

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MUSSOLINI*

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WHAT I propose to present to you tonight is no estimate or critique of the qualities of Benito Mussolini. You will not, I hope, at any point misunderstand me, as acquiescing in a piece of self-analysis which I am merely trying to set before you as I have tried to set it before myself for consideration and appreciation. My problem is this: let us forget, for the time, all we have ever heard or read elsewhere about Mussolini, and—limiting ourselves to the disclosure he has made of himself, consciously or unconsciously, in his memoir of his own career—what is the picture of him that we should thus store up in imagination? To me it is an arresting picture: in many respects far from a pleasing one; but startling, and supremely instructive. We shall keep in mind, of course, that the artist, thus painting his own portrait for readers whom he desired to impress, may have left the original very far behind. But it is part of the value of autobiography that these very manipulations—the suppressions, the inventions, the exaggerations in the writer's own interest, not seldom ludicrously obvious, are part of the self-disclosure. We learn much of him by what he records: still more by his manifest straining after a certain likeness of himself to be engraved on the reader's memory.

The book in which Mussolini thus wrote himself down appeared nine years ago. It was written at the prompting of Mr. Richard Washburn Child, who was then United States Ambassador to Italy. The Dictator dictated it in Italian, corrected the original text in typed copy, and then committed it to Mr. Child to make the English translation, empowering him to edit at will. "You know Italy," he said, "you understand Fascism; you see me, as clearly as anyone". And so, Mr. Child tells us, here is the book: it is all Mussolini's—and so like him! "There is not an insincere line in it." He has called it *My Autobiography*. I am going to set before you tonight the lineaments of the man who in this book alone, other evidence being for the moment disregarded, reveals itself to one who has read and re-read it.

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I

Constantly he speaks as one with tremendous pride in the Roman inheritance and tradition, coupled with contempt for contemporary Italians who were undeserving of their birthright. Mussolini's father was a blacksmith: his mother had been the village school-teacher in a small hamlet of North-East Italy: all around him, as he spent his boyhood in the nineties of last century, were the tokens at once of a great past and of a generation unworthy to sustain its prestige. His father and mother could recall the time when the unification of Italy had just been achieved, when the name had ceased—as the old jest went—to have a merely geographical sense, and had begun to stand for nationhood. The blacksmith, whose smithy like so many others of the craft was a meeting-place for political discussion, especially in the evenings, had a special taste for the writings of Machiavelli, and this champion of Italian nationhood in the early sixteenth century used to furnish readings to the circle round the forge on winter nights nearly four hundred years later. But it was a Socialist not less than a National movement that was being started there: something like what Hitler has called by his new term which so many have found a puzzle—"National Socialist". The greatness of Italy was not, in the thought of that reflective blacksmith, to be accomplished by the indolent Italian grandes who constituted the aristocrats of the new monarchic *régime*. They would have to be brushed aside, that men of greater readiness at once to work, to suffer and to risk might achieve the redemption of provinces still under Austrian control. So a keen class-consciousness, a sort of national proletariat pride, began to surge in young Benito's veins as he listened to talk in the smithy:

I began with young eyes to see that the tiny world about me was feeling uneasiness under the pinch of necessity. A deep and secret grudge was darkening the hearts of the common people. A country gentry of mediocrity in economic usefulness and of limited intellectual contribution were hanging upon the multitude a weight of unjustified privileges. These were sad, dark years not only in my own province but for other parts of Italy. I must have the marks upon my memory of the resentful and furtive protests of those who came to talk with my father, some with bitterness of facts, some with a newly devised hope for some reform.

Here we touch a characteristic which appears many times in the autobiography: an assertion of Italian—or, as he often prefers to say, Roman—patriotism, coupled with fierce disgust

towards those who have previously affected to lead the Italian people. Mussolini speaks of the thrill he felt as a boy when he went with his mother to Ravenna: of his delight in visiting every corner of that city steeped in the essence of antiquity. His joy in literature has been and still is in the study of the Italian Renaissance, of what Italy has contributed to the development of European art and science, or again of the Italian revival in the nineteenth century. Fascists, said the late Frederic Harrison, are essentially Dantistic, and their inspiration is derived from the poet. "I am desperately Italian," writes Mussolini; "I believe in the function of Latinity." But not merely consistent with this, rather a consequence of it, was his revulsion from the officials, the governing class of pre-War Italy, by whom in his view the national tradition was being obliterated and the national ideal denied.

II

Particularly in those years he came to abhor the chiefs of party politics.

Mussolini with a living to earn, and forced to earn it soon, drifted—for want of anything else in sight—as so many have drifted before and will drift again, into the vocation of a teacher. His father's smithy had been his school of social discussion, and he knew that he had been named "Benito" after the Mexican revolutionary who had led the rising against the foreign Emperor Maximilian. He knew also how his father used to march in Socialist processions, at times landing himself in a jail sentence for sedition. So with anger in his heart against the privileged classes, scarcely overcome or disguised by his passionate love for the Italy they had somehow come to dominate, he prepared to be a teacher. The preparation was at a Normal School in a small city, and just about the first year of this twentieth century Benito Mussolini, then seventeen, was given a teaching job in an Italian village. He had no love for his work there. After a year he wanted no more of it, nor did he want to go back to his family. He thought he would try his fortune beyond the frontier: so almost penniless, he made his way across the Alps to Switzerland. Courage, as he remarks, was the one asset he took with him.

☛ The Swiss have long been hospitable to turbulent spirits from many countries. Just now, by common consent, they are constantly asked to supply a neutral meeting-place for world conferences, more or less productive, generally the latter. In the early years of the World War, one might often have watched pacing

the streets of Zurich a short stout figure with the look of a caged lion: he was yet to be known to all the world as "Lenin". He was already there when Mussolini eked out a living in Switzerland by odd jobs he did as a mason, a laborer, from time to time a translator of books from Italian into French. It is recorded of Lenin that he later recalled the Mussolini of those distant days, and said the greatest mistake of the Communists was to have somehow repelled so promising a recruit from their movement.

There was, indeed, at that time the chance of almost any development in this thoughtful, poverty-stricken, pugnacious Italian youth. He was starting his battle against a hard world, with a temper for anything except submission—the temper with which he had fought other boys at the village school, getting such scars that he used to conceal one wrist under the table at meals lest his mother should ask what had happened to him. (A constant tenderness, by the way, in references to his mother is one of the pleasing features of Mussolini's autobiography). Recalling the Swiss period, he writes this:

To this day I thank difficulties. They were more numerous than the nice happy incidents. But the latter gave me nothing. The difficulties of life have hardened my spirit. They have taught me how to live. . . Above all, I threw myself head foremost into the politics of the Emigrant—of refugees, of those who sought Solutions.

To a young man conscious of high talent, chilled by poverty and social injustice, seeking what he has called "Solutions", the appeal of Socialism was tremendous. Mussolini, in the few free hours he had, attended discussions of every sort on the economic problem of his age. Especially the lectures then being delivered at Lausanne by the economist Pareto! "I looked forward", he says, "to every one. The mental exercise was a change from manual labour. My mind leaped towards this change, and I found pleasure in learning. For here was a teacher who was outlining the fundamental economic philosophy of the future." It is perhaps needless to add that before long Mussolini was expressing himself in public debate with a vigour which attracted the attention of the Swiss police. Looking back on that event, he recalls how a certain intemperance in language made him appear undesirable to the authorities, and he was expelled from two cantons. By a fortunate coincidence the time for his military training in Italy just then arrived, and he should have been obliged in any case to recross the Alps for service with his regiment at Verona.

He records the excellent impression that he left upon his military superiors; the pleasant surprise it brought to captains and majors and colonel when the red revolutionist, who could not be kept even in tolerant Switzerland, proved so docile and responsive under army discipline. When his course was finished, once more he had the old problem, complicated this time by the fact that the Swiss outlet was closed. Naturally he met it in the traditional way. All other portals being stopped, he went back to teaching. But he combined with this an adventure in journalism. His new school was in an Austrian province, and while there he had the temerity to write a newspaper article contending that the Austro-Italian frontier had been wrongly drawn, that Ala should not be the last town on the Italian side, and that Austria must be brought to surrender more territory to its rightful owners. For this escapade he suffered another expulsion—the sort of treatment, his autobiography remarks, to which he was becoming accustomed. At all events no one then living in Italia Irredenta could be surprised at the fate of the young teacher-journalist. The hand of Austro-Hungarian rule was heavy.

This was, for Mussolini, the end of the experiment in teaching. Henceforth he would be altogether a journalist, and one—to use a recent descriptive phrase we owe to the Archbishop of Canterbury—of that revolutionary rather than acquiescent type which His Grace thinks may, after all, be the more Christian. The apostate from school was not much concerned about how Christian, or how un-Christian, it might be. “I understood now,” he writes, “that the Gordian knot of Italian political life could be undone only by an act of violence.” True to his violent spirit, he was to be found haranguing the crowd in an Italian city against the war his countrymen were then waging against Turkey—the War which in 1911 won for Italy the control of Libya. No wonder that the Socialist newspaper *Avanti* (“Forward”), the only organ of the Party in Milan, sought his services. In 1912 he became its editor, at the age of 29. Within a few months he had brought up its circulation to 100,000.

In the next two years, until the outbreak of the World War, Benito Mussolini was a hard-working journalist, notably successful as success was then counted in a Socialist newspaper office, thought very dangerous by the Conservative interests in the State, and of course from time to time sharply watched by the police. He wrote vehement articles to incite class war, dwelt with eloquence on the wickedness of bourgeoisie or capitalist, and never failed to remind the workers how costly their ultimate achievement would be: as he liked to put it, “in sacrifice and sweat and blood.”

The time was one to call forth in peculiar degree Mussolini's temperamental disgust with the ways of parliament. He still likes to recall how in the years 1912-14, just following her war with the Turks for her present possessions in Northern Africa, Italy provided a foretaste of what would be seen after the Great War. Just a smaller-scale edition of the chaos and inefficiency of parliament under social strain! The Turkish conflict had cost to a degree then thought intolerable, though it now seems slight enough, in lives and money. Hardship real or imaginary produced, on the average one riot each week: during one ministry of Premier Giolitti our autobiographer can remember thirty-three! Outbreaks became frequent even in the class normally most peaceful—among day labourers, and peasants in the valley of the Po. Agitation began in the Italian islands to establish a separate government of their own. "And in the meantime", Mussolini adds, "above all this atrophy of normal life, there went on the tournament and joust of political parties struggling for power."

Again and again in this book one meets with fresh analysis of the inherent faults of a parliamentary system: the thing which the writer so prides himself upon having destroyed is held up before us in its rottenness, depicted with a wealth of lurid imagery that would have called forth devotional acquiescence from Thomas Carlyle. He tells how from time to time, whether politicians like it or dislike it, the life of man changes, new necessities and new demands—incapable of being reduced to ancient formulae—revealing themselves. But never, until violence gives them no option, will the party leaders alter. The conceptions which form their stock-in-trade are dresses out of measure, shape, style and usefulness. But never until they are terrified into change will they cease trying to make these tawdry old garments fit: watch them as they cling so pathetically to their old programmes, repeat their familiar phrases, attempt at the utmost some pitiful repair or tinkering, so that they may feel they have preserved the wretched thing they call their continuity or their consistency—as if that were what chiefly mattered. What they describe as their "policy" is but fish-bait for votes; more or less cunning calculation of how to secure the maximum balance of advantage at the polls, playing off group against group, no matter what the consequence in domestic chaos or national humiliation. Giolitti, for example, who ranked as so conspicuously successful a party leader, might be described—says Mussolini—as a man who made the premiership a profession, and his return seemed—to the sullen, discontented patriots who were meditating desperate courses in silence—to be that of a re-

ceiver in bankruptcy for so-called self-government. "Our democracy of yesterdays had died: its testament had been read: it had bequeathed us naught but chaos."

These, however, are reflections which required experience of the Great War period and its *sequelae* to develop. They were but inchoate, though distinct, in the Mussolini journalism of the years 1912-14.

III

I now come to that part of my task in which it is hardest to observe the limitation I laid down at the outset, namely to draw the lineaments of Mussolini altogether from autobiographic material. As I present to you from his story of his own life, supplemented only by his recorded articles and speeches, an account of how and why he fought for Italian participation on the Entente side, you may not be able to keep grave countenances. You will be thinking of things which he has done since, and of the light they cast on the motives he then professed. But it will all go to render more complete, if also more bewildering, the picture of the most remarkable man of our time.

As a Socialist editor, he was fully expected to behave like other advanced Socialists, to denounce impartially all sides in the war as participants in a capitalist "ramp", and to join his voice with that of men like Jaures in France for the union of the proletariat of all nations against the wealthy militarists who were exploiting them. Mussolini did the very opposite. He threw himself with all his boundless energy into organising the demand for immediate Italian intervention, not on the side of the Central Powers, with which Italy had an alliance whose obligations were very hard to explain away, but on the side of Great Britain, France and Belgium. The first organisation of his Fascist groups was with this interventionist purpose, to form centres of influence and pressure all over Italy by which a sluggish, procrastinating Government, which did not realise how the hour of Italian destiny had struck, might be goaded into action. His Socialist associates were astonished, then infuriated. He had to resign his editorship of their paper, and was likewise deprived of his card of membership in the Socialist organisation. Forthwith he started a new paper, consecrated to the interventionist cause. In that paper, now edited by his brother Arnaldo, he still frequently writes an editorial. As his autobiography tells us, he cannot overcome his affection for newspaper work, that intellectual dug-out, the journalistic trenches from which he began to fight.

In the collection of his propagandist speeches made at that time you will find participation in the war urged with an eloquence very like what was heard at the same time in London, in Paris, in Brussels, in Ottawa. Mussolini speaks about heroic Serbia that has broken loose from Austrian oppression, about Belgium the martyr who refused to sell herself, about the sanctity of treaties and the majesty of international law, about the call to rescue mankind for ever from the menace of a brutal military domination, and about the new, the nobler, the peace-loving Europe which will emerge from such holy sacrifice. Whether Italy would have entered the war but for the efforts of this incomparable agitator, there is much reason to doubt: resistance was obstinate, and the intervention party could not well have dispensed with any element of their strength, least of all with this element. Within about two weeks of the Armistice, speaking at Milan, then a returned man, convalescing from hospital where 38 wounds had been treated, he burst into a peroration that one feels would more beseem the "keynote orator" at a League of Nations Assembly than the organiser of a poison gas campaign for the pillage of Abyssinia. Here are his words:

We have arrived at a decisive point in history. While we are gathered here, the battle is raging: there are millions and millions of men who are fighting their last fight. Let us swear that all this has not been in vain, but that these sacrifices must mark a new phase in the history of humanity. Let us say to ourselves that all that can be tried will be tried, in order to make the purple flower of liberty spring from the blood shed in the cause of freedom, and that justice shall reign as sovereign over all the peoples of the renewed world.

Now, whatever we may think of a passage such as that in the light of later developments, however we may feel that it was the mere playing of a propagandist part for an interest whose real motive the speaker would not crudely avow, we cannot bring a like reproach against the corresponding chapter of the *Autobiography*. There Mussolini makes it plain that what drove him to break with the Socialists in 1914 was his vision of the great chance for Italy. Now was her time to settle old scores with her Austrian neighbour, to recover her still unredeemed provinces, to exact as member of a victorious group such concessions as might give back to her Rome's ancient place on the map of the world. It is the Mussolini we have come to know otherwise who wrote Chapter IV of the *Autobiography*—so different from the tone of the war speeches.

He dwells upon the nonsense of supposing the outburst of 1914 a return to barbarism, when it was in truth the development of a thrilling national destiny which antiquated and rusted democratic ideas, the pernicious sophists of sentiment, could do nothing to retard. There is no further disguise of the contempt in the writer's mind for Serbia, of his admiration for German and Austrian resoluteness, of the joy he felt that in his own time had fallen one of those great dramatic events in which his country might take her part—war not on the puny but on the gigantic scale, another stage in the great procession which would go on for ever in defiance of the half-witted internationalists; for—as Mussolini puts it in one of his historic sayings—“It is blood alone that turns the wheels of history.” His problem was how, from the editorial chair of his newspaper, and in lightning tours through Italian cities, he might so work upon the mind of his country as to produce popular demand for intervention on the Entente side. It would be obviously inexpedient, because it would jar so unpleasantly against the British and French methods of appeal, to avow just the real motive. Caution must be exercised in any reference to fulfilling at last through war the dream of Dante, pushing back Italy's frontier to the Brenner Pass, to the Giulian and Illyrian Alps, bringing Fiume and Dalmatia under Roman sway. These projects should be confided to those who were intellectually fit to receive them unalloyed, the daring young spirits he was planning to organize in the first Fascist groups—emancipated like himself by Machiavelli and Nietzsche, the twin idols of Mussolini's intellectual worship, from the rule of minor morals. But for general consumption the cant of vindicating public law must still be kept. It was the challenge to justice, to international order, the outrage upon France, the breach of faith with Belgium, that one still calling himself a good Socialist, though an outcast from official Socialism, must urge as a sufficient ground for war. It was likewise, of course, needful to show—with a casuistical subtlety which German cartoonists did not fail to note—how the Triple Alliance to which Italy had set her seal was consistent not only with one member's refusal to fight for that interest, but with her resolve to fight for the opposite!

The *Autobiography* describes how the interventionist propagandism was prosecuted, how eager youthful spirits, with a vision of the Italy thus to come to life, crowded round the bold editor, and the first few legions of Italian volunteers were organised, before the laggard Government at Rome could be stirred to a definite decision.

The next scene in the autobiographic picture is that of the returned Italian troops coming back after victory to a country in which Socialist, Communist, Bolshevist agitation had destroyed the national spirit. To the slowly convalescing Milan journalist, so proud that he could think of the victorious national effort as prompted by himself, it was an indescribable shock to discover that there was no welcome for those Italian heroes, that in place of enthusiasm and gratitude there was cynicism, disparagement, hostility. It was surely a time for celebration rather than for debate? But no:

Everything was discussed again. We Italians opened the box of political problems and took apart the social clockwork. We pawed over everything from the Crown to Parliament, from the army to our colonies, from capitalistic property to the Communistic Soviet proposal for the federation of the regions of Italy, from schools to the papacy. The lovely structure of concord and harmony that we combatants and the wounded had dreamed that we would build after the luminous victory of October, 1918, was falling to pieces. The leaves were falling from our tree of idealism.

What particularly exasperated the Mussolini of those months, at the end of 1918, was the substitution of a weak and watery internationalism for the enhanced national prestige and glory in national achievement he had so eagerly awaited:

We suffered the humiliation of seeing the banners of our glorious regiments returned to their homes without being saluted, without that warm cheer of sympathy owed to those who return from victorious war. Now it again appeared to me and to my friends as if there was in everybody an instinct to finish the game of the war, not with the idea of real victory, but with content that we had lost as little as possible. Ears and spirits were ready to listen to words of peace, of humanity, of brotherhood between the nations. At night before sleep came I used to meditate and realize that we had no dam to stop this general decay of faith, this renunciation of the interest and destiny of a victorious nation. The sense of destruction penetrated very quickly and deeply the spirit of all classes. Certainly the central government was no dike to prevent the flood of weakness.

And who was responsible for this decline in the national temper? First, German and Austrian spies. Then Russian agitators, sapping enthusiasm with the Bolshevist poison, and exploiting every economic hardship to foster discontent. Millions of men had to be demobilized in the dark, with warning from the spineless Government not to rouse popular resentment by appearing on the street in uniform!

It was at such a period that the office of the *Popolo d'Italia* was made a centre of organization for such returned men as were resolved not to accept this abandonment of the national victory without striking a blow. A characteristic editorial in defence of the name of 600,000 dead and 1,000,000 wounded had this passage:

We, who are not ashamed to have been interventionists, will shout to the heavens "Stand back, you jackals!"... Fear not, glorious spirits. Our task has just begun. No harm shall befall you. We shall defend you. We shall defend the dead, and all the dead, even though we put dug-outs in the public squares, and trenches in the streets of our city.

Not merely, not perhaps chiefly, against German, Austrian, Italian corrupters of the national morale, but against the faithless inefficient parliamentary leaders, ever manoeuvring for popularity and office, had the battle to be fought. Mussolini explains how Italy's representatives came back from the Peace Conference at Versailles having been outwitted at every turn: how they came back empty-handed, to acknowledge that the expansion of Italian destiny for which such sacrifice had been made was a vanished dream. They had the effrontery to tell a disappointed people that no better terms were obtainable:

The Nitti Government, with its continuous note of pessimism, was doing no better than to describe our situation as near to bankruptcy, economic as well as political! Nitti himself, his newspapers and his acolytes, tried to make the Italian people believe that the Versailles Treaty was for us the best result obtainable. A sense of humiliation had crawled over our whole peninsula, but many there were who did not want to resign themselves to accept the tragic facts. No one knows better than I that many meditated, in sullen silence, most desperate actions.

In like manner, as strike followed strike, as workmen's councils took possession in true Bolshevik style of the factories, as revolutionary postal and telephone officials disorganized the whole public service, nothing wiser seemed to come into the mind of Government than some fresh scheme to appease those who had most votes. A particularly gross example was that of a railroad strike, when orders to carry troops were disobeyed:

There was the incident of the station master of Cremona, Signor Bergonozoni, which fell without my observation. He, by an energetic act, ordered the railway men subject to his authority to hook on to a train a car conveying some troops to Piacenza. For this episode, exhibiting the most ordinary case of regularity in routine, the Railway Syndicate, dominated by Socialists,

demanding of the Ministry of Public Works the dismissal of the station master, Bergonzoni. And because the Ministry by its firmness rejected this demand of the syndicate, Milan, which had nothing to do with all this matter, had imposed upon it a railway strike lasting thirteen days. Milan, a city of 900,000 inhabitants, choked by an enormous traffic, found itself *incommunicado* from its suburbs and the whole world. It was thrown back on the use of stage coaches, autos, camions, and was obliged to use even the small boats along the Naviglio River.

Milan, our greatest modern city, was in the power of political anarchy.

Here, then, is the picture of the rise of Fascism as we now know it: not the early forming of political groups to agitate for a certain policy within the limits of the constitutional system of parliament, but a superseding of parliament for the sake of public order by a few resolute men who appointed themselves to this office. No longer just Fascisti, but *Fascisti di Combattimento*—"Bundles of Fight."

The next three years saw them fighting—in the city streets and squares, in the small towns, in the villages. The organization grew, always under the central control of the editor in Milan. Externally what the observer could notice was incessant faction fights, apparently the old Italian turbulence. But the spirit of the fights was new, everywhere groups of returned soldiers fighting strikers, Communists,—as Mussolini likes to put it, "subversives". Money began to pour in, from captains of industry, who valued a counterforce which was apparently making head where government had collapsed before disorder. After three years this new and most formidable movement was officially installed in power, when Benito Mussolini was asked to form a Government.

As he tells the story, incessantly drawing general inferences, the autobiographer discloses much of his peculiar disposition.

IV

(i) First, his disgust—complete and irremovable—with all the ways of parliamentary government. What the so-called "free" countries so admire, accept indeed as if its value were axiomatic, like a first principle in geometry, Mussolini thinks based on a clearly false psychology and altogether discredited by trial. I mean the doctrine that the best government is by will of the people, expressed through voting on policies at an election and choice of representatives under the party system. This assumes an average competence, an equality of judgment and honour, a capacity in the multitude to discern the meaning of public issues, which a moment's thought should show to be lacking. In practice, all countries

realize, or should realize by this time, the hideous spectacle into which party rule degenerates. Above all, could any Italian, with proper pride in what his country had been and might again become, look without dismay and shame at the recent parliamentary record?

The old "liberal" Italy with its petty dealing with problems, its little parliamentary pea-shooting, its unworthy plots in corridor and cloak rooms, ante-rooms and sidewalk cafés, for puny personal power, its recurring crises, its journalistic bickerings, was breaking the real Italy. Italy, with its struggling co-operatives, its inadequate rural banks, its mean and superficial measures of economy, its incapable and improvident charity! Italy, in its position of humble servant, with napkin on arm to wipe other mouths at international conferences! Italy, prolific and powerful! Italy, like a mother able to supply, even for foreign ingratitude, laborious sons to make fruitful other soils, other climates, other cities and other peoples! Such was her leadership; such was her plight.

It was Mussolini's conviction, based upon more than half a century of trial, that whatever might be practicable in other countries, the Italian people were unfit by a parliamentary *régime* to rise above the degraded, despised status which by common consent was theirs, the position—as he sometimes puts it—of a national Cinderella: neglected in diplomatic interchange, expected abroad to be represented by the ice-cream vendors, the shoe-blacks, the dealers in green-grocery, the waiters and other menials of foreign service. Fascism, he has often said, is "not for export": he does not presume to suggest that it is the true scheme for all nations. But he is sure it was the only productive scheme for his own country, and he appeals to the evidence of the visitors to whom Italy seems so transfigured in the efficiency of its administration at home, while the Chancelleries of the World know only too well the new deference that must be paid to the voice of Italy abroad.

What, then, is the conception of government, so remote from the parliamentary or elective *régime*, that has wrought the change? Mussolini would answer, and herein Hitler would support him—It is personal leadership, not the interplay of parties and majorities, that is wanted. By no means in the national interest is the persevering effort of democratic countries to make it hard for any one man to dominate. The domination of one man, provided you have got the right man for leadership—and that, after all, is proved just by the good old method of struggle, survival of the fittest—is the essential of progress. To Mussolini it is eternally untrue, it is just one of those glib plausibilities used to flatter the mob and to make the stupid man happier at the expense of the

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realize, or should realize by this time, the hideous spectacle into which party rule degenerates. Above all, could any Italian, with proper pride in what his country had been and might again become, look without dismay and shame at the recent parliamentary record?

The old "liberal" Italy with its petty dealing with problems, its little parliamentary pea-shooting, its unworthy plots in corridor and cloak rooms, ante-rooms and sidewalk cafés, for puny personal power, its recurring crises, its journalistic bickerings, was breaking the real Italy. Italy, with its struggling co-operatives, its inadequate rural banks, its mean and superficial measures of economy, its incapable and improvident charity! Italy, in its position of humble servant, with napkin on arm to wipe other mouths at international conferences! Italy, prolific and powerful! Italy, like a mother able to supply, even for foreign ingratitude, laborious sons to make fruitful other soils, other climates, other cities and other peoples! Such was her leadership; such was her plight.

It was Mussolini's conviction, based upon more than half a century of trial, that whatever might be practicable in other countries, the Italian people were unfit by a parliamentary *régime* to rise above the degraded, despised status which by common consent was theirs, the position—as he sometimes puts it—of a national Cinderella: neglected in diplomatic interchange, expected abroad to be represented by the ice-cream vendors, the shoe-blacks, the dealers in green-grocery, the waiters and other menials of foreign service. Fascism, he has often said, is "not for export": he does not presume to suggest that it is the true scheme for all nations. But he is sure it was the only productive scheme for his own country, and he appeals to the evidence of the visitors to whom Italy seems so transfigured in the efficiency of its administration at home, while the Chancelleries of the World know only too well the new deference that must be paid to the voice of Italy abroad.

What, then, is the conception of government, so remote from the parliamentary or elective *régime*, that has wrought the change? Mussolini would answer, and herein Hitler would support him—It is personal leadership, not the interplay of parties and majorities, that is wanted. By no means in the national interest is the persevering effort of democratic countries to make it hard for any one man to dominate. The domination of one man, provided you have got the right man for leadership—and that, after all, is proved just by the good old method of struggle, survival of the fittest—is the essential of progress. To Mussolini it is eternally untrue, it is just one of those glib plausibilities used to flatter the mob and to make the stupid man happier at the expense of the

talented, to say "Good government is no substitute for self-government," or again to argue that it is less valuable to enact good laws than to develop law-making capacity in the average man. That, Mussolini will reply, I can safely say—backed by history and biological analysis and all sorts of scientific proof—is what you will *never* develop in the average man. But that of which most people, at least most Italians, are capable, unless misled by democratic impostures playing on their vanity, is a readiness to acknowledge and accept direction from commanding talent where it shows itself. In respect of these two things—the inevitable débâcle of democracy, and the response of the public to genuine leadership—the post-war years for the Italian people merely illustrated with extreme and most painful clearness a general truth.

(ii) The second outstanding conviction this *Autobiography* reveals in Mussolini's mind is one harder for people of our way of thinking to follow. It is what has been called his mystical reverence for the State. To achieve status, glory, imperial expansion for Italy, to bring back something of the thrill of the old Roman Empire, to assert the Italian dignity in world affairs, is in his view not only urgent: it is that for which no sacrifice either at home or abroad can be too great. He won't argue this point with anybody: that is why I say he holds it with *mystic*, not *reasoning*, devotion: sometimes he speaks as if it were a revelation, a quasi-religious revelation to himself; and in turn he speaks of the internationalists—those sickly, sentimental Italians who wanted to be content with something short of what their country could exact in spoils from the Great War—very much as a religious leader, the herald of a revival, might speak of unbelievers. Mussolini's word for them is "subversives." He will not try to convert them: what he has in mind for them is Lipari Island, or—as he once pleasantly put it—a charge of lead in the back.

Now this takes us into an altogether new sort of arithmetic of valuation. One reason why we find it so hard to follow a speech or an article by Mussolini is that in the comparative estimate of values—how much of this is worth so much of that—we are constantly using a different scheme of moral weights and measures. To us altogether differently from the way it appears to him seems the objection to silencing the press, abolishing trade-unions, compelling everyone at peril of his life to profess enthusiasm for the Fascist Creed, extinguishing every sort of society or cultural group for the young except that which the government official oversees and regulates. To us that would be intolerable: but not to him and his disciples. These expedients are necessary for

the sort of leadership which alone can achieve national greatness, the parliamentary alternative having been tried and having failed. We should say "Perish national greatness, rather than pay such a price." It is a conflict of ultimate values.

(iii) The third and last feature I want to mention is one which helps in a measure to explain the success of some others. Mussolini is anything but a partisan of capitalism, though from time to time capitalists have found it in their interest to use him. Big business and little business, employer and employee, are for him the servants of the State, and if quarrels among them are hindering State service, he will coerce them with an impartial vigour. The Charter of Labour, issued—like all else, authoritatively—in the first period of his rule, is often commended by Fascists as the first guarantee of the worker's rights issued by any Government in any country. The Duce's constant appeal to workers is that of one who has perhaps taken away political liberty, but who has given them instead that economic liberty which is incomparably more precious.

This is how he has written himself down, unfolding his projects and methods and motives, in an autobiography of rare interest. The temptation to criticism is strong. But I abide by the limits which I set myself at the outset, and present only a picture.