

BARNETT HOUSE PAPERS. No. 8

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The  
Historical Causes  
of the  
Present State of Affairs  
in Italy

SIDNEY BALL MEMORIAL LECTURE  
DELIVERED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD  
31 OCTOBER 1923

BY  
G. M. TREVELYAN

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## THE HISTORICAL CAUSES OF THE PRESENT STATE OF AFFAIRS IN ITALY

MR. VICE-CHANCELLOR, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

When Dr. Carlyle asked me, on behalf of the authorities of the University, to give the Sidney Ball lecture for 1923, I felt that I could not refuse the invitation to address so distinguished an audience on the subject of Italy. Nor was I irresponsive to the attraction of being asked to speak at this annual celebration of Sidney Ball's memory, as I spoke two years ago at a similar lecture that is annually given in Cambridge in honour of Henry Sidgwick. It is true that I only knew Sidney Ball by the report of those who knew him. But I take it that I shall not go far wrong if I say that he, like Henry Sidgwick, was one of those rare and modest spirits who have done so much to inspire modern Oxford and Cambridge. Such men form a special class among the assets of the nation, and their lives appeal to me more strongly than the lives of the more loudly celebrated, whose fame 'in broad rumour lies'. For I think I am one of those who, although they go down from Oxford or Cambridge into what is called the larger world, always remain at heart a cross between an undergraduate and a don, rather than become truly 'men of the world'. And therefore occasions of this sort, and men like Sidney Ball, always appeal to me with a peculiar force.

I confess, however, that I shrank from Dr. Carlyle's original proposal that I should lecture 'on the present state of Italian affairs'. I am neither a politician nor a publicist, and the actual is not my forte. I see the past more clearly than the present, and it charms me more. We arrived at a compromise which I hope will prove satisfactory to you—namely, that I should lecture on some of the *historical causes* of the present condition

of affairs, though that will of course involve a final brief glance at some aspects of the present condition.

In studying any foreign country it is always necessary to begin very far back, and not least in the case of Italy. Although as a State she is not so old as several persons in this room, as a civilized land she can show continuity in social and civic life with the classical civilization. France alone could put up something of a similar claim on that score, but a claim weaker than that of the Italian cities.

I have already stumbled on the secret of Italian social and political life in using the word 'cities'. Italy always has been pre-eminently the land of cities; she is so still. England has become a land of industrial occupation and of city life, but she is not a land of cities, like Italy.

If you write a history of England on the basis of locality, you write a history of the several shires, like the *Victoria County History*. A similar local history of Italy would be a history of the cities, into which each country district would come in as the appendage of each city. For the Middle Ages this is obvious, as the city was then the normal political unit. From the fifteenth to the eighteenth century Italy was indeed divided up into larger political areas, but the only real life of Italy under the later despots was cultural, not political at all. And that cultural life was an affair of the academies and artists and operas of each individual city.

In the England of to-day the city population is very large, but the Englishman has relatively little sense of the individual city that he lives in. In Italy the city population is small, but civic patriotism is very definite and very strong. You can see Vicenza or Siena, and you can love them because you see them. It is difficult to see Birmingham and Glasgow, and possibly if you could see them you would not love them more. City patriotism may be in inverse proportion to the size of the city. Witness Oxford, an English city which men can both see and love.

The great majority of the Italian population are indeed peasants, while in England our peasantry has dwindled to a tiny minority, divorced from its own cultural traditions and fed on the intellectual pabulum fabricated by the omnipotent city

dweller. Yet although the Englishman is a city dweller, he lives under political institutions which were mainly devised by rustic squires and freeholders to meet the necessities of the old rural life of England.

In Italy, on the other hand, it is almost true to say that there has never been a squirarchy in the political sense of the word, nor indeed any class with an effective political organization of a rural type. The patricians of ancient Rome were the leading citizens, who might or might not have farms or latifundia in the country. The plebeians, even when they were farmers, would only express their grievances through the instrumentality of the city officers and the assemblies of the city of Rome. And such, I take it, though I speak under correction, were the patricians and plebeians of the Federation of Etruscan cities, whence modern Italian civilization is derived no less than from the cities of Latium.

In the dark ages, when Italy was partially conquered by races who had had no share in the Mediterranean city life, we might expect a change. The Lombards, indeed, did for a while establish feudal law and custom in some of the rustic parts of North Italy. But Roman law and custom survived within the walls of the cities, thence to emerge again to the reconquest of anything temporarily lost in the country-side. In the later Middle Ages the feudal class in Italy, unlike the proud feudal class in France, Germany, or England, were forced like bad boys to come and live inside the cities under the eye of the merchant magistrates. The feudal south—Naples and Sicily—was indeed very different. But the feudal south was more barbarous, and it did even less than the north to train the population to self-government.

Thus at the end of the Middle Ages the peasantry, while forming the great majority of the Italian people, were unled, unorganized, voiceless from a political point of view. Power had always resided in the towns. From time immemorial political life and the formation of political opinion had been the monopoly of the citizens, of the men who could run to the piazza in time to take part in a municipal election, a party demonstration, or a street fight. The range of effective citizenship of this sort has been in our day extended to those who

can obtain motor transport to bring them to the scene of action. The *Fascisti*, with the help of motor traffic, can mobilize on the piazza more quickly than the 'red' workman.

In mediaeval England, on the other hand, power lay in the castle and the manor house rather than in the walled city. Even in Tudor and Stuart times, powerful as the English towns had by then become, the squirarchy was more powerful still. The Crown could only govern so long as it had the squires as allies. The English country districts could make themselves heard in national affairs; for they had two voices, the voice of the squires, and the voice of the yeomen and smaller freeholders. These rural classes, working in union with the cities, and working sometimes with and sometimes against the Crown, built up our Parliamentary system. It is a system necessarily based on representation. Why necessarily? Because only by representation—that is, by electing one man to speak for all the inhabitants of some large area—only so could the various rural districts have a voice in the national government. The Crown had taught us the need for a national government; the squires and freeholders of the shires insisted that it should be representative, for only so could they get a hearing.

In Italy, on the other hand, there was no 'Crown' to unite the Peninsula, and no squirarchy to insist on representation and to give the rural population its due political importance. I say there was no 'Crown' to unite mediaeval Italy, unless it were the Papal Crown. The ghost of the Roman Empire, sitting crowned and robed on its grave, was indeed a very formidable monarch spiritually. But as a flesh and blood ruler the Pope was only strong enough to thwart the pretensions of the man who might really have been King. The Pope prevented the Emperor from penetrating from across the Alps and becoming veritable monarch of Italy.

How did the Pope become strong enough to repel the Emperor from Italy? Partly, it is probable, by representing the half-conscious national feeling against a German master. The defeat of Frederic Barbarossa at the battle of Legnano is to the Italian what Bannockburn is to the Scot. At any rate it has become so in the imagination of posterity. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the name of Legnano has been the

watchword to resistance against the invader from beyond the Alps.

The half-conscious racial resistance to a German monarch, and the conscious resistance of the Pope to the Emperor, found a potent ally in the traditions of the City State, the aboriginal form of Italian civilization. The people who won Legnano were the citizens of Milan and her allied towns. They objected to Frederic Barbarossa not primarily because he was a German, but because he represented an authority that was not municipal. The attitude of the Italian cities to the Crown was as different from the contemporary attitude of the English cities to the Crown as anything could well be.

The City State had been the original form of the Mediterranean civilization of ancient Greece and Italy. The Roman Empire had submerged it for a while without destroying it. As the waters of Roman Imperialism ebbed, the walls and towers of a hundred ancient Etruscan and Umbrian cities emerged and again occupied the political landscape. The very words 'politics', 'policy', remind us that the Mediterranean conception of *public* affairs was identical with *city* affairs.

In the hill towns of Central Italy—such as Perugia, Volterra, and many more—it is hard for the uninstructed tourist to see where the Etruscan walls end and the Roman walls begin, where the Roman walls end and the mediaeval walls begin. And as with the walls so with the life of the city. There is continuity unbroken from before the days of Lars Porsena to our own. In the Italy of the Middle Ages the City State revived. It took over once more the rule of the adjacent rural parts, sweeping aside the feudal nobility and depriving the peasant of any chance of obtaining political consciousness.

This development in the Middle Ages was the negation of united Italy and the negation also of representative or Parliamentary government. For the city had no need of a representative system. It governed the surrounding district despotically. It was itself governed by its own direct democracy, or by its own oligarchy, or by its own dictator. When it changed its government, it did so not by a general election, but by a *row in the piazza*. The citizens rushed together and clubbed some unpopular person, or pulled down his house. 'For', writes

Villani, after recording one such occasion, 'it is the custom in the cities of Lombardy for men to assemble and fight on the piazza of the Commonwealth'. That was the heart of Italian politics—not the knights of the shire coming up to vote for the deposition of Richard II or for the abolition of the monasteries, nor Mr. Hampden riding round to visit the freeholders of Buckingham and the adjacent counties to exhort them to elect honest men to the new Parliament. In Italy there never was any such person as Mr. Hampden, any such people as the freeholders of Buckingham in their political capacity, nor until the middle of the nineteenth century any such thing as a general election.

And so, in the autumn of 1922, while we were putting a Conservative government in power by holding a general election, the Italians achieved a similar object by a series of rows in the piazza all over Italy, culminating in a grand national 'row in the piazza'—Signor Mussolini's march on Rome. 'Ther n'is no newë guise that is not old', said Dan Chaucer, and that is equally true of the two lands that inspired Chaucer's muse—England and Italy.

People sometimes ask me, Why could not the Italians have effected the change of government that they desired by means of a general election? It is certainly a very pertinent question. I reply by pointing the inquirer to their social and political history, which had unfitted them for expressing themselves by means of a general election. It is, in my view, very unfortunate that the Italians fail to express the national will at the polling booth, but it is not at all unnatural. It is really very difficult for thirty or forty millions of people to get the government they desire by means of a general election, unless they are to the manner born. We have this obscure inherited instinct. The Italians have it not. In England a general election is a moral earthquake, before which sport, fashion, and business hide their diminished heads; it is more terrible to behold than a cup-tie; its result is more anxiously expected than the Derby itself. The popular press will give us news of it even on the chief page, among the divorces and murders. But in Italy a general election is the sum of a number of obscure intrigues. One used to be able to remain in the country and not know that a general election was going on.

How then do Italians naturally express their wishes? I have already told you—through a concourse of citizens in each city. When the soul, the mind, or the passions of the Italian people require to have vent, they find it in a *row in the piazza*. So it was in the time of the regifuge, in the time of Virginia, in the time of the Gracchi; so it was in the time of the Guelfs and Ghibelines, of Rienzi and of Masaniello; so it was in the five days at Milan in March 1848, and in every other city under the Austrian rule that month; so it was in May 1915, when the inhabitants of the cities overrode the elected Parliament, and by a series of demonstrations in all the piazzas of Italy, from Reggio to Bergamo, carried the country into the war and saved the allied cause from defeat.

Representative government, the just relation of the executive to Parliament, the necessary popular interest in the wider issues of a general election, these things were all invented in our island; or rather they were not invented, but slowly evolved to meet English needs and to satisfy English instincts. They are English goods. They have been imported, or are now being imported, ready made into most of the other countries of the world—even into Egypt and India—because other countries, coming much later to racial freedom and national self-consciousness, have not had time to evolve native systems of their own adaptable to modern requirements. Some of these countries make the English system of government a success, others not. Some, like Spain, have only pretended to work the electoral system and have really been governed in quite a different way. Italy, perhaps, stood somewhere half-way between Spain and England in this matter. We will presently examine a little more closely the outline of the history of Parliamentary government in Italy.

But first of all I must again hark back. Many of you will have noticed that I have so far skipped over very lightly the period of three hundred years, from the Renaissance to the *Risorgimento*, when the City State had been suppressed in Italy. During those three hundred years there were half a dozen large States—Naples, Tuscany, Piedmont, Papal States, Venetia, Lombardy. What of that period? you may ask. Those States were large areas, bigger than most of the German

States of that day. They were governed, mostly, by monarchs of the ordinary European type. That period—answering in time to our own Tudor, Stuart, and early Hanoverian epochs—did it not train the Italian to ideas of government larger than those of the City State? Well, the answer, to my mind, is that it trained the Italian to no ideas of government at all. The sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries in Italy were the negation of patriotism, the negation of public spirit, the negation of every form of interest in the common weal. The Italian States of that period were entirely artificial creations—there was no Lombard patriotism, more especially as Spaniards or Austrians represented government in Lombardy; there was only a suppressed feeling for the ancient independence of Milan, Como, or Pavia. In Tuscany there was no Tuscan patriotism, only a pride in the history of Florence or Pisa or Siena. There was no patriotism for Venetia in the larger sense, only pride in Venice, or anger that Treviso and Padua must submit to the dominant city. Least of all was there any feeling of patriotism for the Papal States; laymen can hardly be enthusiastic over the circumstance that they are governed by priests, and the Romagna, lying to the north of the Apennines, belonged by nature and tradition to Northern Italy and only by political accident to the Papal dominions. In Piedmont alone, where the traditions of the City State were weaker and where the Royal House was native and vigorous, was there something like Piedmontese patriotism; that perhaps is one reason why Piedmont became the nucleus round which the new Italy was eventually built up.

After the Napoleonic deluge had retired, it soon became apparent that the revival of public spirit in the nineteenth century was essentially municipal, not provincial—everywhere indeed except in Piedmont. Of course, the *Risorgimento* was a national movement, a movement to liberate and unite Italy. But the centres from which it radiated were the various cities of Italy. The Italian revolution of 1848 was the sum of its municipal revolutions. The closer you study that year in detail the more that fact emerges. Three centuries of foreign and native despots had effected no radical change in Italian political mentality, except in teaching Italians by bitter experience the

absolute necessity of national union. The despots had done nothing to create new organs of political life in the country districts; they had created no provincial patriotisms larger than the city; they had done nothing to introduce representative government.

The best that can be said politically for the governors of the Peninsula between 1530 and 1796 is that they had not completely destroyed the municipal life of the cities. And the best that can be said of the restored Austrian rule of 1814 to 1848 is that it left the Mayors and Municipal Councils of Lombardy and Venetia to be elected by the Italians. The Municipio was the one native and the one vital organ of Italian life, the emaciated, but still living descendant of the old City State. Hence, when North Italy revolted from the Austrian in the spring of 1848, the municipalities became the first organs of provisional government.

In order to win racial and political freedom, and overturn the existing bad governments, the cities of Italy agreed on national union. Their first programme, in 1848, was half union in the form of a Federation of States with the Pope as President. But Federalism broke down, partly because the Papacy abandoned the national cause, partly because, as I have said, there was no local patriotism larger than the city. None of the States at the proposed federation had any real hold on men's loyalty. There was indeed Piedmontese patriotism, but Piedmont aspired not to be one of a Federation, but to take the lead in making a united Italy. And so the failure of the revolution of 1848 involved the failure of the Federal idea. After that the cities of Italy united on the programme of complete unity for the whole Peninsula under the House of Savoy.

When therefore Italy set up for herself in 1860 or 1870 as a united Kingdom with Parliamentary institutions, she was essentially a union of city communities; she had no Parliamentary or electoral experience; and there was no political sense or tradition in the rural districts. The *Risorgimento* had been carried through by a vigorous minority—the inhabitants of the cities. The peasants had very slowly followed suit. In 1848 they had been much divided in feeling, and mainly indifferent. In 1860 and 1870 the peasant threw up his cap for Garibaldi

and Victor Emanuel, except in certain districts of the south. But the living faith of Italian patriotism had flowed out from the towns to cover the country, and the living faith might ebb back from off the fields and vineyards if things went badly. The Parliamentary system imported brand new from England gave the peasant, nominally at least, an equal voice with the citizen in the government. But the peasant had no political traditions, and the townsman had no Parliamentary training.

Such was the internal problem that Cavour had to face in 1861. He at least had studied, understood, and absorbed the Parliamentary traditions of England. And being a man of genius he had succeeded in setting up the Parliamentary Cabinet system in little Piedmont; he had made it a reality there, and even a success. In 1861 the far more difficult task lay before him of making a reality and a success of Parliamentary government for the whole of Italy—North and South together. He was the only man in Europe who could perhaps have done it, and in 1861 he died. Where were ye, nymphs of Parliamentary life, and genii who preside over Cabinet government? How much died with Cavour we are to-day better able to estimate.

The work of the *Risorgimento* was incomplete in 1870. In the inner life of the country the new doctrine of patriotism had not penetrated the whole body of the people in a permanent manner, particularly not the peasants. When thirty years of economic distress came in place of what was to have been the golden age, patriotism ebbed, and grumbling and cynicism took its place. High taxation was necessary to set up the machinery of a modern State throughout the whole Peninsula, to drive railways over and through the Apennines—an essential but very expensive prelude to national prosperity under modern conditions. The economic return for all this vast expenditure was not very evident until the early years of the present century. Naturally, therefore, towards the close of the nineteenth century people were not well pleased with the new régime. *Italia Una* was blamed for all that was wrong. 'Who filled the butchers' shops with large blue flies?' *Italia Una*.

To counteract this revulsion of sentiment there was no organized patriotic propaganda of an effective kind to enlighten and uplift the peasant and the ordinary citizen. While the

parties who had made the *Risorgimento*, Liberal and Conservative alike, ignobly squabbled over the sweets of office at Monte Citorio, the field of popular propaganda among an uneducated and largely illiterate people was left to the priest and to the socialist. Now in those days both priest and socialist were, in different ways, hostile to the new State. For different reasons they were enemies of the very idea of Italian patriotism. They were international, anti-patriotic forces. And the white field of the Italian harvest was abandoned to them. Such was Italy when I first knew her thirty years ago.

It is only fair to add that in that period the socialist was the first person who aroused the peasant to a sense that he was a citizen, that his vote meant something, and that he ought to apply his mind to politics. I have often heard opponents of socialism, especially *Fascisti*, acknowledge the value of socialist work in arousing the neglected peasant. And you will doubtless recollect that Signor Mussolini and many of the leading *Fascisti* are ex-socialists. It was the war that revealed to them what they conceived to be the great lacuna in Italian socialism, its want of patriotic feeling.

Under these circumstances, at the end of the last century the *Risorgimento* tradition became too much a memory receding into the past, instead of a faith that should mould the present and the future. Its official inheritors, moreover, discredited Parliamentary government by their feeble administration and by the absorption of their energies in the pettifogging arts of electioneering and Parliamentary management. The bureaucracy and the State employees (*impiegati*) on the railways and elsewhere were multiplied exceedingly as part of a system of Parliamentary graft. Do not suppose for a moment that bureaucratic corruption was new in Italy. This also is a question of long historic tradition. Graft is as old as Italian history. The State servants had been far more corrupt formerly under the governments overthrown by Victor Emanuel—especially in Naples and Rome. But in the new Italy so much more was expected of the new régime that failure was more noticed. More money was being spent on public services, railways, &c., and a higher standard in the service was therefore required than in the old pre-industrial days. In England we should find the



official habits of the eighteenth century utterly intolerable to-day. And so in Italy the graft, idleness, and inefficiency natural in doddering despotisms in the days of brigands and glass coaches was held to be intolerable in connexion with the Parliament of Monte Citorio. Yet the connexion was only too evident.

Now the *Fascisti* in the last few years have arisen to meet these two needs, which as I have shown were already acutely felt at the end of the last century :

First, the need for a popular propaganda of patriotism, and

Second, the need for a government strong enough to deal with bureaucratic and Parliamentary graft and with the monstrous regiment of *impiegati*.

In the early days of the twentieth century, long before the rise of the *Fascisti*, there came indeed a great economic recovery. The economic prosperity of ten and twenty years ago was felt most in the manufacturing districts of North Italy, but it was felt everywhere. Unfortunately it was connected with political and cultural vassalage to the Teuton. The German lent the money and called the tune. And therefore the moral and political life of the country only partially recovered its tone with this increasing prosperity. But the monarchy and the new State were undoubtedly safer in 1914 than they had been twenty years before. On Italy, thus prepared and thus unprepared, came the test that 'read each nation on the brow'.

As might have been expected, when the question of neutrality or war was fairly posed, it was not the Ministry or the Parliament or the peasants who gave the lead, but the inhabitants of the cities. They had made the first *Risorgimento*, and in 1915 it was they who revived its drooping spirit to meet this new crisis of the nation's fate. In the 'days of May', by demonstrations in the piazza of every city, the city-dwellers forced Italy into the war, with little enough encouragement from the parliamentary classes, and in opposition to most of the priests and socialist leaders. In such circumstances the struggle on the 'home front' in Italy, during a war of three and a half years that was to have been for six months only, was much more severe than in England. The *fascio* or *bundle* of patriotic parties at Monte Citorio was formed to fight the

defeatists in Parliament, and did yeoman's service to the Allies, and to Italy. Between Caporetto and the final victory at Vittorio Veneto this good spirit swept over the whole country, overleaping all barriers, and saved the nation. That is why the Italians are so deeply moved by the words 'Vittorio Veneto', even more than because they there captured 5,000 guns and 500,000 prisoners.

But after the victory there was a violent though brief reaction. When men looked round to count what they had lost in the terrific catastrophe, a wave of angry despair, of semi-Bolshevist revolt against it all, passed over Europe, including England. In Italy, where patriotism is scarcely a century old, it took a form that it did not take with us, of 'defeatist' assaults on men in uniform, especially men with war medals, and on all supporters of the war, as well as on 'capitalism' and 'property' of all sorts. The national colours could not safely be shown; an anti-patriotic 'terror' was established. The socialists never did a worse day's work for themselves than when they adopted methods of violence in place of the ballot. Their unfortunate choice was partly due to an international tradition of 'red' rowdyism, dating perhaps from the Jacobin terrorism of Paris, and revived by the success of Bolshevism in Russia. But the Italian tradition, three thousand years old, of the *row in the piazza* as the method of political action, also influenced them in adopting methods of violence. It was as natural for the Italian socialist to terrorize his fellow citizens as for the English socialist to walk to the polling booth. History can best tell you why.

The Parliamentary Government failed to restore order. It bowed to the storm, hoping that it would pass. It 'hesitated to shoot'. The crisis, therefore, produced the second and most characteristic development of the *Fascio*—the growth of a private army of young ex-service men in football shirts, armed with sticks and revolvers, with branches in every city and district, to fight the Communists and defeatists with their own weapons. In this the *Fascisti* were completely successful, and earned the thanks not only of 'capitalists' and landlords, who in some districts were in suspiciously close relation with the *fascio* warriors, but of the community in general, and of patriots in particular.

It is unnecessary to emphasize the grave present evils and the future dangers involved in the fact that 'a sort of civil war' has been fought to a finish between two groups of citizens, while the Government looked on helpless, and that the victorious group has seized the government. Whether the blame lies mostly with the Communists, the Fascists, or the weak Parliamentary Government will long be disputed. But in order to look at the matter in proper perspective, in order to understand aright Mussolini's amazing *coup d'état* of October 1922 and the present position in Italy, we must realize that in Mediterranean lands Parliamentary government is not native but an importation from England, and that since Cavour's death it has had no great exponent in Italy. Although Parliament will very possibly survive as a piece of machinery for which there is no alternative, the kind of politics that the Italian race has in its blood is the politics not of the lobby or the polling booth, but of the piazza. They want something dramatic—theatrical. The faction fight in the city square, the demonstration in front of the *Municipio*, have been the popular method of politics in Italy from times before history began. In England our mobs, meetings, and demonstrations are merely adjuncts of the Parliamentary system, but in Italy they are the very pulse of the nation's political life.

It is perhaps improbable that *Fascismo* will prove a final form of government for so subtle and civilized a nation as the Italian. Indeed the dictatorship of a man of genius at the head of an armed faction is on the face of it something provisional. Already there are signs of tension between the man of genius and the chiefs of the faction that raised him to power. Yet I do not feel at all certain that the old state of things will ever be restored unaltered. What is likely to be the ultimate form of government in Italy, who would venture to foretell? I only wish to emphasize the inherent political difference between Italians and English, due to their respective histories. If the whole course of Italian history be considered, it is not hard to understand why the *Fascisti* have in effect repealed the constitution on the English model under which Italy lived from 1860 to 1922. Only a few days back I heard a *fascista* say that Italy was reverting to her old native forms of government,

in place of the constitutions imported from England in the time of Cavour, which have not worked well.

Whether we regret or applaud the change, we must be careful to understand why it has taken place. Italy owes a great debt to *Fascismo* for the restoration of order and security, for the fearless exercise of the power and authority of the central government after a period of partial disuse. In these respects *Fascismo* has some analogies to the Tudor despotism in England following after the anarchy of the Wars of the Roses. The Wars of the Roses had been brought on by premature Parliamentary control of the executive in an age not socially capable of enjoying full constitutional liberties. In every age and in every land, society requires order first and liberty second; τὸ ζῆν comes before τὸ εἶ ζῆν. Men desire to be governed even more than they desire to govern themselves. The economic recovery of Italy, which is very marked this winter, is gratefully attributed to the peace and discipline enforced by Signor Mussolini.

Furthermore, the Italians as a race have always had a leaning towards a dictator as the surest means of expressing the popular will. It is in the blood and tradition both of their city life, and of their life as a nation. Witness the names of Marius, Julius Caesar, Rienzi, Masaniello, the Capitani del Popolo of the mediaeval cities, and the element of dictatorship in the careers of Manin, Mazzini, Cavour, Garibaldi, and Victor Emanuel, even in that most liberal of revolutions. The Italian is accustomed to turn for relief to a dictator, to put his trust in a man. The Englishman, owing to an equally great historical tradition, looks for relief to Parliament. Cromwell is our one case of a democratic dictator, and where he signally failed to make the idea popular no other Englishman will succeed. But with the Italian it is different.

All this we understand, in appreciating the revolution that has carried Signor Mussolini to power. But we may perhaps be permitted, on account of our English idiosyncrasy, to regret that so many *Fascisti* look on the abrogation of their country's liberties not as a provisional expedient but as a permanent and desirable change. They regard the suppression of free speech not as one of Cromwell's 'cruel necessities', but as a thing good in itself, an ideal realized. Many of the *Fascist* chiefs, including

the *Duce* himself, were before the War advanced socialists of a school very much less Parliamentary than that of our labour trade-unionists. Four years of warfare against the Austrians, in which Signor Mussolini and the other youthful *Fascisti* played so patriotic a part in the front line, have not made them any less disposed than before to idealize force as good in itself. After their war experience they are more than ever inclined to despise Parliamentary government and personal liberty as what we should call 'outworn Victorian ideals'.

It would seem that personal liberty and freedom of speech are bound to rise or decline with Parliamentary institutions. (The Oxford political school might profitably inquire into the truth of that proposition.) Certainly the *Fascisti* look askance on the right of the citizen to criticize government. In restoring the proper authority of government they have with more doubtful wisdom claimed that it should be immune from criticism. They think that to be in opposition is to be a bad citizen. The proper seat of government, they suppose, is on the top of the safety valve. The press, the platform, and all forms of public utterance on politics are in practice subject to very drastic limitations in the Italy of to-day, and the curtailment of liberty is by no means at the expense of socialists only, but of all parties except *Fascisti*.

For my part, perhaps because I am so academic, I value freedom of speech even more than Parliamentary government, with whose fortunes, however, it seems inextricably involved. The 'outworn Victorian' preference for

A land, where girt by friends or foes,  
A man may speak the things he will

seems to me as sound and necessary to-day as it was when Tennyson wrote the sentiment, whether we are most interested in building up the moral and intellectual fibre of a man or of a whole nation. The *Risorgimento* did for Italy another great thing besides driving out the foreigner; it relieved men from base fear of their fellows, from the degrading interference of the spy and the police, from the petty persecutions of the party in power, which, in the words of Settembrini, 'corrupted people to the bones' under the old régime. I hope that Signor Musso-

lini will be able to establish such discipline in the *Fascist* ranks that this state of things will not be reproduced. If the quarrel between him and extremists of the *Fascio* does something for the liberties of the country it will be all to the good. Because Italians were for so many centuries subjected to foreign and native despots, the chief thing that the Italian character needs is more moral courage in public affairs. It was because they possessed just that quality that the *Fascisti* were able to save Italy three years ago when others quailed. I wish they would remember that government by threats of the stick and of castor oil is not the way to inculcate the same virtues in their fellow countrymen. Nor does censorship by wrecking newspaper offices improve the tone of the press.

Yet though we may be anxious, we cannot, if we look at history, be surprised at what is happening in this matter. Freedom of political speech is a very modern thing in Italy. It has only existed in Piedmont since 1848 and in most other parts of Italy since 1860. In the world as a whole it is very recent and still somewhat rare. Even in England, where political freedom of speech originated, it is of more recent origin than our Parliamentary system, which begat it. In the reigns of the later Plantagenets and Lancastrians, when the Parliamentary system first flourished under the patronage of the great noble families, the ordinary Englishman neither claimed nor enjoyed freedom of speech on affairs of State. The dependents of a great feudal noble could, under their lord's protection, speak up for him against the government, but that was not the same thing as freedom of political speech for the citizen. Neither was it safe to criticize government in Tudor times, when Crown and Parliament were bound together in a formidable union. Outside Parliament there was no freedom of political speech in Elizabeth's reign. Mr. Stubbs, the loyalest of subjects, had his hand cut off for writing a pamphlet to warn his beloved Queen against marrying Alençon. The subtle spinster had not the smallest intention of so doing, but she resented Mr. Stubbs's offer of advice on the subject.

We must look to more modern English history for the freedom of the individual citizen to criticize government, and to go, as we say, 'into opposition' without being regarded as a traitor.

This freedom began slowly to emerge as a consequence of the quarrel between Crown and Parliament under the Stuarts. Milton's *Areopagitica* first proclaimed the theory of free debate to a scandalized world. The legal freedom of unlicensed printing came, almost unnoticed, in William III's reign. In the eighteenth century real freedom of discussion in politics grew up owing to the balance of the two great parties of Whig and Tory, each able to protect its own partisans. The alarm at the French Revolution and at Tom Paine's propaganda led to a renewed suppression of political free speech for about a generation. In the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century freedom of discussion revived in greater power than ever before, and we have had it ever since in this island. The phrase 'His Majesty's Opposition' indicates how completely we realize the value of criticism. No British government would desire to be without it, and when opposition becomes weak we all cry aloud that our political system is on the decline, and shuffle parties afresh in order to concoct an opposition. But this whole school of ideas is comparatively novel even in England. It is alien to Italian political thought, particularly to that of the *Fascisti*, who think that a government is stronger for having no opposition and no critics.

If, therefore, even in England, the land of 'His Majesty's Opposition', freedom of speech and person is so recent, let us not be impatient with Italy if she is for a moment swerving from the path of liberty in the course of a very earnest attempt to set her house in order and to cope with the evils which the weakness of the friends of liberty have allowed to grow up. But let us not either acclaim as good in itself any injury done to the frail young plant of liberty, in a land which we love for many reasons, but not least because for sixty years she has been a land of freedom. Signor Mussolini is a great man and, according to his lights, a very sincere patriot. Let our prayer for him be, not that he victoriously destroy free institutions in Italy, but that he may be remembered as a man who gave his country order and discipline when she most needed them, and so enabled those free institutions to be restored in an era happier than that in which it is our present destiny to live.

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