.

The new road climbs up to a little cluster of wooden houses. This is the village of Rocca di Pietore, in the middle of which rises a slender, dark steeple from a low square tower with two Roman arches, supported in the middle by a column. This building, in a pretty, early Gothic style, with streaks of black stone appearing through the whitewashed walls, is the church. It is an historical monument. We go inside. A kneeling soldier prays before a Madonna. The screen of the high altar is in the German style, of sculptured wood in many colours, with beautiful heavy gilding. The Virgin sits enthroned on the central panel between St. Barbara and

St. Catherine, and other saints are carved on the side pieces.

Beyond the village of Sottoguda the mountains shut in the valley so closely that it seems impossible to pass between their black walls; but a rent was made in them centuries ago by a torrent of the Pettorina, which flows at our feet and fills the whole of the breach without leaving any banks. Man has turned this torrent to use. He has simply roofed it. It is a wonderful feat. Trunks of trees were thrown across the fissure in the rock, which varies from four to six metres in breadth, and beams have been superimposed on these trunks. We fly along for more than a kilometre on the torrent between two walls from three to four hundred metres high, dripping with the water of innumerable springs.

In winter time, as we are informed by the obliging officer who has acted as our guide since we left Alleghe, the spectacle is extraordinary. "This is the only road by which we are able to bring supplies to the troops on the Marmolada. One has to pass between two green mirrors, all the water which you now see flowing here being frozen and forming walls of ice of more than a metre thick. Sometimes there are blocks of snow wedged overhead at the top of a fissure in the rock; it may be a whole avalanche threatening to fall into the narrow stream. Ah! the avalanche is the great enemy in winter. It is all the more terrible because one feels powerless before it. Do you know that an avalanche killed more than seven hundred of our men out of a single brigade

and buried a whole battalion in one moment? The firing of a gun up there is sufficient to set one in motion. The gorge of the Campo d'Arei will presently come within your view. Sometimes it has happened that two great avalanches have become detached at the same moment from two opposite mountains and been hurled against one another as they reached the valley. Woe to the man who is caught between them!"

We now enter the gorge. In front of us we see the strange Dolomite formations of huge, arid peaks. Around us are green fields planted with fir trees, amid which our road runs.

This road was not made by the engineers, but by infantry. Useful soldiers, indeed! If kindly treated, an Italian infantryman will do anything you want. He is engineer, Alpino, and bersagliere all in one. He is a hero to whom sufficient justice is not done.

In the Campo d'Arei (which means the King's Field in the Roman dialect spoken here) there are twelve metres of snow in the winter. The troops fighting in this mountain region are sometimes isolated from the rest of the world for weeks together. Therefore, directly the winter comes they are provided with supplies for sixty days.

The huge rock which we see in front of us on the right, like some grim wall built of irregularly shaped pillars, forms the group of the Marmolada celebrated in Roman song:—

"O Marmolada, tu es bella, tu es grana,
Fina in pes e forte in verra."

"O Marmolada, thou art beautiful, thou art majestic,
Lovely in peace and strong in war."

The song speaks true—this mountain is a fortress; and what a fortress! The Italians occupied the whole of it after a terrible struggle. Of the men forming the first companies who drew themselves up to the summit by ropes, three-quarters were frozen; but they seized every inch of the ground. They hoisted guns and men on to the Pizzo Serrauto, 3,875 metres high. The position is now served by a funicular railway, the loaded wagons of which we see in the distance on climbing the mountain. This railway ascends in three stages from seventeen hundred to three thousand metres; but when the position was first occupied there was no railway, and the guns were carried up on men's backs! . . .

We gaze with emotion at the summit of Monte Marmolada, enveloped in the clouds. The miracle of the Italian war is brought home to us again in a concrete form by the vision of this great expanse of mountain. Every peak is stained with blood. Each one of these fortresses of rock has been the scene of a desperate struggle. It was necessary to return a score of times to the attack, and sacrifice as often whole companies, before a footing could be obtained on a single ledge; and then begin all over again a hundred metres farther on. Not only special regiments—Alpini and bersaglieri—have taken part in this rough warfare, but soldiers of the regiments of the line. "We are all Alpini now," said an infantryman, with a smile. And amongst those who showed the greatest bravery in the attack, and were best able to resist fatigue and privations, who became

the best inured to storm and cold, the soldiers of Sicily and Naples have won distinction. These men from the sunny South were the first to conquer the winter, the first to triumph over the mountain.

Patience—this is the virtue which the Italians have revealed to an astonished world in the Dolomite peaks no less than in the muddy trenches of Flanders and Champagne. And patience in this long war will one day be the synonym of victory.

Chapter X.

THE WITCH'S ROCK.

Col di Lana. Sasso di Stria.

WHEN, after our excursion to the foot of Monte Marmolada, we descend again in the direction of Caprile, an obstruction in the road causes us to stop for a moment in the middle of the village. The houses—built of black wood, surrounded by openwork balconies, in which are stored the forage for the animals, and firewood—seem to be stifled by their immense roofs. One feels that they have been constructed with a view to the long winters which bury them in snow. Poor village, with its houses at the mercy of an avalanche throwing itself heedlessly down, as witness the wrecks lying there since last March!

But even in these districts exposed to this constant danger, even in this most distant spot of Italy, near the bare Austrian peaks, the proud patriotic faith in the great and rich Fatherland asserts itself. At the summit of a slender column stands the Lion of St. Mark's to show that once the Serene Republic extended its glorious dominion over these regions. This lion of black bronze, no larger than a child's toy, raised on high so that the snow may never cover it—what a bright symbol it is to the eyes of the soldiers who pass along the paths of the Austrian hills, their blue helmets on their heads! It is a noble

sentinel guarding the little cemetery where sleep, under fresh tombstones, those who have fallen gloriously in the siege of the mountains.

Some of the peaks already bear German names; that to which we are making our way at this moment is called the Castle of Buchenstein. To reach this point we have to follow a long winding road by the side of the rock. It is white throughout its length, for its construction is scarcely finished; the stone-breakers, with their red sashes drawn tightly round their waists, have just finished laying it out. We cross woods—lovely woods of firs and chestnut trees—over which are scattered wooden barracks for the troops, while to the left a charming Alpine valley discloses itself with white houses amid the bright green of the meadows and the sombre verdure of the pines.

We have now passed beyond the old frontier.

"You can see that we have done that," says our officer, "by the ruins of the villages. Wherever the Austrians retire they leave behind them no stone upon another. It matters little to them if what they destroy is Austrian; look there at those heaps of ruins. There was once a prosperous little town, Pieve di Livinalungo; they bombarded it as they retired, and notwithstanding the fact that they had left there a hospital full of their own wounded!"

The village of Audraz, which gives its name to the valley, met with the same fate as Pieve di Livinalungo. We turn our eyes for a moment to a spot where the green gorge grows narrow, and see

a group of crumbling houses with their tottering and blackened gables showing where the shells have burst.

The guardian saints of the district are St. Christopher, St. Roch, and St. Sebastian, who are there to ward off accidents, scourges, and calamities. Can these innocent, pious people, who engaged the artists to represent the images of these saints in fresco on the walls of the churches and chapels on the roads, have foreseen the war of to-day—a war more terrible than the plagues and famines of old ?

At each of the numerous turns of the road which we are following stones have been piled up to a great height, kept together by the trunks of trees.

"This is done," said our guide, "to protect the convoys against the enemy's fire. The Austrian guns bombard this road as well as the valley itself. If we lean over we shall see many traces of the shells on the mountain side. On the summit of the Col di Lassa, to which we have now climbed, the new road joins another worn by time and use. It is the famous road of the Dolomites. The Italians have conquered it almost in its entirety, bit by bit. They would have to carry also the Folargo Pass and the Sasso di Stria before they can make full use of this means of communication, so essential to the carrying out of their operations."

We ascend on foot to another point yet a little higher, where there is another turn in the road, and whence we look down on another valley. In

front of us rise mountains with rounded peaks, which appear in the distance to be on different levels: that is the Col di Lana—one of the points in the mountain warfare where the struggle was the bloodiest and the most desperate.

These peaks have their geographical names. They are mentioned to us, but they slip our memory. But those which bear humorous names or names with glorious or tragic associations—names given them by the troops now stationed there—fix themselves in our minds, such as the fortress of *La Marmora,* so called because it was carried against the enemy by the bayonets of the bersaglieri; or *Napoleon's Hat,* from its peculiar shape; or *Mount Panettone,* on account of its resemblance to the large loaves of that name which they make at Milan; or, lastly, the *Valle della Morte,* recalling the dead bodies which rolled down there in hundreds.

The sight of those dark peaks, on which so many lives have been sacrificed, as on the altar of the Fatherland, is a tragic spectacle, even on this day of sunshine and silence.

"We carried the Col di Lana," said the officer, "and we shall one day conquer the Sasso di Stria, which you see over there on your right. That line, showing dark on the light surface, is their line."

A white wall, stained with dark-red streams, with dark ridges on the surface which seem to cleave the clouds—a perpendicular wall, inaccessible, even if no human agent were there to hurl down the climber—this it is which the Italians

are now preparing to conquer with that cheerful perseverance which the least success increases tenfold and no check can diminish. They are preparing to conquer it in battle, exposed to the fire from above at a spot where stones and snow are themselves murderous projectiles, and wind and winter are implacable enemies. It is as though they had to overcome a coalition of determined diabolic spirits; and this white and red-stained rock, standing up in the now misty sky, bears a name which the soldiers will have no need to change, so absolutely is it in harmony with this demoniacal war—the Sasso di Stria or Witch's Rock.

Chapter XI.

THE HEADLESS MOUNTAINS.

Col di Lana. Castelletto.

THIS strange region of the Alps has been the scene of strange military operations. Their conception and realisation have only been possible owing to the slow progress of this war, which distinguishes it from that of former ones, to the means by which it has been found possible to adapt oneself to new conditions and to the special skill of the Italian workman in constructing mines and piercing mountains. At times, when unable to overcome the resistance of the enemy by artillery fire or infantry attacks, the Italians have had recourse to the simple expedient of destroying them by the explosion of mines. The incident of the Col di Lana is one of the most characteristic examples of this unusual strategy. To make sure of the definite occupation of this height and diminish the sacrifices which would result from an assault, the idea was conceived of making the attack underground. The credit of this conception is, we believe, due, in the first place, to Gelasio Caetani, son of the Duke of Sermoneta, and thus a descendant of one of the greatest Roman families. This did not prevent him from interesting himself in the most practical forms of modern industrial activity, which he studied closely in the New World.

When he proposed to blow up the Col di Lana,

the project seemed too bold and rash to the military authorities, who refused at first to give the order for its execution. But the lieutenant insisted, sustained by the confidence which he had in the special qualifications of the Italian workman. The works were continued for six months; an enormous gallery was dug in the rock, ending in a chamber, which was filled with explosives; and on the 18th of April, 1916, the summit of the mountain was hurled into the air, burying in its debris the Austrians, who thought themselves masters of it. A curtain-fire from the only path by which the enemy might have approached to deliver a counter-attack prevented him from recovering the position, and the Italians were even able to add to their victory by the conquest of Mount Cief, to the north of the Col di Lana.

Told on the spot, the details of this extraordinary episode make a more direct and vivid impression. And later on, in a hospital of Pallanza, how apt was the description given us by a young Sicilian, with flashing dark eyes, who was wounded on the Col di Lana, of the varying events of those days, of the hideous tumult following upon the explosion! How strange it seems that in these almost inaccessible solitudes of the Alps war should disfigure the unchanging outline of the mountains!

The success of that operation induced the General Staff to repeat it in order to extend the conquest of the Dolomite road—the celebrated Dolomitenstrasse. It is well known that this

admirable road was built by Austria entirely on her own territory in order to unite Bolsano (Bolsen) to Toblach on the great Vienna line. Roughly speaking, it goes from west to east, perpendicularly to the valleys of the Boïte (where Cortina d'Ampezzo lies) and of the Cordevole, which comprises Caprile and Alleghe. We must bear in mind these geographical points to realise the necessity which the Italians were under of occupying this direct line of communication between the valleys. As long as this communication was not possible, it was necessary, in order to forward reinforcements and supplies or even for the simple transmission of commands or information from the higher extremity of the valley of the Cordevole to that of the Boïte, to descend the whole length of the first of these two valleys and climb the other—that is to say, to complete a journey of nearly 200 kilometres.

The Castelletto still remained one of the points by which the Austrians barred the Dolomite road. The Italians were masters of the Tofanas—neighbouring peaks in the form of towers, seen from Cortina d'Ampezzo. But although the Castelletto was on a lower altitude than the Tofanas, it remained invulnerable, for it lay in such an angle that no artillery fire could reach it, and its walls on the Italian side were absolutely perpendicular for several hundreds of metres of its height.

It was decided to overcome the difficulty by means of an explosion. A gallery, 240 metres long, was cut in the rock, starting from the walls of the Tofana Prima. It had its entrance near

the Hill 2300, rose at an angle of 45 degrees, and ended at about 26 metres from the summit in a room in which were placed 34 tons of gelatine. It was thus one of the most powerful mines ever recorded in the history of industry. The preparation required four months ; but it took almost as many, before the work was started, to construct military roads for the transport of the material, to build barracks for the workmen and the sentries, and to set up the boring machinery worked by compressed air, etc.

When all was ready, artillery was placed on the neighbouring heights ; two 210 mm. howitzers were hoisted to the Torcella di Fontanalegno, two 149 mm. mortars and two 75 mm. cannons to the Tofana Terza, another to the Tofana Prima, and two to the Cinque Torri.

When one sees these abrupt rocks, with their strangely constructed towers and fortresses standing out against the sky, one looks with wonder on these fabulous exploits of the Alpini.

During the night of the 11th–12th of July, 1916, a match was applied to the train of the mine. The air was rent as by an earthquake of appalling dimensions and the Austrians were annihilated. At the same moment, the guns on the heights opened a barrage fire, and the summit of the Castelletto was seized by three assaulting columns, which had been waiting in readiness at the foot.

The Austrians appear to have been warned of the danger threatening them, and to have endeavoured to dig a counter-mine ; but it was too late. What a drama was enacted during those few

days of suspense when the unknown was felt to be approaching in silence ! What themes for marvellous legends in this country of the weird mountains !

Is it possible to believe that men had to decapitate the Alps before they could vanquish the enemy ?

Chapter XII.

A VISIT TO THE MAKER OF THE ROADS.

WE had the honour of meeting the man on whose shoulders principally falls the task of overcoming the mountains—General Count Robilant, who commands the Fourth Army (the Army of the Peaks).

It is unnecessary to record the name of the town in which he has established his staff. We need only mention that this town reveals, in the architecture of its palaces and houses, the influence of Venice ; this is not disclosing the secret, for all the towns in this district have the Lion of St. Mark surmounting a column in the principal square, and all the edifices are in that elaborate Gothic style which the Serene Republic created by fusing the forms of eastern and western architecture.

The *Comando* is established in a vast building, which seems to exaggerate the silence and peacefulness of the little provincial town. Some dragoons on guard salute us as we pass. We mount the staircase. We reach a bright antechamber with a parquet floor, the business character of which is enhanced by the only noise which breaks the silence there—namely, the sharp and irregular tapping of the typewriter. We are greeted by the officers in a few words, pronounced in a low tone, and are then ushered by them into the presence of the General. The

room in which His Excellency Count Robilant prepares his plans of offence and defence is hung with red damask. Its gilt furniture is of the style of the first Napoleon. A modern-looking writing-desk clashes with its old-fashioned surroundings ; it is covered with maps, as is also a large table standing in the middle of the room. A window opening on the street admits the peaceful atmosphere of the little town.

Here it is that the astonishing works which we have witnessed are decided upon. Here is conceived the plan of the roads which are carried to the foot of the mountains, and then pierce and conquer them, thus assuring the success of the military efforts which only become possible owing to the previous efforts of the engineer. However great has been the initiative of Count Robilant in the construction of these roads of which he is justly proud, we must admit that he has only acted in obedience to the counsels of his ancestors, and the reason why his orders have been carried out with such rapidity and completeness is found in the circumstance that they were in harmony with the immemorial traditions of the race.

Road-building won for Rome, in greater measure than anything else, her reputation as a civilising power. Wherever her legions extended her dominions, she built these admirable ways of communication, the utility of which has not diminished with the lapse of centuries. With spade and pickaxe, Rome made her way through forests and plains, and caused her higher culture to penetrate the homes of barbarians.

And to-day the Italian has taken up the pickaxe and the spade again to defend himself against the barbarian. The pickaxe and the mine, which conquer the rock, the spade and wheelbarrow, which transport the soil, are tools which arouse in him a natural instinct enabling him to discern the work he has to accomplish. The necessity of the day has turned these peaceful implements into arms which contribute to win the victory no less than the sabre and the rifle.

Modern Italy has not forgotten the genius of ancient Rome for the building of roads. For fifty years she has sent out her workmen to all parts of the world to carry out the most important public works. She has developed an army of excavators, miners, borers of tunnels, and piercers of isthmuses —men full of experience in these works. These are the peculiar aptitudes of the race—qualities which they have inherited from their ancestors—and in the hour of danger the men who possess them were found ready and eager to bring them into play.

As Count Robilant converses with us, we notice his white beard cut to a point, his heavy moustache, his finely-chiselled nose, and his green eyes behind his glasses. He speaks in excellent French (he has a great reputation as a linguist) of his troops and his projects. He refers with a smile on his face to his past successes and those which he will achieve in the future. Bending over his maps, he points out to us the peaks of the Tofanas recently conquered, and recounts in detail the episode of the Castelletto, illustrating it with

photographs, and showing us, one after another, the gallery bored in the rock and the cleft which was unfortunately discovered in the middle of the work and had to be filled in ; the store-room for the explosives ; next he shows us the rock subsequently to the explosion, which buried an entire Austrian company while digging the gallery of a counter-mine ; and, lastly, the crater, in which the Alpini immediately established themselves.

This was no great victory, of course. It had not the importance of a great battle, nor one to be trumpeted abroad by the Press. But it was a notable success, which may be added to so many others of the same kind, and a just reward of the extraordinary labour and skill by which it was achieved ; and it gives a clear idea of this mountain warfare, where perseverance is indispensable and only gradual progress can be expected.

The General's explanations enable us better to appreciate the importance of this continued offensive. A moment may come when these daily operations will have magnificent results.

Count Robilant is especially gratified by the praise which we bestow upon his mountain roads. He is pleased that we should understand that this work in the rear of the army was indispensable in order that those who are fighting may maintain their positions and make further progress.

"Mark well our roads," he says, as we take leave of him ; "they are the paths that will lead to victory."

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We looked at them with growing admiration. One of them rises gracefully to the Pelmo—a majestic mountain—and descends on the other side, with a bold and picturesque incline, towards the valley of the Piave. This, as yet, almost untrodden path winds like a white ribbon round the rose-coloured peak, standing out against the blue sky and snowy clouds, through Alpine landscapes, which alternately charm the eye by their softness and inspire awe by their grandeur. The eye can rest on no more beautiful mountain than the Pelmo Peak. Its formidable mass rises sheer towards the sky, surrounded by towers and steeples like some colossal mansion. If the Italians had the hundredth part of the advertising spirit of the Swiss, this mountain would be as famous as the Matterhorn. As we descend amid the numberless wonders of the Fiornatina Valley, it occurs to us that this glorious country must find a new fortune through the war. Nature has adorned it with exceptional charm, and the war has given it excellent roads. There is no spot in the world better fitted to become a large tourist resort. When American curiosity brings again to Europe some of the dollars with which their purses are filled there, we hope that it will attract them to these parts. If proper steps are taken for this purpose—and associations, such as the Italian Touring Club, are sufficiently influential to ensure the success of an enterprise of this nature—the New World will soon have reimbursed the expenses which these military roads have necessitated. Switzerland can boast of nothing

more calculated to excite the enthusiasm of travellers, in the form of summer excursions or winter sports, than the beauties of the Alps, of the Cadora, or of the Dolomites. And the generous blood which has flowed there has hallowed the spot.

But these are projects of the future. For the moment, the new, perfectly white roads—the roads in the valleys or on the heights, the roads which pierce the mountains here and there—are the active agents of success. The enchanted mountains are already vanquished.

Chapter XIII.

THE VALLEY OF ARSIERO.

Trentino.

HENCEFORTH the charming city of Vicenza will have to celebrate the 25th of June as a great and glorious anniversary. On that date the inhabitants will fly the proud colours of the national tricolour from the balconies with their Venetian windows and from the noble façades of the palaces, in memory of the day when the soldiers of Italy rescued their town from the barbarians. The 25th of June is the date of the Italian counter-offensive, which victoriously repulsed the Austrian attack.

After climbing the mountain, which ends in the crest of the Colletto, one looks back on enchanting scenery in the valley below; it is a landscape of rich meadows, orchards, and vines, with a bright and busy little manufacturing town—Schio by name. The initiative of Senator Rossi has made of it a centre of great importance for the manufacture of woollen cloths. The fertile plain stretches away beyond it. Seventeen kilometres farther lies Vicenza, whence the vast Venetian plain extends itself again. The Colletto is the first mountain peak of modern Italy. It also marks the limit of the Italian retreat during the offensive of the Archduke Charles and General Conrad von Hoetzendorf.

On the Novegno, which is immediately behind

the Colletto, to the west, an Austrian company gained a foothold for a brief moment. From its heights they had a vision of the plain, with its villages, its orchards, and its crops. It seemed as if they had only to descend the slope of the mountain to penetrate into the heart of this fertile country. Victory must have appeared to them in the form of rich booty ; for no doubt the imagination of these soldiers, excited by the intoxicating spectacle, saw, as though in a mirage, the green Adriatic and the domes of St. Mark. The whole extent of this plain, with its corn, its maize, its grapes, its towns, and its women, seemed to be ripening in the powerful sun in order to enrich their victory, and for no other reason. The company on the Novegno passed an hour of intoxication similar to that experienced by all the proud barbarians who have climbed to the summit of the mountains and seen Italy, bathed in sunshine, at their feet.

But the barbarians are to-day very far from the Novegno, very far from the Colletto, and the plain is saved. It owes its safety to those who, by maintaining the positions occupied by the Italian Army in the valleys of the Adige—the heroes of the Passo di Buole—and of the Brenta, enabled the strenuous defence of the Monte Ciove and of the Colletto to be carried out with full effect.

From this crest one is not yet able to overlook the valley on the other side, to the formation of which it contributes, on account of the trenches, with their parapets, which, extending the whole length of the summit, cut off the view ; but all

around one sees traces of the battle. The 305 mm. Austrian shells have ploughed up the whole of the grassy and thickly wooded slope. There it was that the Italian artillery, being under the observation of the enemy on the higher summits of the Priafora, was subjected to a murderous fire. We were shown a hole, dug by a shell, at the very spot where a gun which had been placed there was carried away by the explosion and embedded in the soil fifteen metres farther on, and found intact in that position. We were also shown a small cross commemorating the fact that all the men who were serving one particular battery were annihilated in that place together with their guns.

But the principal defence of the Colletto was maintained by means of a number of guns hidden in caverns. We reach these caverns through a dark, damp passage. In the first we notice a gun with its muzzle peering through a round loophole bored in the rock itself. We pass into a second, adjoining the first. There is another loophole there; but of the cannon nothing remains but the carriage; the gun which had rested on it, and which fired down into the valley and on the mountains, was finally struck with great force and broken in pieces after a hundred shots had been fired at it without any of the shells having effect, beyond producing a hundred large rents in the rock.

We creep inside the loophole. The walls—built of concrete—are wide enough to hold several persons at the same time; and from this point of vantage we are able to see the ravine of Arsiero

immediately below us, at the foot of the precipice.

This gorge is at the point of junction of two valleys, that of the Astico on the right, and of the Posina on the left. Each of them extends along the side of the mountain, which forms the main feature in the landscape; it is Mount Cimone, which is covered with green foliage to a height of 1,000 metres, beyond which are 250 metres of sheer rock, as barren as a wall. The Cengio rises in a black mass to the right of the Astico, whilst to the left of the Posina a chain of heights, including the lofty Priafora and the Ciove, is linked with the flattened ridge of the Colletto, on which we stand at the present moment.

It is a fine mountain landscape, the silence of which is broken from time to time by the prolonged echo of the cannon. The rays of the sun, falling on the sides of the mountains bathed in vapour, causes them to glitter and flash like blocks of mica. But the Arsiero ravine—at the bottom of these hills—lies in a deep silence; there is no sign of life. Again we feel this tremendous silence in the heart of the war—this silence which is more than peace. The tranquil scene is varied by shades of blue and green. Here and there are meadows with clumps of trees and houses. At the entrance of the Valley of the Posina is seen the bright, gay little town of Arsiero. Behind it was a group of factories, all traces of which have been completely obliterated. Near to us—almost at our feet—lies the village of Velo d'Astico, bearing the traces of a violent

bombardment. All that remains of it now are ruins grouped round a headless campanile.

From where we stand the lines of the Italian defence are clearly visible. They follow the crest of the Colletto, which is outlined by what appears to be a red-stained stream, and is in reality the rusty barbed wire in front of the trenches. They extend thence to the Ciove and, farther still, to the Pasubio. Had the Austrians forced this line, they would have marched on Vicenza.

A single glance at the scenery makes it clear how critical was the situation, which, indeed, some considered desperate. If the Austrians had succeeded in carrying Mount Ciove they would have threatened with their artillery not only Schio and the roads leading to the Colletto, but also the communications with the Pasubio, the defence of which would have become almost impossible. And in retiring from the Pasubio, the Italian troops would have exposed the fortifications of the Arsa Valley.

The soldiers understood this, as we understand it ourselves to-day. And so they remained firm on Mount Ciove, using energy and supporting sacrifices to the limit of human power. Exposed to the fire of heavy guns and mitrailleuses, they heroically defended this key to Vicenza, realising that that alone would open the gates of the town —the gates of Italy itself. For ten days they sustained the gigantic struggle and under appalling conditions; and we must not forget that not only had munitions and provisions to be carried to the combatants, but every day 450,000

litres of water had to be conveyed to the summit of the peaks for men and mules.

It was this obstinate courage which assured the victory of Italian arms in the Trentino. Whilst the wings were pressing hard on the flanks of the Austrian Army, the centre remained unconquerable; and one morning the enemy's troops blew up the bridges and fortresses, and retired, pursued by the Italian soldiers.

These men were admirable in the defensive, and performed wonders in the offensive which followed; the Cimone, which rises to a barren peak in front of us, bears irrefutable testimony to the miracles achieved. The Italian infantry made an assault at 250 metres from its summit. Planting supporting bars of metal in the stone, metre after metre, the heroic soldiers climbed to the top and carried the crest, leaving behind them the wall of rock streaming with their blood.

And now, on high, floats the victorious green, white, and red flag, bearing witness that the plain has been well guarded; and Italy is henceforth safe.

Chapter XIV.

A NEW THERMOPYLÆ.

Passo di Buole (Trentino).

AMONG the many places which were unknown yesterday and to-day are famous, having sprung into a sudden celebrity since the war began, the Passo di Buole had a special attraction for us on account of what had been told us about it. It is an extremely lofty col in the chain of mountains which separates the Arsa Valley from that of the Adige. During the Trentino offensive the Austrians directed a furious attack against the Italian troops on Monte Cogni Zugna, who constituted the left wing of the defence. They succeeded, with great difficulty, in causing them to fall back slightly, and concentrated their efforts in a desperate attack on the Passo di Buole, by which they hoped to extend their front to the valley of the Adige. At least twenty separate assaults were directed against it, often with considerable forces, and with a bravery and perseverance which it is impossible not to admire; but the resistance was equally brave and determined. Thousands of Austrians now sleep on the wooded slopes of the mountain. The impetuous onslaught of the imperial Jäger was broken by the indomitable courage of the Alpini stationed on the peak. In spite of furious and repeated assaults, in spite of their exposure to artillery fire from higher positions in the distance,

in spite of their isolation from the rest of their troops on this front, the little company which had been entrusted with the protection of the pass did not waver for a moment.

When their officers warned them of the progress of the enemy offensive, of the gravity of the crisis, and of the responsibility which the circumstances threw upon them—"My children, Italy is in peril; she looks to you for her safety!"—they fought like lions, and sacrificed their lives without a murmur. Out of a thousand men, seven hundred fell on those heights; but the Austrian advance was arrested.

The story of the deeds which took place there is not less glorious than that of the heroism of the Greeks at Thermopylæ. When historians shall have told them in detail and exalted their glory, the soldiers of Italy will, indeed, be ranked with the heroes of old.

We desired to visit these Homeric sites. To reach them we have, starting from Vicenza, to follow a long road which winds upwards through magnificent old chestnut trees. All along it we see signs of military operations—lorries, mules, motors pass without interruption. At the inn of the Dolomites—now deserted—we are already able to see some of the effects of the Austrian shells. Farther on, at the Osteria Strava, we pass over the old frontier, and find ourselves once more on territory which belonged to Austria. The activity is still greater here on the road; and under the trees soldiers are encamped. The gaping shell-craters look like brown stains on the

meadows. We now make our way down again to the Valley of the Arsa; but we are obliged to proceed with caution, for the road has been bombarded again within the last few days. A bridge called the *ponte delle prigione* is particularly exposed, and a rampart of sandbags has been built up on it to conceal the traffic. We pass over it hastily. At Piano we have to abandon the motor, as it is too conspicuous, and climb on foot through the bushes to a carefully concealed post of observation.

From this post the whole of the valley is visible to the point where it joins that of the Adige. At the bottom of it is the little village of Chiesa, where there is no longer a living soul—nothing but desolate ruins. The white church is completely gutted; its roof has been carried away, and one of the walls is pierced and riddled with bullets. All around, the little houses have lost their roofs.

And we are struck again, as we stand before this vast extent of country, which has been the scene of the severest fighting, by the silence and solitude now reigning there. Everything in that valley is motionless. From time to time we hear the booming of the cannon in the distance, its dull, resounding echoes succeeded by little white puffs of smoke, which evaporate in the air, or we see the earth thrown up around a shell; for the Austrians bombard, at intervals, these villages and deserted fields without any apparent object. And then all is calm and silent again.

The Passo di Buole is in front of us, at the

other side of the valley. It forms a slight depression in the chain of mountains, so slight that the col itself stands out as a peak. Little trees cling to the slopes, and above everything is singed and devastated by the artillery fire. Rows of white pebbles which fall from it mark the bed of a dried-up stream.

This mountain looks like many others which we have already seen; and, indeed, this Monte Corno, which is shown us on the right, has no special character of its own. But we have only to think of the battles of the Passo di Buole or to remember that it was on Monte Corno that Battisti fell, to realise the tragic associations of these mountains. No doubt Thermopylæ has rocks in no way different from many others; but the blood which was spilt there has for centuries made them ennobled spots, and no true lover of glorious deeds or of ideals can think of them without emotion.

At the moment when a soldier is offering us a bouquet of sweet-smelling cyclamen, which he gathered whilst we were looking at the scenery, the guns boom again with sharp, dry sounds, quite close to us. This time it is our allies, who are pursuing an aeroplane, which rises rapidly to escape the shrapnel, and is soon nothing more than a black speck in the sky.

Chapter XV.

THE IRON GATES OF VERONA.

The Valley of the Adige (Trentino).

THE outer defences of Verona consist of a line of forts established on the first heights which meet the eye as one proceeds from the town in a northerly direction. At the outset of the war the Italian military authorities took the precaution of extending these defences towards the north, occupying, after unimportant engagements, the heights situated in Austrian territory, with the result that, at the present moment, the farthest point of the Veronese defences lies in the little village of Ala, in the valley of the Adige.

It is with a view to visiting these defences that we leave Verona in the company of General Giorgio Bompiani, who himself organised them, and is anxious to show them to us. This, again, is all the more pleasurable to us because the General is not only an expert in the actual conduct of war, but an intelligent exponent of the military art. He was for a long time the military critic of the *Corriera della Sera*, and distinguished himself by writing for this newspaper a series of articles on the African campaign. The clear and simple manner in which he expressed his views rendered these articles most valuable as an instructive course.

After traversing a somewhat lengthy path in the Veronese plain we penetrate the valley of the

Pantana. This valley is one of those which descend from the Lessini mountains and extend themselves over the plain somewhat like the fingers of a hand. A little farther on we climb between the Modi Valley and the Anguilla Valley in the direction of the village of Erbezzo, at a height of 700 metres. This is a smiling landscape of gentle slopes ascending in wooded or cultivated terraces ; from the summit a fertile table-land is seen rolling away into the distance, and here and there a bright little town. Higher up, the valleys are adorned with extensive woods of chestnut trees, full of fruit, in the shade of which little villages seem to nestle. The road beyond has been cut in the rock itself by the military engineers. The tints of this rock are rich and warm, ranging from flesh-pink to blood-red ; it is Veronese marble, of which the churches of the town of Scaligeri are partly built.

The weather, which was very rainy in the beginning, now seems to be improving. The sky clears, and when, at Erbezzo, we descend from the carriage to visit the officers of the Staff, a gleam of sunshine lights up the Lago di Garda beyond the mountains which form the right bank of the deep valley of the Adige.

We leave Erbezzo. The scenery grows bleaker. It consists of large broadly undulating grass-lands, where a few herds chew the yellow cud. These meadows are pierced here and there by large round holes, full of water. They are known locally as the *pozze morte*—the dead pools. Rocks, like low towers, rise up from the grass, fretted

into strange shapes by the elements and grouped in twenties. In the folds of the ground charming clumps of chestnut trees are occasionally to be seen. Everywhere are the signs of extensive works—trenches, barbed wire, bastions, and gun emplacements.

Suddenly the rock comes to an end, and an abyss opens beneath our feet. Here were constructed the great military works, the mountain being a fortress in itself.

At the moment, however, we see nothing of these heights, which have disappeared in a slowly moving sea of white mist. The peaks of the Coni Zugna and of the Zugna Torta, and the hollow formed by the Passo di Buole, can only with difficulty be pointed out to us ; but at our left, behind the deep valley of the Adige, the massive shapes of the Baldo chain and Mount Altissimo are more clearly distinguishable, and in the distance a fortunate ray of sunshine lights up the sparkling glaciers of Mount Adamello.

We now leave the white chasm to follow the line of another range. The newly constructed military road zigzags upwards continually to a point where it is necessary to abandon the motor and mount on horseback in order to reach a place far up the valley of the Adige.

We ride through a landscape of woods, meadows, and groves of chestnuts already tinged by the red of autumn, and enveloped in a thick fog. At last we stop and dismount.

Miners receive us at the entrance of a shaft which reminds us of the *bouveaux* of our Walloon

collieries. They are carrying their little lamps, and these gleams of light guide us through the moist darkness. Subsidiary galleries have already been started; workmen are labouring at them, and we can hear the noise made by the mechanical drill as it bites into the rock. We walk 200 metres, and then an opening in the rock discloses itself. And in that opening, its black shape outlined against the grey sky, stands a piece of artillery—one of the guardians of the Adige.

When we are standing upright in that huge loophole we see nothing at our feet but a perpendicular rock, and in front of us, towards the left, the grey surface of another wall. Between the two flows a stream of white vapour, uniting with another, which marks the valley of the Adige.

Whilst we are regretting the bad weather, the sun rises and disperses the clouds. The mist rolls back from the valley in great waves, and the river is suddenly unveiled.

The river is a green twining ribbon; the landscape is divided into squares of well-tilled fields. On the bank of the stream lies the small town of Ala, and a little farther off, on the other side, the village of Picante. More distant still, in a bend of the valley, is Serravalle—now occupied by the Italians—and beyond a few white specks. Can they be the first houses of Rovereto? We have not time to make sure. Through that loophole, leaning on a cannon levelled at the valley, we have a momentary glimpse of the road to Trent, squeezed between the mountains, amongst

which the Baldo, the Altissimo, and the Vignolo, which have now been won by the Italians, stand out in the foreground ; whilst in the far distance the shining Adamello and the Austrian Stivio spring into view. But already the mist is spreading over the countryside, and the cluster of valleys is now nothing more than a moving sea of white vapour.

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Verona wears its customary air of animation. There are perhaps a few more soldiers in evidence than in normal times, and also more pretty and alluring young women in new clothes, which bear witness to rapidly acquired wealth. Oh, beautiful daughters of Verona ! What damage you must have inflicted on warrior hearts ! For a printed notice affixed to the doors of a church solemnly adjures you in the name of God and of your country, to be modest ; it impresses on you that effeminate soldiers are useless as fighters. We are much interested in this display of patriotic zeal on the part of the clergy.

This evening the Piazza della Erbe has timidly closed the huge parasols of its market, and piled up the baskets of vegetables and fruit. The wind is swirling through the town, and the storm is threatening ; already, long streaks of lightning flash in the sky. . . .

Nevertheless, in spite of the storm, in spite of the war, the city of the Scaligeri retains its charm. Though bruised and a little frightened in its battle array, it still wears an air of elegance. The great Can, who laughs so heartily on his armoured

steed, is hidden from our eyes, as are all the other statues surrounding him in the proud and rugged tomb of his family. The warfare of to-day has obliged that warrior of yore to wrap himself up like an invalid. He is protected by a pointed dome of zinc.

The knights of bronze, though certainly most inoffensive at the present time, are none the less threatened; blind and treacherous death, falling from the sky, awaits them as well as the soldiers of flesh and blood.

In the churches we find that sandbags and queer barricades have transformed the elaborate churches into rough fortresses, though the pavements are full of kneeling soldiers and women whose faces are buried in their hands.

Let us return to the market-place. The wind, which has grown more violent, threatens the upright umbrellas and the piled-up baskets round the column of San Marco. The iron chains of the pillory, which used in former days to bind malefactors and criminals as a salutary warning, are made to creak, and a garland on the front of a house rustles with a sound of dead leaves. The answer which we were seeking is there, inscribed over the arcade of this market-place where the storm is raging; it is that the war, which has caused the swathing of the statues and the barricading of the altars, has killed, by bombs thrown from the sky one brilliant morning, twenty-nine civilians who, like ourselves, were wandering through this market-place, with its fruit and flowers.

Chapter XVI.

BLESSING THE WOUNDS.

AT Cormons, the day after the taking of Gorizia, we saw a poster, in the national colours, with this threefold inscription :—

"Let us rejoice over the new triumph of Italy. —Bless the wounds of the brave.—Bring gifts and flowers for those who have been wounded in the cause of civilisation."

This notice expresses a feeling which is very general and very intense throughout Italy, that of respect for the wounded soldier. Not only is he well taken care of, but he is treated with deference and held in honour. All are conscious of their obligations, and strive to express their gratitude with humility. Relief for the wounded is admirably organised. From the field of battle, where the wounded man is picked up with all solicitude and brotherly devotion, to the field-hospitals, where he is given first-aid ; to the motor-ambulances, which take him to the railway stations ; to the hospital trains, equipped for long journeys ; to the base hospitals ; to the convalescent homes ; and to the establishments where he is taught a new trade—all these things are arranged with one end in view, that of relieving and healing and restoring to normal life those who have suffered for their country.

We are not doctors, so that it is not for us to estimate the technical efficiency of the ambulance

service; we can give no more than passing impressions. We witnessed everywhere these strenuous efforts to relieve suffering, and amongst the wounded everywhere we found the same courageous and exalted spirit.

At the front the field-hospitals are numerous, clean, and well organised. Even in the bombarded villages they exist amidst the ruined houses under the illusory protection of the Red Cross. We saw the stretchers on which, under enemy fire, the soldiers who are unhurt transport a fallen comrade; we saw the carriages on which the wounded are brought down from the heights, and the huge Red Cross motor-lorries moving slowly over the dusty roads.

We saw, in the stations, whole trains fitted up with beds, a kitchen, and everything which ingenuity could devise for reducing to a minimum the pain and weariness of the journey; and amongst the feverish patients lying in their little white cots or those who, with bandaged heads and arms in slings, were able to sit up, we rarely saw a sad or reproachful face.

We were able to come into closer contact with the wounded in the excellent hospitals of Florence, Rome, and Milan. We talked with them and with those who attended them. Their nurses are heroic examples of humble patience and boundless devotion. The ladies of Bologna, for example, offered to allow pieces of their skin to be peeled off when grafting was recommended by the doctors.

We were in Rome, at the hospital established

in the Queen-Mother's palace, on the 24th of May, 1916, when they celebrated the anniversary of the declaration of war upon Austria with an enthusiasm and sincerity touching in those of whom the war has demanded blood and suffering.

We visited, at Turin, the hospitals which French generosity and brotherly sympathy have offered at the shrine of suffering of the children of Italy ; we saw, at Pallanza, on the beautiful and health-giving shores of Lake Maggiore, the homes for the wounded, the sick, and the convalescent.

Everywhere we found willing self-sacrifice, cheerful resignation, and desire to go back to the front. From these places, where human misery might have been expected to lift up its voice in cries of anguish and of hatred, we heard only words worthy of an epic, and tales of splendid energy and courage.

At Bologna we visited a magnificent orthopædic hospital, where the soldiers are received in what was formerly a convent — a building on an eminence commanding the village and its two separate towers. Dr. Putti, the superintendent, attired in elegant officer's uniform, explained to us in detail the different methods employed in restoring suppleness and activity to injured limbs. At the same time, establishments for technical training assist in the work of re-adaptation to social life.

All this is ingenious, well conceived, well organised, and appears to carry out its functions perfectly. Throughout Italy the Red Cross is fulfilling its beneficent mission, and its badges

decorate alike men's buttonholes and women's bodices.

It is the cry of all Italy; it is the ardent, generous, and compassionate soul of this people, still further uplifted by patriotism, which finds its expression in the notice at Cormons: "Bless the wounds of our brave men."

And the second appeal—for gifts and flowers for the wounded—is equally characteristic of the Italian temperament. This warm-hearted people considers that brotherly duty is only half performed unless generous gifts are accompanied by graciousness, by smiles, and by flowers.

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