

MUSSOLINI AND FASCISM

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THE last seven years of Italian history are an epitome of the world's post-war troubles. Pacifism, war-weariness, and the intolerance of the disillusioned, officiously fanned to a devouring flame by the Socialists, brought Italy close to the abyss. The nation's sounder instincts saved and regenerated it.

A broad movement of reaction and recovery was natural, and even inevitable. Other countries, belligerent and neutral, passed through like phases, with appropriate variation according to their constitutions and circumstances. Italy swung impulsively in the one direction, and then with passionate conviction in the other, each stage being marked by startling and impressive events. The severity of the disintegrative phase was imperfectly understood outside Italy, so that the world has been astounded by the apparent harshness of the cure and by the ironies of the political upheaval. The civilization of Italy, the oldest continuous civilization in Europe, rests on the fine balance of the Italian mind. But fine instruments are easily thrown out of gear. Italian history records many a balance suddenly lost, and as suddenly recovered. In those brief and rapid dramas the inexhaustible vitality of the race re-established poise and perspective by no State-mechanism or mass-pressure, but by a personal inspiration. Such a drama was the period of war reaction in Italy, and such a personality Mussolini.

Neither the plot nor the man could have graced the stage in any other country. In those years Britain, for instance, experienced little worse than under-surface heavings and explosive rumblings that could not shake a structure safe by its sheer weight and by an almost mechanical cohesiveness. In Germany the victorious Socialist Revolution seized the cumbrous State mechanism, but only to become the saviour of the society it had sworn to revolutionize. The mechanics of politics enslaved the German masses, sterilized the leaders,—and saved Germany. But Italy could be saved only in a more dangerous and brilliant way. No bulwark of State machinery could suffice, not the paraphernalia of authority piled high and broad, but only personalized power.

Mussolini was born at Predappio in 1883. He took his politics from his father, a Socialist blacksmith who had been captured by

the doctrine of "direct action" preached by Georges Sorel and other French syndicalists. Young Benito worked in the smithy, talked politics, and wrote revolutionary articles in the local Socialist paper. In consequence of disorders at a municipal election in which he was a candidate, he was fined and imprisoned and afterwards took refuge in Switzerland, where he worked as a navvy while qualifying as a teacher in French. On returning to Italy he took up journalism. In 1908 he was editor of the *Avvenire* of Trento and a contributor to the Irredentist *Il Popolo*, until the Austrian Government expelled him as a dangerous revolutionary. His vehement intervention at the Socialist Congress at Reggio Emilia in 1912 helped to drive the Reformist wing, of which Bissolati and Bonomi were the leaders, out of the party, and won him the editorship of the official organ *Avanti*. He had a hand in the revolutionary outbreak in the Romagna in June, 1914, and when it failed he attacked the *Confederazione Generale del Lavoro* for its lack of radicalism. It had been the policy of the Socialist centre for some time past to co-operate with the State and the Liberals in order to develop trade-union interests and the economic organisations, e. g. the Co-operatives, of the Socialist proletariat. To the pacifism and the class-greedy opportunism of the Italian Socialists and the fatalism of the German Marxists he was equally hostile. He was not content to wait until Capitalism should negate itself, and give rise to its opposite, nor to allow the *denouement* to be postponed or obviated by Liberal reforms. His association with the Irredentist *Il Popolo*, the organ of Cesare Battisti, who—though legally an Austrian—joined the Italian army, and when captured by the Austrians was hanged as a traitor, showed him to be a patriot rather than an internationalist. Georges Sorel said of him in January, 1912, when he was still the hope of Italian Socialism: "Our Mussolini is not an ordinary Socialist. Believe me, you may one day perhaps see him at the head of a sacred battalion, saluting with drawn sword the Italian flag. He is an Italian of the fifteenth century, a *condottiero*. It is not yet known, but he is the only energetic man capable of repairing the weakness of the Government."¹

The events of August, 1914, divided the sympathies of Italy. She had now to choose between fighting her old enemy Austria for the unredeemed provinces and a secure frontier, and enduring for ever the effects of neutrality. Various factors embarrassed the decision, and sowed the seed of future troubles. Because the Government inclined slowly towards intervention, the Giolittian

1 Quoted in Villari's *Awakening of Italy* (Methuen: 1924), page 18.

majority in the Chamber hastened to declare itself neutral. The Socialists were pacifist by principle. The Vatican as an international organization, and the unreconciled enemy of the Italian State, was unavoidably neutralist. Mussolini and his personal following declared at once for intervention. They preferred western democracy to the absolutism of Germany and Austria, and they looked on war as a means towards revolution and renewal. The German Socialists, moreover, had joined hands with the Kaiser in support of the war, despite their cult of internationalism. "German national unanimity", said Mussolini at Parma in December, 1914, "has automatically determined the unanimity of other countries." The speech concluded characteristically:

It is necessary to act, to move, to fight, and, if necessary, to die. Neutrals have never dominated events. They have always gone under. It is blood that moves the wheels of history.²

Mussolini had been expelled the previous month from the Socialist party, and had abandoned the *Avanti* in order to found and conduct *Il Popolo d' Italia* in the cause of intervention. His brilliant and powerful pen helped to swing the public towards war. His hostility fastened on the ill-assorted army of neutralists, the irresponsibles in parliament, the clerical opposition, and the anti-patriots of every shade in the country towards some of whom he was less than just in the years that followed. In his fervent eyes the false or foolish steps of his opponents were sin, and unforgivable. With the intolerance of the enthusiast he brought into politics a measure of the *odium theologicum*. Intervention, when it came, ended or silenced the scruples of neutralists, and healed most divisions, save the Socialist heresy. For the Socialist party the decision between peace and war was fateful. "Within a period of two years," writes Bonomi, "both extreme wings were lost: on the right Bissolati's wing, that might have given the party a sense of national realities, and on the left the revolutionaries, who had courage and daring. On the eve of Italy's entry into the world war Italian Socialism was already a grey mass from which the energy both of right and of left had been banished; it was an organism living on traditions and formulae, without internal force, and therefore without a grasp of the formidable problems of the new era. The successive mistakes of Italian Socialism spring from these two ruptures, which were meant to preserve the purity of the faith, but only robbed it of energy and life."³

² *Mussolini as Revealed in his Political Speeches*: translated by Quaranta di San Severino (J. M. Dent, 1923), page 17.

³ *From Socialism to Fascism*, by Ivance Bonomi, ex-Premier of Italy (M. Hopkinson & Co., London, 1924) page 14.

The "grey mass," led by pretentious mediocrities, pursued its ignoble path to the bitter end. Party discipline was tightened so as to keep the flock immune from the least infection of the fighting spirit. A querulous pacifism confounded the pleas of the Entente and the Central Powers in one impartial condemnation, and derided the idealism of the war. A thousand tongues harped pessimistically on the miseries and losses which were inseparable from it. Its vicissitudes easily proved to the sceptics the certainty of defeat. Moreover, support, open or covert, was available for unrepentant neutralism in important quarters. It was inevitable that the pre-war neutralists should remain suspect, and that they should repay in kind the hatred and the distrust of their opponents. Socialism rallied to itself the sympathy of the aggrieved and the discontented, of injured interests and wounded pride. Its fierce attacks on the war party won it the condescending patronage of circles that until then had been hostile or contemptuous. The Russian Revolution in 1917 emboldened the defeatists, who redoubled their disloyal propaganda in the press, on the platform, in the Chamber itself, and at the front. A result was seen at Caporetto. From the very depths of disaster Italy rose again to ultimate victory. But the "grey mass" had neither eyes to see nor the moral force to change its ways. "It continued," writes Bonomi, "its angry criticism and its prophecies of disaster, unaware that a new spirit was arising in the trenches, unaware that material wealth, the destruction of which it deplored, no longer appeared the same to men that for months and years had beheld death very close; unaware that the transformation of Europe, where the oldest empires were soon to fall and new nations to be born, was a far different thing from the expiatory upheaval which it had prophesied. When, therefore, in November 1918 victory proclaimed the reward of Italy's struggle and sacrifice, the Socialist party was like a sleep-walker who awakes unexpectedly in a spot which he had never hoped to see."⁴

The sleep-walker found his bearings very quickly amid the abundant aftermath of war. Victims of economic dislocation and psychological upheaval needed no better champion than the Socialist party. The relief from the strain and discipline of war provoked a general intolerance of restraints of every sort. Younger men, disillusioned and longing for change, drifted either towards insurrectionary Socialism or into the arms of D'Annunzio. The example of the Russian Revolution fascinated the lawless, and inflamed the instincts of mischief. In the north, both in the towns and in

⁴ *From Socialism to Fascism*, page 24.

the country, the phenomena of Bolshevism began to appear. The strike mania raged everywhere, and not least in the Government services. Under cover of anti-profiteering legislation, outrageous attacks were made on private traders. The Government's land policy lent itself only too easily to the cry of "the land for the peasants," and provoked the most deplorable incidents. The Government shrank, however, from repressive measures, hoping to kill Socialism with kindness, and content that lawlessness should make havoc of society and industry provided it spared the State. Nitti was ready to save the State by the sacrifice of all that it was the State's function to defend. For the moment the sacrifice was not ineffectual. The madness of Bolshevism spent itself on targets other than the State. Supineness of the authorities robbed the disorders of political point, so that sabotage and intimidation became ends in themselves rather than steps towards immediate revolution. From day to day the period was one of confusion, chagrin, license and violence, of paradox and stricken consciences, of paralysis and fear.

Without developing into a true revolution, the scene entailed much tyranny and cruelty, and the deepest humiliation. Neither life nor property was safe, and the courts could do little. Strikes and indiscipline had completely undermined the confidence of the business world in itself. The extreme venom of the mob against all that reminded it of the war spared neither the dignity nor the limbs and life of uniformed soldiers in the public streets.

Demobilized men dared not show their medals or badges, while the Government warned officers to wear "unprovocative" mufti. Socialist pressure procured an amnesty for all deserters in the war. The victory celebrations were put off indefinitely. In preparation for the Election of November 1919, the Socialist Congress at Bologna announced a full-blooded Bolshevik programme, while the complaisant Nitti framed a scheme of proportional representation which the Socialists rightly expected would make them the strongest group in the new Chamber and fissure all other parties. No fewer than 156 Socialists, nearly a third of the Chamber, were returned at the polls. At the opening of the new parliament the Socialists, each wearing a red carnation, greeted the entry of the king by singing *The Red Flag*, and then trooped out. Elsewhere blood flowed, as at Mantua where on December 3rd the mob burnt the prison, let loose two hundred criminals, and indulged in pillage and murder, before order could be restored. The long sequel of incipient revolution made 1920 the blackest year in the history of United Italy. Amid strikes and rioting authority decayed, and the

climax came nearer. In September, 1920, it seemed to the Socialists that the hour had come to act. Taking advantage of a lock-out in the metal industries, the workmen proceeded, without striking a blow, to occupy all the factories in the North. They marched in, helmeted and armed, without the least resistance from the employers, the police, or the Government. Within three weeks the occupation collapsed. The men marched out, confessing their failure to conduct industry, and surrendering to the employers their rights and possessions. Liberty had killed the rebellion. The great *coup*, towards which all the propaganda and all the intimidation had been directed, ended in a fiasco. From that moment Socialism began to decline, and within two years it lay beaten at the feet of Fascism.

Fascism had a forerunner in the poet D'Annunzio. His fiery, if somewhat histrionic, patriotism helped to arouse the war spirit among the educated, just as did Mussolini among the masses. The hostility of the Peace Conference to Italian claims, and the "renunciatory" tendencies of some Italian politicians stirred up patriotic reaction which D'Annunzio headed. In September, 1919, he and his following of ex-soldiers occupied Fiume, which President Wilson had assigned to Yugoslavia, and he established himself as military and civil head of the new province of Carnaro, for which he framed a constitution. The occupation was far more than a chauvinist raid. D'Annunzio believed that only an organized movement inspired by a three-fold sentiment of respect for the State, for the dignity of work, and for discipline, could redeem Italy. His "constitution"⁵ was remarkable for its sympathy with devolution and the rights of the local communes, and for its organization of all citizens in ten "corporations," or guilds. Citizenship was to rest on productive function, and wealth to be a trust. On the military side D'Annunzio revived the old Roman organization: and the picturesque usages, such as the old Roman salute with the right arm outstretched and the nomenclature of *manipulus*, *cohors*, *triarrii*, etc., with which he familiarized his men, were taken over later by the Fascists. In the seizure of Fiume D'Annunzio had the support of the Fascists, who in turn had his good wishes in the Election of November, 1919. But Mussolini polled very poorly at Milan, and D'Annunzio, immobilized on the frontier, could exert no decisive influence on public opinion, or on the governing class which he had flouted, nor could he even begin to organize a patriotic reaction. The weakness of successive Cabinets and the aggressions of insurrectionary Socialism made a problem which could not be solved

5 See *Fascism*, by Odon Por (Labour Publishing Company, London, 1923), Appendix I.

from Fiume, nor with the meagre help of the early Fascists. When the Government forces expelled D'Annunzio from Fiume in December 1920, Mussolini had not yet the strength, even if he had had the mind, to intervene. It was not *Fiumanismo* that was destined to re-establish Italy, nor D'Annunzio. The occupation had originated in a genuine outburst of patriotism, but as time passed its *morale* declined, and its leader busied himself more and more with the theatricalities of his self-assumed position. It became clear that D'Annunzio had a poor sense of the objective in politics, and no instinct for revolutionary method. A revolution, as Mussolini realized from the start, must have a method; the wise revolutionary avoids challenging the State, and even more the army, too soon. The movement which dates from 23rd March, 1919, had no more promise of greatness than any other of the thousand and one associations of ex-soldiers, apart from its incomparable leader. The Constituent Assembly of Interventionists, as these bellicose spirits christened their first meeting, was carefully staged by Mussolini as a protest against the incompetence and inertia of the bourgeois politicians. He assumed a messianic tone:

The Senate must be abolished. . . . Representation must be given to the various economic interests. We demand universal suffrage. . . . and proportional representation. . . . We shall demand a decision upon the form of the State. It must put the question: "Republic, or Monarchy?" We, who have always been republicans at heart, will thenceforward answer, "A Republic."⁶

The Fascist programme, like the Socialist, aimed at a workers' republic, and demanded such immediate measures as the confiscation of war profits, heavy taxation of the rich, and the disendowment of the Church. Too radical for the bourgeoisie and too patriotic for the masses, whose eyes were bent on Russia, Mussolini bided his time. Fascism could not grow until the struggle between Society and Bolshevism had developed further. Its own attitude was equivocal. Early in 1919 Mussolini gave his blessing to the seizure of a factory at Dalmine by syndicalist workmen. Nor did he oppose the notorious occupation of the factories a year and a half later. Speaking at Trieste on 20th September, 1920, he said:

No social transformation which is necessary is repugnant to me. In this way I accept the famous control of the factories, and their co-operative management by companies. I only ask that there shall be a clean conscience and technical capacity, and that there shall be increased production. If this is guaranteed by

⁶ *From Socialism to Fascism*, page 100. See *A Political Escapade, the Story of Fiume and D'Annunzio* by J. H. Macdonald, O. S. B. (London, John Murray).

the workmen's unions instead of by the employers, I have no hesitation in saying that the former have the right to substitute the latter.

The union of the scattered Fascist groups in one organization at Florence, in October, 1919, excited derision and hostility in most quarters. Fascist "cells," Mussolini's eyes and ears, were multiplying in the industrial establishments. The "conspiracy" of Fascism included the armed *squadre*, which from small beginnings as a bodyguard for Mussolini during his editorship of *Il Popolo d'Italia* came to scandalize every pressman and disquiet the nation by their menace and scale. But the course of events favoured this dubious movement, and the brilliant radical opportunist at its head. The fiasco of the occupation of the factories encouraged the employers and the middle-classes to organize a counter-offensive. Fascism became their willing and effectual weapon. It harried Socialism and Bolshevism in every form, retaliating in kind upon violence, incendiarism and murder, and extirpated it from its last refuges. Where constituted authority dared not or could not assure order, Fascism stepped boldly and methodically into the breach. The State, supinely abandoning its task, or pushed aside by enterprising Fascists, steadily lost credit and drew the supplanter on.

How complete was the degradation of public authority may be judged from the case of Bologna. A Socialist mayor, Zanardi, administered the city in the exclusive interests of the mob. The city sank into chaos. "Bucco, deputy for Mantua and secretary of the Bologna *Camera del Lavoro*," writes Villari,⁸ "was the despot of the city, and exercised his authority by means of his bodyguard of armed apaches . . . Every form of crime was freely indulged in, as the criminal classes were under the special protection of Bucco and his gang. No motor car could circulate without a pass signed by Bucco. The ordinary law had ceased to be respected, and the authorities had instructions never to interfere with the doings of the Reds Not only were non-Socialists boycotted, starved, robbed and occasionally murdered and their farms burned down, but huge fines were imposed on landlords, farmers and labourers who dared to disobey the orders of the Red tyrants, and receipts were given them made out on the headed notepaper of the municipal or provincial councils, so safe did the Reds feel. Similar conditions prevailed in the province of Ferrara, where the deputies Matteotti and Merangoni were all-powerful. In both provinces the Fasci were beginning to develop, and they formed the only organizations

⁷ *Mussolini as Revealed in his Political Speeches*, page 116.

⁸ *The Awakening of Italy*, page 108.

which dared to resist the Socialists and fight them with their own weapons. The first meeting of the newly elected council on 21st November, 1920, was chosen by the Socialists as the occasion for a general insurrection in the town and province. Shots were fired outside the Town Hall, and ten persons were killed and sixty-six wounded. The Socialist councillors inside the Council Chamber, hearing the shooting, opened fire on the Constitutionalist members, killing Giulio Giordani, a disabled officer, and wounding others." The Fascists led the popular revulsion against these crimes. The Fascisti," says Villari, "whose numbers were swelling from hour to hour, attacked and wrecked many Socialist institutions, both in Bologna and in the province, and the Red leaders hardly dared to appear in public save under strong escorts of those Royal Guards and Carabinieri whose comrades they had helped to murder. A few days later a number of Fascisti from Bologna and elsewhere went to Modena to attend the funeral of a companion who had been recently murdered by the Reds. During the ceremony some Communists fired at them, killing two, and the others retaliated by burning down the *Camera del Lavoro* and the Chambers of the Communist deputy Donati The Fascista movement grew daily in strength, and Socialist power broke down in one district after another. Fighting occurred frequently, as the Reds would not willingly give up their predominance: many isolated Fascisti were ambushed and murdered, while their companions adopted a system of reprisals for these deeds, usually consisting of expeditions of Fascisti armed with bludgeons or revolvers, who would enter the town or village where the crime had been committed, arrest the murderers when they could find them, kill them if they resisted, and if not hand them over to the Carabinieri." Villari's account of affrays at Florence in February, 1921, is also worth quoting:

A group of Communists hidden in a side street, off the Via Tornabuoni, threw a bomb at a cortège of schoolboys on their way to a patriotic celebration, killing and wounding several people. The Fascisti retaliated by attacking and wrecking the offices of various Red organizations, and killed a certain Zavagnini, a notorious railway agitator and editor of a Communist paper: he was known to have been the instigator of various similar outbreaks, and had been warned that if another Communist crime were committed in Florence, he would pay for it with his life. The railway men of the Florence district of course went out on strike, and so did the electricians. A series of affrays took place between Fascisti and Communists, and the latter erected barricades in the popular San Frediano quarter. They also committed a number of exceptionally brutal murders, including that of a small boy named Berta, whose only crime was that he was the son

of a manufacturer: he was thrown into the Arno as he was crossing a bridge on his bicycle. The Fascisti continued their work of repression, burning down the *Camera del Lavoro*

By the spring of 1921 Socialists and Communists had parted company, and the whole movement was in full rout. Mussolini desired an end of violence. "The Socialists," he said, "being no longer a danger to the State, are entitled to express their ideas and to carry on their propaganda." He proposed the shortlived Pact of Pacification, which was solemnly ratified under the auspices of the President of the Chamber in August, 1921. But the new adherents and paymasters of Fascism would not hear of peace, nor did the Socialists respond to Mussolini's overtures. Fascism was no longer an ex-soldier's revolt against plutocracy, and its policy ceased to be a synthesis of democratic tendencies. The flood of new recruits had diverted the parent stream. On November 6th Fascism definitely became a political party under the name of *Partito Nazionale Fascista*. Mussolini's programme speech sounded the characteristic notes: devotion to the State, respect for the Church, social and industrial reform, and knightly ideals. Under a cloak of patriotic radicalism, Fascism moved forward towards new objectives. Socialism was crushed, and its dying struggles could not endanger the country. It remained to capture the State. Once more circumstances favoured the Fascists. The *intransigence* of the large Socialist party in the Chamber, and the factiousness of half a dozen other groups made stable government an impossibility. The ease with which ambitious schemers climbed into office by provoking a ministerial crisis was a standing encouragement to intrigue. Lobby conspiracies reduced one Cabinet after another to impotence. Meanwhile the Fascists continued the purgation of local government, and fought strikes with great success. Life became secure again in Italy. The public watched the party passions and the cynical and futile manoeuvres of the Chamber with growing disgust. A doomed parliament wrangled and fretted, while the country's sympathies followed the preparations of an armed revolution for its overthrow. Mussolini's speech at Udine in September, 1922, warned the nation: "We lift our thoughts towards Rome" "I believe that the Monarchy has no interest in opposing what we must already call the Fascista revolution." A month later the Fascists marched on Rome, the Facta Government expired amid spasms and protestations, and the king invited Mussolini to form a ministry.

An adroit and bloodless revolution enthroned the party of youth. The young premier of 39 had the confidence of all the

bourgeoisies, and of the Liberals and the Nationalists in the Chamber. Adventurous, energetic, incisive, vehement, but above all ready to learn, he faced the tasks of government with all the enthusiasms of his eclectic career, but without prejudices. His aim was to synthesize all the political conviction, the idealism, the practical energy, and the urgency of the race. There was nothing very political in the party cry: "*Giovinezza, Giovinezza, Primavera di Bellezza!*"⁹ A radical temper, a responsive patriotism, and an ardour for work, are not exactly a policy in themselves. But a disciplined instancy was the need of the hour, and Fascism desired unmistakably to dominate, to purge, and to energize. "Before arriving here," said Mussolini in the first speech he made as Premier in the Chamber, "we were asked on all sides for a programme. It is not, alas, programmes that are wanting in Italy, but men to carry them out. All the problems of Italian life, *all* I say, have long since been solved on paper. But the will to put these solutions into practice has been lacking. The Government represents to-day that firm and decisive will."

Fascist achievements in reorganizing finance and the judiciary, in reinvigorating local government, in reducing the bureaucracy, in reviving respect for the law, and in giving Italy peace for work, are already remarkable. The twin idols of the Socialists, internationalism and nationalization, have been overthrown. Certain measures of denationalization e. g. in shipping, life-insurance, and telephones, have been carried out, and others have been promised, e. g. on the railways. Much waste land has been reclaimed. The generation of electricity from water power has been developed. Once an anti-clerical republican, Mussolini is now the pillar of the Monarchy, and has made the teaching of religion compulsory in the schools and given the control of it to the Church. The former champion of proportional representation is abolishing it by stages. If he is still a single-chamber man, his affections have veered from the Chamber to the Senate. He has asserted the rights of Italy in foreign politics, and turned her ambition eastwards. The Election of April 1924, the freest, probably, for many years, gave the Fascist and pro-Fascist parties nearly three-quarters of the total poll. Mussolini's threat to hold another Election amid the troubles which followed the Matteotti murder only exasperated his opponents, who regard his constitutionalism as hypocrisy. Neither the political dogmas of Fascism nor Mussolini's hold on his armed supporters, who are now organized as part of the army but swear fealty to him as well as to the king,

can be reconciled with traditional Democracy and Liberalism. But whatever the more irresponsible Fascists desire, Mussolini himself is doubtless sincerely anxious to govern "within the Constitution"; and all Italians have a like interest in smoothing the transition from the dictatorship to the ordinary régime. As the Bolshevik years fade into the past, the public begins to forget how Fascism saved it, and carps at its rulers with something of the old gusto. But the leaders and the parties that failed Italy so recently, and that now fulminate against Fascist tyranny, are still discredited and sharply divided. The press-censorship has earned Mussolini the hostility of most pressmen at home and abroad. Certain episodes of repression have reminded the world that Fascism has not forsworn the use of force, the "creative violence," *la violenza realizzatrice*, which Mussolini has frequently defended, or weaned itself from the use of force *sans phrase*. But all these evils and discomforts seem to millions of Italians a modest price to pay for the new era of security and progress. The dictatorship of Fascism means that as yet the Fascist Government has neither rival nor successor in the field.

The rise of Fascism has become a legend, in which a champion of miraculous virtue rescues Italy from the claws of a monster. But for how long will the glamour of knight-errantry transfigure the political stage? To friends and foes alike Fascism has seemed a fate, gradual, remorseless, ardent, accepting bloodshed and martyrdoms level-eyed, and obeying a deadly instinct of dominance. It originated as an avowed Nemesis. How can it escape vengeance in its turn? But it is idle to speculate when or how the curtain will ring down. The drama that has interrupted the banality of ordinary politics offers lessons and challenges. Fascism has shown an exemplary sense of the obligations of authority, and of the nobility of service. A passionate conviction of the abyss that separates political right from wrong, of the superiority of action over procrastination, has inspired its course. A higher courage and an older wisdom have discomfited the fumbling troublesomeness of Socialists, and their loud waste of words. The spirit of an ancient people has flashed forth again, rebuking a perverse and selfish age. Political responsibility has been discharged in work, not frittered away in manoeuvre and evasion. Decision and importunacy have conquered drift. In will and technique, therefore, Fascism has shown itself competent to rule. But whither does it tend? Is it a purge of the old system, or a new dispensation? It has vindicated the State as the instrument of justice, defence and order, as a moral force and an ideal, against the crude usurpation of the sphere of

private enterprise which Socialism would force upon it. It has pruned away some of those electoral devices of political democracy that encourage divisions and disperse the national will. In so far as Liberalism demands freedom for the citizen and restriction of the State's sphere and power, Fascism is its handmaid. But Liberalism rates the nation above the State, while the Fascist doctrine of the State tends to absolutism. This doctrine was learnt in the trenches. "The soldiers," writes Bonomi,¹⁰ "forgot the jargon on which public life had fed for fifteen years. It seemed to them now unreal and fantastic: a frenzy from the dead, an echo of things gone by. The only reality was Italy, the nation, for which the soldiers daily gave what had never been given for party—their lives. For them the nation became the sole reality, the sole motive force, the sole idea. It superseded all rival passions and conceptions, and nullified class and party. The idea of class and class-war gave place to that of the nation as controlling the work of each of her sons, and as superior to all class and personal rights." This conception reserved for the Fascists the exclusive right to rule. Obedience to the Fascist State was the only mode of co-operation open to the other parties. Behind the Fascist Government stood the Supreme Fascist Council and the Fascist Militia. Parliament declined into a parleying-ground, where factions might argue with each other and question the Government, but could not make or unmake Cabinets. Employers' and workmens' organisations passed under the control of the Fascist "corporations" empowered to assure harmony and hard work. The dictatorship however, has not wholly abased parliament, nor have the "corporations" sustained their rôle. But if that absolute entity, the State as conceived by Fascism, is a rare and usually a shortlived phenomenon, the State is always more than the variable makeshift, the thing of compromise and convenience to which some democrats would reduce it. The Fascist saviours of the State have the right to castigate the era that preceded them. They claim, too, that they themselves express the true Italian spirit in the realm of politics. It is a maxim of the movement that parliamentarism and parliamentary democracy are an English device unsuited to the Italian genius. In a speech delivered at Milan on the eve of the march on Rome, Mussolini illustrated his contempt for democracy. "Fascism," he said, "is a reaction against the democrats who would have everything mediocre and uniform, and tried every way to conceal and to render transitory the authority of the State, from the supreme head

¹⁰ *From Socialism to Fascism*, page 115.

to the last usher in the law courts." What follows is worth quoting in the original: ¹¹

La democrazia credeva di rendersi preziosa presso le masse popolari e non comprendeva che le masse popolari disprezzano coloro che non hanno il coraggio di essere quello che devono essere. Tutto questo la democrazia non ha capito. La democrazia ha tolto lo "stile" alla vita del popolo. Il Fascismo riporta lo "stile" nella vita del popolo: cioè una linea di condotta, cioè il colore, la forza, il pittoresco, l'inaspettato, il mistico; insomma tutto quelle che conta nell'animo delle moltitudini. Noi suoniamo la lira su tutte le corde da quella della violenza a quella della religione, da quella dell'arte a quella della politica. Siamo politici e siamo guerrieri. Facciamo del sindacalismo e facciamo delle battaglie nelle piazze e nelle strade.

"Democracy thought to win the masses, and did not understand that the masses despise those who dare not be what they ought to be. To all this democracy has been blind. It has robbed the life of the people of 'style.' Fascism brings back 'style' into the life of the people; that is to say, it brings back colour, force, picturesqueness, the unexpected, the mystical, in fact all that counts in the soul of the multitude. We sound every string of the lyre, from violence to religion, from art to politics. We are statesmen, and we are warriors. We are syndicalists, and we fight battles in the streets and the squares."

Style has its roots in *L'Elan de la Vie*. Fascism has brought the impulses of personality and all the braveries of life into politics. Democracy counts up its majorities with penurious perplexity, while Fascism sweeps with coruscating logic from feeling and thought into action. Mussolini would have the world, or at least Italy, choose between the two—Democracy, with a mind so open that it seems empty; and Fascism, with its prestige of conviction and relentless will. "Belief in the power of personality," says Professor Ludwig Bernhard,¹² "and disbelief in the mechanical—that is the essence of Mussolini's point of view. Our age suffers from mankind having for more than a century sought after mechanical, automatic, compulsory solutions of political problems. The fear of strong-willed personalities and the revulsion from absolutist doctrine produced in the XVIIIth century a belief that a system of elections and majority decisions could enable the People to rule the State Jealousy of personal power, the desire to dethrone the personality that can make history, prompted the idea that the different stages of political organization follow unavoidably one upon the other. 'We do not believe,' says Mussolini, 'that History follows a fore-ordained itinerary, nor that Democracy must neces-

¹¹ *Fascismo*, by Emilio Papasogli (Vallecchi, Florence, 1923), page 32.

¹² *Das System Mussolini*, by Prof. L. Bernhard (August Scherl Berlin, 1924) page 44.

sarily be followed by Super-democracy.' The weak despair of the constructive power of personality it is that has spread the belief in the irresistible pressure, the compulsive influence of the arithmetic of Society These attempts at mechanical solutions led to those crises of the Liberal State and of Parliamentarism which have attacked almost all modern countries The deepest significance of Fascism is the supersession of *Staatsmechanismus* by the energizing government of an individual. This implies no recognition of monarchy: on the contrary Fascism is in tendency republican. But the State must have a form which permits strong personalities to animate and direct it." In personal rule and personalism in the State—and the one for the sake of the other,—an Italian theorist, Camillo Pellizzi, finds the core of Fascism. "The State," he writes,¹³ "is not a systematization, but a dynamic moral centre inspiring and co-ordinating a vast movement which gradually shapes and expresses an historical personality." The democratic State, it is true, can be so democratic and the representative system so representative as to nullify free institutions and make government impossible. The representative principle is no more than a variable incident of parliamentarism, and parliamentarism is no absolute, even in Anglo-Saxon eyes, but is conditioned by the other elements, the administrative and the judicial, which help to make up the *totum* of government. No two races apportion the stress among the three elements in an identical manner: nor would they, even though all alike were on the highest level of political development. Some races lean towards a dictator as the surest means of expressing the popular will. Dictatorship, according to Mr. G. M. Trevelyan,¹⁴ is "in the blood and the tradition of the city life of the Italians, and of their life as a nation." Many brilliant figures have been enthroned by the armies in the twenty-seven centuries since Rome was founded. English Liberalism is an influence of yesterday. The question which the future will answer is not how soon a penitent country will abjure its Romanticism, and become Liberal again. Mussolini has revived an older and deeper tradition of politics. Is there room in Italy for the new and the old? And if there is room, what shall their *modus vivendi* be?

13 *Problemi e Realta del Fascismo*, by Camillo Pellizzi (Vallechi, Florence, 1924) page 179.

14 *The Historical Causes of the Present State of Affairs in Italy*, by G. M. Trevelyan, (Oxford University Press), page 17.