

Trevelyan's History of Italy's Part in the War

By JOSEPH COLLINS,

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MR. G. M. TREVELYAN has special qualifications for writing about Italy and the war. He is a trained historian, intimate with the traditions of Italy, an admirer of her people and institutions, familiar with her language and sympathetic with her aspirations. Moreover, he is a real student of the psychology of the Italians and recognizes keenly that they are a strange mixture of materialism and idealism. As commandant of the first British Red Cross unit for Italy from the middle of 1915 to the end of 1918, most of which time was spent in the war zone, he had unusual opportunities to get first hand information from Italians of all ranks. That he made good use of those opportunities is evidenced by his book, *Scenes From Italy's War*. Careful perusal of this book will go a long way toward purging the minds of many English readers of erroneous ideas and mistaken notions of the conduct of the Italians during the war.

Mr. Trevelyan is master both of the art of narrative and of compression, and he depicts in a lucid and terse fashion the conditions that existed in Italy, particularly in her Government, during the time that she was making the decision, so momentous to her allies, to forsake her neutrality. Any one who reads the first chapter, entitled *Days of May*, will get a fairly comprehensive idea of the determined forces that finally took the Government out of the hands of Giolitti, the dictator, and made it the expression of the will of the people, who, despite the coquetting of Germany, realized that her promises were but camouflage of the determination on the part of Austria, the ancient and hereditary enemy of Italy, to make her a vassal country. It would have added enormously to this chapter had the author made reference to the public utterance of Salandra, made in the early autumn of 1918, that Italy's King was determined to abdicate the throne had his country not made the decision to throw her fortunes in with the Allies. Evil minded, malign, bigoted and prejudiced individuals, who seem to have a perverted pleasure in maintaining that Italy spent the months of her neutrality bartering with the Allies and the Central Powers to determine from which she could get the best terms, may get their jaundiced minds clarified by careful perusal of this chapter.

II.

The second and third chapters are of less interest and are taken up largely with more or less personal narrative of the advent and conduct of the British Red Cross unit which Mr. Trevelyan directed. Nevertheless, he intersperses his narrative with personal notes which help to sustain the interest of the reader. His remarks on the Italian engineers; on the way in which the Italian medical war service controlled what threatened to be a most devastating attack of cholera in the summer of 1916; on the accomplishments of the Fiats and the conduct of the mules, whose adequate praise has yet to be sung, all make interesting reading.

The writer gives a lively description of the Isonzo front in 1916, which, unsupported by documentary evidence of any sort, must perforce be what he has seen or heard. Really a unique opportunity for a historian to be for weeks and months in the midst of battle and to draw his conclusions of its conduct from personal observations. What he has to say about the Bersaglieri, whose fame goes back to the '40s of the last century, when they were the crack regiment of the little Piedmontese army that played so great a part in the making of Italy and who nowadays add to their stature, physically and mentally, by their nodding plumes, is very interesting. Likewise his description of the troops known as the Arditi, that is, the daredevils or men full of daring, and of the Aplini, who are recruited from the mountains and who are neither so modern and impressionistic as the Arditi, nor so dignified and early Victorian as the Bersaglieri, shows that the writer is not putting forth second hand information.

It is one of the merits of the book that the various scenes which it depicts are frequently enlivened by gossipy narratives. Perhaps, indeed, this is a bit overdone, and one tires a little of "my friend Gen. So-and-So," or Major So-and-So, whose professional accomplishments are adorned by his literary gifts and lofty patriotic enthusiasm. Moreover, as the

volume does not purport to be a history of the British Red Cross in Italy, but a narrative of some phases of Italy's war, it would be acceptable to many readers, I am sure, was there less detail of the conduct of the personnel. Some of the writer's personal references have an amusing aspect at the present time, particularly the one describing the "thin, aquiline form of Mr. Wickham Steed, the evil genius of the House of Hapsburg, and the dvening angel of the races oppressed by the Dual Monarchy." "He had come to the right place at an historic hour." The traditional satan has vanished for the average Italian, and Mr. Wickham Steed, formerly resident correspondent of the *London Times* in Italy, later editor of *New Europe*, and latest, shadow of Lord Northcliffe and editor of the *Times*, has taken his place!

III.

The distinct note of Mr. Trevelyan's book is praise, praise of everybody and everything, particularly of everybody from the King down to the Duke of Aosta, from Gen. Hamilton, whom, "if any one in the world could replace as the Italian commandant of the British troops in Italy it was Lord Cavan," to Mr. Marbridge, the mechanic of the ambulances under his direction. The only name that we miss in this psalm of praise is that of Gen. di Robilant, who was currently credited in the latter part of 1917 and the early part of 1918 with being responsible equally with the Duke of Aosta for having stopped the advance of the Austrian troops after the colossal defalcation of

Italy's second army on October 24, 1917, at the Piave. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say for having shaped the success of the retreat of the Italians after that catastrophe.

Mr. Trevelyan is one of the increasing number of Britishers who sincerely hope for a closer intimacy, emotionally and intellectually, between his countrymen and the Italians. He knows the sensitiveness of the Italians. He has obviously been a close observer of their temperament, and he is convinced that the relations which he wishes to see can be facilitated by praise. It is the consensus of opinion that praise is an emollient and a cement that must be used with discernment with nations as well as individuals. However, it is to be hoped that these efforts of Mr. Trevelyan's—offset, in a measure at least, the effect of some of the irritants that were applied to the Italians after the beginning of the Peace Conference.

The chapter that the average reader will turn to with the greatest keenness is the one entitled *Caporetto and the Retreat*. We have no hesitation in saying that the gist of the real truth concerning Caporetto is contained in that chapter, and if the author had not covenanted with himself not to say a word that could hurt the most sensitive or erethitic feeling of church or state, individual or party, soldier or civilian, his qualifications as historian and psychologist, observer of events and interpreter, would have permitted him to make acceptable statement and interpretation of one of the most lamentable defalcations and one of

the most marvellous reconstructions that the world has ever seen. As it is, he overhandicaps himself. In a few pages he sketches the part played in those extraordinary occurrences by the mentality and character of the Italians as a race; the merits and defects of its political and educational system; the relation of the different classes and parties to the war; the enemy propaganda; the grievances of the soldiers at the front; the marvellous strategy of Ludendorff and the tactics of the German army; the actions of Cadorna and his subordinates, and the advent of the Allies. In his lines and between his lines the careful reader can find an adequate description of the Caporetto disaster and of its real causes. He may also get hints of the factors that led up to that event, which will always be one of the glories of modern Italy, viz.: the development of a determination to win the war which was as unitarian on the part of the Italian people in June, 1918, when their army made its wonderful resistance on the Piave, as if it had been concentrated in the heart of their best beloved recent patriot, Cesare Battisti. It was then that the finishing touch of the struggle for United Italy, which began with the advent of Mazzini practically a hundred years before, was given.

If Mr. Trevelyan's book had no other merit than this chapter, it would still be a welcome contribution to the literature of the war.

SCENES FROM ITALY'S WAR. By G. M. TREVELYAN. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

She Came Out of the Kitchen!

By CORINNE LOWE.

WE Easterners are awfully apt to think that what happens to a person west of New York doesn't matter one iota. Our conviction has been deepened undoubtedly by those romance curdling folks from Seattle who, sniffing at Lake Lucerne or glancing patronizingly at the crescent blue of Naples, have always capped every European landscape with the remark, "Oh, if you could only see Mount Rainier and the Seattle roses!"

I myself, when abroad, used to become very violent on the subject of Western enthusiasts. I called them Europe spoilers and made various remarks about vandals who instead of taking away wares always brought them along. That I have come to know the hold which the Cascades and the Olympics take upon the imagination is due to my meeting with Ruth Dunbar, author of *The Swallow*. For Miss Dunbar comes from the State of Washington and, though she has lived in New York city for the past four years, her spirit has never moved from the ghost peaks that follow Hood's Canal or the great lonely dome of snow breaking through the mists of Puget Sound.

The mountains and the deep hearted firs and the rivers—this Western sweep of landscape—are all felt in Miss Dunbar's first book, *The Swallow*. There is more in the novel, which, though slight in size, is to me one of our most valuable contributions to war literature. Told in the first person, this story of a young American aviator who went to France before America's formal entrance into the war, has a tremendous grasp of that battling courage which we women are polite enough to call masculine. From first to last *The Swallow* is a tale of battle. And whether Richard Byrd is fighting against seasickness and thugs on the mule boat which took him to Europe, whether he is trying to get his airplane back to French soil after the German bullet has exploded in his thigh, or whether—most terrific of all—he is trying to keep himself alive through all the suffering in a French hospital, we see the "overcoming spirit" which his creator has claimed for him.

"How did you ever do it?" I asked Miss Dunbar as she sat in her apartment on Washington Square. "How did you, a woman, imagine so vividly a man's pluck?"

I really need not have asked her. If I lived in the time of Jane Austen, I should say that Miss Dunbar's face was "a wonderful combination of strength and gentleness." Writing to-day, I celebrate her by saying that she has one of those grave, deep, dark faces—seeing far and going far—which the early Florentines put down for us on canvas. She might be a portrait by Botticelli.

"Well," she said with a little twinkle—the twinkle of humor that runs straight through her book—"it wasn't so hard to

imagine, really. I've gone through a battle, too. It's my battle with the East."

Quaint words for an Easterner to hear! I thought of those ladies who used to moan, "Oh, if you could only see Rainier," as they looked at the Neapolitan goats.

"Why did you leave the West then?" I asked. It was the very same question I used to ask the elegiac ladies abroad.

Miss Dunbar, however, had a reason. "Well," she answered slowly, "I came East because I wanted to learn to write. I had gone to a little Western college and I felt I ought to have a post graduate course in English. So I came to New York and took a course at Columbia. There wasn't a day when I wasn't so homesick that I felt I must take the train to Olympia—"

"Olympia?" I asked wonderingly. I felt suddenly as if I should lapse into a Homeric verb.

"Yes," she answered, "that is the capital of Washington. I have always lived there, for my father was Chief Justice of the State for many years. He was a very wonderful person," she added reverently, "Oh, no, that isn't a daughterly prejudice—he was like the West—big and honest and courageous—and it's a matter of history that his dissenting opinions often became laws in the course of time."

"Ah, then you inherit your courage?" I asked.

"If I have it I certainly do," she replied with a gesture of very fine, delicate hands. "All my ancestors have been pioneers—going out to the West before there were any railroads, fighting the wilderness at every step—indeed, my mother's father was killed by Indians, the Indians that he had always befriended. You see," she added after a minute, "my grandfathers were pioneers of the West—they fought their way there. Now, I'm a pioneer of the East. And I don't believe"—this with another twinkling smile—"that they fought the West much farther than I fought the East."

"Tell me more about that," said I. I was beginning already to have more sympathy with the Rainier mourners by the Bay of Naples.

"Well," said she, "I hated New York.

I was so homesick for the West—there wasn't a night when I didn't dream of the mountains nor a day when I just didn't spatter the streets of the big, strange city with tears of loneliness."

"Yet you stayed. Why?"

"Because," she answered, "I knew I could learn more here in the East—I know it meant my own development. Yet things did get harder. In the first place, my money gave out and I did—what do you suppose I did?"

I shook my head.

"Why," said she merrily, "I began cooking for a woman for my board. I'm a good cook, you know, and I could get a recommendation any time. But it did make my work at Columbia harder and having no money is always rather forlorn, isn't it? One night, I remember, a friend of mine invited me to sit in a box at the Metropolitan given her by Mrs. J. P. Morgan, so after I had cooked the dinner and washed the dishes I got myself into evening clothes and went with her. That was so funny that it did cheer me.

"Well," she concluded, "to make a long story longer, I got into the habit of sending some stuff to one of the evening papers here in town. They took nearly everything I wrote and finally offered me a job. I had stayed away from them for a month before this offer; all the time you see I was terrified for fear something was going to keep me in New York away from my beloved West. When it did come I hesitated for a long time. Then I finally decided I must—that this New York experience would develop me as a writer; that I couldn't afford not to be plucky. So I took it and I went to live in a settlement house for factory girls. The meals were terrible, the summer months with their terrific heat made me physically sick, never was there a moment when I didn't long for my mountains and my friends in the West. Yet it was worth it all—the struggle. For I did learn a great deal through my newspaper experience here—"

"Yes," I interrupted, "and the greatest thing you learned was winning the battle, for if it had not been for that you could never have written so well of how Richard Byrd, the aviator, won his battles."

The Man With the Lamp

By JANET LAING

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