

Mussolini

MAN AND HIS MIRACLE

AROLD REGGIE, in Daily Mail states an American Cardinal lately returned to the United States is the one country in Europe which manifests a recovery from the economic ravages of the three years ago this same Italy plunging into the anarchy which devastated the Russian Empire. Mussolini's achievement, separated from the methods of some of his followers, seems to me incomparably the greatest act of modern statesmanship. He has destroyed cynicism in the highly civilized State and kindled a flame of idealism in an ancient people.

He has taken the battalions of sedition, and driven down Russian Satanism under the clouds of civil war and sublimated class hatred, to give a new hope of enthusiasm to forty millions of war-wearied people, and to give to the very springs of real existence, the state of mind which has been known in the world since the days of Cromwell.

Let any man in England think I exaggerate, let him try to make unselfishness in our trade unions or in our public life, or in our Government, or in our officials. Any fool can play the game of Mr. A. J. Cook. Any mountebank can climb to power in a half-dozen years by promising the masses cakes and ale in the shape of wages and shorter hours. But to inspire a nation of forty million men with an impassioned enthusiasm for discipline, sacrifice, and duty, and to demand certain qualities of which the agitators of our day have no knowledge, and with which the best of our statesmen appear to be almost entirely ignorant.

Began as a Socialist.

A little boy Benito Mussolini, born in 1889, was wracked by a feeling that the operations surrounding his village were badly done. He was a mighty ambitious of an instinctive aversion to inefficiency and incompetence. He had a conviction that he could do many things better than he was doing them being done. No premonition of political activity, however, entered his mind. He heard his father, a blacksmith, speaking of Socialism as an event of the future. He grew up in the faith that one day all men would be Socialists.

His main concern was with the conditions in which he lived. He loved books with the same ardor as his mother, whom he adored and whose memory he reverenced, told him that one day he would be a celebrated man, prophesying that an hour would come when he would achieve glory as an Italian patriot. He did not certainly covet either honor or fame. His youth-time was dominated by the ambition to be a leader and a statesman.

"I might be surprised," I said to him when we first met. "I expected you to be a monster. You seem to me more of a poet."

"That, too, may be confessed," he answered with a boyish smile. "Now I must begin to write."

These were days when the sun shined too fast for him, when books were not long enough for his appetite, when the loveliness of nature and the magic of great music swept his senses and ardent soul with exquisite beauty.

He believed in his mother's prophecy of the first time when he took to the streets of Socialism. His success was great and tremendous. He wanted to create a new world, and he believed that Socialism could create it. He has spoken with his tongue as a poet. Never has he used the language of the poor to push his friends or to line his pocket. At the best time of his Socialism he was a honest man, clean of all pretence, free from all dishonouring hypocrisies. Sincerity told. He rose to leadership among Italian Socialists and was hailed by the International as a force.

A Vision.

He came to Europe, and he saw that if civilization were to be saved Italy must fight. The breath of universal brotherhood howled down, crying, "Kill him! Kill him!" The preachers and prophets of Socialism expelled him from their ranks. He disappeared out of Italy and reappeared as an Italian hero.

His courage told in that fighting. He fought like a lion, and when he fought men were inspired to do like him. He made friendships which changed his life. He rose to be a corporal, and went on fighting till he was wounded in a hundred places. His body was bursting with shrapnel. Useless to the army, apparently useless to the world, he was sent home. But Mussolini was not to stand in the gutter selling matches or singing doleful songs with his cap in his hand. He had seen a vision on the battlefield which became to him a veritable mission. It was the vision of national unity, expressed by courageous youth cheerfully enduring hardships triumphantly going out to meet death, unquestioningly accepting sacrifice as the true glory of life. He returned to find middle age complaining of incontinence, and old age moping over the dread of ruin. In order that Italy should be saved from ignominy and ruin he formed a legion of men who had fought in the war, making each man take the sacred oath. "In the Name of God and Italy, in the name of those who have died for the greater glory of Italy, I swear that I will consecrate myself, entirely and forever, to live for the good of Italy."

The poet may be seen in this oath, and those who smile at its solemnity or shiver with disgust at its fervour must wait to understand its meaning. (Ill Revolution trusts its bloody first into their faces.)

Triumphal Idealism.

Mussolini had discovered the secret of statesmanship. He who would save his country must appeal to Youth. "Youth," he said to me, "has no money values. It is life uncommercialised, the human soul without a trade mark. Youth feels itself insulted if you speak to it of the wages of patriotism. Its natural impulse, where the cause is sacred, is self-sacrifice. It understands better than the wisdom of old age the two greatest things in the world, love and sacrifice. The complete glory of human existence bursts upon the gaze of Youth only when it has found a cause for which it can die."

I said that I understood what he meant, but I wondered if this impulsive idealism of Youth could survive the cold and encroaching materialism of middle age.

He replied instantly that whenever true idealism clashes a sword with materialism, materialism falls. Materialism destroys a nation only when it is an unheeded disease; let it appear armed as the contrary principle of idealism, and humanity will rise to destroy it. When the Italian Communists ordered a general strike he exclaimed, "Thank God! Now they shall meet their deathblow."

Idealism, he protests, is not a speculation of philosophers but the instinctive knowledge of every man's daily life. It is the natural effort of the soul to ascend, not to fall. It is the warfare of man's higher nature with his lower nature. Man cannot rest in materialism. Neither man or nation can be satisfied by the things that perish. To strive for an ideal, to reach up to the higher, to long and agonise after the perfect, this is the only state of existence which can satisfy the intelligence of man and secure the continuing greatness of a nation. Without the impulse of idealism at the very birth of creation there could have been no progress of evolution.

Mussolini has seen what no man in England has yet seen, and pray God never shall see. He has seen the forces of Satanism organised to destroy civilization. Two thousand of his Fascist perished in the three years of Italian Leninism, some brutally tortured before they were hacked to death. Children were taught in schools that conscience has no authority over animal instincts. Red Guards were openly recruited from the police, the firemen, and the municipal workers. Seditious propaganda was organised among the soldiers and sailors. Peasants were forbidden to reap the harvest. Engine-drivers refused to carry officers in their trains. The Italian flag was torn down. Factories were seized by fanatical and drunken mobs. Murder and looting spread like a prairie fire. It was not until the Italian Government, trembling and surrendering, refused to meet the menace of a general strike that Mussolini exclaimed, "Inaction is a crime," and ordered the forces of idealism to converge on Rome.

"Discipline, Sacrifice, Work."

His idealism did not forsake him with accession to power. Bolshevism was conquered, but everywhere was corruption, idleness and waste. He swept away Ministry after Ministry; he dismissed thousands of unprofitable Civil Servants and thousands of useless railway workers. He called for longer hours, more honest work, and lower wages. There is not one act in his life and not one word from his lips which can be cited as an effort to gain the popular favor. Italy, saved from Bolshevism, was now to be saved from economic bankruptcy. He addressed her not as a condescender, but as the mother of Italy's future. Discipline: Sacrifice: Work. These words became a trumpet from the Alps to the Straits of Messina.

A distinguished Roman said to me, "I once heard Garibaldi make a curious remark. He said, 'I had volunteers from many countries in my army, but never one Italian peasant. Think of that! But now in the processions through our cities which celebrate Mussolini's triumph you may see hundreds of peasants. They had driven or tramped into the cities to march side by side with landowners and professional men, with merchants and shopkeepers, with mechanics and labourers, to acclaim IF LUCE—the leader. Because of this enthusiasm of the slow-moving peasant I say that Fascism has given us a national resurgence. Mussolini is neither a usurper nor a traitor. He is our Liberator and our Leader."

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