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ITALY AND FASCISMO



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ITALY AND FASCISMO

by Luigi Sturzo

translated by

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with a Preface by

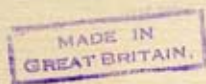
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PREFACE

THIS book provides for the English reader a careful analysis of the historical process which has led to the overthrow of the Italian Constitution and the elevation of a dictator 'trampling', as he himself expresses it, 'on the rotting corpse of Liberty'. It is written by Don Sturzo, a Catholic priest, and at the same time leader of the *Partito Popolare*, a party founded in 1919 to support a Wilsonian and League of Nations policy, opposing both Reaction and Revolution. The writer is now in exile; his name is said to have been down on the condemned list as the next victim after Matteotti; and, like Professor Salvemini, he is sometimes commended by Fascist newspapers to the special attention of any assassins who happen to be idle in England. One who realizes all that this means will find it easier to admire than to imitate the moderation and the calm reflective insight with which Don Sturzo analyses symptom by symptom, the crises which have led Italy to its present pass. It is the tone of a dispassionate and Christian philosopher. There is no touch of the embittered exile. And though English readers may not always agree with his point of view, they will certainly find it interesting and instructive.

To an educated Englishman, especially to one who has been concerned either with politics or with history, it seems amazing that a great nation should allow all its free institutions to be destroyed, and itself to be dominated by gangs of young roughs armed with bludgeons and castor-oil bottles, belonging to a private society whose members are above the law. But one must allow for the terror of

Bolshevism which 'maddens even the wise'. One must remember that Italy is politically very different from England. Free institutions have no deep roots in Italian history. The Italian cities, when they wished to change their governments, regularly did so, as G. M. Trevelyan has put it not by votes but 'by a row in the market-place'. And many parts of Italy have long been accustomed to the rule of private extra-legal societies like the Camorra, the Mafia or the Black Hand. The Fascist Society is only a Camorra on a grand scale. But Don Sturzo enables us to understand step by step, how the thing has happened. Despotism has come because free institutions have failed. The governing classes failed in their duty and their power of government. The liberalism of the Risorgimento lost itself in morasses of impotence and intrigue. The War brought confusion, both social and economic. The Italian people, so gifted in all regions of art and of intellect, somehow lost grip of the steady and humdrum duties which constitute citizenship, and political power fell a prey to the group that was most violent and most ready to face risks and to take trouble. 'The price of liberty is eternal vigilance.' Free institutions will not work unless the people as a whole are ready to live up to them. They will not work unless there is some degree of stability in the social organism and a certain standard of civic virtue in the individual citizen. They will not work unless, on the whole, people are honest and trust one another.

Freedom in Europe is not secure. We need not flatter ourselves that it is. Free institutions are still on their trial, or rather the peoples are on their trial to see whether they are capable of freedom. Let me take two incidents, both typical, one from a free community and one from a despotism. The nation that accustoms itself to the first type of behaviour is preparing itself for the second.

A short time ago in a certain English-speaking community, there was a coalition government consisting

partly of an Agricultural Party and partly of a party that we will call X. The agriculturals had based their electoral programme on Railway Reform, including a sweeping reduction of freights and other aids to agriculture which most people thought economically impossible. When the government was being framed, the agricultural leader said to the X leader : ' You must take railways.' ' Why ', said the other : ' that is surely your special job'. ' You see', said the farmers' leader, ' we have got all that programme, which we can't carry out. So, if you don't mind, you take the Ministry of Railways and I will explain that we cannot propose our bill because you do not agree.'

Not exactly a crime? Hardly even surprising. In idiomatic English it would perhaps be described as ' a bit thick', in philosophical language as a profound unconscious and fundamental dishonesty. It is typically the sort of auto-intoxication which is common in all third-rate uneducated democracies and which undermines the health of parliamentary institutions. People who behave like that may not be very wicked, but they are not capable of freedom.

The other type of story has been unrolling itself before the eyes of Europe, while this book was in the press. We may take two phases of it. Signor Amendola, leader of the parliamentary opposition in Italy, a man who has been blamed for a moderation verging upon timidity, but never for any baser or more provocative fault, has just died from the effects of the second of two savage bludgeonings inflicted on him in public by Fascist ruffians, whom the police—though they happened to be looking on at the time—have been unable to identify. Signor Matteotti, the fiery and courageous leader of the Moderate Socialists, having been murdered in June, 1924 by persons high in the confidence of the Dictator, it has at last been found desirable to hold a mock trial in order to give absolution and public thanks to the murderers. No element of fraud was lacking ; and lest any judge should by accidental obtuseness mistake the Government's wishes, the defence was

entrusted to the Secretary-General of the Fascist Party, who has since been presented with a special 'robe of justice' worked by noble Fascist ladies, as a reward for his skill. The Matteotti trial will probably remain for some generations a classic model of the perfect perversion of justice.

There have doubtless been worse crimes than this, perpetrated by the Fascist despotism, as by the Bolshevik or the Czarist despotism. 'Fascism tolerates no differences of opinion : its block is monolithic.' And since by nature human beings do sometimes differ, those who differ must be silenced or destroyed.

Outside Italy, Mussolini is largely regarded as a theatrical performer, and Fascism, with its hysteria and its frizzed hair, as a subject for jests. But the farce is a desperately dangerous, as well as a cruel one. Consider such stuff as the following :¹ 'A Fascist Catechism. There are Ten Commandments. 1. I am Italy, thy mother, thy sovereign, thy goddess. 2. Thou shalt have no mother, sovereign nor goddess above me. 3. Thou shalt honour her god and keep her festivals. . . .' The name of the god is not given, but can be guessed. Or this from an official Fascist journal : 'As to Africa, we ought to make a push to the right and a push to the left, with Tripoli as a pivot, laying hands on Tunis on the one side, with a bit of Morocco, and on Egypt on the other, with a bit of Nubia, linking up with our Red Sea possessions by the way of the Nile.' Then some more about Asia Minor ; and then 'we should have something to say about Europe'. Or again the posters and postcards proclaiming the revived Roman Empire with Mussolini as Caesar, and the gathering in of poor distracted France 'under the wing of her Roman mother' ; even phrases *totidem verbis* about Italy's 'place in the Sun' and her 'future upon the sea'. The self-same spirit of *Hubris* which another despotic ruler is now expiating in exile, the same style of language, the same neurotic excitement, the same grandiose vagueness of outline, even—

¹ See *Review of Reviews*, Feb.-March, March-April and May-June, 1926.

curiously enough—the same instinctive cowardice which titubates at the last moment and does not dare to be definite.

William II's Empire was far stronger than Italy, and he never spoke words quite so megalomaniac as these. Yet his madness was too much for his strength, and led his people, blundering and intoxicated, towards their bath of blood. Every true friend of Italy must pray that some gentler wisdom, some saner patriotism, some spark of that spirit of brotherhood which is at last, however slowly and timidly, permeating the other nations of Europe, may arise in time to save from the ultimate tragedy a nation so gifted and so beloved.

So far as I can read Don Sturzo's mind, it is in that hope that this book has been written.

G. M.

May 1926.

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