

# The New York Times

## Book Review

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# Fascism in Italian Literature



ROME.

**F**ASCISM, which began in Italy as a political and social force, soon became cultural as well. Already the movement has produced a considerable literature of its own. It is a literature of thews and sinews, of conflict and aspiration; its appeal is to a people awakened to a new consciousness of the possibilities and the responsibilities of life, a people that is confident that it has recovered the elixir of youth and has faith in the future. Fascist literature in general is not of a high quality as literature, but in its sincerity, struck off in the heat of achievement, it is wholesome and inspiring and does justice to the higher qualities of human nature. In part it seeks to vindicate the action and policy of fascism, in part to educate the youth and make the future of Italy "safe for democracy"—for its unquestioning faith, for the present and the future, is fixed upon the youth of the country. The latest volume, and one of the most important, of the fascist school is a life of Mussolini by Antonio Beltrami, published by A. Mondadori under the title "L'uomo nuovo" (The new man). Other biographical works upon Mussolini had already appeared. His own "War Diary" (Casa editrice "Imperia," Milan) told us what was most essential of his conduct during the World War; Pietro Gorgolini wrote an excellent study upon him as the originator of the fascist movement, a volume which Fisher Unwin discovered when it was two years old and published last Spring in an abridged English version, and Mussolini's own Speeches (Milan, 1921)



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gave us much of his vital thought from the Autumn of 1914 to 1921. But what we have in vain wanted to know in detail was Benito Mussolini's earlier life, that we might judge more securely the "New Man" of today.

We know now that his father was one of the chief internationalists in his little section of the Romagna, in correspondence with all the leading Italian internationalists of the time—indeed he was the red mayor of his village. We know now that Benito's mother sought to differentiate her sons from the boys of the streets by making them speak Italian, instead of the dialect of the Romagna; that the boy Benito once asked her: "Mother, do you suppose that the day will come when Italy will be compelled to fear me?" that his father foretold the future declaring to the lad that he was destined to be "the Crispi of tomorrow;" that his mother was the companion and confidant of Benito's life until her death in 1905. We know also that he did his utmost to promote general strikes, and that for active participation in one of them, in 1911, he went to prison for a year, and there wrote a life of John Huss and learned English.

Beltrami goes on to tell us of the terrific crisis of Mussolini's life at the outbreak of the World War. Mussolini hoped for a New World as the outcome of colossal conflict. Italy must bear her part in winning the future. If the Italian proletariat was too weak to fight, it could never hope to obtain the rights to which it aspired. In 1914 he abandoned the direction of the Socialist daily *Avanti* and founded the interventionist daily *Il Popolo d'Italia*. His old companions attacked him without mercy. Then came the hour of imputation and defense before the great Socialist meeting in Milan. Hooted, hissed and vilified, his voice rose above the infuriated mob with the sculpturesque phrase: "Voi oggi mi odiate perchè mi amate ancora" (You hate me today because you love me still). These were the words of a strong man conscious of his strength. Beltrami makes clear Mussolini's unswerving loyalty and devotion to the Italian proletariat; his hostility to the Socialist party will continue only so long as Socialists "continue to be anti-Italian."

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**I**N the flush of the enthusiasm of her reawakening Italy, however, has by no means forgotten her past. Among recent publications are lives of "Michelangelo," by Adolfo Venturi; "Sant' Ambrogio," by E. Buonajuti; "Vincenzo Gioberti," by Valentino Piccoli. They encircle Beltramelli's volume like an effective old frame for a present-day portrait. This is the country in which, par excellence, civilization has proved the unbroken



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continuity of progress through genius. The three volumes mentioned all belong to Formiggini's collection of "Profil" which, having been interrupted by the war, is now resumed. Venturi's volume is a little gem; the others are by specialists and, although brief, are scholarly and maintain the highest level reached by their sixty predecessors of the collection.

Another work which has had an immediate success and has produced a deep impression in Italy is Senator Corrado Ricci's "Beatrice Cenci, storia, legenda e poesia," published by E. Treves (Milan) in two volumes, of which the second appeared in the middle of August. Such has been the interest created by the publication that the Cenci Church of S. Tommaso delle Moli (St. Thomas of the Quays), which had been closed for thirty years, has now been reopened. The little edifice stands on Monte de' Cenci close by a point on the Tiber's left bank where wharves formerly existed. In the church Giacomo, brother of Beatrice, was buried after he had been, by order of the courts, torn with red-hot irons, brained and quartered. The story of the Cenci is a foul page of history, characteristic of the sixteenth century which Ricci paints in all its outward splendor and moral filth. The work, though of profound erudition, reads like a novel. Beatrice can no longer appeal to us as a pure young woman, nor is her portrait in the Barberini Palace in Rome genuine—Guido Reni painted a sibyl, not Beatrice—but in her corrupt and terrifying surroundings her figure in its beauty and its passion compels sympathy as the dramatic victim of environment. Ricci has appended to his work an exhaustive bibliography of manuscript and printed sources.

The best seller of the Italian Summer has been, not unnaturally, a novel, Virgilio Brocchi's "Il destino in pugno," published by A. Mondadori. Brocchi, who is of the Milanese school, was predestined to create a pleasant, if not a perfect, world. His leading characters invariably struggle, and in the end successfully, against vice; the bad people die at the right moment or receive a just retribution. His characters are not degenerate and offer no attraction for the study of the alienist—a relief after the perversion of the average psychological novel. Brocchi, writing in his olive grove of the Liguria, is rich in imagination and this latest production is a perfect salad of sentiment and intrigue. The public finds it appetizing. The volume has run into its eleventh thousand in two months.

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