THE INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS OF FASCISM

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THE first and second rules of reasoning, as formulated by Newton and repeated by popular physicists down to the present, read as follows: "We are to admit no more causes of natural things than such as are both true and sufficient to explain their appearance. . . . Therefore to the same natural effects we must, as far as possible, assign the same causes. As to respiration in a man and in a beast; the descent of stones in Europe and America; the light of our culinary fire and of the sun; the reflection of light in the earth, and in the planets." Such rules are valid for human as well as for natural history, and therefore the reasons that explain Italian fascism must be good, at least in their main outlines, for German fascism too, and vice versa, or they are not reasons at all.

Attempts have been made, both from the political and from the economic approach, to establish the fundamental character of this new type of political organization. It has been said that German fascism is a revolt against the injustices and humiliations of the Treaty of Versailles, a revulsion of defeat. But this interpretation does not account for the birth of fascism in its country of origin, Italy, a country which had won the war more smashingly than any other of the combatants, utterly destroying her hereditary enemy, the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and acquiring a frontier of a perfection, geographical, ethnical and military, unparalleled in continental Europe. To be sure she failed in getting hold of that zone of the Dalmatian mainland, opposite to her coast and inhabited almost wholly by Slavs, which the Allies had formally granted her; but she won Fiume, which she herself had promised to Croatia, and she took definite possession of Rhodes and some other Greek islands off Asia Minor, of which her occupancy had hitherto been considered more or less temporary. It is also true

that she did not share, as largely as her sacrifices entitled her, the tough and bony African and Asiatic prey, improperly although magnificently called the "colonial booty." In this she suffered a disillusionment partly due to the selfishness of her partners and partly to her own lack of colonial purpose. Also she felt that England and France were blindly stubborn in contesting with her even some ragged readjustments of borders around her sandy or rocky African territories. But such minor failures, even supposing that they injured real interests more than feelings of pride, cannot make a defeat out of a victory. Neither can they justify the nationalistic slogan, "Italy won the war and lost the peace." Among some Italians a feeling of defeat arose and gradually increased during the years 1919 and 1920; but it was a matter of feeling, not of fact, and it was a consequence, not a cause, of the fascist and prefascist mentality which later swept the country. For their emotional purposes these Italians wanted a feeling of distress, and they got it.

Happy warriors, totalitarian victors, exist only in the jealous imagination of competitors or, less frequently, in the case of nations as well as in that of individuals, in the self-sufficiency of a delicately balanced and moderate mind. If the imperfection or, as it was said, the mutilation of the Italian victory explains fascism, why had not fascism risen earlier and elsewhere, after other partially unsuccessful victories? Why did it not rise immediately after 1918 in France, who had lost both the main issues of her victory as conceived not only by inflamed nationalists, but even by cautious patriots, and was unable to get either the Rhine frontier or the Anglo-American guaranty of her safety? Why did it not rise in England, who saw, as an indirect but prompt consequence of the triumph, Ireland drifting away and the ties of the Empire loosening? Or even in America, which did not acquire any territory worth mentioning and, rather stunned, lost her money? This is indeed no world of justice, no Kingdom of God; and the destiny allotted to the Italian nation, jammed as it is in a poor and narrow territory, is inferior to the claims she may base not only on her historic grandeur but on the actual ambition of her living children to

collaborate in the work of human civilization and to pluck, also, some deserved fruits of human happiness for themselves. But even admitting that this feeling of inferiority was bound to grow more insistent after the passion and sacrifice of war, and in spite of its positive results, why did it find its expression in fascism and not in a subspecies of communism or, as reason seemed to suggest, in a political plan which would somehow have made Italy the leading power in Geneva?

Italy was, as she is, the strongest among the feeble and the feeblest among the strong. Her universal background and ambition might have gained for her the position of leader of the minor and proletarian nations of Europe, to balance with their help the "Mighty of the Earth," opposing the great powers when necessary and pushing them toward a sincere submission of their shrewd policy to their lofty principles. Italy might have made it her mission to revive the inspired democracy of Mazzini, adapting it to changed circumstances; to translate into European concreteness the idealism of Wilson; to quicken the pace of history toward the next goals: a federation, political and economic, in Europe, and a consortium in the colonies, with the "open door" and equality of rights. Certainly such a role would have been much less appealing to particularistic vanities, but proportionally more satisfactory if the aim were real justice and — why not? — real business. This plan might have been conceived, and it was indeed conceived by some Italians of those days; it was, or seemed to be, at the same time wise and great. Perhaps it might have won the support of America, but it did not please the Italian mind and heart of those days. Not only did it appear utopian to the mind; much more important, it was distasteful to the heart. And fascism came.

What Walter Lippmann wrote about Russia and America is equally true for Italy and Germany, and for any country at any time. "It is certain that men must eat; it does not follow that they can eat only what the cook chooses to provide. . . . It was certain that after the breakdown of Czarism there would have to be a new regime in Russia. . . . Yet it was not certain that it had to be the

regime of the Five Year Plan. That was the dinner the cooks happened to provide for hungry men. After the collapse of 1932-1933 a New Deal of some sort was imperative. But not everything that has been dealt out was imperative. That has depended upon the temperament, the prejudices, the quick judgments of the dealers."[1] There was no Italian defeat, and there is no reason to believe that defeat, either imaginary or actual, either Italian or German, had to be followed by fascism. Turkey and Russia were severely and unmistakably defeated, but they resorted to Kemalism and communism, which were indeed dictatorships, but of quite a different brand from fascist dictatorships.

What matters, in each of these cases, is the mental and sentimental background of "cooks and dealers."

It is even easier to dispose of the purely economic explanations that are customarily given of the phenomenon of fascism.

Marxism, at least as a prophecy, collapsed long ago; so everyone asserts. But Marxian concepts and formulae still hang, each on its peg, in the wardrobe of popular mental apparel. They are comfortable and ready to wear. Hence the interpretation of fascism as the angry self-defense of capitalism against the communistic and socialistic menace. But why then did it not appear in Poland or Rumania or the other states bordering on Bolshevism; why did it not appear in France or in any other country where capitalism is really strong and socialism is more or less militant? It is not a simple matter to explain, on purely economic grounds, why the chosen land of fascism, its Mecca or Bethlehem, had to be Italy, where capitalism was comparatively weak, and where in 1922 an agonizing socialism, which had never been very much alive, expressed what strength it had only in rhetorical strikes, compared to which the recent events in San Francisco and Minneapolis or in the American textile strike could be considered as full fledged revolutions.

The answer usually given is that *because* capitalism was weak,

[1] Lippmann, Walter, *The Method of Freedom* (New York 1934) p. 24-5.

it had to rely on violence; *because* socialism and communism, after some years of foolish threats, had proved ineffective, the time was right for revenge.

Another attempt at explanation which has recently become familiar is that the middle classes were impoverished in Italy, ruined in Germany; they had to start something. Why this something; and why was it they who had to start something, and not the peasants and workers? Were peasants and workers happy and wealthy in Italy and Germany? Or, again, the middle classes in Italy and Germany had had no sufficient experience of freedom; therefore they crushed it.

In other words: these middle classes were ruined, and they were victors; they were strong, and they were weak; they were strong enough to crush freedom and the other classes; they were not strong enough to compromise with the other classes and to maintain freedom.

All these may be truths. But they exhibit a quality of neutral, compensated, pendulum-like truth that has nothing, or very little, to say.

There certainly would be no fascism if the war had been followed by the miracle of a peace satisfactory to everybody. There would be no fascism if there had been no communism. Looking at a European map one visualizes a fascist trench or wall, a black stripe from Sicily to the Baltic shore, which in a way seems to protect the world of Western capitalism against the other world, the world of communism; it looks like a broad dike; or, to strain the right of metaphor further, it resembles a scar through which the capitalistic flesh reacts against the revolutionary wound. The existence of an outer zone, from the Balkans to Finland, does not impair the validity of the simile. These minor states, often also of very recent origin, are a softer surface on which an irritated reaction was less to be expected and would have been less definite.

A conception of this sort may appeal to the imagination and may contain, although symbolically, a part of the actual reality. A part

of reality is also contained in the views that emphasize the results, political or economic, of the war. But these are the crude materials of fascism; they are far from giving its specific nature and spirit. They explain that some kind of reaction might have occurred, or must occur, that the European body was bound to get a fever; they do not explain at all why and how and where that particular kind of reaction had to occur, why that particular kind of fever had to befall those nations.

For long centuries historiography was almost totally political. It dealt with treaties, with great men and their ambitions and beliefs. Then came the Marxist reform, and history writing became economics and the class struggle. If we want a more complete and truthful insight into human events, the intellectual and emotional elements of those events need to be taken more largely into account. They are not always economic interests in disguise; much more often, on the contrary, the economic interests are embodiments and materializations of intellectual judgments or prejudices and of emotional drives.

When the logical analysis has been pushed to its conclusion one realizes that the specific elements of fascism are of a mental and sentimental nature; they are the ideal and emotional backgrounds of "cooks and dealers"; and only through these, as through common denominators, is it possible to attain an interpretation of fascism and of its issues that is equally adequate for Italy and for Germany. Of course, these ideas and emotions embodied themselves in the political rivalry of states and in the economic class struggle; what happened first in the mind found its way into the facts of mass history. But it happened first in the mind.

This mental pedigree reaches far back. Included in it are Machiavelli and the Florentine historians of the Renaissance with their bitter contempt for the idealism of words and for unarmed prophets, and their elaboration of the concept of the state as might. Overlooking analogous tendencies in the Greek sophists, many were their forerunners among the writers of the early Renaissance. Croce

quoted complacently, many years before the fascist rise, the story of Messer Ridolfo da Camerino, as related by Franco Sacchetti. His nephew, after having studied law for twelve years at Bologna, came to visit him. He asked, "And what didst thou do at Bologna?" The young man answered, "My Lord, I have learned reason." Then Messer Ridolfo replied, "Thou hast spent thy time ill. Because thou shouldst have learned force, which is worth two of the other."

But, nearer to us and with an incomparably more decisive effect, we have, early in the decline of the eighteenth century, the German Storm and Stress, with its appeal to violence and passion and its uprising against reason and rule. Lessing, in his *Laokoön*, had opened the path to the wilderness, substituting in the appreciation of poetry passion and expression for the classical criteria of order and beauty, of "noble simplicity and calm grandeur." He had also most resolutely asserted that if man had to choose between the possession of truth and the research for truth, he should prefer the research; the effort is better than the goal — a proposition that included in itself much more explosive stuff.

The revolt, far beyond the conception of Lessing, was one against both classicism and Christianity. Naturalism and nationalism, primitivism and extreme individualism, hero worship and pessimism, all these ideas and others connected with them were born, so to speak, all together in a bundle at the very outset of the eighteenth century which, after having built up an intellectual system of reason, universality and human hope, distilled also the intellectual by-products whose slowly increasing accumulation was finally to overwhelm the results of the constructive work. Of course the intentions of the forerunners, often involuntary, did not always include the necessity of the consequences; Lessing and the *Stürmer und Dränger*, for instance, were inspired by a lofty desire for freedom and justice. But in the later disintegration of European thought this moral background was forgotten, and the nude appeal to violence and expression came to the fore.

Nationalism has proved to be one of the main ingredients of

fascism. In a way it is of course related to patriotism, to the selfish-unselfish, tender and proud feeling that obviously and almost instinctively attaches every human being to his native place, be it hamlet or metropolis, parish or continent, But in another way it is a feeling or emotion quite recent, and of a quite different quality, and inexplicable without the philosophic issues which it presupposes. One of them is naturalism. Assuming, as even Bergson assumes, that nature's purpose was to organize mankind in separate group formations, each eventually fighting the others (much the same as among some arthropods, especially ants), no doubt seems to be left that nations, as they appear organized in modern states, obey nature's purpose at its best. Their perfection, if it cannot be traced back to religious mission or to purity of race, lies in the unity and exclusiveness of language. Generally speaking, one may say that a nation is the realm of a (literary) language: an entity deeply significant for romanticism and its mystic worship of words. Whatever may be the partial origins that modern nationalism can trace to the ancient world and to Hellenism, comparatively few have realized that its pattern came, through the Bible, from the Jews: a group formation, ideological, racial and linguistic, unparalleled in its self-sufficiency and self-awareness, the real paradigm of any modern nationalism, especially German. This modern conception of nationalism pretends to be equally superior to the narrow exclusiveness of the ancient city or of the mediaeval commune, and to the abstract emptiness of internationalism and supernationalism. It has often been repeated that the individual and the universal find an unsurpassable dialectic synthesis in the idea of the nation; that this is the field where nature and reason meet. To overstep its boundaries into universalism, is not only utopian, it is unholy, because the nation is constituted by nature, and nature is holy.

At the root of this error is the romantic belief that nature is supreme, instead of being an environment whose opposition the human mind, if it so chooses, must overcome. If universalism is judged better, nature, or the imagined nature, cannot be strong enough to stand against the better choice of human will.

Another philosophic and emotional issue implied by nationalism is mere individualism. If an individual who lacks a feeling of superiority cannot attain it through his personal power or mind he can always have recourse to a collective device. He may fancy himself as belonging to the highest possible human group formation, and therefore a shareholder in this corporation of superiority. If the capital of the corporation is boomed, so also is his personal share. Indeed, for most people, this gain may be had in ordinary times with very little personal effort, and for the majority of intellectuals and politicians, who are often the most excited about national primacy, without effort or risk even in extraordinary times. This is the obvious connecting link between nationalism and egotism; an egotism more easily fed than any other kind, since any individual belonging to the chosen people, whoever he may be, is unquestionably chosen and superior from the moment of his birth. Nationalism and fascism praise themselves as authors of a new ethics of duty and hierarchy; but on the other side they start by conferring a birthright, and a big one, upon all the members of the nation, building out of it a totalitarian aristocracy, which is a synonym for demagogy. There is a story of the Emperor Charles V who, before a little crowd of little noblemen greedy for advancement, lifted his right arm and jokingly decreed, "Estote comites omnes"—"I make all of you counts." The nationalist dictator on his balcony or podium, lifting that same arm before the big crowd, earnestly decrees, "Estote principes omnes"—"You are all chiefs."

In the melting pot of fascism are naturalism and individualism, as they are combined in the spiritual chemism of nationalism; neo-Machiavellianism and Storm and Stress; ideal of the totem and of the "folk" and hero worship (from Schiller's *Räuber* to the pioneers or even to the gangsters, and in the other direction from Plutarch to Napoleon and even to General Boulanger); aesthetic privacy of aristocratic feeling and herd-like compactness of demagogy; operatic picturesqueness of conspiracies (from Ku Klux Klan onward) and equally operatic thrill of parades and processions;

appeal of the past and revolutionary thrill toward an unknown future; philosophic — chiefly Fichtean and Hegelian — "nationolatry" and statolatry; philosophic anarchism; and many other more or less romantic substances. Their prolonged enumeration would be as easy as futile: a matter of course, and a matter without end.

Indeed, the success of fascism among middling cultured middle classes and lower intellectuals is mainly due to the thoroughness and critical indifference with which it has made and still makes a concoction of all the possible elements of modern culture; who eats of it eats a bit of everything. To quite uncultured people, like the proverbial peasant or shepherd, it has nothing to say; neither has it anything to say to real minds, which want a critically clean food. But for the numberless people who thriftily carry on beyond intellectual starvation and not up to intellectual plenty, it means a lot. It means their daily spiritual meal. In this sense, much more than in an economic one, it may be said that fascism, wherever it is allowed to come to power, is the creed of the lower middle classes.

The completeness with which any spiritual need, degraded to emotional appetite, finds satisfaction within the frame of fascism is, one may say without irony, admirable. But this achievement is not the work of a single genius. It was not a single grammarian who from classicism developed pedantry; it is not a single fanatic who from a religion derives a superstition. Fascism is first of all a degradation of romanticism, both cultural and political. It is not a revolution, as often boasted, but an involution. This transformation was of course collectively produced. Such wide disintegration could never possibly have been the exploit of one single hero. It must be granted that the bacteria of the disease have circulated since the beginning in the blood of romanticism, a body which never enjoyed a single moment of wholly healthy consciousness.

Examples of the stupendous, although instinctive, skill with which any spiritual requirement of romantic mentality is translated into purely emotional impulses can be picked up at random. How far can fascism be Catholic or pro-Catholic, following the

path of romantic pro-Catholicism? Certainly not in so far as Catholicism includes elements of Christian ethics or any kind of supernatural belief; but the pomp and luxury of the ritual is coveted and emulated, the pyramidal symmetry and loftiness of the hierarchy and organization is admired as the grandest architecture of history. Therefore the attempt at imitation. It is beyond doubt that the model for the fascist political system was found in the Roman church. The dictator has the position of the Pontiff; every pronouncement of truth and every appointment of officials emanates from him. He is, at least in theory, secretly elective; the electoral, and somehow consulative, body is the Grand Council, an equivalent to the Consistory and Conclave. The Roman church contributed also the support of its Syllabus, a grim condemnation of criticism and reason, which did not lack courage nor, as became clear after a while, a remarkable amount of success.

Further, how far is fascism Protestant? As far as Protestantism can be interpreted, by those who like such interpretations, as the disruption of ethical codes and the foundation of any ethical imperative in the spontaneity of any individual genius, or grace, or passion: whence the self-sufficient ethics of the brigand, of the tyrant, of the pioneer, of the poet, of the hero, of the saint. How far is it democratic? As far as democracy too has its grandeur of ritual and ceremonies: crowds, well ordered mass demonstrations, plebiscites, parades. How far is it socialist? As far as socialism implies the concept of struggle (i.e: fighting, sport) and as far as the Marxist Manifesto of the Communist party denies "eternal truths such as freedom, justice, etc.," and strips away the Platonic attire in which for millennia the harsh reality of hungry interests has hidden. How far is it martially inclined? As far as war can be fought with fifes and drums and words — for down to the present, and one hopes into the future, its zeal for war does not reach for weapons more deadly. How far does it care for peace? Certainly not in connection with any education of the people to feelings of peace, which is the only way of really fostering peace, but as far as speeches in behalf of peace may attain the sheer beauty of *Real-*

politik and of Machiavellian tricks. Even in minor appearances, how far is the Roman salute Roman? Was it really the salute of the Roman citizen, or of the slave? This does not matter, especially for Germans. It is beautifully dramatic; it is proud and strong; it looks like an exercise or even, eventually, like the threat of a straight blow; in any case it implies a display of energy.

This proves indeed to be the constant substance under the flow of fascist appearances: the romantic cult of energy — or violence or passion — transferred if not into real historic deeds at least into a ritual performance. Hitler says, "We think with our blood": a motto which might well have been adopted by the primitive tragic hero, such as Lessing conceived him, or by any leading character of the Storm and Stress literature. Hence the fascist evaluation of revolution and war. There have always been revolutions in human history; but they were considered by moralists and historians as sad necessities which it would have been wise and lucky, if possible, to avoid; and the theory of revolution as the loveliest and most admirable of human social expressions is thoroughly modern. The Christian, especially the Protestant, experience of conversion and grace, which is a kind of individual revolution, gave the mightiest impulse to this conception, whose vigor increased through contributions flowing from various philosophic, scientific, political and literary sources. The lurid glamor of modern revolutions from the English to the Russian, but especially the French, added a fantastic suggestion which worked decisively on emotional complexes. Finally in the footsteps of Nietzsche and Sorel came the fascists with their idealization of revolution as such, *Revolution an sich*. Strangely enough, both fascist countries, Italy and Germany, know in their long past much more of riots and local upheavals than of real revolutions. Italian fascism was from the very beginning approximately legal and was immediately legalized; the rise of Hitlerism was legal throughout. But only to a superficial observation may it seem strange that fascism upholds things that lie outside of its history and its nature. On the contrary, it quite belongs to fascist mentality to thirst for waters that do not flow.

As for war, there have been wars enough in human history; and fascism, either Italian or German, has hitherto fought none, not even civil war. But fascism, for the first time in human history, has erected an altar to the god War. "Fascism, before everything, in what generally concerns the future and development of the human race, and leaving aside any consideration of actual politics, does not believe either in the possibility or in the utility of perpetual peace. It therefore rejects pacifism, which masks a disavowal of struggle, and a cowardice before sacrifice. Only war raises to their maximum of tension all human energies and imprints a seal of nobility on the peoples who have the virtue to face it. All the other trials are but substitutes which never make a man face the alternative of life and death. Any doctrine, consequently, which moves from the presupposed postulate of peace, is foreign to fascism; and no less foreign to the spirit of fascism, even if accepted for what utility they may have in some particular political situation, are all the international structures and leagues (*tutte le costruzioni internazionalistiche e societarie*) which, as history demonstrates, may vanish in thin air as soon as sentimental, ideal and practical elements rouse to storm the hearts of nations." So wrote Mussolini under the caption Fascism in the 14th volume of the Encyclopedia Italiana, in 1932; and this theory has often been proclaimed by him and his followers in other but similar words, and has been widely echoed by Hitler and Hitlerism. Peace can be accepted, must be accepted some times — alack! too many times — but as a fact of existence, an unavoidable sad necessity. The ideal condition of human life is battle.

Could one imagine a more romantic suggestion? "Venez, orages désirés." One sees the Wagnerian god Thor arousing with his hammer thunder and hail. And, since this state of mind is purely emotional and imaginative, it would be of little use to advance objections. Is it really true that human life is so miserably bereft of noble trials and dangers that war, if it did not exist, ought to be invented? And is it true that the maximum of human tension is reached only in war? Goethe, who has his share of responsibility, however mod-

erate, in the making of this mentality, wrote nevertheless the superb self-epitaph of the man who desires admittance to the Islamic paradise, a "Paradise under the shadow of swords," in spite of never having brandished a sword. "Denn ich bin ein Mensch gewesen—und das ist ein Kämpfer sein" ("Because I was a man, and that means to be a warrior"). The knight-errant or professional condottiere who rode self-determined from duel to skirmish might have boasted about the alternative of life and death; so may the volunteer, although not in every circumstance. But the democratic compulsory enlistment, which the anti-democratic fascism has not hastened to discard, has sharply changed things; and the poor devil of a soldier who has to charge against the enemy's machine gun if he does not like better the rifles of the firing squad, does not face an alternative of life and death but a choice between probable death and certain death. If, however, an alternative of life and death is an inescapable test for human nobility, why not the fire trial or simply a mortal duel as soon as any boy (or girl) comes of age? Such systems, among other advantages, would have the recommendation of economy. Certainly, it can hardly be denied that this theory of war for war's sake, of war as one of the fine arts, climbs a peak of human ingenuity. Whereas people of olden times fought, or had the illusion of fighting, for their gods or for their homes, people nowadays ought to fight because war is beautiful and supreme, the sport of sports. If such is really the fascist feeling about war, peace is safe; and their battles, as they call them, will ever be those, often salutary, which they fight no differently from communists or democrats, to drain marshes, to improve crops, to have trains running on time, to exterminate flies, or to macadamize highroads. Now and then may occur a murder or a purge, like the German Saint Bartholomew's of June 30th; but this is no war, since there is no alternative of life and death for murderers or murdered.

Whether war in human history is due to fate or to human guilt may remain an open question; but never before, in three thousand years of Western civilization, was any serious attempt made to interpret war as nice and jolly, a sword dance, and the best pastime

mankind may enjoy. To be sure, Mussolini has more than once quoted Heraclitus, "the melancholy solitary of Ephesus," according to whom "strife is at the root of all things," and Hitlerites assume that all pre-Socratic philosophers were also pre-Hitlerites. But, to say nothing of the fact that they are not usually adept in the difficult field of pre-Socratic philosophy, the fact must be taken into account that Socratic and post-Socratic, not pre-Socratic, philosophy gave the decisive imprint to ancient thought, and that the attitude toward war of pagan poetry and philosophy was scarcely different from that of the Jewish prophets and of the Christian disciples. The oldest monument of Mediterranean literature, the Iliad, knows certainly the emotional "joy of battle," but defines war, even in its first pages, as "the evil war" (*pólemos kakós*), and aims at forgiveness and peace. The Aeneid is characterized throughout by a longing for peace; and Christianity, at least theoretically, could only deepen this longing. Even the Emperor Charlemagne of the *Chanson*, though not recognizably a dastard, tears his beard when the Angel brings him the news of another war that has to be started; even in the grim Nibelungenlied, Etzel and all the other heroes would, after all, prefer peace, if peace were only possible. No doubt, strife is at the root of all things; but the inference that therefore the mutual killing of man by man is metaphysically necessary—indeed, that war is the richest cream of spiritual existence — is just a sophism of the meanest sort; as if on the premise that water is a necessary factor in human diet someone were to draw the conclusion that ocean water or boiling water, being supremely waters, make the best drinks for human meals.

Only in very recent times, with the "revolt of passion," has the cult of war grown up; for war is passion. Napoleon, with his startlingly visible glory, embodied the ideal far better than Schiller's imaginary robbers or the schoolmaster's excerpts from Plutarch's heroic biographies. Goethe in his Euphorion, half Byronic, half Storm and Stress, knew how to translate into song the scorn of pacifism that had already been formulated in plain prose, several decades earlier, by Moeser and others:

"Dream ye the peaceful day?
Dream, then, who may!
War! is the countersign:
Victory, word divine."

Although the Chorus objects:

"Who peace and unity
Scorneth, for war's array,
With impunity
Slays his hope of a better day."

On the crest of the same wave foamed Schopenhauer's pessimism, and, as a deduction from Schopenhauer, came Wagner's music and controversial writing. Wagner is the genius who gave flesh and blood to the most expressive of modern myths: Siegfried as a demi-god of irrationalism and of adventure for adventure's sake. Wagner, too, combined German self-deification with anti-Semitism, a tendency which never before had shown the tremendous emotional swing with which Wagner was able to endow it.

Later Gobineau and others carried the tendency forward with the tale of German superiority, founded substantially on nothing but the thrilling pamphlet in which the Roman historian and orator Tacitus transferred the traditional Arcadia, begemmed with the virtues of early patrician Rome, to the German woods: a utopian republic which he contrasted with the corruption of the Roman Empire. Then came Darwinism, with the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest; then pragmatism (and, why not, Christian Science, and, why not, theosophy, and any kind of occultism) placing imagination and will above truth and reason. Meanwhile Nietzsche—the grandest storm on the horizon of human thought, as Andler aptly said — placed the cage of the "blonde wild beast" on the meadow where Rousseau's innocent savage used to play on his reed pipe.

Is it necessary to repeat that these philosophies and arts and these intellectual heroes, major and minor, are not, each and all, directly

responsible for fascism? That a full enumeration of the elements would be interminable: that the genealogical tree of fascism is as leafy as a weeping willow? The disintegration of European thought from the decline of the eighteenth century to the dawn of the twentieth — a disintegration which did not impair, and even occasionally stimulated an astounding wealth of creative energy—took many directions; and fascism gathered from every direction whatever suited its requirements. It skimmed, one may say, anthologically, the romantic and post-romantic mentality, quite unprejudiced in the choice of details, provided they might be arranged along the main line of fascist impulsion. This consists in a strenuous and, in spite of the multiplicity of appearances, a very coherent opposition to any form of rationalism and Platonism in the interpretation of history; and, therefore, especially an opposition to the latest concrete experiment in rational idealism: progressive democracy as it was conceived in the philosophies of the eighteenth century. Further, fascism consists in the rejection of any fixed goal or permanent aim, in the belief that change is substance, passion is virtue, force is right; or, for those who like concise definitions, fascism consists in the substitution of the idea of power for the idea of justice. Any other definition misses its proper intention; it would not touch what is specific in fascism and what is common to all brands of fascism.

As for freedom, fascism takes equitably into account—and not contradictorily at all — both extremes of the post-romantic disintegration: the super-individualistic, anarchic, solipsistic extreme, and the reactionary, obscurantist, herd-like opposite. The tyrant, or hero, is free, so far as the Superman or Stirner's *Einziger* can want to be free; hence, his rebellion against any law that might be imposed on him, League of Nations or international codes. But slaves are slaves. Chains, forged either by church or state or in the underworld of conservative ethics and complexes, are equally good; for how could He be free, had He no slaves?

All that precedes is tantamount to saying that fascism, if it were a real thing, could claim the glory of being the most deeprooted

involution or revolution in the course of our civilization, "the grandest storm that ever burst on the horizon of history"; subverting both the Christian teaching of love and the classic doctrine of permanent justice; as its ultimate achievement looming a bifront Janus, one face Antichrist, the other Antiplato. But is it a real thing? Has it outgrown the literary, musical, aesthetic cradle where it was nursed with slogans and *leitmotive*? True, there has been some castor oil, some blood, a few concentration camps, a little, perhaps not so little, suffocation. There is also a good deal of talk about the corporate state; as if a corporation or any other kind of institutional organism were even conceivable so long as His power, the omnipotence of the despot, is totally uncontrolled. But what will such historic scenery look like from the height of the future, say in a hundred years, if fascism did not go further? More chronicle than history; wavy outline, no mountain range; all in all a postwar neurosis, and an epigonic output of literary aftermath. Most of it still exists only in speech, journalism, song, cheer, advertising, broadcast. Public utterance by word of mouth and the circulation of the daily paper, this unavoidably democratic tool, is managed as a weapon against democratic thought; a paradox which, more than anything else, bares the weakness of the system. No fascist dictator has yet openly proclaimed his divine, or, at least superhuman right; no fascist dictator has retired from the profane mob behind the walls of an Escurial. A really anti-democratic belief ought to require no less than this.

Far away, almost imperceptible from the distance of the future, the tom tom of Emperor Jones fades into the jungle of nothingness.

But whatever is real in fascism, little or much, could never have come to the world, if the intermarriage of ideas, related in the foregoing pages, had been celebrated only in ideal beds, which are sterile. Not a single prophet, during more than a century of prophecies, analyzing the degradation of the romantic culture, or planning the split of the romantic atom, ever imagined anything like fascism. There was, in the lap of the future, communism and syndicalism

and what not; there was anarchism, and legitimism, and even all-papacy; war, peace, deluge, pan-Germanism, pan-Slavism, Yellow Peril, signals to the planet Mars; there was no fascism. It came as a surprise to all, and to themselves too.

One may imagine all the possible interrelations of ideas and all their thinkable results, one of which undoubtedly was fascism, although overlooked by prophets; but such results are bound to remain mere day dreams, ambivalent or plurivalent hypotheses, unless someone comes and grafts the living shoot of a real volition upon the sterile stock of the imagination. This is the final issue in history: personality. No collective explanation, either economic or dialectic, can dispense with it.

Why did not fascism arise in Russia? Because, the answer runs, the components of Russian culture were Czarist mysticism and mystic communism; there you have the resultant in communistic Czarism, or Bolshevism. Why not in the United States? Because, here also the answer is at hand, her youthful sturdy innocence preserved her from both major diseases of sophisticated Europe: the tuberculosis of eager pessimism (Schopenhauer) and the syphilis of megalomania (Nietzsche).

But why did it not arise in France, where teachers of obscurantism and hatred, from de Maistre and before to Maurras and Daudet and after, had been quite a college? The sabre rattling of General Boulanger did not impale even a mouse; Jacques Lebaudy died as emperor of Sahara; Coty, the Corsican of the twentieth century, died a short time ago as a perfumer; and the Pretenders are charming gentlemen.

England too had her share, a large one, in the disintegration of romanticism, mainly in the aesthetic and literary field, although not without encroachments on the neighboring fields of ethics and behavior. But Oscar Wilde did not set himself up as Prince of Wales; and if it must be granted that, had fascism conquered England, Irish sophistry and Popish revival would have found in fascism its good sides, nonetheless G.B. is still only G.B. and G.K. still wears no mitre.

Finally, why did not fascism appear first in Germany? We have of late heard an American sage utter the judgment that fascist mentality is un-German. This is no doubt inaccurate; no doubt a large majority of the intellectual elements of fascism had their fatherland, primitive or adoptive, in Germany. But fascism did not, however, spring up first in the furrow where Fichte or Hegel, Wagner or Treitschke, Gobineau or Chamberlain or Bernhardi or Spengler had sown; neither did corporatism, in spite of Adam Müller and Othmar Spahn. It was a long, wearisome way from the beerhall putsch to the plebiscites; and even the first putsch was started several months after the march on Rome.

Why then did fascism arise first in Italy? Because Italy had had her share, with Vico and Gioberti and others, and finally with the Pope of the Syllabus, in the shaping of neo-reactionary doctrines? This share had not been decisive, and had lacked the rhetorical spell appealing to the masses. Because Italians had not been long enough accustomed to political and intellectual freedom? This is, as already emphasized, generic for many nations, not specific for Italy. Because, more than any other nation, they had been accustomed through two thousand years of world empire and universal church, across dramatic peaks and valleys of majesty and misfortune, to loftiness of political imagination, and at the same time to the most dejected renouncement of personality in public life and to the most daring experimental versatility in political thinking? This is a better reason. They were prepared to accept anything strange and new, particularly if the novelty promised somehow to revive the hereditary complex of Roman superiority and to check the stubborn, although scarcely reasonable, complex of modern inferiority. They were also hereditarily ready to give up their personal rights that a collective imagination might thrive. But this too would have remained a theoretical reason, had the Man not come. A hundred Machiavellis cannot breed a single Prince.

The Man was not the Marquis and Professor Vilfredo Pareto, about whom we have already begun to hear much idle talk in this country. Pareto was a rather difficult nobleman, who transferred

the loathing for plebeians that saddened his genteel blood into a rather confused and pretentious system of aristocratic pessimism. Much of what is good in his work is a plagiarism or unavowed borrowing from the Italian jurist Mosca, who had already discovered that groups and elites, not undifferentiated masses, are the makers of history. Many details, especially in footnotes, are striking; and they are often the fruit of an original and rich scholarship (even if at times a bit whimsical), especially in ancient history. Much of what is bad is the inadequate and positivistic ambition to classify human history as a kind of natural science (*vide* Taine), nay, as a branch of mathematics. Nobody ever read him except in indexes, abridgments or book reviews, or in browsing. It is often reported that Mussolini, when a young wanderer in Switzerland, attended some of his classes; probably an opportunity, unusual with him, for a rest.

The man of destiny was Gabriele d'Annunzio: a great poet, so far as his greediness for life allowed him greatness in poetry, and a real man of action, so far as his poetic talent allowed him real action; a Bryon raised to the *n*th power. Now an old man, grumbling behind the walls of his freaky Escurial, the Vittoriale on the Lago di Garda, he was once a phenomenon unique in history: a poet who meant what he wrote, and lived, if not up to his full success, at least to his fancy. He had collected in one single trough all the distillations and drippings of the romantic witch-kitchen: titanism and sadism, voluptuousness and despair, Nietzsche and Verlaine, Mona Lisa and Yseult, La Belle Dame sans Merci and the Holy Virgin, the saintliness of the peasant's family, the pious silence of the cloister, the beauty of slaughter, of fire, of tyranny, of treachery, of bravery, of Rome, of sacrifice. Everything that is fascist is in his volumes, and various other things that fascism later dropped. Early in the new century he had carved the line, "Arma la prora e salpa verso il mondo" ("Arm the prow and sail toward the world"), which, incidentally, is rather a bewildering sailing direction. Certainly a genius, even if he had only written. But he did more than that; he acted. As war came, he went warring, an

individual warfare incomparably more striking than Byron's in Greece. He fought his own war, indeed as a potentate strictly allied to the King of Italy, but choosing whatever gallant enterprise on land, in air, on sea, suited his taste, and totally ignoring any other discipline or obligation; a self-determination unprecedented except perhaps in *Orlando Furioso* or in *Don Quixote.* Even the military rank that he adopted, *Commandante,* although apparently borrowed from the navy, was, in more or less secret intention, the literal translation of the Roman *Imperator.* As peace, or at least armistice, came he was heard saying, "I smell the stench of peace." Shortly after at the head of a handful of people, although meeting no military resistance, he seized a city, Fiume, challenging the wrath if not the guns of all the Great Powers, and there he settled, a Signore and monarch, like a condottiere of the Renaissance. There he invented or perfected everything: salutes, speeches from the balcony and choral cheers from the crowd assembled underneath, rites, processions, oaths, transvaluation of Faustism and perhaps of Mephistophelianism, into a mysticism of action. Even corporatism has roots in d'Annunzio's love of the beauty of guilds in the mediaeval Italian communes, where everybody belonged to an "art," which is, in a way, the equivalent of saying that everybody was an artist. It is an effect of this leaning far more than it is an enactment of Müller's and Spahn's highbrow speculations, a derivative from syndicalism or a loud echo of what, more modestly but more successfully, had been achieved a generation earlier in democratic Australia and New Zealand under the compulsory Arbitration Act. A year or so later some shellshots of the Italian regular forces drove him from Fiume; he withdrew, undisturbed, to his fanciful Vatican on the Lago di Garda, where a real warship with real guns lies, far away from any water, on the hills of the poet's estate, and might some day sail anew toward the world.

A failure, when compared to the promise of dreams; but a huge achievement in the difficult realm of things. If d'Annunzio, some twenty years earlier, had conquered the *jeunesse dorée* and the

naive youth through little more than his admirable poems and his smart riding on horseback, now, giving evidence that "anything is feasible" (or almost), he swept all the lower and middle emotional strata of the country. Other experiences of the same kind loomed in the memory of the race: Caesar, Columbus, Napoleon, Garibaldi in the grand style; Cola di Rienzo at about the level of d'Annunzio; the adventurers, from the Renaissance to Casanova and further, in the woodland of irresponsible pioneering. Perhaps this feeling that history is inventive, that the world of reality is plastic and obedient to a strong, creative hand, belongs to Italians more than to other nations. The deed of Fiume aroused many hearts.

Could philosophy have diked the land against the wave of mystic activism? Philosophy had enjoyed great popularity in Italy during the first two decades of the twentieth century; and the authority of Benedetto Croce, a great thinker and scholar, had not been conconsiderably impaired by his pro-German, or neutral, attitude at the start of the war. Some tendencies of his ethical and aesthetic taste entitled him, in a way, to claim the national office of an anti-d'Annunzio. But Italian neo-idealism, either in the shape conferred on it by Croce or in the variant of Gentile — who, in fact, joined the Fascist party as early as 1924 — had, and still has, no fundamental objection to nationalism and fascism. It asserts, in the wake of Hegel, that "all that is rational is real, and all that is real is rational"; if so, is not nationalism real? Is not fascism real — so far as it is a reality? And how, possibly, can reason, or philosophy, oppose them? Besides, this philosophy is impregnated with a considerable amount of belief in the state, and in the national state as the highest possible attainment and the broadest possible community through which the individual is allowed to come in contact with the universal. It expressed also, indefatigably, a bitter dislike of Mazzinianism, democracy, freemasonry and of any kind of abstract, utopian, "eighteenth century mentality." The short autobiography which Croce composed on the eve of the Italian intervention in the war, in 1915, is very interesting in the candor with which he confesses his slowness, almost sluggishness, in political curiosity and

interest at the beginning of his career. There was an approach to socialism, followed by a quick disillusion. The only constant element in his political temperament from adolescence onward had been a feeling against the liberal and democratic "rhetoric," and an aversion to the abstract thinking of the "eighteenth century mentality." He had raised, or created from nothing, the reputation of a writer, Alfredo Oriani, now canonized among the prophets of national fascism. In his most brilliant if not most successful book, *Philosophy of the Practical,* he had inserted a short but eloquent defense of the Holy Inquisition, which was "really holy." Approximately at the same time he warmly introduced to Italian readers Georges Sorel and his "Reflexions sur la violence." This was a big event. The Italian *jeunesse dorée* and the honest fanatics — often former socialists and syndicalists of extreme vehemence — did not have to bother any more about the intellectual quality of the suggestions of violence that came from the poet d'Annunzio. Sorel's pamphlet, with Croce's preface, stamped the seal of serious learning on their passions; philosophy, so they felt, legitimized poetry. In the following decade Sorel was far more popular in Italy than in France, and he liked Italy very much: an experimental zone where, perhaps, the toilsome nail work of this misanthrope scratching nervously on the facade of contemporary civilization might help to bring about some crumbling worth the while.

In the municipal elections of 1914 at Naples, Croce headed the conservative parties, *Fascio dell' ordine,* against the leftist block. At the start of the war he was pro-German or neutral; he never agreed with the interpretation of the war as making the world safe for democracy. This war had to him no ideal meaning at all. Certainly dialectic thinking is difficult and noble, and in the very many things that Croce wrote and said about politics and history in the making there was ever a kernel of truth; but dialectic action is impossible. Hamlet may talk and sink, Fortinbras must choose. So far as Croce was a Fortinbras, directly concerned in action, he had to choose; and at the very decisive moment, which was the close of the war and the immediate morrow of war, he chose to put all the

weight of his work on the side of nationalism and pre-fascism. The eighteenth century mentality of Wilsonians and Mazzinians was necessarily hateful to him; he had already announced the death of socialism; he minimized the League of Nations; he scorned the idea of "State as justice," again and again upholding the state as force; he stressed national differences, such as those between "English and Russians, Italians and Croats, Christians and Turks"; he ultimately decided that politics cannot "be treated as ethics, whereas politics (this is the plain truth) is politics, just politics, and nothing else but politics; or, if you want me once more to repeat the tenet and comparison that are dear to me, the morality of politics consists wholly and only in being excellent politics, as the morality of poetry, whatever the incompetents may say, consists uniquely in being excellent poetry."[1] In the following years, under fascism, he has written much finer things, some of them quite beautiful; he has steadily drawn nearer to the ideas of Europe as a unity and of political freedom, though not yet giving an adequate philosophic definition of this latter idea; he certainly belongs more to the future than to the past, for a man belongs where he has most suffered and hoped. In firmness inspired by personal pride and by disinterested conviction he withstood and withstands fascist threat and fascist boycott. He has helped as no one else has to build a bridge between the generations of the intelligentsia. This is very good for the future, although it does not entirely make up for the past. During the fascist rise Croce's philosophy and attitudes did not, to be sure, contribute an impulse comparable to d'Annunzio's; but neither did they present any real obstacle. Overstating, as usual, things moderately true, fascists claim him as one of their forerunners and assume that he, not they, took the wrong turning.

Now the apple hung ripe, ready for the strong quick hand that would stretch to pluck. There was, somewhere in the huddle, the hand of Mussolini.

He had learned from Lenin and Mustapha Kemal that the coup

[1] *Pagine Sparse, Serie Seconda* (Naples 1919) p. 258 and *passim*.

d'état was possible also in contemporary states. Indeed, both these coups d'état were toward the left, in the supposed main direction of history; but d'Annunzio had taught that anything is feasible (or almost) with no matter what intellectual or emotional stuff. Mussolini was an anarchist and an artist. Endowed, no doubt, with an exceptional and exceptionally well trained ability for handling human passions, he shared also the natural inclination that such ability usually carries with it: the inclination to prefer passions easier to handle. At the close of the war he was at a crossroads. Had his intellectual background and his moral belief been rocks of steadfastness, he would have turned to the road on the left; toward socialism and Mazzinianism, toward proletarian, progressive, scientifically inspired revolution or reform; there lay all the passions and cravings of his feverishly staring youth. This choice offered chances of failure, very many of them; and some of real greatness in history. But his adventurous and mixed reading could not possibly have bestowed on him an intellectual supply better than the sophisms and *trahisons de clercs* which he relished every day, nibbling the famed books of his time; he personally went so far as to suppose that Einstein's relativity means that there is no real truth and that everything is just relative. After hesitations, the content of power grew meaningless before his need of power. On the opposite road there were nationalistic emotionalism and the fear of the owner classes; all that he had despised and hated. But they were the forces at hand, under high pressure, ready to start, while the socialist throng had proved helpless. He was an anarchist and an artist, and the temptation was too strong. He reached for the next opportunity. He got it.

Probably he is sometimes restless, and dreams of a second chance.

Hitler, fundamentally, is nobody.

He learned, in turn, from Mussolini the lesson that everything is feasible (not almost), that a reactionary coup d'état is thinkable even after the Reformation and Kant; that individual pioneering is possible even in the heart of Europe.

He merely translated, engrossing it, Mussolini's system back into the German language in which—though until then lacking impulse to action—it had been first conceived. The differences, such as the much talked of difference in attitude toward the Jews, depend on objective circumstances, not on the intentions of the leaders.

Hitler is only the shadow of Mussolini; but such a broad one that it seems doubtful if many sun rays for autonomous development are still left to Italian fascism. For the time being Mussolini, the creator, already looks like the precursor of Hitler, the imitator: a destiny allotted to many such geniuses.

In the economic field, and seen in the most favorable light, fascism, either in Italy or Germany, has faced the crisis neither better nor worse than communistic or democratic communities have. If so, what is the use of fascism? In the international field, the clashes between Mussolini and Hitler seem to indicate that it is extremely difficult for fascism to build a new international system. Should Mussolini, in the desire to evade the Hitler shadow, be driven into the path of liberal England or of democratic France, that would imply some consequences for his future in Italy; since, in the ultimate issue, foreign policy and domestic policy are interdependent.

Is the alternative war (which, as Mussolini quite recently said, with a quotation from Proudhon, "is of divine origin")? Who can wage it, or where can it suddenly explode from the patiently accumulated heap of explosive material? Or is the alternative revolution? Or slow disintegration and gradual merging in the ordinary flux of things? Such queries may be left to fortune tellers.

There are, beyond doubt, positive and creative elements in fascism. First, the appeal to energy (although energy must know its aim, and the aim must be a good one). Second, the appeal to social order and discipline (although the basis of this order must be shifted, and the aim must be collaboration among freely ordered nations, not war, which is the worst of disorders). Third, the criticism of democracy and parliamentarianism in their decay (although a better democracy, not despotism, must be the inference).

Fourth, and best of all. Italy and Germany came last, not yet two thirds of a century ago, into the row of modern national states. They were immature. Fascism is giving them the inner experience of struggle and character that France and England had in the late Middle Ages, and America in the Civil War. Much of Germany is still a storage place for the pious safekeeping of mediaeval memories; Italy is still a peninsula jutting from the ancient world into the new. Involuntarily, but at highest speed, fascism is burning in both countries all the material of the past: personal and dogmatic authority, monarchy and church, classic and romantic pedantry, daydreaming and involuted introversion. From fascism both nations will emerge, soon or late, renovated, quite European and modern, and makers of Europe.

For the rest, the conclusive words are in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, XII, 95 ff.

> Tyranny must be,
> Though to the Tyrant thereby no excuse.
> Yet sometimes nations will decline so low
> From virtue, which is reason, that no wrong,
> But Justice, and some fatal curse annex'd,
> Deprives them of their outward liberty,
> Their inward lost. . . .

It has also been said, "Deeds, not words." But it must be said, "Words, not deeds."

It was first sinned in the Mind. In the beginning was the Word. Mind and Word must make it up. The intellectuals of the new time, philosophers and poets, must reject sophistry and lies; they must think in terms of righteousness and truth, and of united Europe, which is the next stage in the development toward unity of human effort. They must not feel ashamed of feeling like prophets; and they must cultivate the endurance and selflessness of prophets. They do not need to see a better world if they, "immovably centred," keep working toward it.