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The "RED" DRAGON
AND
The BLACK SHIRTS

How Italy Found her Soul

The True Story
of the
Fascisti Movement

By

SIR PERCIVAL PHILLIPS, K.B.E.

(Special Correspondent of "The Daily Mail.")



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PREFACE

This volume contains the first complete and authentic English account of the famous Fascisti movement. It is the result of a mission on which "The Daily Mail" despatched its Special Correspondent, Sir Percival Phillips, well known to the British public for his brilliant work on the West front during the war, which was rewarded by the British Government with a K.B.E. He examined the organisation and working of the Fascisti* in the Italian cities and in Rome. He even inspected documents which, so far, have not been published, such as the secret orders and the rules of discipline.

The results of his investigation were published in a series of articles in "The Daily Mail," which have attracted extraordinary attention. They are here reproduced in full. In almost every line they contain information which is new to the British public. They deal with one of the noblest and most stirring chapters in the history of our times—the rescue of Italy from the cruel despotism of the Bolsheviks and Communists by the Fascisti under Signor Mussolini.

In itself the salvation of Italy is an event of commanding importance, far more important than anything that has happened since the armistice. It is full of hope and instruction for the world. The Fascisti have proved that, if everything else fails, if a cowardly Government abdicates before disorder and crime, and if democracy goes to pieces, a nation with any virility can yet be saved by its able-bodied youth and patriots, acting under a man. An antidote has been discovered to Communism. A means has been found of destroying the poison spread by the Red propaganda and paralysing those who preach the class-war. *For the first time in half a century there is a democratic force in the field stronger than the Socialism and Communism of Marx.*

Signor Benito Mussolini, the blacksmith's son, has been acclaimed in Italy as a Cromwell or Napoleon come again. Assuredly there is in him the strength of will, the energy and the consummate organising power which marked those two famous leaders. As Paoli said to the young Bonaparte, "O Napoleon, you are a man out of Plutarch!" so the noted Socialist Sorel, inventor of the general strike, declared of Signor Mussolini ten years ago that he was "an Italian of the XVth century, the only energetic man capable of

* Their name is derived from the "fasces," or bundle of twigs fastened round an axe, which was carried by the Roman lictors as an emblem of authority.

mending the weakness of his Government." Sorel's judgment, like Paoli's, has been confirmed by events. Mussolini is cast in the heroic mould.

Sir Percival Phillips shows how grave the Communist peril was, and how great was the bravery needed to face it when Signor Mussolini, despite his hundred wounds received in the war, stepped forth like a new David to challenge the Bolshevik Goliath. There was a state of things such as, fortunately, has never been known in law-abiding England. Italian officers were murdered for showing themselves in uniform; Italian soldiers, crippled in the war, were brutally assassinated. The Government ran away. There was no safety for the lives and property of those who resisted the Communist brigands. A series of great strikes was organised by the Communists, that they might multiply unemployed, reduce the country to bankruptcy, and, in the general ruin, seize power and establish a reign of terror. The nearest parallel to Italy, as she was before the Fascisti got to work, is the Southern Ireland of to-day.

The Fascisti have grown to immense strength because they obey what is really a religion of duty and love. Lenin has said that Fascism and Bolshevism cannot co-exist in the world; one must kill the other. He is right. Fascism must win if only because it is founded on love, while Communism is founded on hatred; and love will be stronger than hatred as good is always ultimately stronger than evil. Indeed, so high are the ideals of Fascism, and so stern is its discipline, that it will be difficult for mere men to live up to it when the strain has passed. But that is for the future; to-day, adapting Pitt's famous words, it can be said that Italy has saved herself by her Fascisti's exertions, and she is saving Europe by their unselfish and heroic example.

* * *

Not the least touching passages in these inspiring pages are those in which Sir Percival Phillips gives an account of the Fascisti martyrs, and of the transcendent valour of the Fascisti storm troops. It may be doubted whether there is anything in romance to surpass the feat of Cesare Rossi, who, with 31 comrades, carried Ancona, a city of 68,000 inhabitants, held, as it seemed, impregably by the Reds. Surely there once more it was proved that "faith can move mountains."

The Fascisti won largely because they are swayed by spiritual forces and because they have restored justice. They punished the murders of their comrades by unflinching reprisals. Yet they have killed in all only 2,500 malefactors, a striking contrast with the fearful roll of 1,780,000 victims whom the Bolsheviks of Russia admit having executed. They have known when to hold their hand. Transgressions of their Spartan discipline have been very rare indeed.

Now the victory is gained, and the way in which Signor Mussolini is using it is not less instructive than the means by which he gained

it. He is dealing with all crime on lines of common-sense. Instead of feebly protesting he "cannot stop Waste," he is attacking it with such vigour and virility that every Italian limpet is trembling. He is rationing departments in money and officials, and doing precisely what "The Daily Mail" has suggested a hundred times should be done by Government departments here. He is stopping wanton strikes, which are a disastrous form of Waste; and he is preparing measures against "the idle rich" who spend their time in gambling and feasting. Among his followers are all classes and ranks, though most are young men with brilliant records of service in the war; and he has known how to inspire in them a spirit like his own.

H. W. WILSON.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE HOLY WAR FOR FREEDOM

Italy has turned the tide against Bolshevism, and it may yet be said that she has saved Europe.

The victory of the Fascisti, which swept into power that strange dominant personality, Benito Mussolini—knight of the 15th century in white spats and a morning coat—is still but imperfectly understood and appreciated by the outside world. Comparatively few people realise that, apart from the Great War, the revolt of Italy's young manhood against the tyranny of Red Socialism will be set down by historians as the most important movement of our time.

Beyond the Alps, the belief is still too prevalent that Fascismo has yielded nothing more than one of those explosions which from time to time shatter Italian politics and, by clearing away the débris of an unpopular Government, prepare the foundation for a new one possessing the same characteristics. Fascismo has done far more than that. It has fought a holy war.

A nation has suddenly risen from its lethargy and made anew its profession of faith in principles which are the bedrock of our civilisation.

Christianity, patriotism, loyalty to the state, liberty of the individual, recognition of the rights and duties of all classes of society, co-operation of all classes for the good of the country, obedience to established authority, social morality—all these tenets of national life which Bolshevism would consign to the dust-heap have again been embraced by the people of Italy, high and low alike, in a spirit of enthusiasm which is nothing less than sublime.

A writer of the Middle Ages would relate the story of this awakening with fine imagery, for it contains all the elements of a great romance. You have a valiant knight going forth almost single-handed, jeered at by enemies and despaired of by faint-hearted friends, to fight a Red Dragon which is steadily increasing in size and strength. The entire country is in danger. The struggle is long and painful, and at times the dragon seems well-nigh victorious.

Gradually the knight's band of followers increases, and when the people see that their rescue is possible they flock to his banner.

And so the dragon is slain and the valiant knight—who was no more than the son of a village blacksmith—becomes the King's first Minister.

In truth the dragon has not been slain, but it has been rendered powerless. Bolshevism, instead of being a gospel rammed down the throats of defenceless workmen with threats and curses, is now hardly more than a secret cult. A public act of disloyalty is in Italy to-day a form of suicide. No longer are ex-soldiers spat at in the streets; the man who wishes to jeer at the Italian flag should first make his will. Not so long ago the King was openly spoken of with contempt by the servants of Moscow—even in the Houses of Parliament. To-day such an insult ensures painful meditation in a hospital, if not the seclusion of the grave.

The state of Italy when Fascismo rallied to her aid is almost beyond belief. It is difficult to realise that the *moral* of a victorious nation could sink so low. Encouraged by the inertness and timidity of the Government, the agents of Bolshevism had subjugated the workers to such an extent that they were virtually masters of the kingdom, which was drifting steadily towards anarchy.

Lenin and Trotsky knew the importance of a "Red" triumph in a country which had helped to win the war, and their efforts were redoubled to establish Soviet Government in Italy. Money, propaganda, secret agents who had little need for secrecy, were all forthcoming to reinforce the local Communist organisations and to hasten the downfall of civilisation. They were aided by renegade Italians attached to the Russian central machine.

Their triumph seemed almost at hand. The trade unions were riddled with Communism and the wavering elements of Labour which still clung to a shred of their old patriotism were terrorised into accepting its poisonous creed. It was a crime to have fought in the war and a worse crime to acknowledge it. Medals won for valour could not be shown in public; indeed, many dupes of Bolshevism were actually ashamed of possessing them.

Then arose Benito Mussolini, himself an ex-Syndicalist and a disillusioned Socialist, and an outcast from the Socialist Party because of his passionate love of country. He founded the Fascisti. He had come out of the war with a hundred wounds and the shattered dreams of a millennium brought about by his cherished doctrines. He saw the naked soul of Communism and it appalled him. Within

four months of the signing of the armistice he was gathering together a band of pioneers to save Italy from destruction.

Thus began the Crusade of the Black Shirts. They were enrolled with a vow of discipline, obedience, and unquestioning devotion to their country and religion. The grim, relentless, savage spirit of the Middle Ages and the harsh self-sacrifice of those times flamed out anew in these intrepid students and officers and working men who gave up everything to fight for a free and sane Italy.

Their sombre dress, their stern creed, their disregard for the frivolities and the dangers of life, and their almost fanatical heroism gave them the aspect of militant churchmen rather than political adventurers. In the early days of their crusade they had no politics. They scorned the comparative safety of a secret society.

When on duty they wore the black dress of their organisation ; at other times they showed on their coat a small button which proclaimed their purpose. They were at all times marked men. They put aside all pleasant things and calmly walked with Death. The new crusade was fought with as fiery zeal as their forefathers showed in the struggle for the Holy Sepulchre.

They fought the Red Terror with its own weapons. They made reprisals—which may shock some of the “ peace-at-any-price ” pacifists of this humane age. The methods of Moscow found an answer in the methods of the Fascisti.

They did not copy Communist policy in flinging men alive into blast-furnaces, as was done by a Red tribunal partly composed of women at Turin ; nor did they torture prisoners like the followers of Lenin in other parts of Northern Italy, but they made the savage apostles of anarchy realise that whatever crimes were committed in the name of Bolshevism would be amply avenged without appeal to a spineless Government at Rome.

It is a wonderful epic, this story of a long, weary struggle against heavy odds ; of the taking of “ all-Red towns ” by handfuls of brave men ; of night raids and of long days of heavy toil to free a starving community from a political strike ; of other towns fed and policed and even lit by Fascisti volunteers who would not see their deluded countrymen die under the yoke of Communism ; of successes and defeats ; of renewed hopes and moments of black despair ; of grim little processions to a burying-ground with their uncovered dead, and the grimmer aftermath when Red culprits paid their debt ; of the gradual increase in volunteers as cowed working men,

taking courage from these brave hearts, slipped out of the arms of Bolshevism and became free men once more.

And then the steady rise to power ; the voice of the awakening nation heard with increasing strength, and finally, the dramatic bursting of its shackles when north and south responded to the bidding of Mussolini and demanded liberty.

The Bolshevik dream of a march on Rome came true. It was, as Lenin hoped, a march of simple peasants, some of whom saw a large city for the first time, and of working men from the mills and factories, intermingled with other elements of society, all demanding liberty. But it was a march against Bolshevism, not on its behalf.

Nearly 120,000 armed men, many of them ex-Socialists and ex-Communists, all Fascisti, all loyal, all pledged to put self aside and think only of their country, gathered at the gates of Rome. They came like the legions of old, in cohorts, in companies commanded by centurions, in "manipoli," or sections, bearing names made famous by their exploits in action.

For nearly seven hours they marched through the capital, carrying their carbines and their triangular flags, an unbroken column of black shirts and tasselled caps, passing through crowded, friendly streets, cheered by the people and saluted by the King.

It was the end, and yet only the beginning.

The knight in white spats and morning coat is now the first Minister of the King. He has set to work without hesitation to rebuild Italy. That chapter of the epic has scarcely begun, yet the effect of his stern creed is already perceptible on the altered face of the nation. A spiritual awakening has taken place throughout the country.

Patriotism has become a sacred thing, and self-sacrifice the noblest of virtues. Party creeds have been put aside. The doctrine of the Fascisti, "Our country and not ourselves," is being practised as well as preached in a way that the people of other countries may well contemplate and profit by.

Here is the oath of 15,000 Fascisti of Piacenza :

"By the blood of our 2,000 martyrs whom we invoke as witnesses and judges of our action, we, the Black Shirts of Piacenza, swear that for one year we will not wear on our persons any gold, silver, or other precious metals or stones. We will work ardently without pay for the good of our country. We will give all superfluous ornaments to a fund for supporting

enterprises having goodness, civilisation, beauty, and civic improvement as their objects."

All classes of society are pouring in offers of help for the new Government. Signor Mussolini receives 10,000 letters a day, many of them containing proposals for voluntary work. The newspapers are filled with them.

State employees, many of whom are badly underpaid, offer the only thing within their power—extra work without pay. The workers in the national tobacco factory were the first to ask to be allowed to remain an hour longer every day for nothing. They were followed by some of the clerks in the Ministries, the workers in the Naples arsenal, and the local staffs at a number of railway stations. Other railway employees are contributing a day's pay a month to the Government.

The Army and Navy Stores in Rome, a Government institution, now keep open until 8 p.m. instead of 7 on the initiative of the employees. Army officers are contributing a percentage of their small pay; old soldiers write in to the Ministry of War to say that they are still able to earn a living with their hands and desire to give their pension to the nation. Women offer their jewellery—one sent her gold watch. The story of the widow's mite can be duplicated many times.

A new era of retrenchment and reform, and of greater industry, has begun under Signor Mussolini. For the first time on record you see Cabinet Ministers working to reduce their staffs so that they will have more work to do. One of them, the Minister for the Devastated Regions, is labouring night and day in the effort to abolish himself, his salary, and his department by next June.

The Red Terror has failed. Lenin said with truth that Bolshevism and Fascismo cannot exist together. By terror his emissaries sought to overthrow Italy; by voluntary self-sacrifice she has been saved.

The story of the rise and fall of Communism and of how Italy at last regained her soul can at present be told only in fragments. As one of the Fascisti leaders said to me: "We have been too busy making history to record it. What may be known of the details of the movement in one place may not be known elsewhere."

Nevertheless, I have secured sufficient material to give, I hope, a convincing and an accurate picture of Italy during those troubled times, and of her escape.

I can offer no better proof of the changed spirit which is now to be found among the workers than the letter of Giovanni Esposito, a

poor Neapolitan living near Afragola. He wrote to the King the other day begging to be allowed to change the name of his infant son, an act only possible by a Royal Decree. He explained, in scrawling, illiterate sentences, that when the child was born on December 28, 1919, Bolshevist propaganda was sweeping through Italy, and the peasants had to embrace revolutionary doctrines or starve.

Now that the Fascisti have made the country safe for patriots who are not ashamed of having shed their blood in the war, he begs to be allowed to change the name of young Esposito from Lenin to Benito Mussolini. Which has been done.

CHAPTER TWO

ITALY UNDER COMMUNIST RULE

The picture of Italy drugged and helpless in the hands of the Communists as she was when the Fascisti came to her rescue is not one that future generations of Italian patriots will care to contemplate. It is a shameful picture.

You must visualise the state of the country when the Socialist régime was at its height to appreciate fully the magnitude of the Fascisti victory. Only in this way can one realise how the insidious doctrines spread broadcast from Moscow are able to paralyse a nation when the Government is afraid to be strong and the public is blindly tolerant.

The disease was first manifested in familiar, seemingly harmless symptoms. We have seen them elsewhere and passed them by. Red flags flaunted in street processions; Communist songs sung at public meetings; virulent attacks—printed and shouted—on Parliament and the Throne; appeals to class hatred; incitement to mob violence. This was the beginning of Italy's sickness. Government looked on deprecatingly, and when goaded into action tried conciliation. Which was like petrol thrown on a fire.

Anti-Nationalist and anti-Army propaganda increased so rapidly and so successfully that a soldier became a loathsome object, fit only for extermination. Red agitators and orators roamed the country freely, making seditious speeches; decrying the war; egging the people on to anarchy and the seizure of private property, sneering at crippled veterans. The Government did nothing.

For two years the Communists had the upper hand in Northern Italy. Only they were allowed to speak at public meetings and to put up posters. They threatened, insulted, even killed, when the opposition tried to be heard.

In municipalities which the Communists had conquered by brute force, Liberal minorities were not allowed to express their opinions. The majority downed them with shouts and by flinging sticks and chairs.

Working men were forcibly enrolled in Communist clubs and heavy contributions were levied on them. If they could not or would not pay, they were visited in the night and "taxed" double or beaten, according to the state of their resources. Communist orators continued to preach of freedom for the workers while thrusting them into a condition of slavery they had never before experienced.

The Communist policy was: "Frighten the Government. The more they give way the harder we press them; the harder we press them the more they give way."

At the inauguration of the first Parliament after the war all the Socialist deputies left the Chamber in a body when the King entered, even with threatening gestures and cries of "Down with him!"

Contempt for the Army increased so rapidly that as long ago as 1920 the Government issued orders that officers were not to appear in public in uniform nor carry arms. Brave men who had led troops with great gallantry were submitted to the grossest indignities in the streets. Medals were torn from their tunics. They were only able to retaliate with their fists against men who were armed with knives and revolvers.

The railwaymen were the masters of the State railways. If an officer in uniform got into a train, he was requested by the guard to get out again. If he declined, he was thrown out.

Carabinieri and Royal Guards, the two police organisations, were objects of especial hatred and violence. Detachments sent to preserve order were defied and spat upon, and the unhappy men were ordered not to retaliate. If Carabinieri or Royal Guards tried to use a train in order to proceed from one town to another the train staff would refuse to move until they left.

Indiscipline and resentment began to eat into the armed forces of the Crown. Men could not endure indefinitely being treated like wild beasts. An officer sent to police a Communist riot realised that he was liable to be broken, no matter what course he took in dealing with the mob. The Communists were fully aware of his predicament and made the most of it.

Since the war there had never been a Government in Italy with the courage to tell the police to shoot if the occasion demanded it. Their orders were couched in vague and cautious phraseology. They were told to "exercise firmness, but with prudence." Observe the result:

When the workmen of Milan seized some of the factories the police were told not to interfere. A lieutenant of the Royal Guard

was driving a lorry with some of his men, when he was fired upon with rifles from the roof of a factory. He battered down the door by flinging the lorry against it at full speed and forced some 300 armed workmen who were inside to surrender. For this he was degraded and dismissed from the service. He had not acted with the necessary "prudence."

A lieutenant of Carabinieri was ordered to march with his men from one village to another where rioting was in progress. The direct route was through a hamlet where the male inhabitants were waiting with shot-guns, behind a barricade, to attack the detachment. In order to avoid bloodshed and to exercise the necessary "prudence," the lieutenant made a *détour* around the hamlet. For this he was degraded and dismissed from the service. He had not shown the necessary "firmness."

Acts of this kind on the part of the Government disheartened the police and angered the loyal portion of the population. It became increasingly evident that the only way to freedom was by joining the Fascisti and freeing themselves.

The inertness of the Government played directly into the hands of the agitators. They refused repeatedly to raise the pay of clerks in the Ministries so that they could live decently, and it was not until the clerks, in sheer desperation, had formed a kind of Socialistic trade union and thoroughly frightened the Premier that they were given what should have been granted voluntarily. Naturally, the Reds claimed this as further justification of their terrorist methods.

In addition, there were real Communists in Government pay openly undermining the organisation of the State. One notorious example was that of a chief in the Rome Central Post Office who spent much of his time when on duty waving a red flag and singing Communist songs. The night staff in the telegraph office sent few, if any, telegrams although they were receiving extra pay for night work.

When the Government did try to act, and dismissed this seditious employee, the entire postal staff threatened to strike unless he was reinstated, and reinstated he was. Nor would the workers allow the night staff to be suppressed when the Government seeing that the volume of work done did not justify the expense, contemplated doing so.

The peasants, taught that land which they tilled ought to belong to them, seized estates, and the owners were left without redress. In the north Communist co-operative societies controlled the machinery for gathering the harvest. A landowner was not per-

mitted to own reapers and threshers, nor could he obtain the use of the workers' equipment. His crops rotted while the others were gathered in.

In the mills and factories production was hampered and strikes were declared on frivolous pretexts. The unvarying aim of Communism was to cripple the resources of the nation in every way ; to reduce the bulk of the population—which still remained outside the influence of the Terror—to helplessness and dependence on them.

They organised Communist co-operative societies, which the Government had to subsidise and the workers had to patronise. In the north, the industrial heart of Italy, every working man had to be a Bolshevik. Hundreds of them were forced to subscribe publicly to sentiments which they deplored in private.

The rank and file of the Socialist forces were far from being solidly Bolshevik, even at the height of Red domination. The militant element, I am told, was comparatively small. But so skilfully and subtly did the leaders of this destructive movement follow the procedure of the Russian Soviet that they were able to drive before them, as with whips, scores of unwilling working men who knew not where else to turn. The Government would not protect them ; the police could not ; the very name of the Army was anathema. Like sheep, they passed into the Communist fold.

Socialist government was hurrying hitherto prosperous municipalities into bankruptcy. In Milan the tramways, which under a private company paid to the city between two and three million lire a year, as well as making a substantial profit for its shareholders, showed a deficit under a Socialist administration of 22,000,000 lire a year, in addition to 6,000,000 lire subsidy from the State. The system had been allowed to fall into such a condition of disrepair that an outlay of 40,000,000 lire will be necessary to put it right again.

Under the last Communist administration Milan had 12 municipal employees for every 1,000 inhabitants. It is estimated that the municipality paid 2.80 lire for each letter sent by hand—a total annual outlay of nearly 1,000,000 lire.

The municipal pay-roll was weighted down with new sinecures. The keeper of a deserted cemetery who got 50 lire a month formerly had his pay raised to 700 lire a month. Clerks who in other cities were entitled to a pension of 8,000 lire a year were raised by the Communist gang in Milan to 18,000 lire or 21,000 lire, with the result that employees were retiring at the earliest possible moment.

The Milan firemen, who were organised as a "Red Guard," were receiving 18,000 lire a month in addition to an average of 7,000 lire a month "extra pay" and their uniforms, food, and housing.

All this, of course, was plain propaganda for the increase of the Red forces.

In every possible way patriotism and civic pride were derided. The Socialist newspapers glorified as heroes the deserters from the front and the renegades from civil life who had fled to Austria or Switzerland during the war and were amnestied. Shameful caricatures of the King were sold freely without protest from the authorities.

A worker who dared show the national colours or salute his country's flag in a Communist centre was liable to be beaten to death. Religion was decried, and the extremists boasted of what they would do when they had captured the capital as they had captured the people.

All these things the Crusaders of the Black Shirt saw with rage in their hearts and a vow on their lips not to rest until they had purged Italy of the poison of Bolshevism.

CHAPTER THREE

MUSSOLINI THE BLACKSMITH'S SON

It is a significant fact that the first time Benito Mussolini saw Socialism in practice he was disgusted and disillusioned, although he himself had been a lifelong Socialist.

Nearly nine years ago the party which preached such lofty ideals decided to test them by proclaiming a Republic in the districts of Ravenna and Forli, in the north of Italy. Signor Mussolini witnessed scenes of feasting and drunkenness, much waving of red flags and more pillage, the destruction of cattle, and other senseless deprivations. The millennium which Socialism had promised was recognised by the sale of chickens at $\frac{1}{2}$ d. each to the simple peasants in the market place at Molinella.

This object-lesson convinced Mussolini that the average Socialist unmasked was not a pleasant or a practical person. The searchings of heart which led him finally to disavow the creed began on that spring day in 1914 when the short-lived rising let loose a spirit of greed, selfishness, and brutality.

The revolt which he at last inspired and led to victory must be traced back to those pre-war days for its foundation. Mussolini had all his life been steeped in Socialism. His father, a blacksmith at Predappio, 12 miles from Forli, was himself a convinced Socialist, although of a healthier, broader type than the by-product of later days. Young Mussolini was imbued by his father with the ideals of love and justice.

He was dragged into politics when hardly more than a boy and induced to run for Parliament against a rich man. He lost, and in an outburst of anger smashed a ballot-box. The police searched for him and he fled to Switzerland to avoid imprisonment. There he studied many subjects, made himself a master of the French language, and became the guiding spirit of a Socialist paper. The Swiss became uneasy and banished him. Curiously enough, the edict of banishment was not revoked until he became Premier.

Then he travelled in France and the Trentino ; was amnestied by the Italian Government ; returned to edit a Socialist paper in the province of Emilia ; took part in the Ancona Socialist Congress ; became a leader and eventually was asked to edit the "Avanti," the official organ of the Socialist Party.

All this time he held to the ideals of Socialism. He had a large following and was regarded as the coming man of the party. It is interesting, in view of later events, to recall the prophecy made by George Sorel, the Belgian Socialist, in 1912. He wrote :

"Our Mussolini is not an ordinary Socialist. Believe me, you will perhaps yet see him at the head of a sacred battalion, saluting with his uplifted sword the Italian flag. He is an Italian of the fifteenth century. It is not yet known, but he is the only energetic man capable of mending the weaknesses of his Government."

No prophecy was ever more fully fulfilled.

Then came the disillusionment when Socialism became militant in Forli and Ravenna. It was followed by other signs that Mussolini was indeed "not an ordinary Socialist."

When the Italian and Austrian Prime Ministers arranged a meeting at Abazia, in 1914, the Socialists decided to stand aloof from it. Mussolini told them they were wrong, because the decisions to be taken there were important for Italy, "which could never be Socialist if it was not completely Italian."

Then came the Great War and the breach was complete. Socialism was against the war ; Mussolini was for it. He declared that "the very reasons for civilisation and the dogmas of history were implicated." He admitted that capital might have had a share in bringing about the conflict, but he declined to use those causes as propaganda for keeping Italy out. He weighed up the situation and declared that she must join the Allies.

Thereupon his late comrades attacked him with extraordinary violence and cried, "Kill him !"

He faced his traducers at a mass meeting on November 25, 1914, calm and serene, and told them that consideration for their country must come before everything else. "I warn you," he added, "that from this moment I will never show any pity for those who, in this tragic hour, do not speak their thoughts because they are afraid of being hooted or of the cry 'Down with him !'"

Thus he sacrificed everything for the conviction that Italy had to fight. He was only 29, a young man with a brilliant future as a leader, flattered by his elders, admired by the people, feared by

the opponents of Socialism. He had nothing to gain but scorn, derision, hatred, by abandoning his friends and his career. He was cast out, at peace with his conscience but stripped of all the success he had won by years of effort.

His defection proved the greatest blow Socialism had ever received.

A new Socialist daily newspaper, the "Popolo d'Italia," was founded for Mussolini on November 15, 1914, and he became its editor. In its columns and from the platform he preached the duty of Italy to enter the world war and railed at the "flabby and frightened" foreign policy of the Government. He more than any other one man was responsible for his country joining the Allies.

"Neutral countries have never dominated events but must always submit to them," he said at Parma in December, 1914. "We must act, must fight, perhaps must die."

When war was declared, he asked to go to the front as a volunteer. He was refused, but eventually he joined the 11th Regiment of Bersaglieri, fought with conspicuous bravery, was hit by shrapnel which made, literally, a hundred wounds, was invalided as unfit for further service, and found himself back again in Milan in civilian clothes before the campaign had proceeded very far.

The "Popolo d'Italia" became the great war paper in Italy. It heartened the people, assured them of victory, and inculcated a far healthier public spirit than the other Socialist organs which denounced the war and did their best to end it at any cost.

Then Communism began to show itself. The *debâcle* in Russia turned the thoughts of the Socialists toward revolution. Moscow became a kind of mythical symbol, worshipped—as one of the Fascisti has described it to me—as an African savage worships a "ju-ju" idol. Long before peace was declared, traces of Bolshevik influence were discernible in Northern Italy. It even permeated the army. The defeat at Caporetto is believed by many Italians to have been brought about largely by the efforts of disloyal agents scattered among the troops.

Still the Socialist element held the upper hand. It was split into two parties: the official Socialist wing and the so-called Reformist Socialists; while two other parties, the Democratic Labourites and the Republicans, maintained distinct organisations, though all tended towards a common anti-Government, anti-dynastic policy. The Communist influences behind them all were quietly at work moulding them into a single weapon for the overthrow of society.

Italy's army came back from the war to find that patriotism had

gone out of fashion. Socialism had already poisoned the country by subversive doctrines to such an extent that victory was considered by its followers as a greater disaster than defeat. Instead of marching through the capital as their comrades in Allied countries had done, the soldiers virtually slunk back as though beaten, jeered at on all sides by the Socialists.

The Government, which thought it was adopting a conciliatory attitude when in fact it was merely exhibiting rank cowardice, acquiesced in the demand of the Socialists that the proposed triumphal march through Rome should be abandoned. The arches and other decorations in the ancient Roman style which had been prepared for this festival were destroyed.

This surrender to the enemies of Italy was an awakening for many former believers in the Socialist movement. They rallied to Mussolini when he raised his voice in the north: "Socialism is a false god. Cast it out and help me save Italy!" They were not many but they were sincere.

With the advent of peace came renewed activity on the part of the subversive elements. The Socialists pointed to Versailles and asked of the working men: "What did you get out of the war?" The high cost of living, widespread unemployment, depreciated currency, all were material for the Red propagandists.

As one of Mussolini's lieutenants put it to me: "A few people during the war had even said, 'Let the Austrians come; we can live as well under an Austrian Emperor as under an Italian King,' but now people began to say, 'Well, let the revolution come; we cannot go on this way.'"

They remained passive under the activities of the Socialist factions. They were told that there would be no more wars, therefore the army and navy should be scrapped. Officers became targets for abuse. The Government held an inquiry into the defeat at Caporetto which became a kind of mud-slinging competition in which many gallant soldiers were bespattered. The Socialists added this to their stock-in-trade.

There was no loyalist propaganda worth speaking of. Mussolini's voice was as one crying in a wilderness. The Socialist groups had everything their own way. The Government was afraid of them, and the Socialists knew it. So they grew in strength and influence.

Mussolini saw that no help for the loyal portion of the population would come from Rome. Working-men who only wanted a living wage and who still believed in the simple principles of loyalty to

their country were being hounded into the Socialist organisations with the alternative of starvation. Four months of peace were more than sufficient to convince him that if Italy was to be saved from internal enemies it would only be by the intervention of intrepid patriots who were willing to risk their lives constantly and to become technically criminals in order to uphold the law.

And so, on March 25, 1919, the crusade of the Black Shirt was begun.

CHAPTER FOUR

DAVID GOES OUT AGAINST GOLIATH

When Fascismo was born not a single newspaper mentioned the fact.

Signor Mussolini did not overlook this slight. Frequently during the next eighteen months, while his Black Shirts were slowly and painfully making their way forward, he warned the nation through his journal, the "Popolo d'Italia," that its air of indifference would be rudely dispelled.

"You will be speaking of the Fascisti one day! By Jove, you will speak of it!" he said. And they did.

The organisation which had its inception at Milan—a hotbed of Socialist and Communist intrigue—on March 25, 1919, was founded on historic lines. Its symbol was the Fasces, the emblem of authority carried by the Roman lictors: an executioner's axe with the handle enclosed in the rods wherewith criminals were scourged. Thus the first groups of volunteers assembled by Mussolini and pledged to discipline, obedience, and loyalty to the State and their religion, were known as "Fasci."

These first crusaders were almost entirely ex-officers and soldiers of the Arditi (Italian storm troops), who had distinguished themselves in the war. They were fearless, ready to take any risk and to lead any forlorn hope, and animated solely by the desire to save their country.

Their discipline was stern as in the Arditi, and from this famous legion they borrowed several distinguishing features. The Arditi were divided into two sections: the "Fiamme Rosse" or "Red Flames," and the "Fiamme Nere" or "Black Flames," from the cap badge which showed a flame device in either red or black. Red was already the colour of Socialism. Black, therefore, became the colour of the Fascisti.

Their uniform was a tight-fitting black shirt, military breeches of grey-green cloth, puttees and stout boots, and a peakless black cap like a fez, from which depended a black tassel. On their

shirt were emblazoned the national colours and the distinguishing badge of their section—sometimes a skull and crossbones. They never wore a coat when on service, in order that their arms might be free. In action their cap was usually replaced by a black trench helmet. They carried revolvers and a loaded stick, which was very useful in close-quarter street-fighting. The Communists loathed it. In later days the rank and file were armed with carbines, the short weapon carried by all Italian forces except the infantry. They took as their marching song the Arditi air "Giovinezza," a song of youth for which special verses were written. They saluted in the ancient Roman fashion with the right arm outstretched, which was revived by d'Annunzio at Fiume. Their cry, "Eja, Eja, Alala," said to be the ancient Greek equivalent for "Hurrah," was adopted by the Italian aviation corps, on d'Annunzio's suggestion, during the war.

Their formation was at first confined to "manipoli," or sections, composed of from 20 to 30 men under a section leader. As the movement grew, Signor Mussolini expanded the organisation on ancient military lines. The "manipoli," or handfuls of men, were welded into groups of 100 under a centurion. The unit in every province became a cohort which might be any number of smaller groups. The commander in each region was styled a Consul. Over the Consuls was a Zone Inspector. The supreme military command was vested in a council of three.

During the recent operations which brought the Fascisti to Rome, 117,000 strong, the Supreme Council consisted of General Debono, a retired officer; Cesare Maria Devecchi, who was a captain during the war and is now an under-secretary at the Ministry of War in charge of soldiers' welfare work; and Italo Bollo, an ex-lieutenant.

Mussolini directed the general organisation and was its leading spirit, but he did not confine his labours to mere desk work and oratory. He took part in more than one battle with the Communists, fighting with as keen enthusiasm as the newest recruit.

At first the Fascisti were pitifully feeble compared to the Red forces around them. The new crusaders were for a time looked at askance, even by opponents of the Socialist movement. The Reds branded them as the agents of a new "Czarist" conspiracy for the social and industrial enslavement of Italy. They were denounced as sinister reactionaries. Their high ideals and unselfish devotion to duty were not fully realised in those early days of the

struggle against Bolshevism. Yet they kept stoutly on the rocky road to freedom, content to let the world judge them by results.

It was a battle of a pygmy against a giant.

The "Popolo d'Italia" changed from a Socialist paper to the organ of "ex-soldiers and producers." Mussolini's old paper, the "Avanti," continued to attack him viciously and the Fascisti in general. When the general election was held in 1919, a few months after Fascismo was launched, Mussolini ran for Parliament with Toscanini, the musician, and Marinetti, the Futurist painter, this trio being considered by the Fascisti representative of the new spirit in Italy.

Mussolini only received 5,000 votes, while Turati, the Socialist, was returned with over 100,000. The "Avanti" exclaimed after this defeat of the Fascisti: "The rotting corpse of the almost-deputy Mussolini has been found in the canal." Which, as Mussolini blandly pointed out to his friends, appeared to be untrue.

The defeat did not discourage him. He dismissed it as a "Socialist victory on paper" and went ahead enlisting Fascisti.

When the Fiume expedition became the great issue in Italy in September, 1919, the Fascisti acclaimed this "revolt of spirit against brute force," and threw their weight on the side of d'Annunzio. While the future of Fiume remained in the balance, they concentrated their efforts on supporting the poet who held the town. During 1920 perhaps half the Fascisti activity was devoted to him.

D'Annunzio finally victorious, the Fascisti again focused their attention on the fight against Communism, and went ahead perfecting their organisation and the machinery for mobilisation.

The Socialists had, through their lawlessness and methods of terrorism, alienated public sentiment in many places, the first symptoms of a healthier feeling being in the province of Emilia, then in Cremona, Mantua, Southern Venetia, and Umbria. Consequently their terrorist campaign was redoubled. The punishment meted out by Fascisti bands for local outrages incited them to fresh reprisals, and these were countered again by their enemies, so that in the turbulent north life—and death—ran in a vicious circle.

The Fascisti went about their grim work with a scornful calm. They hardly ever gave way to excesses even under extreme provocation. They meted out punishment with the inexorable demeanour of an executioner. Communist clubs, in which outrages had been planned, were burned to the ground. Communist assassins

died in street battles—sometimes in private. Miserable dupes of the Bolshevist agents were beaten and sent aching away.

The effects of the reaction against Socialism and Communism were seen at the spring elections in 1921, when the Fascisti obtained 32 seats—a great victory. Mussolini, who had only 5,000 votes before, was returned almost unanimously in Ferrara and Milan, both strong Socialist centres. The son of the blacksmith at Predappio, who ten years before had lived a hand-to-mouth existence, often working like a labourer to keep himself alive, found himself in the Chamber of Deputies at Rome, proclaiming the rights and aims of the Fascisti.

This was the real birth of Fascismo as a political party, although it was not formally organised as such until the Rome congress in November in the same year.

The crusade struggled on, receiving additional help, but comparatively slowly. The Government remained supine and almost obsequious at the feet of militant Socialism. Entire towns in the north such as Ancona, Livorno, Milan, and Bologna were in the grip of Communists. Political strikes were strangling the people. It was not until the murder of Giordano, a crippled soldier at Bologna, in November, 1921, that the first nation-wide impulse was given to the Fascisti movement purely as an antidote to Communism. It was, perhaps, the most striking of many examples of a sudden impetus due to a tragic reverse. Every time Fascisti died in defence of their faith, the flow of recruits was accelerated. The story of Bologna, therefore, is worth relating as an instance of this stimulus.

Bologna was perhaps the greatest hotbed of Bolshevism in Italy. Manufacturing interests had grown enormously during the war, and the number of working men had increased without a proportionate growth of the middle classes as in Milan and Turin, the two other great industrial centres. (In the elections in 1921 the Reds were defeated in Turin, and in Milan they only got in by about 3,000 majority out of a total vote of 140,000.)

In Bologna, the Communists won the elections, and as usual when a new municipal administration takes over, the Communist mayor-elect, Gnudi, wished to deliver his inaugural address from the balcony of the town hall on November 21. The Communists proposed to hold a great demonstration and to carry a monster red flag made especially for the occasion.

The Fascisti, who numbered only a few hundred, opposed this

and said that if the flag was carried there would be trouble. They finally compromised by agreeing to the Communists' showing one red flag from the town hall balcony during the mayor's speech, on condition no other flags were displayed there or elsewhere. The Communists broke this pact and their banner was raised over the famous Asinelli tower.

The Fascisti stormed the tower and removed the flag. While they were marching back in triumph they were shot at in the street. The people assembled in the square to hear the mayor's speech—the majority of them Communists—heard the shots, thought the Fascisti were attacking them, and bolted for cover towards the portico and courtyard of the town hall.

A Communist councillor who looked from the window of the council chamber saw the mob of Communists running towards the building, concluded they were Fascisti about to storm the chamber, and began flinging out hand grenades, with which he had thoughtfully provided himself in anticipation of arguments at the first council meeting. At the same time other Communist councillors rose from their seats, revolvers in hand, and began shooting down the minority.

Many people were killed and wounded in the square, and several minority councillors, recruited from the so-called "Blocco dell'Ordine," or "section of law and order," fell under the bullets of their opponents in the chamber, among them a crippled ex-soldier named Giordano, who was killed outright.

His death helped to create a distinct reaction throughout the country, and Fascismo enrolled many new volunteers. They included professional men, students, ex-soldiers, and not a few working men who had followed the Communist cause.

CHAPTER FIVE

FASCISTI MARTYRS

For nearly two years the Fascisti fought Bolshevism as small units scattered throughout Northern Italy.

They contrived to mobilise local expeditions for special purposes, but a local section of 5 to 20 men was the ordinary weapon for countering Communism.

It was not until January, 1921, that Fascismo became a definite military organisation capable of operations controlled by a central headquarters.

Before that time mere handfuls of men carried on a determined but unequal struggle, surrounded by hostile communities and branded by the Government as dangerous revolutionaries.

Such cities as Milan, Bologna, Ancona, and Leghorn were in the hands of all-Red municipal councils. Scores of smaller towns and villages were completely dominated by Communists. As soon as they came into power, through the manipulation of the elections, they followed the tactics of the Moscow machine in establishing Red Guards. These were the municipal employees. Firemen, police, and clerical staffs came under the influence of an inflated pay-roll and were loyal enough to their bread and butter.

In such centres the Fascisti were less than handfuls. They hardly existed. Ancona, which is a fair example, contained less than a dozen Black Shirts. Fano, an important fishing port on the Adriatic, had but one follower of Mussolini, who spent most of his time in hospital.

In March, 1919, there were only 75 Fascisti in Milan, and at the end of that year less than 1,000.

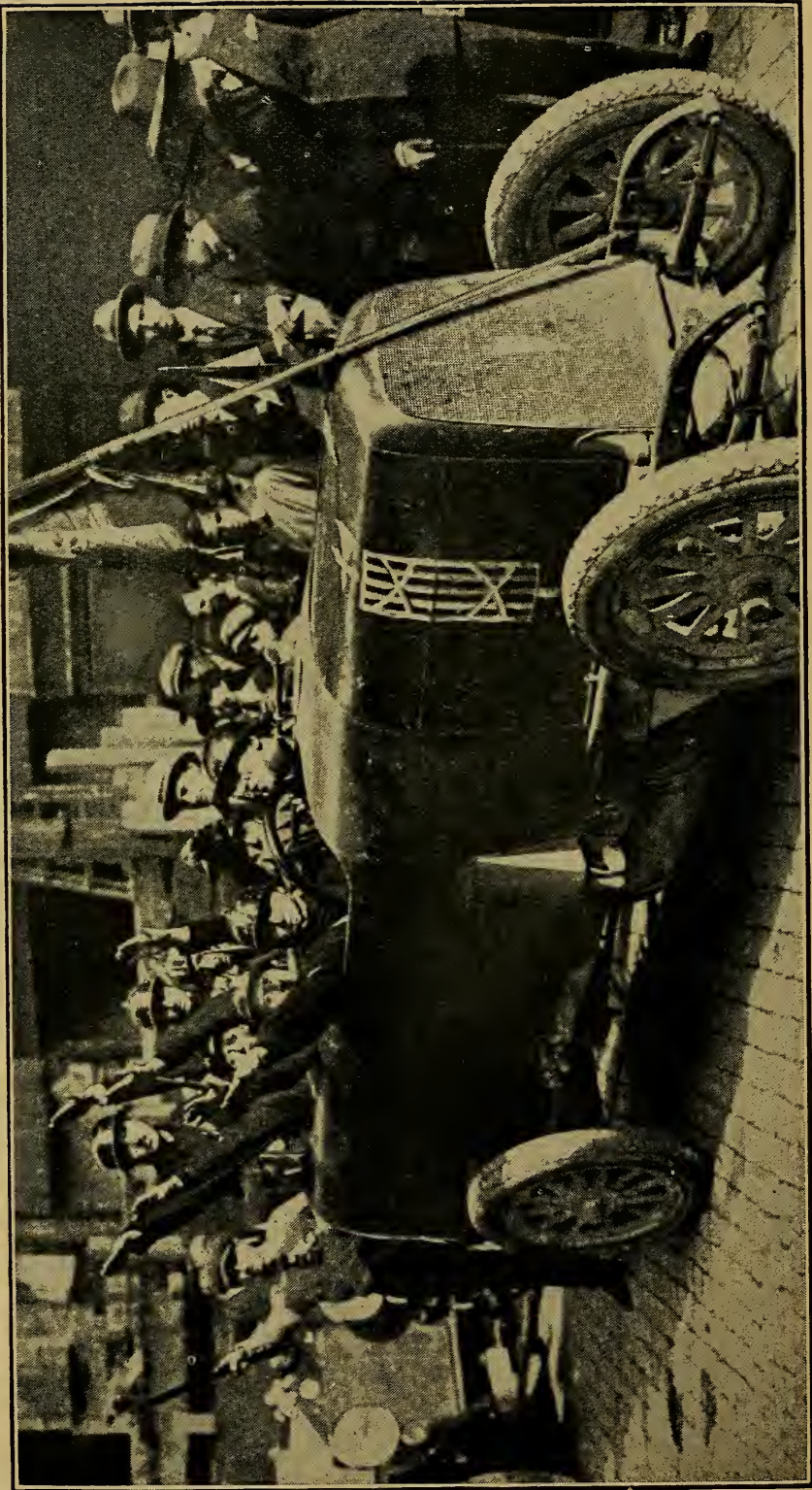
The almost imperceptible minorities in the Red strongholds were helpless. Their hour did not come until Fascismo created an army. Ancona will long remember the storming of the town by 32 valiant men, and its complete administration for more than a month by the Crusaders of the Black Shirt. In the rural districts the Crusade assumed a definite form against the Bolshevist seizure of land. The



TWO CHARACTERISTIC ASPECTS OF SIGNOR MUSSOLINI



BURNING COMMUNIST PAPERS IN THE STREETS OF ROME



FASCISTI STORM TROOPS IN ROME



FASCISTI TROOPS CHEERING THE KING IN FRONT OF THE ROYAL PALACE AT ROME



TYPICAL FASCISTI



FASCISTI IN LONDON SALUTE THE CENOTAPH

peasants had become infected with the creed that they owned the earth, and that landlords should starve.

They proceeded to practise what their leaders preached. Nearly all the land in Northern Italy is worked on the half-share system. The owner provides a house for the farmer, and the necessary implements, as well as money, for cultivation. The farmer sows and reaps and the crops are equally divided between them. Socialism taught the peasants to take everything and to give nothing.

In some places the farmers planted all the land and placed a line of Red flags down the middle, dividing their portion from that of the owner. They reaped their own crops, and let the remainder rot. In other districts they did not even sow the landlords' share of the fields.

When the land seizure was at its height the Red delegations went to some proprietors and demanded heavy fines for allowing them to keep their property, but in many places the Communists simply took it. If the owner resisted he was the victim of reprisals, often of a savage and barbarous character. In the Pollesine area of Southern Venetia a proprietor who resisted the confiscation of his estate awoke one morning to find the corpse of his daughter, which had been dragged from the grave in the village cemetery, lying on his doorstep.

Such acts helped eventually to hasten the downfall of Communism. In the Pollesine area the Fascisti, in the following year, won 60 out of 62 electoral districts. The Communists, still following the precepts of Moscow, secured the control of the harvesting machinery through their co-operative societies, and declared openly that they meant to ruin the bourgeois landowners.

Only the peasants' crops could be threshed. The peasants, interpreting the half-and-half policy in the Communist way, demanded payment in cash for their share in the live stock. When they received the money they allowed the beasts to perish for lack of water. In this way the entire district around Cremona was denuded of cattle and pigs.

Thus the Fascisti were faced with the problem of saving the agricultural districts. One of their first acts was to carry food and water to the beasts left to die in the fields. They went forth in handfuls. They had fierce encounters with bands of peasants who opposed their humane efforts with knives and pitchforks. Then they resolved to harvest the landowners' crops, believing that the latter had as much right to live as had the peasants.

Bands of Black Shirts marched into the Communist districts

and threshed the corn. The first time this was done was at Zola Predosa, a few miles from Bologna. The peasants rang the church bells and gathered together, with weapons. There were only a few Fascisti and a great many peasants. Threshing was stopped, and the machinery taken away in triumph.

The same night the owner of the machinery received a visit from the Fascisti, who demanded the names of the peasants involved in the affair.

"Why?" asked the owner.

"Because we intend to cut their heads off," said the Fascisti leader, politely. "We shall not leave Zola Predosa until their heads are off—unless the machinery is restored by 6 a.m. to-morrow. Moreover, you will meet us at 6 a.m. and go with us to their houses, so that we shall not make a mistake and cut off the wrong heads."

Naturally the Fascisti had no intention of putting their threat into effect, but it produced the desired result. Threshing was resumed the next day.

These battles of the harvesters were "individualist" acts initiated by small local groups of Fascisti, who did not have any powerful backing. They were law-breakers in the eyes of the authorities and deadly enemies of the strong Communist organisations.

Yet they went their way steadily, combating the forces of anarchy and trying to show the deluded peasantry that they were ruining themselves as well as their country. The courage of these young men cowed the Communists, even when the latter outnumbered them by 50 to 1. The knowledge that every threat they made was fulfilled kept down the counter-campaign of assassination which might have eventually wiped them out.

I can illustrate this by the case of Cesare Rossi, one of the earliest and most ardent Fascista, which may be taken as showing the Communist spirit in many parts of Northern Italy. Rossi is a surveyor who was entrusted by the Government with the task of building a village in the Romagna province which had been destroyed by an earthquake. He was head of the Fascisti of his district, who at that time numbered only 20. The district was completely Bolshevik. A thousand armed Reds were around him. His work took him to outlying points, and he frequently had to return alone at nightfall.

He contends that the only reason he is alive to-day is because the Communists knew he was a crack shot, and that if they shot at him, and missed, he would surely kill someone. If, on the other

hand, they shot and did not miss, one of his friends would as inevitably kill the assassin or one of his associates.

Northern Italy was full of Fascisti like Rossi, who went about their daily work in the position of men surrounded by wild beasts. Their activities never lessened for a day by this knowledge. Some of them died in defence of their country, but the remainder carried on.

I could give scores of incidents of the bravery and self-sacrifice of these youths. Here are a few shining examples which live in that record of heroism the Fascisti "Book of the Dead."

Giovanni Berta, a 19-year-old Fascista of Florence, challenged a group of Communists whom he found engaged in seditious propaganda in the street. They threw him into the Arno, and when he caught hold of the pier of a bridge, they beat his hands until he was obliged to let go. As he dropped into the water he shouted "Long live Italy!"

Franco Gozi, another lad, while participating in a street fight at Ferrara, refused to take cover though the Communists were shooting at him from windows on all sides, and he continued to return the fire with his revolvers until he fell dying with three bullet wounds. With his last breath he gasped, "Long live Fascismo!"

Amos Maramotti, who was killed in a Fascisti attack on the Communist Chamber of Labour at Turin, carried in his pocket a letter addressed to his mother, in which he said, "I am going out; perhaps to die, but it does not matter. Long live Italy. Long live Fascismo!"

Frequently Fascisti were hunted down and tortured. A group, while making a demonstration against the Bolsheviki at Sarzana, were shot at by Carabiniers, and thereupon retired rather than attack the forces of the Crown.

They found themselves caught between the fire of Communists and that of the Carabiniers. Four Fascisti were killed; the remainder fled into the country. Seventeen of these fugitives were put to death by the Communists. Some were burnt alive. Two were cut up into bits. One was first blinded with red-hot irons.

These atrocities caused a deep revulsion of feeling through the Sarzana district.

When the Fascisti grew strong enough to undertake punitive expeditions into the Red towns they literally seized Bolshevism by the throat. In these Communist centres war on society was openly directed against well-dressed persons obviously members of the hated bourgeois class.

Red drivers would not stop tramway-cars at appointed halting

places if they saw "white collar" travellers waiting to be taken up.

The Fascisti adopted the course of putting one of their number in plain clothes on the platform beside the driver. If the latter failed to stop for the usual reason, he received a terrific blow on the head. If he showed truculence, he found a Fascisti revolver pressed against his stomach.

In this way the receipts of the tramways gradually increased, and women of the middle classes no longer had to walk.

Political strikes were broken by detachments of the Fascisti in borrowed lorries or motor-cars paid for by their publicly subscribed funds. The Communist tactics in such cases were directed, of course, towards starving the people by paralysing the food supplies and the public services. The Fascisti sent their vans and cars into the country districts and collected eggs, live stock, bread and vegetables, and also collected a sufficient number of sullen, unwilling peasants and brought the lot into the nearest centre affected by the strike, where the peasants were forced to sell their wares at a fair price.

These anti-strike campaigns did not become successful on a large scale until after the Fascisti became a military organisation at the beginning of 1921, but even in the earlier days small communities, which would have suffered greatly from the Bolshevist form of local strike, were saved from destitution.

Thus an object-lesson was ever before them. Two kinds of freedom were displayed for their contemplation: one hung about with fine words, with chains underneath for binding them to Bolshevism; the other offered by men who asked no more than that workers gave to other classes of society the same chances as they desired for themselves.

CHAPTER SIX

CASTOR OIL FOR THE BOLSHEVIKS.

In their war against Bolshevism the Crusaders of the Black Shirt used many weapons. One of the most effective was castor oil.

As one youthful leader explained to me, it was not so much a weapon as a remedy. The Fascisti were constantly encountering acts of disloyalty which deserved punishment on the lower scale, and Signor Italo Balbo, who looks like a militant poet, but is nevertheless one of the veterans of Fascismo despite his 27 years, conceived the idea of purging society in this simple way.

He had to deal with the case of a man of nearly 60, who was guilty of propaganda against the State. The culprit was too old to be beaten. Signor Balbo had him forcibly fortified with a pint of castor oil, administered in two large tumblers by simply stopping his breath until he had to swallow or die. He was kept under restraint until the remedy had taken a firm hold on him and then sent back to his family.

Thereafter castor oil became a sovereign remedy for "Red madness." It was given to all breeds of Bolsheviks, from desperadoes recruited from the criminal classes to schoolmasters and "intellectuals" higher up in the movement to overthrow the kingdom.

The effect was unfailing. I am told that a "patient" never rendered himself liable to a second dose. When he emerged from his retirement, pale and haggard, he found himself an object of ridicule instead of a martyr. He was never quite the same man again. Fascisti would pass him by with an ironic inquiry as to the state of his health, and Communist accomplices had difficulty in expressing sympathy which did not betray a suggestion of amusement.

Ridicule thus became a powerful ally of the Crusaders of the Black Shirt. The psychologists at the head of the movement gauged exactly the mentality of their opponents, and where less subtle leaders might have relied mistakenly on brute force alone, they waged war with fine discrimination.

So potent has the influence of castor oil become, that it is now a formidable argument for suppressing various forms of disorder. The local Fascisti at Adria, in Venetia, have just issued an edict against drunkenness which prescribes this now familiar antidote for over-indulgence. Not only is the habitually drunken citizen to be dosed with castor oil, but the publican as well, if he sells intoxicants to unsober persons or to boys under 14. *Moreover, a bottle of castor oil is to be kept in every café*, exposed to plain view, as a warning to tipplers.

Only this week a Fascisti warning was issued to newspaper vendors who appeared to be unwilling to handle certain journals. In the biting, ominously polite language of which these Black Shirts are masters, the hawkers were reminded that certain remedies existed for the relief of persons who seemed to be sluggish and heavy-minded. For machinery which did not run smoothly there were lubricants. The Fascisti were ready to supply them free of charge, and even to oversee their administration in obstinate cases.

Throughout the Fascisti penal system there runs this same vein of sardonic humour, which appears to be more effective than a dull repetition of bloodcurdling threats. Even the deadliest reprisals have been prophesied in a seemingly lighthearted, almost frivolous manner. The Communist who found himself confronted by three or four smiling young men grew curiously cold and feeble. In tones of honeyed sweetness he would be invited forth to meet retribution. There is something mediæval in the way the coldly ferocious leaders of New Italy clothe a sinister purpose in courteous, almost caressing words.

In the later phases of militant Fascismo, many Communist mayors in small districts were persuaded into retirement by these Chesterfields in black shirts. A typical example was that of the Mayor of Fano, a little town 12 miles from Bo'ogna. He went to Bologna on a holiday, and was sitting in a café when several young Fascisti entered, greeted him politely, and asked :

"Are you the Socialist Mayor of ——? " naming another town in the neighbourhood.

"No," was the reply. "I am the Socialist Mayor of Fano."

"Oh, that is the same thing," said the Fascisti leader kindly. "Will you be good enough to step into the street? "

The mayor vigorously declined, whereupon the proprietor came up and said : "You had better go. You will be beaten anyway,

and if you stay here my place will be smashed up. So please move a little way off."

The mayor went out like a man in a dream, and was soundly trounced in the middle of the street. He went back to Fano and resigned.

Other Socialist-Communist mayors found themselves out of office before they knew what was happening. One of them would receive a Fascisti letter saying that of course he was aware that he was wholly unfit to be mayor, and that naturally he was expected to resign.

If the mayor took no notice, he received a second letter three or four days later, couched in the same direct but polite language.

This would be followed within a week by the arrival of a group of Fascisti—invariably from another district—usually in the middle of the night. The mayor would come down in his nightshirt to find a grim but smiling spokesman surrounded by other Black Shirts, wearing the business-like equipment of men on active service.

"We hear that you want to resign," says the spokesman.

"But, no," chatters the mayor.

"But, yes," insists the Fascista, "why, here is your resignation, already written out. Sign here, please."

The mayor signs and the resignation goes to the Government. In due course a Royal Commissioner is appointed by the Crown to administer the commune until the next election. In this way more than 500 mayors who had been put in office by Communist-controlled elections were displaced in a few weeks.

Ridicule has been the predominant element in many forms of Fascisti reprisals. The luckless secretary to a Communist deputy unwillingly started a new fashion in futurist adornment. His head was shaved and his skull painted with the Italian national colours. He was marched through the principal streets of Rome between two smiling Fascisti, preceded by a third who bore a banner reading: "My only pleasure in life is to shout on every possible occasion, 'Long live Italy!'"

This form of public penance was further enlivened in the case of another Communist. He, too, displayed the tri-colour of Italy on a shining pate, and the banner which led his little procession said:

"Every day and every hour I grow more and more patriotic!"

Wounds or a flogging would have given the victim a chance to invite sympathy. The Fascisti made him an object of derision, and

to this day he can be goaded to madness by a covert reference to the greatness of Coué.

There were, of course, more serious reprisals. Known murderers of Fascisti have themselves been killed. A very thorough secret service kept the Crusaders well informed of the culpability of Red organisations. In every district there was a black list—strangely accurate in every particular—of criminals and their misdeeds. Ambushes, concerted attacks on "manipoli" (sections), single assassinations, all had their place in this doomsday book.

Reprisals were of two kinds—against anti-patriotic organisations, and against individuals. The former consisted mainly of destroying the premises occupied by Communist clubs. The greater outrages against the Fascisti found an answer in the burning of houses in which lived the principal leaders. On occasions a specially mobilised column would fall upon a red-hot Bolshevik community in the night, and with unerring accuracy and marvellous swiftness devastate perhaps 20—on one occasion as many as 40—Bolshevik homes.

This was never decided upon wantonly or hastily. Every case was investigated and justified before action was taken.

The Fascisti did not invariably take the law into their own hands. It was a common practice to make a public example of Communists who were known to have committed crimes. The culprit would be arrested and hidden by the Black Shirts, who would then advertise a mass meeting. On the appointed day the hall or square designated would be filled with spectators. After several speeches the Fascisti chairman would have the culprit brought to the platform and exhibited while his crime was described. Then he would be handed over to two Carabinieri and taken to prison.

If his crime was not covered by the penal code, the Fascisti dealt with him summarily. In this way they administered beatings and castor oil for such disloyal acts as insulting soldiers, singing the "Red Flag," and speaking disrespectfully of the King. The Communists never knew when they were safe. Even in their most populous centres they were liable to be whisked away in the night and treated with great severity.

They stigmatised the Fascisti as law-breakers, and, illogically enough, demanded police protection while denouncing the police.

In the country districts a Fascisti raid, made by perhaps only five men, was an ever-present possibility, which excited as much foreboding as did an air raid in London during the war.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE FASCISTI ARMY AND ITS SECRET ORDERS

Fascismo became a centralised military organisation on January 6, 1921. The leaders realised that they must be able to operate in large numbers if the fight against Communism was to be successful.

A conference was held at Oneglia, at which General Gandolfo (who commanded troops adjoining the British sector of the Italian front), Italo Balbo, and the Marchese Perroni of Florence, perfected the scheme on ancient Roman lines which had been inspired by Signor Mussolini.

There were at this time about 100,000 Fascisti, all in Northern Italy, and chiefly in the provinces of Emilia, Romagna, Milan, Tuscany, and Umbria. A million Communists held this region when Fascismo was born, in March, 1919. By the end of 1919 the Fascisti numbered perhaps 1,000, mostly in Milan. During the next twelve months of Communism, they increased a hundredfold.

Signor Mussolini and his inner circle of friends now had a real fighting force which had been tested in units. They knew what they wanted. They realised that sooner or later they would have to march on Rome.

The military organisation was a marvel of completeness. I have seen the secret orders, never before made public, which lay down to the smallest detail the duties and obligations of the Black Shirt army.

Italy was divided into twelve zones. The supreme command was vested in a Headquarter Staff composed of three chiefs and a military secretary.

The fighting force, the "Principi," as distinct from the "Triarii," or reserve—also known as the second-line troops—follows closely the formation of the ancient legions.

The unit is the "squadra," declared to be "the first element of the Fascisti militia," and consists of from 15 to 20 men, commanded by a "Capo squadra."

3 Squadre form a Manipolo, under a Decurion.

3 Manipoli form a Centuria, under a Centurion.

3 Centurie form a Cohort, under a Seniore.

3 to 6 Cohorts form a Legion, under a Consul.

3 to 6 Legions form a Group of Legions, under a Group Commander.

All the Legions in a zone are under an inspector of zones.

12 Zones constitute the entire Militia.

The secret military handbook provides also for cohorts of cyclists, the maximum number of men in each being 200. A legion cannot have more than one cyclist cohort. Motor-cyclists are formed in units of manipoli.

Inspectors of zones are nominated by the General Staff, as are also the Consuls, but the latter must be proposed by the zone inspector in consultation with the zone staff. Commanders of cohorts are chosen by the zone inspectors. Consuls have the right to nominate the commanders of centurie and decurie.

The duties of the various commanders are very clearly defined.

The consul has the chief responsibility from the point of view of *moral*, because the solidity of the Fascisti militia is based entirely on the legion. He must know intimately and personally the commanders of cohorts and centurie under him. Commanders of cohorts must have deep knowledge of the various groups composing their force and of their dependability.

The commanders of centurie and manipoli " must have daily contact with their men ; they must know them thoroughly, develop their good qualities ; check any unjustifiable impulses on their part, and animate their faith and spirit. They are responsible for discipline, absolute obedience to orders, and the neatness and bearing of their men when in public."

The captains of squadre have even greater responsibilities.

" These must be the friends of the squadristi, and their authority must be fraternal. They must exercise the ascendancy which is easily obtained over a group of people of the same class. They must always have at least two-thirds of their men within call. They must ensure the absolute correctness of the rank and file even in private life."

The value of small units is repeatedly emphasised. They must be able to mobilise suddenly at a given place. A mobilisation officer is responsible for these arrangements and for special signals, "which, however, must never be the firing of shots."

Each *squadra* and *manipolo* has a fixed base.

The General Staff must be kept constantly informed of the forces at their disposal. Captains of *squadre* are required to send in each day a report of the men ready for active service, and these are tabulated by the inspector of zone, who forwards a detailed statement of military strength at least once a month to General Headquarters.

Emphasis is placed on the value of rapid transport. Railways, tramway-cars, motor-cars, lorries, bicycles are to be used, but never requisitioned without the authority of the political heads of the departments concerned, or, in a case of special urgency, by the commander of a legion.

The individual salute is in the Roman fashion, by raising the right arm and looking towards the person saluted. A collective salute is given in the same way, except that the right or left arm is raised, according to the position of the superior officer. A voice salute is given only to Signor Mussolini, the three military chiefs, and the Secretary-General of the Fascisti. Flags are raised and waved when passing these high officials.

"It is not necessary to exchange salutes between individuals," states the military handbook, "but as a sign of camaraderie it is a good habit, and the inferior must always salute the superior. . . . The Fascisti salute both in the Army and the Navy."

Other disciplinary orders to the Fascisti, which were not made public until just before the *coup d'état*, breathe throughout a lofty and patriotic spirit. They emphasise over and over again the glory of self-sacrifice and the unflinching acceptance of duty to country before everything else.

"The Fascisti Party is always a militia. The Fascisti militia is at the service of God and of our Italian country. Every soldier must serve Italy with purity, pervaded by a profound mysticism, sustained by an unshakable faith, dominated by an inflexible will, as disdainful of opportunism and prudence as he is of cowardice, convinced of his holy call to save his great common mother Italy, and to give her strength and purity.

"The Fascisti soldier knows only duty. He has no rights, save that of being allowed to perform his duty, and duty is his only joy.

"He has a moral code of his own. The usual moral code, which is prismatic, with many facets, with many meshes, is of no use to him. Honour is for him what it was for the ancient knights, a law which strives though it never reaches the apex of perfection. It must be outside, as it is always above the written or formal code.

"Absolute honour is one of the laws of our discipline.

"The Fascisti militia has no place for the impure, for the unworthy, for traitors.

"The Black Shirt must be worn with pride and love. At all public manifestations the Fascisti must give the impression that they are the first bulwark of the nation and of being, as they are, the purest and highest force in Italy, a force that asks nothing of anyone and that knows how to die daily for its country.

"The heads, military as well as political, have on their shoulders the greatest responsibility. Whoever to-day desires to build up a new hierarchy which will be the hierarchy of the Italy of to-morrow must have the temper of a feudal chief, the will of a dominator, and a heart as large as the heart of Italy. He must be a master of sacrifice even before he is a master of passion and of arms.

"The chief (and more so the higher heads) must teach by example. He has the right and duty to use violence on his men. But he will never be able to carry out his duty if he has not inspired love, because only love engenders sacrifice."

Volunteers must be at least 17 years of age, but provision is made for "training battalions" composed of youths between the ages of 15 and 17, who go through a kind of novitiate until they can be taken into the active organisation.

A man cannot join the Fascisti and elect to serve in the "Triarii" or reserve instead of the fighting line. He must put himself entirely in the hands of his superiors, who decide whether he is to become a Black Shirt, liable to be called upon at any time for dangerous and difficult duties, or a non-combatant save in times of great emergency. Thus there is no place for shirkers who would like to wear the uniform without incurring the risks it involves.

No more Fascisti are to be enlisted. Signor Mussolini and his circle are convinced that the present force is adequate. Moreover, it is to be subjected to a drastic process of "weeding." Fascismo does not want the men who held aloof until they saw the movement would be a success. Hundreds who were Socialists when they thought Socialism was victorious have rushed to the banners of the Fascisti since Socialism was overthrown.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HOW THE FASCISTI CLEANED UP "RED" TOWNS

Communism began to feel the pressure of the Fascisti seriously when the military machine inspired by Signor Mussolini was put in motion.

The Reds tried mistakenly to resist it. The first military demonstration, which took place in September, 1921, on the occasion of the Dante festival at Ravenna, provoked a Communist attack.

Ten cohorts from Ferrara and Bologna districts, formed into two legions, left their mobilisation places on September 9 and arrived at Ravenna three days later. Some of the units marched nearly 100 miles in oppressive heat.

The Government, now alarmed by this revelation of independent militarism, sent two regiments of artillery to the outskirts of Ravenna to overawe the Fascisti, who marched into the town with field guns trained on them. Communists fired at them from hiding places, and several Black Shirts were killed. That night the Fascisti destroyed several Communist clubs and burned portraits of Lenin in the street.

From that time onward, events moved with ever-increasing swiftness. The tide had actually turned against Socialism, but its influence was in many places still all-powerful. The Fascisti redoubled their efforts to break local Red monopolies, to kill political strikes, and to put down attacks on peasants who were weary of the yoke of Communism and wanted peace.

The period of eighteen months which elapsed between the organisation of Fascismo as a military force and the last great struggle with the Socialists—the breaking of the general strike in August last—was filled with dramatic incidents. The outstanding feature, however, was the steady rise to power of the Fascisti through taking four towns which had been nerve centres of Bolshevism.

Each town was, in fact, a distinct step towards victory. If you ask a Fascista to name the mile posts on the last lap of the road which led to Rome, he will name them as Ferrara, Bologna,

Ravenna, and Genoa. Ancona and Parma were later in the list of captured cities.

Ferrara was occupied in May of this year as a direct challenge to the Government.

In the provinces of both Ravenna and Ferrara, Socialist co-operative societies had enjoyed great power, and when there were signs of reaction against their terrorist policy they sought to coerce the workers by making the Government cancel an appropriation for local works, thereby causing widespread unemployment.

The Fascisti decided, as one of their leaders expressed it to me, "that it was up to them to protect the workers."

They descended so swiftly that everyone was taken by surprise. Little groups converged upon the town in the night from all points, by motor-car and bicycle, on foot, and in barges on the river. They occupied the old castle and posted their pickets in the streets. Ferrara awoke to find 5,000 Black Shirts holding the Government by the throat and 58,000 other mobilised workmen supporting them.

Signor Italo Balbo, the leader of this enterprise (now one of the Supreme Council), asked to see the Prefect. The Prefect refused to admit him.

Signor Balbo went to the prefecture with 50 Fascisti. He stationed them in the corridor, with instructions to begin shooting if he did not reappear within ten minutes, and walked blandly into the Prefect's room.

"I am the master of this town," said Signor Balbo, "and I will give you proof of the fact. This afternoon there will be no water, no gas, no electric light. You will telegraph to the Government immediately, advising them to resume these public works."

Signor Balbo was a true prophet. There was no water, no gas, no electric light that afternoon. Reservoirs had previously been filled with water for the Fascisti, so that each man had a litre a day. The Prefect sent a burning message to Rome, and almost immediately word came back that the appropriation for public works in the district had been restored.

The Black Shirts slept for three nights in the streets of Ferrara, and then returned quietly home.

This was the first milestone on the last lap to victory. The working men realised that Fascismo was not against them when what they wanted was right. So all the workers in Ferrara joined the movement.

Next came Bologna.

Owing to the fact that all the workers in Ferrara had become Fascisti, there were not enough jobs on the public works for everybody; while in Bologna, which was still largely a Communist centre, there was more work than workers, for the Communists loved idleness. Therefore the Fascisti said they would take the unemployed from Ferrara and find them work in Bologna.

Signor Mori, the Prefect of Bologna, issued an order forbidding the importation of labour from another province.

"You refuse?" said the Fascisti. "Very good, we will bring them ourselves and put them to work."

They occupied Bologna, 50,000 strong, including the local units. They observed the same rigid discipline and maintained the same perfect order. The Prefect, who had been sent there after the riot in which Giordano, the ex-soldier, had been killed, revoked permits for the carrying of arms, and forbade the transport of motor-lorries through the streets.

It did not matter. The Fascisti ran the town. They ran it completely. They replaced missing Communist employees by Fascisti, and put up notices in public places warning the absentees that unless they returned to work by a given time they would be banished permanently, and killed if they dared come back. Many Communist strikers were routed out from their homes and forced to work under guard.

There was a strong Fascisti element in Bologna, but the district round about was still largely Red. Bologna lived in peace and security under this strange variation of martial law. The Fascisti took turns in serving as a loyal garrison, one detachment from a distance being relieved at regular intervals by another.

Bologna was another step forward. The Fascisti proved that loyalists could completely run a town even if the Communists declared a general strike. For the first time Fascisti workmen's organisations were recognised by the Government.

About this time the President of the Chamber of Deputies at Rome made himself an intermediary for peace between the Fascisti and the Communists, and a pact was actually arrived at whereby they declared they would cease violence toward each other. The Reds broke this truce, however, and Fascisti were beaten in many places, especially at Ravenna, where one of them died from his injuries.

So the Fascisti occupied Ravenna.

A force of 7,000 Black Shirts marched in for the purpose of

inflicting reprisals. The public services were not interfered with. A very accurate "black list" led the local Fascisti to the right places and some 40 houses occupied by notorious Communist leaders were destroyed. The town was occupied for three days.

Within three weeks 20,000 Fascisti mobilised at Sarzana, and descended on Genoa. The dockers there were in the grip of Communism. No man was allowed to work who was not inscribed in its register. Prices were higher in Genoa than anywhere else in Italy.

The Fascisti occupied the municipal offices and shattered the Red monopoly. They founded the first Fascisti trades union—another step on the road to victory.

This brought them to the last great crisis.

The Communists determined to break them. Their deputies protested in Parliament that the Fascisti would not allow them to go back to their constituencies. This was quite true. Bombacchi, the Communist representative for Bologna, was unwise enough to ignore this injunction, and the Fascisti found him at dinner in a café in the town. He was forced to hide behind a wood pile in the kitchen, wearing a chef's cap, until able to escape from the town disguised as a policeman.

"You must crush the Fascisti," demanded the Communists in Parliament.

The Government gave evasive replies.

Thereupon the Socialists secretly organised a general strike throughout Italy which was to be a supreme test of strength. They were confident they could show the country that they were still predominant.

The strike was to begin at midnight on July 31. Every worker in the kingdom was to leave his post. You know the effect they meant to produce: no light, heat, or water; no trains, tramway-cars, or boats; no food supplies to be moved or sold; no commerce; complete paralysis of the nation, in the way the Communists dream of as finally subjugating all other interests to their own.

When Signor Mussolini heard of this threat he exulted openly.

"That is exactly what we want," he said. "Let them strike, and we will give Communism its deathblow. We are ready."

And so, while the Government shivered and the leaders of the Red Terror plotted together, the Knights of the Black Shirt calmly gathered for the final struggle.

Freedom was at last in sight.

CHAPTER NINE

THE CRUSHING OF THE COMMUNISTS' GENERAL STRIKE

When the Communists declared a general strike to begin at midnight on July 31 last, in a desperate effort to crush the Fascisti movement, Signor Mussolini announced that he would give the Government 48 hours to suppress it.

"If the Government does not end the strike the Fascisti will," he said to 20,000 loyalists at Sarzano, after the occupation of Genoa.

The Communist deputies in Parliament issued strike notices to their constituencies and proceeded to dig themselves in. Not one of them dared go back to the district he represented and take part in the struggle. Some of them were so afraid of personal harm that they ate and slept in the Parliament building here, and never ventured outside till the crisis was over.

When the morning of August 1 came, Italy was idle. From the Communist point of view the strike was a success, so far as the abstention of workers was concerned. But this strike differed from preceding ones in one important way.

Hitherto the public had been afraid to try to carry on unaided, with Red Guards on duty and the forces of the Government maintaining an attitude of harmful neutrality. This time the much despised middle classes found support and encouragement in the militant Fascisti.

During the first 48 hours, the time limit which Signor Mussolini gave the Government in which to exert its authority, the Fascisti merely tried to paralyse the strike movement.

In certain all-Red centres, like Ancona, they were powerless, for the Communists completely dominated the town. Elsewhere, in the Bolshevik-ridden north, they turned out in "squadre" and "manipoli" with their revolvers and loaded sticks, and laboured to maintain public services.

Shopkeepers for the first time did not put up their shutters, but kept open for business, knowing there were Fascisti patrols in the street to prevent their windows from being broken. The Fascisti

inaugurated services of motor-lorries—paid in every case out of funds raised by public subscription—and kept supplies of food and fuel flowing into hungry communities.

They commandeered Red workers for the tramway services and for some of the railway trains ; municipal light plants were guarded and maintained in operation. Telephone and telegraph communications received constant attention ; in fact, there was not a branch of the public services which they did not supervise and endeavour to protect from paralysis.

Street battles were of constant occurrence, especially in centres where the Communists had organised a kind of counter Fascisti, which they called the " Red Arditi." But from the very beginning of the strike, the followers of Signor Mussolini exerted a powerful moral effect on the population of towns and rural districts, and their influence increased daily.

The storming of Ancona by 32 Fascisti was undoubtedly the most stimulating incident of the strike. For sheer courage and determination in the face of overwhelming odds, the feat accomplished by this little band has seldom been equalled. The fall of Ancona was practically the end of militant Communism.

A surveyor named Cesare Rossi, whom I mentioned earlier in this narrative of the Fascisti movement, had been released from prison after five months' confinement on charges arising out of his activities against the Communists in the Ancona area. He returned to his home at Fano, 12 miles from Ancona, only a few days before the general strike began.

He was standing in front of his house on the morning of August 1 when several other Fascisti passed, going in the direction of Ancona. Signor Rossi joined them as their leader, and they were reinforced by others, so that there were just 32 of them when they approached the seaport.

The Reds were in complete possession of Ancona. They boasted of having 10,000 " Communist Arditi " in the town, ready to resist any attack by the Fascisti. Shops were shut, people could not buy food or medicine. Red Guards held all the municipal services, and a reign of terror was actually in force.

Signor Rossi's little band arrived at the central railway station and found about 200 Red Guards assembled in the square outside. The Fascisti had only revolvers, but they opened fire without hesitation and cleared the square.

Then they advanced slowly towards the centre of the town, driving

the Communists before them. They stopped long enough to sack several Communist clubs, from the windows of which they had been fired upon. Here they found supplies of hand grenades, which they hung around their black shirts, and then continued their advance.

Ancona is a hilly town, the main street lying in a valley and the suburbs rising on either side. The 32 Fascisti found themselves looking up a long, deserted thoroughfare, at the farther end of which was a barricade, while from the windows of the locked house snipers kept up a steady fire. Signor Rossi formed his men up in six "waves," with intervals of 150 feet between them, and they stormed the barricade, flinging hand grenades as they went.

It was a dangerous, doubtful venture, and even now Signor Rossi cannot understand how he and his comrades came through alive. They were absolutely alone, without hope of reinforcements. At any moment they might be cut off and exterminated.

The sheer loneliness of their plight might well have shaken the stoutest heart. The silence was only broken by the sharp crack of revolvers and the heavier crash of bursting grenades amid a shower of splintered glass. Once or twice Signor Rossi thought he heard a faint smothered cry of encouragement from the beleaguered houses where women and children, sick with terror, were awaiting the outcome of the battle.

Gradually the Reds fell back into the suburbs. Suddenly, from one cottage, where lived a widow with her two daughters and the photographs of two sons killed in the war, was thrust with fluttering hands the Italian flag. It drooped over the pavement, and Signor Rossi confesses that when he saw it he could not keep back his tears.

The valiant 32 held Ancona. They held it for three days, sleepless and constantly on patrol, until reinforcements came. Signor Rossi posted notices forbidding any man to appear in the streets. His men seized motor-lorries, and in squads of two and three kept dashing incessantly through the town, up one thoroughfare and down another, firing at every man they saw who did not wear a black shirt.

On the third day they were relieved by a column of 10,000 Fascisti from Bologna and Perugia, including the famous "La Disperatissima," perhaps the most reckless unit in a region which has yielded many daring bands. Came also the grim "Satana" squadristi from Perugia, whose motto, roughly translated into English, is, "I don't give a damn." The wounded members of the "Satana" even displayed this motto written on their bandages.

The Fascisti ran Ancona for a month. They supervised the collection and butchering of animals for the meat market ; they collected eggs and milk which were distributed daily to the hospitals ; scoured the surrounding farms for poultry and other provisions, which were sold at fair prices ; ran the electric power station, the port, and the tramway-cars until the workmen were obliged to come back and admit their defeat.

They organised punitive expeditions of four and five men in motor-cars to hunt down the leading Communists, who had fled into the hills and were burning and pillaging farms. These men were rounded up and handed over to the judicial authorities.

You may get a further insight into the character of Cesare Rossi from the incident of the duel which did not take place. During the first day of fighting in Ancona he went to the barracks of the Bersaglieri regiment quartered there and pointed out to the colonel that his men had only revolvers. Carbines were accordingly lent to them.

Another officer denounced the colonel to the War Office. Signor Rossi slapped his face in public. The officer challenged him to a duel. Signor Rossi replied cheerfully, stipulating the conditions, which, as the challenged party, he had the right to do. He insisted that they be given two loaded revolvers each and placed in a locked courtyard not more than 50 feet apart, where they were to fire until one or the other was dead. The duel did not take place.

While Ancona was still the hostage of 32 loyal men, the 48 hours' ultimatum given by Signor Mussolini to the Government expired. The general strike was still on, and no strong measures had been taken to end it. Thereupon the Fascisti abandoned their tactics of merely trying to maintain the public services and set out to smash it.

The Communists gave tongue loudly, and called on the world to witness that they were being persecuted by lawless, reactionary methods. The Fascisti went grimly ahead, shooting, bombing, flogging—wherever they found the militant Reds trying to keep their grip on the nation by acts of violence. Gradually the strike weakened as the public rallied in increasing numbers to Signor Mussolini's crusade.

Signor Italo Balbo, that youthful leader of militant Fascismo, who, although only 27, is to-day perhaps the most powerful man in Italy next to Signor Mussolini, for he is virtually commander-in-chief of the Black Shirts, went into Parma with a detachment of

Fascisti. For the first time the Church and the Crusaders of the Black Shirt met officially. The bishop, who comes of an old military family, was saluted by a kind of guard of honour, which was covered with medals for valour in the war.

Incidents of this kind accelerated the collapse of the strike. It dwindled steadily and died in obscurity. On its tombstone might be written the word "Ancona."

It is a pity that the complete record of these historic events has not been preserved. The Fascisti had no time to record them. What could be more touching and beautiful than the scene which was witnessed in every Red-infested town when it had been cleansed by the Crusaders of the Black Shirt?

They were drawn up in a hollow square with their battle flags, and the commander called the roll. It included the names of all the Fascisti who had died in action. As the name of each fallen hero was spoken all the Crusaders answered "Here!" And when the roll was complete the second in command saluted and said in a loud voice: "All present."

In their comrades the dead yet live, and by their example keep steadfast the faith which has brought Italy out of bondage.

CHAPTER TEN

THE FALL OF A COWARD GOVERNMENT

Several important events, following the collapse of the general strike in August, helped to hasten the *coup d'état* which made Signor Mussolini, now Prime Minister, the master of Italy.

The episode of the Trentino in September gave clear proof that in truth there were two Governments in Italy, one described by the Fascisti as "the fictitious Government at Rome under Signor Facta," and the militant organisation dominated by Mussolini.

In the opinion of the Fascisti, the Trentino had not been properly Italianised. The Italian population of this former Austrian province was in the minority, but it was a strong minority. It had not a single Italian school, and the King's bust was not displayed in the existing schools as elsewhere throughout the kingdom. Ex-Austrian gendarmes still constituted the police force.

The Fascisti marched into the Trentino, demanded the resignation of the commissioner and the establishment of Italian police units, and the display of national emblems in public buildings. All of which was done.

At this time the energies of the Fascisti chiefs were concentrated on preparing the *coup d'état* which would give them the Government at Rome. The enemies of Fascismo tried to split the organisation by forcing a definite statement of its policy, more especially with regard to the Monarchy, hoping that the Republican element in Signor Mussolini's army would demand the proclamation of a Republic.

Signor Mussolini himself had shown a tendency toward a Republican policy in the early days of the movement. This was abandoned. In an historic speech at Padua he countered his enemies and consolidated the political factions of Fascisti by accepting, as one of his lieutenants phrased it for me, "the monarchical traditions of Italy." The King and the dynasty were to be maintained.

The details of the final military campaign which was to overthrow the existing Government were settled at a meeting of the leaders

under Signor Mussolini at Milan on October 6. The plan then was that General Fara and General Ceccherini, two of the most popular officers in Italy, were to lead two columns of Fascisti which would converge on Rome. The generals were to wear ordinary service uniform with the black shirt and their decorations.

Another military conference was held at Florence on October 15. Signor Mussolini went through the militant north with the slogan "We must have the State!" He made speeches at Udine, Cremona, and Milan, and then went to Naples, where the emotional southerners rallied to his cause.

The Naples congress of Fascisti on October 24 was practically an ultimatum to Rome. It was also a marvellous demonstration of loyalty. Nearly 40,000 Black Shirts and 50,000 organised workmen marched through the streets, cheered by half a million spectators.

A conference between Signor Mussolini and his chiefs was held the next night at the Hotel Vesuvius in Naples, at which it was decided to open negotiations with the Government for the transfer of its powers to the Fascisti within 48 hours, failing which the Principi legions would march on the capital and take it by force. Signor Mussolini demanded six ministries and the control of the Air Force. He did not, curiously enough, ask for the Ministry of the Interior.

It seems obvious that a Fascisti Minister of the Interior would find himself in an untenable position if called upon to suppress Fascisti activities of the kind which had been necessary during the anti-Bolshevist campaign.

Signor Mussolini went to Rome next day, but the Government refused to yield.

Within 24 hours general mobilisation of the militant Fascisti was begun. The Black Shirts, assembled at Naples, had been told to go back to their homes and await orders. The plan of campaign, perfected by the Supreme Military Council (General Debono, Signor Devecchi, and Signor Italo Balbo), included a time-table worked out to the smallest detail, which enabled a swift and thorough concentration, beginning in the night, to be made before counter-measures could be taken by the authorities.

The crisis was hastened unexpectedly by a mistake in the mobilisation order sent to Tuscany, in consequence of which the Fascisti gathered openly instead of secretly as elsewhere.

Mobilisation began on the night of October 27. Throughout the provinces in the north the Fascisti quietly occupied Government buildings, prefectural and municipal offices, posts and telegraphs,

telephone exchanges, railway stations, and many of the police barracks. By next morning they were moving on the first three points of concentration, under the direction of General Fara, a hero of the African war against Turkey. The Supreme Council of three remained at their general headquarters at Perugia.

Black Shirts from Umbria, Romagna, and Tuscany, under Lieut. Iglioni, a war veteran with six wounds, concentrated first at Foligno, an important railway junction, and then moved to Monterotondo, 20 miles north of Rome.

Men from the Abruzzi came down from their mountain homes and gathered near Tivoli, about the same distance from Rome on the north-east of the capital, under Signor Bottas.

Fascisti units from Milan, Genoa, Bologna, and the north-west generally moved down the sea-coast to Santa Marinella, a little port near Civita Vecchia, where Signor Pollastrini was in command.

Thus Rome was surrounded on three sides by an army of nearly 120,000 men, perfectly organised and disciplined and ready to fight.

I am asked to emphasise the fact that this converging movement was one of small units, not of large military bodies. Squadre and manipoli simply met at their usual rendezvous and made their way direct to the mobilisation centre. They travelled by train, motor-car, and lorry. They were equipped with carbines, revolvers, and trench helmets.

The Government remained helpless and incredulous to the end. When, too late, the magnitude and the weight of the Fascisti machine was realised, a proclamation was drawn up declaring martial law. Preparations were made hurriedly for the defence of Rome which inspired derision rather than confidence.

Barbed wire was erected around the city, and for the first time within the memory of the present generation the ancient gates were closed. Guns were mounted on the walls. The garrison was under arms. There was something reminiscent of Chinese warfare in these spasmodic and futile efforts to overawe the Fascisti.

Then the King saved the day. He refused to sign the edict establishing martial law. Instead, he telephoned to Signor Mussolini, who was at Milan calmly awaiting the outcome of the *coup d'état*, and asked him to come to Rome. Two royal motor-cars were sent to meet him at Civita Vecchia, then the terminus of the northern railway, the line between that port and Rome having been destroyed. The founder of the Fascisti entered the capital as a conqueror.

The people of Rome awaited the dénouement of this historic struggle with mixed feelings. Wild rumours were current as to the imminence of a campaign of pillage and bloodshed. It was feared that the triumphant Fascisti would destroy the local Socialist working-class quarter. Relief at the collapse of a Government which had failed to maintain order was diluted by uncertainty as to the intentions of the new masters of Italy.

Signor Mussolini proved the groundlessness of their fears. No armed force ever marched through a city with more scrupulous regard for life and property, or showed more perfect obedience to its leaders.

The three columns of Fascisti assembled at the Villa Borghese, on the north of the city, just outside the walls. There were 117,000 in all, of whom 70,000 were Black Shirts of the first line troops.

For seven hours they defiled before the impressive Victor Emmanuel Memorial, the greatest modern monument in Rome, and as they passed the Centurie deposited their palms of victory on the tomb of Italy's Unknown Warrior.

It was in striking contrast with their march of less than a year before, when 30,000 men, gathered for the Fascisti congress, gave the surprised and silent Romans their first close view of the Crusade of the Black Shirt. Rome had never been greatly troubled by Bolshevism nor thrilled by Fascismo. Its attitude was rather one of curiosity and amusement.

The Fascisti who marched in November, 1921, accustomed as they were to the people in their own districts standing with bared heads as the black triangular *galiardetti* (the flags which are a memorial to the Fascisti dead) passed by, could not understand why the Romans did not do likewise. They resented the half-sneers with which the populace regarded "these provincials."

It was different in October. The people as well as the King saluted them. Not the least remarkable thing about the entry into Rome was the perfect staff work which moved the army without a hitch. As the units finished their triumphal march they went to the railway station, where trains were waiting to take them home. Half the Fascisti army had left Rome the same night, and 40 per cent. of the remainder entrained next morning.

Signor Mussolini had won his three and a half years' struggle against the Red Terror. He was now the dictator of Italy.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WAR ON WASTE AND THE LIMPETS

This is a time of great tribulation in Government Ministries and other organisations supported by public funds. Signor Mussolini, the Prime Minister, has declared war on the limpets.

He has begun a campaign against slackness and inefficiency with the same ruthlessness as he showed in putting down Bolshevism. His terrible eyes sweep the overburdened pay-rolls with uncanny accuracy, and the silken smoothness of his inquiring voice as it echoes through the dusty recesses of the Civil Service sends a shudder down the backs of those State servants who have hitherto looked upon hard work as a very remote catastrophe.

"Make good or get out!" is the brutal significance of Signor Mussolini's first sermon to the limpets.

The first morning after he formed his Cabinet he was at his desk in the Home Office before 9 o'clock. He rang up each Minister in turn and ordered him to hold a roll-call of his staff immediately, and to note all absentees who had not appeared in their appointed places by the time the hour had struck. The delinquents were to be reprimanded severely, and warned that a second dereliction without an adequate excuse would ensure immediate dismissal.

I am told there were some painful and unusual scenes. Elderly clerks and heads of departmental sections who were in the habit of arriving for duty without haste, perhaps half an hour late, perhaps more, found themselves confronting a crisis which was little less formidable to them than the Day of Judgment. Worshippers of Mussolini who never heard of alarm clocks began to wonder whether, after all, their hero was a god, or merely an unpleasant person with sordid ideas.

Even the most zealous supporters of the new régime became more than a little anxious. It was evident that the first Crusader of the Black Shirt would stand no nonsense. A somewhat bleak atmosphere began to pervade the Ministries, where before all was serene and comfortable, and one could wait for closing time with an easy conscience.

The limpets never felt safe. They heard of a tragic little scene in which a solid bureaucrat of the old type met New Italy face to face and was pilloried in public, and it was evident that at any moment of the official day their master—who might be an angel of liberty, but incontestably was a destroying angel for all that—would appear on the threshold, a dreadful portent clothed in the smartest of morning coats and glistening boots, and ask them if they were quite well.

That was what happened to the solid bureaucrat when he approached his barricade of State papers one morning, somewhat after the appointed hour.

As he came up to the florid portals of the Ministry, where a porter in gold embroidered coat and cocked hat stood with his silver mace of office, Signor Mussolini suddenly emerged. The official gasped as though the devil himself had shot up through a trapdoor in the marble floor.

The porter performed one of those acrobatic bows which are the perquisite of greatness. Signor Mussolini stopped the official, and smiled one of his dreadful smiles.

“I regret, signor, that you are not in good health.”

The official reassured him nervously.

“Your Excellency must be mistaken. I am perfectly well.”

“On the contrary,” replied Signor Mussolini, still with the smile of doom, “it is evident that you are recovering from a severe illness.”

The puzzled official shook his head.

“I assure your Excellency that you must mistake me for someone else.”

Signor Mussolini's smile faded, and his eyes hardened. He struck his clenched fist on his open palm with a report like the crack of a whip.

“In that case,” he said, in a voice vibrating with anger, “be good enough to explain why you are only entering your office at 11 o'clock, when the hour for beginning work is 9 o'clock. Acerbo (to his companion), make a note of the signor's name. And you, signor, go to your office, and wait my further decision in your case.”

Off went the haggard delinquent. Decidedly this new head of affairs was a rude, if not an ill-bred man. Fancy expecting an official of 15 years' seniority to follow the clock like a junior clerk, and speaking in that way before a porter and a chauffeur!

And Signor Mussolini, as he jumped into his racing car and took the wheel, looked as black as a thunder cloud, and his comment

on the incident was by this time a familiar one. "Imagine trying to build up a new Italy with material like that! Oh, there will have to be a lot of weeding out."

The spiritual awakening which has prompted Italians of all classes to offer voluntary work without pay for their country's good has touched the Ministries as well as State-owned industries, but the old-fashioned type of easy-going Civil servant who clings to traditional red-tape routine persists, and is inclined to consider the new era from a detached point of view. He endorses it while continuing to approve of machinery run on a low gear.

"Speeding up" sickens him, but speeded up he has been, and if the pace is too swift he will have to fall out.

Signor Mussolini practises what he preaches—work, early and late. His average day would appal the denizens of Whitehall; it has appalled their counterparts in Rome. He usually begins at 6 a.m., with his secretaries, and is at his office by 8. There he goes through an enormous volume of work, sees innumerable people—all to the point—without wasting a word or a minute.

At 11 o'clock he may decide to rush away in his high-powered car to Professor della Santa's academy for an hour's strenuous sword or sabre play. But it is never safe for the Ministries to assume that he has left them for even so long. As likely as not he may be hovering in the immediate background. It is not prudent to take chances.

He eats a hearty luncheon, and is back again at 1 o'clock. He may stay until long after dinner, dealing with the innumerable affairs which demand his personal attention. He has no time for social duties. He has not even time to deal with all his correspondence. On an average 10,000 letters arrive for him daily, and his secretaries find it impossible to deal with them all fully and still keep abreast of their work.

Signor Mussolini has let it be known that he expects from every Government employee as high a standard of conduct and efficiency as is demanded by every private firm. In fact, he expects a higher standard, since he believes that the Government should set an example for others. A clerk in a bank or business house who invariably is late at the office does not survive; therefore why should the Government tolerate it?

They must not only be in time but really work as well. No more shuffling to evade responsibility; no more interminable passing and re-passing of documents from one water-tight compartment to another merely to postpone a decision.

The old theory was that a man who secured a niche in the Government organisation was safe for life, provided he did not commit some foolish act, such as hitting his chief in the face. Signor Mussolini has made it clear that years of service count for nothing unless real industry and willingness to be efficient are shown to-day.

Moreover, the staffs realise that he is only too anxious to find opportunities for cutting away the dead wood. Many departments have too many clerks. Fewer men and greater efficiency is his aim. Ministers have been ordered to prepare schedules showing how their organisations can be reduced. No new clerks are to be taken on.

It has become the fashion for business houses to engage "efficiency experts" to consider how money can be saved and production increased. Signor Mussolini is his own efficiency expert. He deals with the proposals for compression and acceleration, and if they do not seem adequate he says so.

The effect of his policy is already perceptible, even in minor ways. Telegrams to London, for example, which formerly took 5 to 6 hours in transmission, now get through in about an hour, sometimes in a few minutes. A certain prominent man in Rome, who knew the importance of quicker communication, mentioned the matter to Mussolini, and immediately conditions improved.

Railways are to be speeded up. Signor Mussolini looks with disfavour on non-paying State-enterprises, and he will have something to say to Parliament presently about the failure of Government control. Meantime the railway workers no longer feel immune from earthquakes. The Socialist era, they realise, is over. Officers in uniform and the forces of the Crown can again travel with ease.

The country is with him. That makes Signor Mussolini's position invulnerable. He scourges the delinquents for their own good, and the nation knows that he is not thinking of himself. The keen young men he has gathered around him for this stupendous task of reconstruction have no ambition for personal triumphs. They are the servants of Italy.

You will not find a Mussolini Cabinet harbouring politicians who intrigue for their own selfish interests, and use national issues as pawns in the game. The creed of the Black Shirt has been carried into Government service.

The Fasces, the symbol of the Fascisti, is an axe enclosed in rods. To the shaken devotees of a hidebound Civil Service it looks remarkably like a new broom.

CHAPTER TWELVE

NO MORE STRIKES ; NO CLASS-WAR

Signor Mussolini's attitude towards Labour is being watched with considerable anxiety by the workers throughout Italy. He is credited with the determination to make all strikes illegal, and this has been seized upon by the Socialists as proof that the Fascisti mean to put Labour at the mercy of the capitalists.

I am assured that this is not true. Signor Mussolini was himself one of the heads of the Syndicalist movement in Italy before the war, and no one is better able to judge of the rights and wrongs of trade disputes. He thus defined his position with regard to Labour in a speech to the workers of the Fonderia Milanese, an iron works at Gamboloiza, near Milan, on December 8 :—

"A few straight words to you workers. My Government is not, will not be, and does not want to be an anti-Labour Government.

"The workmen are a live and integral part of the nation. They must be respected, defended, and helped. But my Government is very strong and has no need to beg for great support from all sides. It does not seek for such support, but, on the other hand, it does not refuse it. If the workmen offer their support, we will accept it ; but there must be a clear understanding to avoid delusions in the future.

"The workers have thought they could keep outside the life of the nation. That is a great mistake. It is necessary, in order that our voice be heard in the interests of our country, that there should be the strictest discipline, because no one will listen to us if the nation behind us is restless and turbulent.

"I speak to you at this moment not as the head of the State, but as a man who understands you well and whom you understand—a man who weighs you accurately and who knows what you can do and what you must not be allowed to do.

"I do not descend from illustrious and aristocratic forefathers. My ancestors were peasants who worked the land. My father was a blacksmith who bent red-hot iron on the forge, and I, as a little boy, had to help him in his hard and humble work. Now I have a

harder task in trying to bend the souls of men. I have been a navvy and a stonemason. I tell you this, not to win your sympathy, but to show you that I am not and cannot be an enemy of the people who work.

“I am, however, the enemy of those who, in the name of false and grotesque doctrines, try to mystify the working man and drag him down to ruin.

“My Government is not a mere bureaucratic administration. It will act in the interests of the workers when those interests are just.

“In all its actions the Government will keep in mind these fundamental principles.

“The nation exists, even if one tries to destroy it, because it is an imperishable reality.

“Production must be stimulated. To produce much and well is in the interest of the workmen as well as of the capitalists, because the workmen lose and face ruin equally with the capitalists if production ceases, and if our products do not find a place in the markets of the world.

“All the just interests of the working classes must be safeguarded.

“Deeds count more than words. You will have the means of verifying what I have said.”

Fascisti trade unions were formed during the later phases of the struggle against Communism, and since Signor Mussolini came into power they have increased rapidly throughout the country, particularly in the northern provinces.

They are on much the same lines as other trade unions in safeguarding the interests of the working men, but class warfare is denounced, and the members are bound not to regard the capitalist as their enemy. They take the same oath on joining as the Fascisti :

“In the name of God and of Italy, and in the name of our glorious dead, I swear to concentrate all my energy on working for the good of my country.”

The Fascisti have not said publicly that strikes will be declared illegal, but there is no doubt that Signor Mussolini intends to set up a tribunal which will deal promptly and finally with all trade disputes. He lays down the broad principle that any policy which harms the nation cannot be tolerated. Political strikes aimed solely at paralysing the public services and controlling food supplies are criminal acts, and should be dealt with as such. Strikes for the purpose of securing higher wages can be settled without delay. He argues that one side or the other is always wrong.

The proposed tribunal will hear the case and render its decision. That will end the matter. If a strike is allowed to continue until one side or the other gives in, the nation suffers and the victory is not a just one, since it is due to might, not right.

A Government which is administering the country as it should do cannot countenance a system which, while harming the nation, does not yield a speedy and fair decision.

The Fascisti declare they will be as strict against Capital as against Labour, and that every grievance brought forward by the workers will be given immediate and thorough investigation.

One of the most important problems before Signor Mussolini is the balancing of the national budget. Italy's finances are in a tangled condition, and drastic reforms must be put into effect. All non-paying State enterprises are considered a burden which must be got rid of, and in this connection the new Premier is chiefly concerned with the railways.

They have been hopelessly inefficient under Government control. When taken over from private companies about 20 years ago, on the expiration of a 20 years' lease, they were paying dividends. In recent years the annual deficit has been about 1,500,000,000 lire (£15,000,000). The number of employees increased under Socialist influence to 240,000, and the Fascisti Government declares the system ought to be run well with a third of this number.

Tax-dodgers are to be run to earth by the "finance hounds" of the new Government. I am told that there are at least 500,000 people in Italy liable for taxation who have never paid a penny to the State. In addition, many thousands have legally or illegally reduced their liabilities. Strict legislation is to be introduced for dealing with these delinquents.

"There is no doubt that the fiscal sieve has many holes," said Signor Mussolini's Minister of Finance, in Parliament, the other day. "I promise you that I will sew them up."

Hitherto the working classes have escaped taxation. The Communists taught them that the capitalists and "bourgeoisie" ought to defray the cost of a Government which merely "exploited" the "proletariat." Signor Mussolini insists that every worker ought to contribute to the national exchequer. The net gain in revenue from this source will not be very great, as the tax on the workers will be light. The measure is being introduced "for moral rather than fiscal reasons, so that all Italians may have the satisfaction

of knowing that they are contributing, even if only in a small measure, to the regeneration of the country."

Foreign capital is to be exempt from the payment of income tax, and in this way the Government hopes to induce investors to bring money to Italy.

Signor Mussolini fully realises that the immediate result of his policy of economy and retrenchment will be an increase of unemployment, but he believes the effect will be wholly temporary, and that the increased activity in the country will give everyone ample scope to be profitably employed.

One of the proposed measures for the relief of unemployment is increased emigration. Signor Mussolini is trying to induce the United States to increase its quota of immigrants from Italy. He is negotiating with the South American Republics for wider facilities on the same lines. He is making plans for a more intensive development of the Italian Colonies. He is even discussing with the Turks a scheme for the reconstruction of Smyrna by Italian labour.

These are only a few of the problems which confront the Dictator of New Italy. His friends realise that he cannot bring about the millennium in a few weeks, and they are counselling patience in the provinces, where the people await with simple faith the fulfilment of their hopes.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SHORT WAY WITH CRIME

Now that the Fascisti are the masters of Italy, life is becoming a series of shocks for the unrighteous. It is not enough that a man should be loyal ; he must also be good.

Various social reforms, some of them novel as well as startling, have been imposed by local groups of enthusiasts. The liberty of the lawbreaker is seriously menaced. The police have been shown more than once that the Fascisti can find criminals where they have failed. Consequently the professional thief-catcher is saying—with other disgruntled elements of officialdom—that Fascismo will defeat its own ends by trampling on the law it professes to uphold.

Undoubtedly there is danger that these local enthusiasts in districts which suffered severely from misgovernment in the past may go farther than they should. Signor Mussolini, the Prime Minister, realises that his ardent followers must be subjected to control. He has disciplined some of them for over-zealous activities. Nevertheless, the net effect of their innovations has thus far been good.

Who can quarrel with the recently declared policy of the Fascisti at Alessandria : " Criminals must take up honest work or be punished ? "

The story of the regeneration of Alessandria is now well known. The Fascisti summoned all the local burglars, pick-pockets, confidence men, and other members of the underworld to a conference. There were, I am told, nearly 300 of them at this midnight gathering. They were informed that work would be found for them at a living wage. The Fascisti would be responsible for maintaining them if they trod the narrow path ; if they chose the easier way, it would lead inevitably to their early extinction.

The sentiment of the meeting was unanimously in favour of honest work. Then the Fascisti negotiated with employers of labour to take them on. Men with trades were distributed with due regard to their ability, and even the casual labourer found his niche in the scheme of industrial life.

Wages were paid—part to the worker, part to the Fascisti. A central fund was thus started by the Black Shirts from which they distributed doles to “accredited criminals” for whom work could not be found at the moment. Strict supervision was maintained over them, whether working or idle, but they were absolutely free men, as long as they did their daily task honestly and refrained from crime.

I am told the scheme is working really well. The police at Alessandria have less to do, and the inhabitants, even those who at one time opposed the Fascisti, are grateful for this improvement in the moral health of their city.

Another remarkable instance of the intervention of the Fascisti when the machinery of the law appeared to be useless was the tragedy of little Nello Coccia, a six-years-old boy who disappeared from his home in Rome in October. He was kidnapped by a gang of young bandits and held for ransom. The police could do nothing.

The Fascisti took up the case a few weeks ago. They established the fact that the boy had been murdered, and one by one the bandits were run to earth and handed over to the authorities. They are now in prison awaiting trial.

Signor de Steffani, the Minister of the Treasury, received word one day that his residence at Padua had been looted by burglars and many valuable articles removed. The local police were doubly zealous in their efforts to find the culprits, but days passed without success.

Finally a young Fascista was summoned by his superiors here. “Go to Padua,” they said, “and find the criminals.” He left by the night train and within two days was on the right scent. The thieves have not yet been caught, but the Fascisti organisation in Rome is confident that this amateur Sherlock Holmes—he is only 21—will succeed.

The crusade against drunkenness was begun by a few Fascisti at Adria. They imposed the castor-oil penalty for inebriety, as I have already described. It has worked so well that neighbouring towns are beginning to feel the same respect for sobriety.

The social evil is being fought by the Fascisti. Though as yet there has been no open crusade against it, you can see a change in the aspect of the streets of Rome at night, due to the police having received a powerful hint from Signor Mussolini that it would be better if disreputable characters were banished. The police now look sternly at them instead of looking the other way, and the moral effect is very marked.

There are indications that the idle rich may shortly feel the pressure of the Fascisti.

I was sitting in the lounge of an hotel the other afternoon with two of Signor Mussolini's lieutenants at the fashionable hour known as the five o'clock. Various young men, some of them Roman aristocrats, drifted aimlessly in and out, and the Fascisti watched them with marked distaste.

"They do nothing," said one of my companions. "They simply vegetate and say gallant things. I think," he added thoughtfully, "that we must put them to work." We then talked of other things, but after a time he repeated: "Yes, I think we must find jobs for some of these young men."

When you consider that the young men in question include representatives of some of the oldest families in Italy you will appreciate the significance of this veiled threat. They approve of Fascismo in a general way because they think it is merely a bulwark against the so-called lower classes, and they do not realise that the stern creed of Signor Mussolini's followers, if followed to the letter, means universal service of some kind by all classes, rich and poor alike.

Gambling is, of course, a pastime of many of these idle young men as well as of working-men. The State—which is Signor Mussolini—is thinking of adding to its revenue by putting a luxury tax on baccarat and other games of chance played in secret gambling-clubs. It is argued that if such clubs are licensed and supervised by the authorities the evil itself will be kept under control, and in fact minimised, while yielding a definite amount annually to the Treasury.

This is only one of the many proposals put forward by the enthusiastic Fascisti.

Signor Mussolini is regulating the activities of his crusaders by appointing trusted men to police posts in the northern provinces. He realises that there cannot be two forces operating independently for the maintenance of order. The whole problem of the Fascisti militant organisation is one that has given him much thought. It is being cut down and irregular units which have attached themselves to the original body are being disbanded.

Economy is one important motive in reorganising the police service. When Signor Mussolini came into office there were about 175,000 men employed for maintaining public security, including the two uniformed bodies—Carabinieri, and Royal Guards—the detective units, and a heavy Alpine cordon for the prevention of smuggling; a force almost as large as the standing army.

“ Fewer men and a firm policy ” is the watchword of the new Government.

The Royal Guards have been in existence only since the war. They are on the same footing as the Carabinieri but wear a different uniform, and their organisation was inspired by Signor Nitti when Prime Minister owing to the unpopularity of the Carabinieri. The latter became military police during the war and were as unpopular with the bulk of the civilian population as they were with the soldiers.

The suggestion to dissolve the Royal Guards as a corps was combated on the ground that it was wiser to have two bodies of police. When riots occurred and casualties were inflicted, say, by the Carabinieri, their withdrawal thereafter and the substitution of the Royal Guards had a pacific effect on the population.

Reorganisation of the Black Shirts is being carried out with great strictness. Signor Mussolini does not want the volunteers who joined him only at the last moment when they saw that Fascismo would rule Italy. He is keeping the pick of the Legions—men whom he can trust implicitly—and these will constitute a thoroughly equipped fighting force, probably 70,000 strong, under his orders alone. You hear it spoken of in Rome as the Prætorian Guard.

With this force Signor Mussolini is prepared to deal sternly with disaffection. He is even prepared to deal, if necessary, with d'Annunzio, the poet-airman, who was dictator of Fiume, and his separate band of followers. The poet is a much-discussed personality these days. He is living in seclusion on Lake Maggiore, but he is taking a very active interest in the new régime, of which he does not altogether approve, and his attitude in the immediate future may give Signor Mussolini yet another knotty problem for solution.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SIGNOR MUSSOLINI THE MYSTERY MAN

Signor Benito Mussolini is at this moment the "mystery man" of Italy. He is a solitary, almost a terrible figure, for the immediate future of the country is in his hands, and he walks alone.

History is being shaped, not in the busy Ministries, where officials work with feverish energy, but in a quiet apartment on the second floor of the Grand Hotel. The footsteps that come and go noiselessly down the carpeted corridor, past the massive, watchful detective in plain clothes who can see in every direction at once, will leave their imprint on the record of New Italy.

Here the inner councillors of the Fascisti answer the summons of their untiring chief. Here are held the secret conversations which will bring fortune or disaster to the greatest experiment we have witnessed since Lenin overthrew the Romanoffs. Here Mussolini meets his captains in the night; listens to their words and weighs their views. Here he walks alone.

Few people realise that this group of rooms, where the Dictator eats and sleeps—when he sleeps at all—is the real centre of gravity of the kingdom. He is submerged by the tide of transient guests which ebbs and flows through the Grand Hotel at this season of the year.

They are all round him. The battered luggage of a duchesa lies next his door. Aproned valets and unconcerned chambermaids rub shoulders with his callers and heed them not. The sleepy-eyed, portly man in the baggy lounge coat who yawns as he strolls up and down between the lift and the main staircase might be a tired pensionnaire, only, if you look at him closely, you will see that his pockets sag as pockets used to sag in Dublin.

Signor Mussolini came to the Grand Hotel because he has no home in Rome—only an apartment in Milan. Signor Italo Balbo, who is virtually Commander-in-Chief of the Black Shirts, lives in Ferrara, and he has his present headquarters in an obscure back bedroom at the Excelsior Hotel. Dr. Sansanelli, the Secretary-General of

the Fascisti, lives in Naples, and he has chosen an equally modest habitation.

The King is at the Quirinal, and the Pope is at the Vatican, but curiously enough no one thinks of them. That is, no one thinks of government in terms of palaces. It is a matter of hotels. Other dictators have risen on the wave of revolution to royal state ; Signor Mussolini has only risen to the " second floor front." Will he stop there ?

Yes, history is being made in the " second floor front." It is usually made after dinner, when the languid habitués of the lounge are still lingering over their coffee, but sometimes it is made at the fashionable hour of Roman hotel life : the five o'clock, when vivacious women are trying to talk down the determined flow of jazz and pallid young men kiss their jewelled hands as they come and go.

You see two or three young men of a different type drift into one corner of the lounge. They are usually in black, and their clothes do not show that extremity in fashion which is the life and soul of the ordinary lounge lizard. They survey the room incuriously and seem mentally remote from their surroundings. They wait, perhaps a little wearily, until the hall porter glides up to them with a significant nod. They vanish upstairs.

Other men, mostly young, mostly in black, follow them through the same intermediate state and likewise disappear in the " second floor front." They may reappear, wholly unobserved, within half an hour ; they may not be seen again until midnight.

In this way Signor Mussolini keeps his tryst with the Black Shirts. Throughout the day he grapples with the problems hurled at him by half a dozen Ministries ; towards nightfall—though the problems may still pursue him—he meets the leaders of the militant movement under him.

Momentous decisions are taken at these night conferences. I encountered the dissolving fragments of one of them as I came into the hotel one evening at half-past eleven. Perhaps a dozen men were saying good-night in front of two or three motor-cars. Two uniformed Carabinieri watched them from the shadow of the portico. There was nothing in their appearance or bearing to suggest that it was anything but the end of an informal dinner-party. Yet a few minutes earlier they took part in a debate which resulted in Signor Mussolini's decision to cut down the Fascisti army to 70,000 men. And the Fascisti army, as you know by this time, is the one army that matters.

You cannot pass the barrier of the "second floor front" unless you are a Fascista and are wanted at the moment. No Fascista, no matter how important he may be, walks in or out unasked. Signor Mussolini never forgets that he is the Dictator. His Secretary-General, his Commander-in-Chief, alike send up their cards through the hall porter and wait in the realm of jazz—in it but not of it—until their summons comes.

It is as hard to penetrate even the outer corridor of the Dictator's mind. His friends often ask each other: "What is he thinking about it? . . . What will he do about it? . . ."

No one knows. I gave him a list of questions which, if answered, would throw light on the policy of the immediate future. He would not answer them. I doubt if he can answer them. You cannot answer questions for others if you cannot answer them for yourself. He is pondering over them day and night. When the rest of Rome is sleeping, he walks the floor.

A solitary, a terrible figure, with the weight of Italy on his shoulders, and a path before him that is full of pitfalls. Malignant eyes all about him, watching for a false step that may mean disaster; impatient friends who look for a hundred reforms within a week and cry for miracles.

Surely no man ever faced a more stupendous task than the one shouldered by this sombre personality with the burning eyes and heavy jaw, who walks alone with Destiny in the "second-floor front."

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