

*Calamita*

ITALY STILL HAS SOMETHING TO SAY

Premise

Florence is maimed by the German will to destroy and by the war. But only a few weeks after liberation, from that Florence which saw thousands of Italian patriots rise up to join the struggle against Fascism, comes the voice of the New Italy of the people. In the presence of Brigadier General Edgar E. Hume, Head of the Fifth Army Allied Military Government, the University resumes its mission of education and culture. Florence, center of one of the richest cultures of the world, alive with new forces tempered by the struggle for liberty, is living proof that Italy still has a word to say. Twenty years of Fascism have not weakened or bowed her spirit; her people have the energy and the will to live again; amid the ruins of her bridges and her palaces begins a new life of work and faith.

The University of Florence reopens while the rumble of the cannon pursuing the enemy hordes is still heard in the distance beyond Monte Morello. Only a little more than a month ago in this city of ours, which now we cherish more than ever, the bridges were blown to the skies, the towers crumbled to earth, and in these streets which the minds of foreign travelers adorn with flowers there was fighting at pistol point as the snipers nested on the roofs were scattered like fleeing savages. We thank you, General Hume, and in so doing we thank the Allied Military Government, which in this city so near the front lines, where armored columns still pass, in this turbulent atmosphere of war carried on at our very gates, has permitted the University to reopen and take up again its peaceful pursuits. We understand that in permitting this you offer us a token of your friendship and confidence. You have seen how Florence behaved in the weeks that preceded her liberation and that even under bombardment this people is capable of

carrying on its work with steadfast courage, that the most arduous trials do not disturb the comprehensive and measured clarity of its time-tested judgment. In this way you have shown that you understand that while the battles continue a few miles away it is safe to allow professors and students to take up their civilian occupations again under the newly won liberty. Certainly the young people who are returning to their studies with serious purpose today, would prefer to be doing other things. As long as the war lasts, as long as there remains in Italy or Europe a single German to track down and exterminate each one of them will prefer to fight beside your conquering armies, to drive the common enemy from our land and pursue him beyond our borders; but failing this, if the small but already renowned Italian corps which is fighting beside you is not large enough to include all the Italians who wish to fight, the young men know that here in these classrooms in turning to their books instead of their guns they can be doing their part and serving the cause of our country and of civilization. And even if our thoughts turn toward the battlefields while other Italian cities still under a foreign yoke await the hour of their freedom, I am certain you will find that, gathered together here in mourning, we shall work from the very beginning with serious purpose and in the only way in which destiny permits us to work at present.

As an indication of the University's serious intent to return to its accustomed scientific and didactic sobriety, special accelerated preparatory courses will be given before the fall examination period to help those students who during the past year were unable to enroll in the universities or attend the lectures because they were devoting all their energies to the clandestine struggle against the Germans. The period of Fascist college examinations is finished, when it was enough to have military rank to assure promotion; the students who have performed their duty toward their country

must be assisted in making up their lost time, not by opening the doors to ignorance, which would only mean the betrayal of learning and the continuation of the Fascist lie, to the detriment of the students themselves. In preparing these accelerated university courses, however, our thoughts turn back to another war, to another resurgence of university life, to another return of students from the battlefields to the classroom. In these same summer months twenty-five years ago the students who had lived through a victorious war of four years' duration crowded into the newly reopened Italian universities. I recall them, my students of that distant time, whom now I see as men aged beyond their years; I see again these rows of seats filled with attentive listeners in olive green, just back from battle still in their war-stained uniforms, returning to civilian life filled with an almost religious faith in study and work. That had been a long and hard war; and that people of ours, soberly trained for liberty by that unpretentious Italy which during these last twenty years stupid men have derided, was victorious, and, unable to afford the luxury of great armaments, paid for the victory with the flower of our youth. That was the war in which our infantry, before making frontal assaults, went out to cut the enemy's barbed wire by hand. You, General Hume, who wear on your breast decorations for that campaign, witnessed that war, and certainly you remember under what hardships our people fought victoriously in the Alps and along the Piave when they were still free. Then the young men who returned to their studies at the end of that war, after having accomplished all that duty demanded of them, were filled with faith and joy; they had seen with their own eyes an empire of overlords and hangmen crumble, destroyed by this peace-loving and kindly people; they had seen on a murky October morning those gold-braided generals who were responsible for the death of Cesare Battisti, approaching

our trenches, carrying a white flag, and then, blindfolded, bowing their heads to enter our dugouts to beg for peace.

If now we compare the exaltation of those days when everyone rejoiced that all Italy had finally been united and everyone felt we had merited the friendship and respect of the free people who had been our allies; if now we compare the happiness of that time with the sorrow of the present days it almost seems that we have been dreaming; and we wonder if the twenty years of degradation and moral decay which separate us from that time, the horrors which it has brought us, if all this is not only a nocturnal incubus which the morning light dissolves.

And yet we do not disclaim these twenty years, because they were not a period in which Italy alone has betrayed her ideals and strayed from the path; instead all Europe and the whole world made the generous mistake in the natural reaction resulting from war-weariness, of no longer believing in liberty with that religious fervor, with that vigilant faith which must ever be ready to sacrifice life and property to defend human dignity against every threat. We shared the delusion with the other democracies, that the great ideals of liberty and justice, without which human life is base, have in themselves such a force of suggestion that, unarmed, they can triumph over material force. The violence of Fascism caught us by surprise in this delusion as the aggression of Nazism caught Europe incredulous and unprepared. Europe would have died and civilization would have been destroyed if you, with the sublime resistance of England in September, 1940, with the miraculous reversal of the military situation brought about in these four years by the three great Allied democracies, had not rescued her at the last moment from the catastrophe and destroyed the danger forever.

But as I said, we Italians do not disclaim these twenty years, for now that they are behind us we can look back on that disastrous series of events in synthesis and we can see that for the real Italy, for the better Italy,

they have been a logical continuation and perhaps a necessary complement of our Risorgimento. If there is a period in Italian history which the English and American friends of our country have always loved and admired, it is those fifty or sixty years of the last century when, while Italy was divided and oppressed by foreign tyrants, a small band of idealistic and intrepid men, in exile and in prison, by their words and their deeds prepared the way for the unity and independence of our country. At that time you sheltered our exiles, encouraged our hopes, aided us in publicizing the works of our thinkers, and accompanied our apostles on the road to liberty.

But during these last twenty years in Italy there have also been exile and prisons and gallows, and free spirits who spoke a language so universal that it succeeded in rising from the tombstone of Fascist oppression, crossing the frontiers and making itself heard throughout the world; the voice of Benedetto Croce, as you know, was the clearest of all. It was from this university that Cesare Battisti went serenely forth to a German gallows, an exile, one of the purest and most intrepid spirits of our culture, and from this same university one of its distinguished professors, Gaetano Salvemini, went forth to seek refuge in the free countries, where you not only received but honored him. And now on this first occasion in twenty years that our Atheneum can freely raise its voice, it is my pleasure to send a fraternal greeting to this colleague with the hope that we have remained worthy of him and the wish that at this time, when Italy has such need of teachers of his caliber, he may soon return to these classrooms, still youthful in spirit, and lecture to the students who now await him. From this university the Rosselli brothers went forth to prison, exile and assassination by Fascists in France; they were our friends; we saw them

here beside us in the continued underground struggle. Now they have gone on high, far above us, transfigured by that light that illuminates Mazzini's brow. And behind them a hundred other exemplary figures have followed; a whole people unwilling to bow to tyranny has consciously preferred to face suffering, persecution, imprisonment, and the firing squad. Little or nothing of this was known abroad, of the systematic violence backed by a war machine turned against the people, which no unarmed group could resist and which for twenty years had made of Italy one vast concentration camp; of the commissione per il confino, which treated the accused with increasing severity as they more and more frequently were only guilty of being innocent; of the sentences of the special tribunal, this gang of petty tyrants, who in sentencing men to death or imprisonment were satisfied to obey the changeable humor of the madman who was always right. In the bitterest days of the Risorgimento the political refugees numbered only a few hundred, but in these last twenty years there were thousands and thousands of them, of all ages and classes, professional men, students and workers. The civic conscience of the new Italy was forged through these trials, in the islands and the prisons. The students who came from the so-called bourgeoisie, whom Fascism betrayed in a particularly odious manner when it created the blackshirt squads and armed them against the working classes, reacquired in prison the understanding of that common destiny which unites intellectual and physical labor and learned that it is precisely on this social solidarity which from now on must unite students and workers in the struggle against any man's exploitation of others that the salvation of Italy and of the world depends. All this went on for twenty years, and finally when your victorious armies landed you saw arise from every side, from city and country, from prisons and from the woods and hiding places these new Italians formed by twenty years of suffering, who called themselves patriots because finally the word patria again began to have for them that

vivid meaning it had once had for Mazzini and Garibaldi. They took up their guns, accompanying or more often preceding you, at last united in a single cry that was as old as Italy but seemed to burst forth like a new discovery: Viva la libertà e fuori i tedeschi! (Long live liberty and down with the Germans!)

It has been said that the Risorgimento which gave us unity and independence was achieved almost miraculously by a happy combination of events, and that at that time we gained our liberty without actually paying for it. I do not know whether or not this is historically accurate, but granting that the benefits of the Risorgimento may have been acquired cheaply, I know that our new Risorgimento which continued for twenty years has been won by more severe sacrifices than any other people has ever had to endure. So now at last we can say that this liberty which has been bought with our blood and our tears, has been finally merited, and no one can take it from us in our grief.

All through Italy you have seen what the price of this liberty has been. I recall that in the heavy grey years when we felt the catastrophe approaching I was one of a group of friends who, since they could not endure the moral obfuscation of the cities which were full of false pomp and unspontaneous, dispirited gatherings, fled to the mountains each Sunday to breathe the free air, and to console each other with their friendship and to search among these profiles of familiar horizons for the true face of our country. I think particularly of one morning (it must have been in the spring of 1939) while we were walking along a country road between Maiano and Vincigliata we heard from a radio in a nearby house the hysterical voice of the ever-present ill-omened and irascible charlatan. Even out in that pure air that convulsive oratory pursued us. A single phrase reached us: "We must make a clean sweep of civilian life." That promise was kept. Of all Fascist promises that

alone was kept, and looking about you here, you can see in what way.

Through the ages Italy has become accustomed to invasions of barbarians, barbarians who have always come from the same place. Many times we have suffered devastation, destruction, slaughter. Every new blow has opened an old wound, but over the scars the bell towers of our cities and the cypresses of our countryside have risen again, with an ever more conscious will. But never through the centuries has Italy had to endure a devastation so technologically perverse, so coldly planned and so scientifically mechanized as that to which Fascism deliberately opened the way in these last few years. If the word of our scholars can reach beyond the confines of our country, if the University of Florence can again send a word of heartfelt witness to the scholars of other lands, we here today denounce this new nefariousness with which German militarism was indelibly stained when it coldly determined to mar forever the face of Tuscany and with equal coldness carried out this plan to perfection. This was not, as you see, an unorganized and uncontrolled pillaging committed by drunken and irresponsible soldiers completely out of hand, impelled by their blind fury; it was a systematic destruction, planned by responsible officers with a kind of artistic satisfaction which made it the more ferocious and inexorable, and every member of the pack knew how to carry it out with a conscious and sadistic enjoyment. It was not the invading barbarians' ancient custom of sacking a city to enrich themselves with the spoils, but the new technique for destroying in an orderly manner and for torturing body and spirit with methodical thoroughness, for tearing to pieces with meticulous care machines and ornaments, statues and books, furniture and clothing, and even the most harmless personal souvenirs, for leaving behind it in flight this wake of tortured corpses and broken rubbish as testimony that where the Germans pass, civilization, even in its simplest and most lovable forms, must ever remain barren.



Let us speak no more of these individual disasters which have struck each of us through our closest friends and our most treasured possessions. Each of us is individually in mourning, and in this common grief which unites us it is only fitting that we should silence our private sorrows. But what has offended us most has been the premeditated devastation of our cities, villages, fields and even our countryside. You know that in Italy and especially in Tuscany every little town, every bend in the road, every hill has a face like that of a living person. In our hearts we attach to every curve of the hillside, the belfry of every parish church, the name of a poet or painter, or the memory of a historic event as close to us as our family joys and sorrows. It is not a question of literature but of life. Never as in these recent months when we anxiously began to read the place names of Tuscany in the war bulletins have we felt so deeply that this land is the flesh of our flesh, that the fate of a picture, a statue or a cupola can move us as much as the fate of a neighbor or an intimate friend. In a little place between Arezzo and Sansepolcro which is called Monterchi there is a country cemetery, where Pier della Francesca's most beautiful painting, the Madonna del Parto, the loftiest glorification of maternity, reigns in solitude. Not a day has passed that I have not thought of this painting, abandoned to the mercies of the Germans, in the same way as I thought of my friends and relatives in danger. What has happened to it? Has it been saved? As yet I do not know.

But I have heard stories from one who recently went in search of our art treasures scattered in the bombarded villas, stories to make one shudder as at scenes of torture. A traveler enters a cottage where the entire family has been slaughtered and finds a patrol of drunken Germans banqueting around an improvised table, and notices that that table where the wine and the grease from the bowls has dripped, is a painting by Ghirlandaio.

In another instance occurring immediately after the liberation of Florence an inspector from the Ministry went to Villa Montegufoni, near Montespertoli, to look for certain paintings from our galleries which had been hidden there; he entered a deserted courtyard blackened by a recent fire and spied before him Giotto's Madonna, abandoned in a corner beneath the fallen beams. And it is not only the works of art; the landscapes, even the trees, which are so much a part of Tuscan charm, have been tortured. In Mugello these brutes placed mines in the tops of the chestnut trees, and in the Sienese countryside I have seen with my own eyes an avenue of century-old cypresses, one of the most beautiful in Tuscany, where the Germans, before fleeing, had cut with meticulous care half-way through each trunk, so that they would die but still remain standing as an arid symbol of desolation on the horizon.

And what can we say of our shattered bridges, of this bleeding wound with which they have tried to mar forever the face of our Florence, unique in the world? When we approach the streets along the Arno with anguish in our hearts and no longer see silhouetted against the gold of the sunset that miracle of measured delicacy which was the Trinità bridge, we can think only of those conscious criminals who are impelled by their sadistic lust to disfigure with the slash of a razor the fair, delicate face of a beautiful woman, led on by an evil frenzy of hate and destruction against the beauty which enrages and bestializes them.

But this has not been the worst; for in these years Italy has had to endure trials even more severe. The broken bridges, and the houses across the Arno which are still slipping into the river, an avalanche of rubbish, in their affliction have remained sacred objects, still clothed in dignity and pride; when we see these ruins there almost comes the desire to kneel to kiss them. And then we remember the shame of those houses and of the

bridges when they were repainted in colors of false antiquity to present a pretty picture to the barbarous master who came to visit his feudal fief; we remember the filthy words daubed on the white-washed fronts of our country cottages so that passing by in the train he could read the slogans hailing the "Rome-Berlin Axis." And thinking back over these years of humiliation we feel that we prefer a hundred times over to see our cities ruined but proud, as they are now, rather than sold and disguised and profaned as they were for twenty years. These bloodthirsty rascals and thieves have hidden the face of the real Italy from the civilized world for twenty years; in place of the smiling countenance of this kind and human people the arrogant jaw of a puppet impersonating a war lord has appeared, and some have perhaps believed that that was the face of the Italian people. This has been the sharpest pain, to think that the civilized nations of the world, among which Italy should have its place, may indeed have believed that the Italy of Roman law and of the Codists, the Italy of Saint Francis and Dante, the Italy of the Renaissance, the Italy of Vico and Alfieri, of Foscolo and Carducci could suddenly by a dictator's decree deny these great ideals of justice and civil liberty, this tradition of humanity and charity which is our deepest and most constant characteristic, that the Italy of Beccaria could become a country of hangmen and torturers, the Italy of Mazzini a country of nationalists who would deprive others of liberty, the Italy of Manzoni a country of scurrilous Jew baiters.

Our greatest shame has come from being chained and imprisoned while a group of ruffians usurped the name of Italy to strike a sister France in the back and to massacre Greece; from being gagged while a conscienceless fanatic declared war on the world, and our armies were sent forth to die ingloriously fighting against those ideals of civilization which