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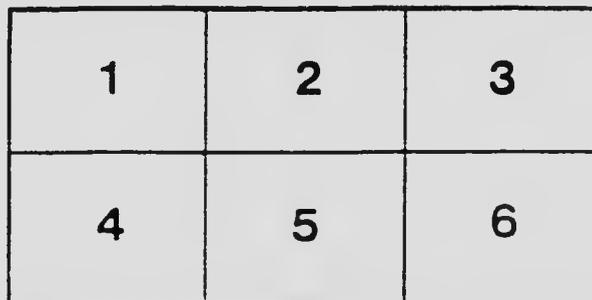
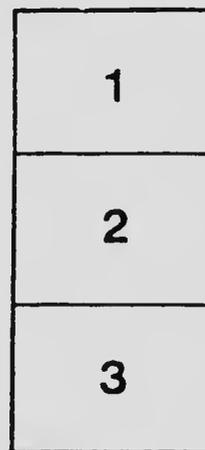
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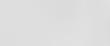
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OXFORD PAMPHLETS  
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ITALIAN POLICY  
SINCE 1870

BY

KEITH FEILING

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*Price Twopence net*

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## THE FOREIGN POLICY OF ITALY SINCE 1870

FOREIGN policy is, as a rule, a matter of business, not of sentiment, and for no country is this more true than for Italy. Her history has repeatedly impressed upon her the lesson that friends in international politics are only less dangerous than enemies; and the eternal laws of geography have made her policy, of necessity, opportunist and complicated. It must, again, be remembered that the modern kingdom of Italy is not yet fifty years old: the taxes are heavy, Lombardy in the North and Romagna in the East have economic difficulties to cope with, while the South has been handicapped by illiteracy, crime, and earthquake. A new and anxious colony has just been acquired in Tripoli, and a policy of risk or adventure is the last thing to be expected from Italy for some years to come. One other general consideration offers itself. Italy will pursue her own policy; the claims of tutelage are over, and no amount of literary, scientific, or moral sympathy will deflect her path, or induce her to a policy which does not offer her manifest advantages.

For the present purpose, the modern policy of Italy may conveniently be divided into two epochs: the first runs from 1870 to 1896, the second is from 1896 to the present day. Not that the year 1896 marks an abrupt or sweeping change, but a different trend or atmosphere is certainly associated with Italian policy from that date. From 1848 to 1870 Italy was engaged in the urgent work of achieving her national unity. The stages were

slow, and each advance was purchased at a fearful cost of men, treasure, and morale. On the whole Italy worked out her own salvation. England lent her a lofty and spasmodic patronage; Austria thrice fought her; Napoleon III helped her to Lombardy in 1859, but either discouraged or positively vetoed her acquisition of Venetia, Central Italy, and Rome; Prussia gave her Venetia in 1866 to purchase her assistance against Austria, but forced a peace upon her which left the Trentino and Istria, which were essentially Italian territory, still in Austrian hands. Only the accident of the Franco-Prussian War allowed Italy to make Rome her capital so early as 1870.

One feeling above all was inherited from this period of struggle: it was a deep-rooted and a well-justified suspicion and dislike of France. The Emperor Napoleon III had used Italy for his own purposes against Austria, but he had no intention of creating a strong national State on his southern frontiers. For the limited assistance he gave, he took as his price the province of Savoy and the district of Nice, and though he was forced by the intensity of national feeling to allow Italy to take the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the Duchies of Parma and Modena, and the bulk of the Papal States in 1861, he firmly vetoed the occupation of Rome itself. At his insistence and by his help Garibaldi's dash on Rome was frustrated at Mentana, and under the French clerical influence he maintained a garrison in Rome till 1870. It was small wonder that his appeal to Victor Emmanuel for help against Germany fell on deaf ears: it is certain that the whole generation of Italians who had lived through the years of emancipation retained a dislike of France that vitally affected later history. Another motive, also, gave impetus to this hostility.

Italy, by reason of her geographical position, is a maritime Power: it is against her interest that any other Power should dominate the Mediterranean by a navy of great superiority, by colonies on the North African coasts, or by a commercial monopoly in the Near East. Now France had taken Algeria in 1830, and any extension of her dominion in Africa alarmed Italian susceptibilities. In 1878 the friends of Turkey, who had supported her against Russia and Roumania, exacted their pound of flesh; Cyprus was assigned to Great Britain, while at the Congress of Berlin in the same year it was agreed by Great Britain and Germany that France might take Tunis. This she did in 1881, and as the direct consequence Italy made the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary. Before we enter on the results of this momentous step, or show what it enabled Italy to do and what it forbade, we must explain the general conditions of the Alliance, as they appeared to Italian eyes.

The Alliance was, of course, advantageous to all three partners, or they would not have made it. To Germany it meant a new link in the chain of isolation that Bismarck tried without ceasing to draw round France: it promised a naval base in the Mediterranean and a colonial rival for France and Great Britain. To Austria the treaty provided some freedom from the agitation of the Irredentists, the party who claimed the Trentino and Istria as part of Italy still unredeemed (*irredenta*), and it gave some additional support against the advance of Russian influences in the Balkans. But to Italy it was a matter of life and death. Italy was outside the charmed circle of Powers: every other country had had some aspiration fulfilled at the Congress of Berlin, Italy alone went begging. The Pope and the Ultra-

montane party in Europe still hoped to re-establish the Temporal Power; the military strength of Germany was the sole hope for Italy to keep what she had or to ensure future progress. With France estranged and Russia uninterested, Italy might hope to get at least as much from Austria by the good offices of Germany as by maintaining an impotent hostility towards her. It must, again, never be forgotten that while Bismarck held office (that is, till 1890), participation in the Triple Alliance did not involve for Italy the strained relations with Russia and with Great Britain which its more recent developments have implied. Bismarck made it one of his maxims not to alienate Russia, and more than once a league of the three emperors entered into his plans. It is equally plain that, so long as Lord Salisbury presided over the Foreign Office, the relations of France and Great Britain were so hostile that Italy lost nothing, so far as British goodwill went, by being a member of the Triple Alliance.

The outstanding figure in Italian politics from 1878 to 1896 was undoubtedly Crispi. He belonged to the Revolutionary generation; he had helped Garibaldi in his attempt to raid Rome; he had a candid dislike of France, and scented the Vatican in every breeze from the Riviera. His letters seem to show a susceptibility to flattery of which Bismarck took the fullest advantage, and while Crispi was in power the Triple Alliance had no more eloquent and unhesitating friend.

And there is no doubt that in choosing to adhere firmly to this Alliance the Italians held on to the only constant and solid fact that existed in European politics between 1882 and 1896. Germany and Austria formed a coalition whose interests were perfectly consistent, whose objects were entirely concerted. Meanwhile,

France and Great Britain were sparring over Egypt, Indo-China, or Morocco. Great Britain and Russia more than once nearly came to blows over Afghanistan and the road to India. By enlisting in the Triple Alliance Italy secured the friendship of Great Britain, and it seems agreed that in 1887 a convention was made between the two countries whereby Great Britain undertook to safeguard Italian interests in the Mediterranean as against France. The Triple Alliance was renewed in 1887 for a further term of six years, and this time the terms were more generous to Italy; her allies guaranteed her interests in the Balkans and in the Mediterranean, a concession no doubt mainly due to Austrian fears of Russian action and doubts as to the future of the Balkans since the blow for freedom struck by Bulgaria in 1885.

Whatever one's opinion of the moral aspects of Bismarck's policy, it must be confessed that it was superlatively clever. Anxious to consolidate the position of Germany in Europe and to complete the humiliation of France, he encouraged all the possible rivals of Germany to carry their ambitions into the scramble for places in the sun in Africa and Asia. The English in Egypt off-set the French in Tunis; the Russians in Merv and Penja balanced the English in the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan. Pursuing the same policy of pin-pricks to France, he urged Crispi to realize the old ambitions of Italy to become a colonial Power, and since it was impossible in those days of Anglo-Turkish friendship to take Tripoli, Crispi devoted his attention to the Red Sea. In 1870 a private company had bought, with the help of public money, the port of Assab on the Abyssinian coast, and this was in 1882 transferred to the State. In 1885 Massowah was occupied and gradually developed into the Colony of Eritrea; in 1889 the Italian strip of Somaliland was added.

Relations with France, which were bad enough in any case, were greatly embittered by the Italian repudiation of the commercial treaty dating from 1881; a treaty which, the Italians claimed, hampered their industry unfairly. A severe tariff war continued for nearly ten years. After 1886, Italian workmen were maltreated in the south of France, and disputes as to the status of each other's citizens in Massowah and in Tunis made things worse. The effect of these events was seen in the renewal of the Triple Alliance in 1891: this was to last for another six years, or, if not then denounced by one of the allies, for twelve years; a clause was also inserted whereby Italy pledged herself in case of need to send two army corps through the Tyrol to attack France.<sup>1</sup>

This marks the zenith of the Alliance: from that time it is possible to mark the tide setting, though very slowly, the other way; the Alliance needs more effort to keep it alive, the influence of Germany as middleman between Austria and Italy is called for a little more every year.

The commercial war with France and the withdrawal of French capital caused great distress in Italy, but this was nothing in comparison with the moral havoc and the dreadful blow to the national prestige brought about by the collapse of their colonial policy. In 1891 the Emperor Menelek tore up the treaty he had made, and forbade the Italians to penetrate farther into Abyssinia; after some years of border warfare Crispi adopted an energetic policy, and in 1895 ordered an army to occupy Adowa, the capital of Tigré, a State tributary to Abyssinia. On March 1, 1896, the battle of Adowa was fought; the Italians lost 10,000 men killed and wounded, were forced to recognize the complete independence of

<sup>1</sup> This clause, it is understood, was dropped when the treaty was renewed in 1902.

Abyssinia by a treaty of November, and abandoned the protectorate they had claimed. This was the end of the policy of adventure, and when in 1899 the Government pegged out a claim in China like other Great Powers and proposed to occupy the Bay of San Mun, public opinion in Italy forced them to withdraw. Labour troubles and political factions were disorganizing the State, and in the last five years of the nineteenth century Italy was in a sorry state. But while she was setting her house in order, the whole face of European politics was being changed.

The first consequence of Bismarck's disappearance was a better understanding between France and Russia, which began in 1891 and grew in strength. Pan-Slavism—the dream of a Confederation of all the Balkan Slavs with Holy Russia—became every day a more tangible force in politics. Almost simultaneously, Italy began to mend her relations with France: in 1896 Visconti Venosta brought about a Franco-Italian Convention which settled disputes of trade and navigation rights in Tunis, and in 1898 a new commercial treaty was completed. In the same year the long period of Anglo-French rivalry in Egypt culminated in the Fashoda incident, and thereafter ended. The South Africa War at the end of the century had this import for Italy, that the German attitude to the war and the passing of the German Navy Law of 1900 destroyed the friendship of Germany with Great Britain. In 1904 the arrangement known as the 'Entente', between France and Great Britain, first became a matter of public knowledge; it was especially directed towards the mutual safeguarding of British supremacy in Egypt and French supremacy in Morocco. The test of these new arrangements and of the change in Italian sympathy came at the Conference of

Algeçiras, which was held in the winter of 1905-6. There two facts of great importance were clearly established : that England and France stood or fell together, and that the Triple Alliance had a rift in it, or at least a limitation. It was plain that Italy would not jeopardize herself for German colonial ambitions.

Two great questions of the future began to cast their shadows before : the vast designs of Germany and the aspirations of the Balkan States. In view of these the Powers in 1907 began to adjust their conflicting interests in the Mediterranean and other spheres, and to gird up their loins for more grave struggles. England, France, and Spain came to agreement as to their respective spheres of influence in Northern Africa and as to the naval situation. Great Britain and Russia settled for the moment their disputes in Persia and Thibet. Great Britain, France, and Italy signed a treaty to regulate the affairs of Ethiopia and the Red Sea. It was therefore from a much more detached point of view and with a more elastic system of foreign relations that Italy undertook the question which is so vital to her, the future of the Balkans.

It is the first maxim of her policy that no other State shall dominate, by military or commercial superiority, the coast of the Adriatic which constitutes her strategic frontier on the east. The Romans and the Venetians had to master the Adriatic, and so must modern Italy. Her eastern coast is flat and exposed, and there is no good harbour south of Venice. But the other side of the Adriatic is indented with many magnificent natural harbours ; Austria has Trieste, Fiume belongs to Hungary, Cattaro is geographically Montenegrin but in fact Austrian ; and in Albania lies Valona, only forty miles away from Bari. Racial sympathies attract Italy to this

coast too. There are said to be over three million people of Latin origin in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Istria in particular is largely Italian. Trieste, though not all the ground behind it, is Italian in mind, and the city sent a wreath to King Humbert's funeral, bearing the legend 'Trieste to her King'. The marriage of the reigning King, Victor Emmanuel III, to Princess Helena of Montenegro in 1896 made another link between the two Adriatic shores. In 1878 Austria was allowed by the Berlin Congress to 'occupy' Bosnia, Herzegovina, and the district (Sandjak) of Novi Bazar that runs between Servia and Montenegro. Italian jealousy was roused, and Crispien was advised by Bismarck to take part of Albania. Italy was not ready for such a great enterprise, and her position in the Alliance was far too weak for many years to come to dream of open action in this direction. But she has pursued, particularly since 1896, the policy known as the 'peaceful penetration' of Albania. While Austria has taken the Catholics of Northern Albania under her wing, while Austrian Franciscans have used education to induce Austrian sympathies among the rising generation, and the steamers of the Austrian Lloyd Company have pushed commercial feelers in every direction, Italy has not been idle. Italian schools have been founded at Scutari and Durazzo, consuls have opened up markets, the Puglia Steamship Line has very largely supplanted the Austrian Lloyd. Feeling each other's support essential in other spheres and unable to agree in this, Italy and Austria have compromised their claims on Albania; in 1907 the two Foreign Ministers, Aehrenthal and Tittoni, agreed that it was undesirable to divide Albania, and that it was necessary to establish an autonomous Albania, independent of Turkey.

The years that saw Russia first deeply immersed in

the Japanese War, and then to some extent in a state of collapse, witnessed a fresh burst of Austrian activity in the Balkans. In January 1908 Aehrenthal announced that the Turkish Government had given Austria a concession to construct a railway in the Sandjak from Uvaes to Mitrovitza ; this would have linked up the Austrian railway system in Bosnia to the Turkish main line to Salonika, and threatened to put the commercial supremacy of the Balkans in her hands. Servia at once protested, and proposed to make a line from the Danube to the Adriatic, thus turning the stream of trade from East to West, not to mention military considerations. Italy, it is worth noticing, supported the Servian alternative, and the Banca d'Italia promised £1,600,000 to the undertaking. But in July came the outbreak of the Turkish Revolution and the first breath of the great tempest that has destroyed so many Balkan landmarks. In the autumn the German Powers determined to test the situation. On October 7 an imperial rescript of the Emperor Francis Joseph declared the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and restored the Sandjak to Turkey ; Bulgaria, by previous arrangement, at the same time declared its complete independence of the Porte. The annexation did not please Italy, and the small crumb of comfort that Austria gave her by abrogating Article 29 of the Treaty of Berlin and allowing Montenegro more freedom of action in her own ports was not looked upon as adequate compensation, rather as an act of tardy recompense. Tittoni's handling of the situation was considered weak, and if the Slav States had risen to the opportunity, it is possible that Italy would have ranged herself on their sides. But when Servia appealed to Russia for support, she found no response. Russia was not yet sufficiently recovered from

her troubles to face the German ultimatum ; England was not directly interested, and so the occasion passed.

Still nothing since 1909 has improved the real relations of Italy and Austria. If Austria has rejected with contumely the proposal for an Italian University at Trieste, Italy in 1911 took a step that threatened at one time a rupture of peaceful relations. Turkish misgovernment did not improve after the Revolution, and the Young Turks showed that they had inherited most of the corruption and cruelty of the old régime without its capacity. It is too early yet to write the history of the negotiations that led up to the Italian declaration of war and the seizure of Tripoli. We have seen that Italy had long claimed Tripoli as her due, but why did she choose September 1911 ? It is certain that German men of commerce were invading ground there that Italy had marked out as her own, and that Germany had ideas of taking the harbour of Tobruk. It is possible that Great Britain, alarmed at German designs on the roads to the East, and grateful for Italian support in the Agadir affair, advised or countenanced the move as checkmate. Italy clearly thought that she must act if she was not to be anticipated in Tripoli by some other Power. Her colonies hitherto had disappointed her. Eritrea and Somaliland had a total area of only 186,000 square miles, a population of about 850,000, almost entirely native, and extremely limited trading prospects ; Tripoli had once been a Roman province, it lies opposite her very doors, it is over 400,000 square miles in extent, a considerable Italian and European population was settled there, its commercial possibilities not dazzling but certainly worth developing. Although considerable sacrifice has been incurred, the result has, on the whole, been a triumph for the New Italy ; the

Army proved its competence, and men of all parties have united at last for a common patriotic object. Nothing of late years has done more to restore national self-confidence, and the effect on international relationships was equally important.

We may treat the foreign policy of Italy since 1911 as forming one epoch. The Triple Alliance, with the commercial treaties that perhaps made it most valuable to Italian feeling, was renewed in December 1912 for a fresh term of five years, but it is not inconsistent with that to say that the ties which bind Italy to her allies have since 1911 been seriously relaxed. The Italian attack on the Turks, the chosen clients of the German Powers, was a distinct affront to them: in the Agadir crisis Italy definitely cast her weight against the German scheme for acquisitions in Morocco itself: the Austrian veto against any attack on the Turks from the Adriatic hampered the Italian operations in 1911, and was naturally contrasted with the friendly attitude of Great Britain, who made all communication between Constantinople and Tripoli through Egypt impossible. The strenuous efforts of the Kaiser to improve the relations of his allies did something, but in any case very strong reasons compelled the Marquis di San Giuliano to accept a renewal of the Alliance, in spite of severe criticism. It was impossible to expect very cordial support from France for the Italian policy in Tripoli, which did not improve her position in Tunis. Neither from France nor from Great Britain could any great readiness be expected to accept a war with the Sultan, the head of Islam and the faith which millions of their subjects professed. The German Powers could at least use their influence with the Young Turks to secure a Turkish evacuation of Tripoli and to get for Italy rights of

occupation in the Aegean Islands. But it was no doubt the prospect of imminent warfare in the Balkans which chiefly induced the Italian Court to seek the shortest cut out of the Turkish War and to seek an understanding with Austria. With Great Britain Italy was on friendly terms in every sphere, with France a clear agreement was come to (October 1912) in regard to Morocco and Libya, but both Great Britain and France were the allies of Russia, the protector of the Balkan Slavs, and it was the vision of a great advance by Slavs or Greeks to the Adriatic which filled Italy with misgivings. In October 1912 Count Berchtold and the Marquis di San Giuliano agreed to maintain, so far as possible, the *status quo* in the Balkans—Italy, it would seem, promising to help Austria in preventing a Servian advance in Albania, while Austria undertook to check Greek pretensions in the north of Epirus or on the vital harbour of Valona. The overwhelming success of the Balkan League between October and December 1912 no doubt surprised Italian diplomacy, as it did all Europe. To a great extent acceptance of the accomplished fact was forced on the Triple Alliance, for it was impossible to refuse the demands of four peoples in arms and intoxicated with victory. It is improbable that Italy played any part in the successful intrigue of the German Powers to divide the League, to set Bulgaria against her allies, and to save Adrianople, from which Turkey might fight another day. But when in December Austria mobilized to force the Servians to leave Albania alone, and early in 1913 advanced the scheme of an independent Albanian principality, Italy felt bound to join her. The Montenegrins were all this winter besieging Scutari, and hoped to annex it; if that was more tolerable to Italy than to Austria, the Servian claims on Alessio, Durazzo, and S. Giovanni di Medua

were most distasteful. Not that Italian feeling was opposed to the Serb aspirations ; on the contrary, it is likely that Italy would look with kindness on a union of Servia and Montenegro, which would form a powerful bulwark against Austria. But Italy could never tolerate any other Power in Albania. Hence her opposition to the Serbs : hence, also, her objections to single Austrian action against Montenegro at Scutari, and her preference of a concerted effort by all the Powers to settle the Albanian question.

But it may be said with some safety that the events of the last year have changed the situation in Italian eyes. Her natural antagonism to Austria is unchanged, but the other factors in the general European system, that made that antagonism count for little, have been greatly modified. The balance of power in the Balkans has altered altogether. The German plans to increase the power of Bulgaria and Turkey have completely failed ; Roumania—half Latin and half Slav—has broken away from German leading-strings, and in conjunction with Greece forced a settlement last year that left both Turkey and Bulgaria weakened and impoverished. It is now impossible to deny or to stultify the claims of the Slavs and Greeks to expansion ; it might be perhaps easier to transact a bargain with them, possibly through the medium of their natural allies of the Triple Entente. Tripoli is a problem no more : France and Great Britain have recognized the Mediterranean interests of Italy to a great extent, and possibly it would be to their profit to give these interests yet fuller scope. Albania is still in disorder ; Italy may look with favour on the claims of Essad Pasha, in default of a better, to rule free Albania, but there are no signs that Austrian influence could be usefully employed to check Greece or Montenegro. Italy

is more likely to seek some agreement with Roumania, a State, like Italy, free of all binding alliances, a State of the Slavs, but not tied to them, a State like her whose interests in the Balkans require a balance of forces. When Italy declared her neutrality in the present conflict, she took the greatest step, and it will need more than gusts of popular sympathy to take her further. Racial considerations by themselves rarely determine policy; the relations of the two Latin States, Italy and France, are hardly yet sisterly; rather those of sisters-in-law. Nor must we minimize the difficulties of a forward policy. If Trieste is Latin, the Alps in winter are coldly neutral, and the hinterland of Istria has no clear or easily-defined Latin frontier. Even if Italy would care to occupy Lissa or some other of the islands, she could hardly embark lightly on a big campaign in the Adriatic. The need for economy is still great, and her expenditure in 1913 on the Army (£16,960,000) and the Navy (£10,240,000) proves it.

It would be as reasonable to say that Italy might claim Malta and Corsica with expectations of immediate success as to anticipate an early advance on Istria or the Trentino. Yet the logic of facts remains. Italy has proved 'felon' (for such is the German charge) to the Triple Alliance: it is probable that she will seek to confirm her friendship in other quarters.

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