

What's What the World Over

New Phases of the World's Thinking Recorded in Current Periodicals

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ITALY'S COME-BACK

How Cadorna Saved the Day Against the Austrian Hordes

IN the middle of May, writes Sidney Low, in the *Fortnightly Review*, the powerful concentration of guns and men rolled down between the Adige and the Brenta. The Italians, battered by a tremendous bombardment and exposed to sudden infantry onslaughts at many points, bent back before the blast. They executed what the official review

audacious, but, as it turned out, a futile attempt at bluff. The Commando Supremo did not believe that the Austrian General Staff would leave themselves at the mercy of the Russians by sending a horde of troops and the cream of their artillery to cut the Italian communication in the Upper Veneto. The very irrationality of the project prevented adequate preparations being made to meet it. When the move did come it obtained the temporary advantage that nearly always attends a surprise attack.

Cadorna had the situation well in hand throughout. Even while the Austrians were still slowly and extensively bearing back the Italian front he was pushing his troops up on their flanks. For this purpose strong reinforcements were required, and a new army was collected from the garrisons, the reserve companies, and other portions of the line, organized, equipped, and moved to the field of action with unprecedented rapidity. There has been no more remarkable triumph of administrative energy in any of the theatres of the war. In the working days of a single week this army of half a million men had been swept together from many distant and scattered stations, formed into brigades and divisions, provided with its staff, train, medical units, and artillery, and transported into the mountain country, in many cases by roads which had to be constructed for this special purpose. The colossal task was carried out with astonishingly little disturbance of the normal conditions of life. Outside the war-zone Italy was hardly conscious of the amazing effort she was making. One has heard hard words said of the Italian railways by impatient tourists; but on this occasion they rose brilliantly to the emergency. Regiments, batteries, army corps, tons of ammunition, supplies, waggons, horses, machinery, the immense and cumbrous impedimenta of modern warfare were trucked from all parts of the Peninsula and rolled in endless trains along the trunk line to the strategic centres. It is scarcely credible, but I know it to be true, that with all this colossal movement of troops, the public service of the railways was suspended for no more than three days. After that it was resumed, and a week later it was working as smoothly as ever, and there was little to tell the traveller that anything unusual was happening.

The great concentration was not effected entirely by road. Motor transport was freely used, and the resources, unequalled in Europe, of the Fiat Company of Turin were drawn upon to their full capacity. No other War Department has such an effective auxiliary of its kind. Without Fiat, and without the brawny arms and tireless backs of the peasant road-makers, the race against time of the Italian armies in the Trentino could scarcely have been attempted.

By the opening of the last week in June the Austrian General Staff recognized that its bold stroke for the subjugation of Italy had failed. Their invading force, held fast in front, and now counter-attacked on both flanks, could make no further progress; and events in Galicia clamoured for the release of the regiments and batteries tied up beyond the Alps. It was decided that half at least of the eighteen Trentino divisions and most of the heavy guns should be drawn back and railed to the Carpathians. Cadorna knew of this intention, or shrewdly guessed at it, and determined that it should not be carried into effect without at least considerable delay and difficulty. On June 26th flags were fluttering, and faces were gay with smiles, in the towns of Northern Italy, for it was known that the invading army was in retreat with the national troops hard upon their traces.

Then followed another week of rapid movement, fierce fighting, and skilful manoeuvres. The Chief of the Italian Staff performed an invaluable service to the Allied cause, not so much by compelling the Austrians to retire, for that they had resolved to do in any case, as by rendering it impossible for them to retire in the manner they had proposed. Their programme was to fall back upon their prepared positions on the high ground from —, across the Altpiano, to the Dolomites, and to establish themselves on this commanding line, with much reduced numbers, while at least nine full divisions were being brought away for the East. But the pursuit was so eager that the Austrians could not disengage, and

could only fall back slowly, in touch all the time with their relentless antagonists. If any unit gained a kilometre of ground it was swiftly followed up and forced to stand and fight a hard rear-guard action with infantry and guns. The Italian troops were flung after them in motor cars along the mountain roads, or streamed on foot over the hills, unrelenting and impetuous; even cavalry were pushed through the woodland paths to worry and delay the retreating columns until the infantry could get their teeth into them.

It was another signal triumph of organization and skilful staff work; for the pursuit moved through an empty and thirsty land, and food and water for the men, ammunition for the cannon, had to be brought up on wheels and mule-back from the plains. But the object was attained. The great transfer of enemy troops could not be effected; and while these sorely-needed divisions were chained to the Trentino, the Russians were pressing on to the Dniester. The Austrian retreat is still menaced. The Italian guns now command the two railway lines via the Brenner and the Pusterthal, which meet at Franzensfeste, and it is doubtful whether the enemy will now be able to use them freely for the further withdrawal of troops and cannon. Certain it is that the Italian operations in the Trentino contributed directly, and in no slight degree, to the Russian successes on Austria's receding Eastern front.

But Cadorna, as I have said, never lost sight of his main objective, which was the road to Trieste. All through July, while the enemy was kept busy with attacks on their remaining positions in the central region and bombardments of their Dolomite fortresses, preparations were being made for the assault on Gorizia and the Carso. There was another of those swift movements of troops in masses in which the Italian General Staff excels, and a highly successful attempt to mislead the enemy as to the purpose in view. The wonderful engineering and road-making contingents were set to work, and tunnels were driven under the very feet of the Aus-



GERMAN KULTUR.

—Gabriel Galantara, in *L'Asino*, Rome.

calls "a calm and well-ordered retirement," which eventually left the Austrians in possession of the greater part of the elevated plateau of the Sette Comuni, with the upper portion of the Brenta valley. With the enemy hanging over the very edge of the plains, and steadily moving his great guns forward from the higher positions, the situation for the Italians in the beginning of June seemed at one time critical, and it looked as if the invaders might after all make good their dash upon the main railway and line of communications, and seize Vicenza and perhaps Verona.

But the army of the Trentino, hampered though it was by insufficient ammunition, held on grimly, and its infantry never yielded a yard of ground without a desperate struggle. Von Conrad had banked all his stakes upon a swift, irresistible advance that would paralyze the Italian defence in time to allow guns and troops to be sent back in a few weeks to the Eastern front. But after the first downward swoop the Austrian progress slackened, and by the middle of June it had definitely come to a standstill in the Adige valley. In the Astico and Val Tugana sectors the forward movement of the invaders was continued a little longer, and a considerable zone, mostly of wooded, rugged, and mountainous country, with the towns of Tonzetta, Arsiero, Asiago, and Borgo, was abandoned to them.

But here, also, the road was blocked. To obtain this limited success the Austrians had used up an enormous quantity of material and munitions, and had lost in killed and wounded at least a hundred thousand men. They had fatally weakened themselves on one of their fronts, and had failed to deliver a decisive blow upon the other. Such success as they had attained was largely the result of an



SERBIA COMES AGAIN.

—The Bulgar: "I thought you were dead."

—L. Raven-Hill, in *Punch*, London.

trians on the Carso, so that when the attack was delivered Italian infantry detachments emerged from the earth within a few yards of the trenches.

The Austrians were completely deceived by the ostentatious demonstrations of activity in other quarters, and apparently knew nothing of the great assemblage of guns, howitzers, and heavy trench mortars which, on August 5th and 6th, rained a