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JAMES-H. HYDE

AVANTI SAVOIA

Impressions du front italien

Extrait du *Parlement et l'Opinion*
n° 1, Janvier 1917

SURESNES — TYP. J. CRÉMIEU
13 ET 15, RUE PIERRE-DUPONT

1917.

FOREIGN EVIDENCE ON THE
WAR AT THE ITALIAN FRONT
1915 - 1918

BENITO MUSSOLINI

**FOREIGN EVIDENCE ON THE
WAR AT THE ITALIAN FRONT
1915-1918**

A PREFACE TO THE BOOK BY
GEN. ADRIANO ALBERTI

NOVISSIMA - ROMA

In the vast amount of literature inspired to the World War, altogether about fifteen thousand volumes in all languages, Italy is up to now represented by a limited quantity of publications, not certainly proportionate to the intensity of her effort. This so-called discretion of hers, on the causes of which it is futile to linger, was useful to all those who, for political reasons, tried to diminish the value of the contribution of blood given by Italy to the Allied victory. This is the motive for which, apart from the outstanding intrinsic value of the book, I am happy to introduce to all my Italian readers, whether they are veterans or not, General Alberti's volume, written with the object of collecting and illustrating foreign testimonials on the part played by Italy in the war. The book is everywhere replete with documentary evidence, the subject-matter is well arranged, it is written in a concise and therefore effective style; a book which brings to light many forgotten events, and teaches many things, most of them unknown to the public. This book fully, splendidly justifies the magnificent test which the Italian Army underwent, and what is more does so through the words of our former enemies. This book should be read, circulated and carefully considered, not in Italy alone, but in the whole world, for it reveals truths which had been too long obscured by defamation and falsehood.

I do not wish to pause on the first fifty pages devoted to the period preceding our declaration of war and to the negotiations with Austria. By this time it is recognized even by our onetime enemies that Italy could not have accepted the vague terms offered her at the last moment. Two testimonials are sufficient to prove this. That of von Bülow, who in his «Memoirs» deplores Berlin's «*lack of loyalty*», the continual «*wavering*» of Bethmann, Berchtold and Burian; the «*senile susceptibilities*» for which the Italian allies had always been treated as «*negligible quantities*», and lastly the fact that he himself was only given a free hand when it was too late.

Prince Windischgraetz — Minister for Supplies in Hungary during the War — is no less explicit in his Memoirs, wherein he denounces the « *ineptitude of Burian who negotiated with Italy without ever getting to know how much to concede and how much to refuse, all this being the consequence on our [Austro-Hungarian] part, of the lack of a program and of an absolute absence of honesty. The Italians, Windischgraetz adds, knew that had we been the winners, we would have immediately taken back all we had promised them.* »

This being established, we may proceed to estimate the value of our intervention both for the aid given to the allies and for the period in which it took place. According to Grey, the English Minister, Italy's intervention was of « *enormous importance* » and took place at a time in which « *clouds were accumulating and expectations were getting darker and darker.* » Italian intervention immediately relieved Austro-Hungarian pressure on the Russian front, as many as eighteen enemy divisions having been dispatched to the Isonzo front, divisions trained by a year's war experience, and moreover well equipped and in high spirits, for, as Hindenburg stated « *against Russia the Austrian Army fought only with its mind, against Italy also with its heart.* »

Let me take you back to the first battle of the Isonzo, June-July 1915. Austria has two hundred and twenty one battalions on the line and occupies the crest of the Carso. The struggle is most bitter. The Italian Infantry is being bled white. Krauss, an enemy general, gave this superb testimonial of the aggressive spirit of the Italian troops: « *In the preliminary engagements from June 6th to 22nd our troops of the Carso — states General Krauss — were compelled to repel forty-one attacks, and after, in the great battle lasting 16 days from June 23rd to July 7th they were forced to repel eight-six more dangerous attacks. After whole units had been pounded by heavy artillery fire behind their poor shelters, many of these attacks were followed by hand-to-hand fighting. We were forced to repel the enemy who had entered our lines in frequent clashes lasting hours at a time, and in counterattacks by night. This battle shall ever remain most honorable for the troops that took part in it.* »

From the month of May up to the time of the third battle of the Isonzo, Austria recalled six divisions from the Russian front and eight from the Serbian front, the latter having lapsed into complete quiet and inactivity.

Notwithstanding the absolute inaction of Serbia and the massing of enemy divisions on the Isonzo front, in October 1915 the Italian Army began the movement that led to the third battle of the Isonzo. A most gruelling trial for the Italians, it subjected the Austro-Hungarian troops to great losses, as General Krauss testifies. « *In the zone of Monte Nero — he writes — excellent Alpine troops were in action; the Italian Infantry in the meanwhile was fighting at Plava, on the Sabotino, on the Carso. The energy displayed by the Italians is proved by the fact that they seven times charged one battalion sector, leaving 800 dead on the ground. On the Carso, the crest of San Michele repeatedly changed hands and the struggle was so severe that on October 31st, the 3rd Honved Regiment lost one thousand men and the brave troops of the twentieth Hungarian Division were so utterly exhausted that they had to be replaced.* »

The character of the third and fourth battles of the Isonzo, between November 10th and December 2nd, is graphically described by the same General: « *In 47 days the Italians had fifteen times attacked the Sabotino, forty times the Podgora and thirty Oslavia. Nor was the struggle less furious on the Carso. The 17th Austrian Division lost 250 officers and 11,400 men between October 15th and November 15th, 1915, and, notwithstanding the incorporation of the reserves, on the 17th of November the Division amounted to only 7500 men.* »

In their « *Kriegsberichte* » the Austrians themselves were bound to recognize that the Italian Infantry « *showed outstanding offensive spirit in the advance, and great bravery in hand-to-hand fighting.* » In France, the year 1916 was inaugurated by the great attack on Verdun. Marshal Joffre asked Cadorna for direct assistance. As a matter of fact the Italians launched an attack in the San Michele zone in March. In five days' bitter fighting, from the 11th to the 15th, the Austrian casualties amounted to no less than 3500 dead and wounded. The 1916 « *punitive expedition* » begun with such high hopes by the Austrians, was shattered by Italian resistance. In his work on the World War, General von Kuhl admits that the « *vertex of the parabola had already been surpassed, our forces began to limp and the attack languished. The greatly coveted descent to the Italian plain, the blow at the Italian rear did not succeed.* » In his book on the « *Battle of Verdun* » Marshal Pétain recognizes the vigour with which the counter-offensive was launched on the Asiago plateau and he

adds the following: « *To the French Army which had engaged the enemy's main body single-handed for three months, General Cadorna had thus contributed a first assistance with the fine resistance and counter-attack of his troops.* » 1916 is also the year in which Gorizia was captured. Cadorna's manœuvre, consisting in the speedy transfer of about 300,000 men from the Trentino to the Isonzo front, belongs to higher strategy. General Falkenhayn writes that the « *conquest of Gorizia produced a serious crisis and also compelled us to take some divisions away from the western front, replacing them with German troops. This event had an unfavourable influence on the general trend of the war. The fatal consequences of the enterprise undertaken on her own by Austria-Hungary in the Trentino still continued manifest. The last of these consequences, the declaration of war of Roumania on the side of the Entente, was about to take place. The events at the Isonzo were decisive even in this connection.* » General von Pitreich, Marshal Boroevic's Chief of Staff emphasized the « *fury with which the Italians, after the conquest of Gorizia, attempted to extend their occupation towards the east.* » General von Kuhl admits that with the capture of Gorizia « *Cadorna had obtained a signal success.* »

General Alberti goes on to reproduce some very beautiful pages devoted by G. M. Trevelyan to the storming of the Sabotino, the conquest of the Podgora and the entry into Gorizia. It is not without emotion that one reads them. The names of Badoglio and Baruzzi are found there. In mentioning the 7th, 8th, 9th battles of the Isonzo after the capture of Gorizia, also colonel Corda of the French artillery recognizes that, from a military standpoint, the year 1916 was brought to a brilliant conclusion by the Italian Army.

After a few months' pause in winter, the tenth battle of the Isonzo began in May 1917 on the front from Tolmino to the sea. How high were the spirits of the Italian troops is stated by Boroevic's Chief of Staff, General Pitreich.

« *With an obstinacy, — Pitreich says — which deserves recognition, on May 24th, 25th, and 26th, the Italians continued their efforts to force an opening to Trieste. Especially on the Carso plateau, furious hand-to-hand fighting went on day and night. If the obstinacy with which the enemy repeatedly attempted to conquer his objectives, both in the zone of sector 652 and Monte Santo, and the Vipacco valley, was truly astonishing, on the other hand his mass attacks*

against the solid defences of the Comen plateau were also, to speak the truth, daring unto madness.»

The English Historian Trevelyan devoted a magnificent page to those days of death and glory in which the heroism of the soldiers of Italy shone in its fulness.

Here are his impressions of the battle of Mt. Kuk :

« *The steep mountainside, unviolated for two years, was at length taken. Like the previous year, on the Sabotino, the preliminary Italian bombardment had in a few hours destroyed the barbed-wire entanglements and the trenches of the Austrians. The Infantry, launched to the attack, climbed in close formation up the steepest tract of the long slope, and on reaching the summit immediately engaged in a series of attacks and counter-attacks. All corps: Infantry, Sappers, Artillery vied in bravery... At night the road along the gully was filled with beauty and charm; on the pinnacles of the Sabotino, high up among the stars, fire blazed out of the cliffs; nearby one could hear the invisible river, the only voice in the valley, one felt the presence of the two silent armies. The searchlights, slowly wandering from peak to peak, sometimes shone on the naked bulwark of San Gabriele, sometimes struck the last skeleton-like ruins of the convent on the summit of the Santo, and sometimes thrust their luminous rays of dazzling whiteness beyond the black mountain into the inky sky, always pointing straight like a stiff fleshless finger of death.* »

While victorious fighting was proceeding on the Italian front, the Russian front totally collapsed and the entire Austro-Hungarian Army was launched against Italy. After a few weeks of rest, the 11th battle of the Isonzo started on August 17th, allowing the Italians to smash the enemy front and conquer the whole Bainsizza plateau.

In his Memoirs Ludendorff gives the following estimate of the Italian victory: « *On the Isonzo — he states — the eleventh battle of the Isonzo had begun at the end of August, on a width of 70 kilometres, ending with the success of the Italians. The Austro-Hungarian troops had stood firm, but their losses on the Carso had been so severe and their spirit had been so shaken by it, that in competent Austro-Hungarian circles the belief began to be widespread that the Austro-Hungarian Armies could neither have sustained a continuation of the battle nor a twelfth attack on the Isonzo. On the Italian front the Austro-Hungarian Army needed help from the German troops.* »

Strong contingents of German troops were sent for the 12th Isonzo

battle, bound to the name of the obscure village where the first break in the lines occurred. General Alberti devotes many pages to the battle, following its development from day to day, hour by hour. It was an essentially military reverse, an initial tactical success of the enemy having produced a strategic result of a certain importance. The inevitable confusion was a consequence, not the cause. It is necessary, once and for always, to establish that in the days between October 24th and November 9th and 10th 1917, the Italian troops fought with great bravery. The enemy himself testifies it in his communiqués, not reproduced by General Alberti, but which I feel it necessary to divulge to the Italians of yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow.

Here is the Austrian Bulletin of October 25th:

« At 7 a. m. the massed artillery began its destructive work. An hour later in the midst of a storm, snow and rain, the infantry proceeded to charge. The weather and the mountains subjected the troops to an extremely severe test; the enemy defended himself strenuously. In the northern section of the Bainsizza plateau, yesterday the Italian Army was still opposing an extremely violent resistance to our attack. »

And here is the German bulletin of the same date — October 25th 1917 — signed by Ludendorff:

« Notwithstanding the dauntless defence, our troops scaled the steep mountain ramparts and impetuously attacked the enemy's posts on the heights. The steadfast resistance of the Italians had to be severally smashed in bitter hand-to-hand fighting. »

The Austrian bulletin of October 27th:

« On the Bainsizza plateau the Italians defended their positions inch by inch. »

The German bulletin of the same date:

« ... the German and Austro-Hungarian Divisions progressed, successively breaking down the steadfast resistance of the enemy. »

The Austrian bulletin of October 29th:

« Gorizia was liberated after bitter fighting in the streets; later in the evening the Podgora was scaled. The sectors of Oslavia, Mount Sabotino, the Korada were the scene of desperate fighting. »

The German bulletin of November 6th (Ludendorff).

« *Towards the course of the river Fella, yesterday the Italian brigades still stood their ground.* »

The Austrian bulletin of November 8th :

« *The allied armies under Field-Marshal Archduke Eugene, with untiring vigour yesterday advanced up to the Livenza river. The enemy everywhere opposed the most unremitting resistance to the passage of the river. On the mountains also the Italians in many places opposed desperate resistance. To the south of Tolmezzo, behind our front, under cover of the breastworks of San Simeone, a brave Italian group, under the orders of the Commander of the 36th Division, was able to hold out for many days against the enveloping attacks of our mountain troops and the German Jägers. Only on the evening of the day before yesterday did the Italian artillery cease fire; yesterday, being completely cut off, the enemy blew up the breastworks and his attempts to force his way through our lines failed. After an honorable struggle, the enemy, several thousand strong, laid down his arms.* »

The German Bulletin of the same date, November 8th :

« *The storm troops cut off the enemy retreat with an enveloping manœuvre on the middle Tagliamento, between Tolmezzo and Gemona, where he is still desperately resisting.* »

These enemy despatches once more establish the historical truth; that of Caporetto was a military reverse, similar to those undergone by other armies. Was not the 5th English Army commanded by General Gough « *pulverized* » in March 1918? What happened to the XVIIth Army Corps commanded by Mackensen at Gumbinnen? Surprised by the drumming fire of the Russian artillery, the German troops, without being attacked by the Russians, fled, a prey to « *frightful panic* », to more than 15 Kilometres from the battlefield.

The German official report admits that the troops had lost their steadiness and the official monograph on the battle of Tannenberg adds that missing men of the XVIIth Army Corps were found at Danzig, namely 250 kilometres as the crow flies from the field of battle! And in 1918 did not the French experience a dreadful reverse at the Chemin des Dames, when, as General Mordacq, Clemenceau's

Cabinet Secretary relates « *whole units, regiments, brigades and even divisions had disappeared in the storm, and the divisions sent to stop the leak did not take long to crumble and be also turned into dust?* » A year previously, after the Nivelle offensive, had there not been a vast disintegrating movement in the French Army, involving 75 infantry regiments and 24 other regiments of various Corps? And what happened to the German Army in August 1918, if Ludendorff speaks of a blackletter day?

And how was the spirit, the « morale » of the German Army after the battle of the Marne? Colonel Bauer of the German Supreme Command tells us: « *Panic — he states — took hold of the entire army, but, above all, things went still worse at the Supreme Command. Moltke had broken down completely, he sat pale and apathetic before the map. He was a finished man. General Stein indeed declared it was necessary not to lose one's head, but did not intervene.* » Now Cadorna did not lose his head, but succeeded in leading the army beyond the Piave, where the situation was taken in hand by calling up the reserves and the recruits of '99. The French and English entered the trenches on the day following the Austrian order to suspend all offensive operations in December. Hardly a month later, in the battle called of the « Tre Monti » on the Asiago plateau — in January 1918 — the offensive of the Italians was renewed with vigour. It is 1918, the glorious year for the Italian war.

In the month of April two Italian Divisions were sent to fight in France and covered themselves with laurels. It is the German General von Schultz who attests: « *that at Bligny the 3rd Italian Division fought wonderfully.* »

After the action on the Chemin des Dames the French General Mangin writes to Albricci as follows: « *Congratulate in my name your brave troops which under your command have conquered the Chemin des Dames position on the whole width of the front assigned them and in a single bound have reached and even surpassed l'Ailette.* » And Pétain, on the return of the Italians to their country: « *When, in April 1918 the IInd Italian Army Corps reached France, its reputation for valour had already been gained with the glorious names of Plava, Mt. Kuk, Vodice, Monte Santo, Bainsizza, Montello. I knew I could ask a great deal of such troops. In the name of the French Army I thank them. Italy may well be proud of General Albricci and the troops at his command, who have bravely fought on the soil of*

France. » And in 1931, in eulogizing Foch, Pétain confirms that « by its heroic conduct the Italian Army Corps contributed to blocking the road of Epernay to the Germans. »

The victory which decided the fate of the Central Powers was that on the Piave. That was the supreme test of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. It was the desperate attempt on the part of the Central Powers to reach a solution in Italy. The order issued by Field-Marshal Boroevic, detailed that « *the attack was to be let loose like a hurricane and with an uninterrupted untiring penetration day and night must lead to the Adige.* » The morale of the Austrian and German troops was excellent. The German General von Cramon relates that on June 15th he was at Merano together with von Arz the Austrian Chief-of-Staff. Archduke Frederick was also there, carrying with him a Marshal's baton, presented him by the Austrian Generals, to deliver it to Emperor Karl at Vicenza or some other place in Italian territory in memory of the coming victory. The dinner was a gay one and cheerful toasts were proposed; then von Arz was called to the telephone. He remained in the telephone booth a few minutes which seemed hours to the waiting diners. He returned with a downcast look. The first day of the « hurricane » had ended with a partial Austrian success achieved with immense losses. The 54 Austro-Hungarian Divisions had nowhere broken through the front held by 50 Italian, 3 English and 3 French Divisions. At page 195 of Alberti's book the melancholy report of the defeat, written by General von Arz himself, is given in full, concluding with the following dramatic and resigned words: « *The offensive had not succeeded and the sad Emperor returned to Vienna.* » The order for the retreat of the Austro-Hungarian troops was issued on June 22nd, 1918, and began to be carried out at 3 a. m. of the 23rd. The figures for the enemy losses are quite sufficient to give an exact notion of the tremendous importance of the battle of the Piave. The Austro-Hungarians suffered the loss of 773 killed, 2684 wounded, 524 missing officers; 17,474 killed, 88,539 wounded and 39,048 missing soldiers. Total enemy losses: 149,042 men. Among the Italian officers there were 416 dead, 1343 wounded and 1153 missing; of the soldiers 7585 were killed, 27,613 wounded and 45,504 missing. Total Italian casualties: 86,614 men. The English losses were 26 dead, 84 wounded, 11 missing officers and 244 killed, 1040 wounded, and 354 missing soldiers. The French losses were, for the officers 4 killed and 18 wounded, and for the troops, 92 dead, 463 wounded and 15 missing. These

figures prove that the battle of the Piave was one of the greatest in history. Great also for the repercussions it produced. The Italian combatants have a right to read with pride the following page devoted by Ludendorff to the battle of the Piave. « *The Austrian Command — states Ludendorff — asserted that the victory was certain; general Arz gave as the goal the valley of the Po. My forecast became more pessimistic when I learnt that the Austro-Hungarian offensive had been put off till June 15th. On that day and the following all my attention and that of Hindenburg were concentrated on the Italian front. We felt that something decisive was happening there, perhaps the final decision for the successive course of the war. When, after the second day of battle, the news reached us that the offensive had failed and that the Austro-Hungarian troops of Marshal Conrad's group in which we had placed our greatest trust, had been so severely tried and had suffered such heavy losses that they were incapable of further efforts, we felt that the game was lost. The decision expected until then on the French front, suddenly was transferred, assuming extremely vast proportions in its repercussions, to the Italian front, which till that time could only be considered a secondary scene of the operations. More serious news of the proportions of the Austrian defeat reached us in the following days. Austria had undergone a defeat which might be decisive. One could no longer count on the transfer of Austro-Hungarian contingents to the German front. It was doubtful whether Austria herself would resist a strong Italian attack. And if, as we had reason to fear, Austria fell, THE WAR WAS LOST. For the first time we had the foreboding of defeat. We felt deserted. We saw that victory which we had formerly felt certain to gather on the French front disappear in the mists of the Piave. With death in my heart I saw that our hopes were falling like dead leaves in Autumn.* »

Nor is Hindenburg's judgement less peremptory. « *The calamity of our ally — stated Hindenburg — was an accident for us as well. The enemy knew as much as we did that in this attack Austria-Hungary had thrown her entire weight into the balance of the war. From that instant the Danubian Monarchy ceased to be a danger to Italy.* »

The English historian Trevelyan says in his turn:

« *Italy was saved. But we did not know with equal certainty that Austria-Hungary was doomed. The defensive victory of Diaz in June 1918 may be added to the long list of the world's decisive battles.* »

We now come to Vittorio Veneto. Before proceeding it is necessary to dispel a myth, and namely that at the time of the great Italian attack the Austrian Army was in a state of advanced dissolution. That is false. It is true, on the contrary, that on the days of October 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th and 28th the Austro-Hungarians put up a desperate resistance. The basin of the Asolone, of the Pertica, of Solarolo were from the 24th to the 27th and later the scene of bloody struggles. Our three Army Corps of the Grappa each lost about 8000 casualties. The enemy losses were also very heavy, General Horsetsky assures us that his infantry lost 40% of its number. The total Italian losses were 34,000 men, the English lost 1500 and the French 500 men. General Alberti depicts all the phases of the battle of Vittorio Veneto.

The narrative is enthralling. Magnificent for their aggressive spirit were our Como and Bisagno brigades.

Colonel Glaise Hordtenau, at present director of the Vienna War Archives, speaks of Vittorio Veneto as follows:

« A fight lasting four days broke out on the mountains between the Brenta and the Piave, in no manner inferior in violence to the greatest battles in the World War, and it became the dreadful tragedy of the history of the war... on every cliff, around every cavern, at every gallery, unutterably desperate fighting took place. »

For the Central Powers the consequences of the Italian victory were irreparable. The German General von Bernhardt laconically declares: *« The decision took place in Italy. »* Less laconic, but no less eloquent is the expression of Ludendorff's thoughts: *« After June 1918 the sensation that we had lost the war became every day more definite within us and in this bitter state of mind we continued our extenuating struggle on the French front, for no general shall consent to declare himself vanquished until there is a single hope of changing the course of events in the struggle and of being in fair conditions for the peace negotiations. At Vittorio Veneto Austria had not lost a battle, she had lost the war and herself, dragging Germany after her in her fall. Without the destructive battle of Vittorio Veneto, in armed union with the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy we might have continued our desperate resistance throughout the winter... »*

It is thus due to Italy if the Allies were saved from spending a fifth winter in the trenches and Germany was compelled to lay down her weapons. Thus one of the greatest factors in deciding the Allied

Les beaux vitraux de la cathédrale ont été enlevés, ce qui l'éclaire encore mieux et permet d'apprécier certaines sculptures très belles.

Dans le train qui nous ramenait à Paris, j'eus comme charmants compagnons de route quelques Anglais, dont l'un avait commandé le premier sous-marin qui traversa l'Atlantique, et qui fut construit au Canada.

Il mit douze jours pour se rendre de Terre-Neuve à Gibraltar. Mes deux autres compagnons venaient des colonies africaines, l'un civil, l'autre militaire. C'était de ces hommes extraordinaires dont on trouve un grand nombre en Angleterre. Le militaire, avec son casque colonial et son costume de toile brune, sans pardessus, ne faisait que se plaindre d'avoir trop chaud et fumait une pipe qui sentait terriblement mauvais. Ils voyageaient depuis quarante jours et se réjouissaient à la pensée d'être un jour plus près des muffins anglais.

Enfin nous sommes en France, cette belle France où, si le ciel est plus bas que celui de l'Italie, l'idéal est si élevé.

Une des plus merveilleuses et des plus utiles inventions modernes est certainement celle que l'on doit au grand savant italien, Marconi. Et de même que dans l'ancien temps Rome était le centre du monde sur lequel elle rayonnait, de même aujourd'hui le génie latin, doublé des génies gaulois, slave et britannique, rayonnera victorieusement dans le monde après la victoire, après la fin de cette longue et terrible lutte pour la liberté. Dès maintenant, les idées morales, comme les idées militaires par la télégraphie sans fil, rayonnent partout dans le monde entier. Si de pareilles idées peuvent être interceptées, elles ne peuvent être ni volées ni souillées.

JAMES HYDE.

they are now considered friends and a policy of peace, justice and collaboration with them is pursued. This narrative is directed against those who tried to forget or diminish in the eyes of the world the sacrifice voluntarily shouldered by Italy, after having been saved or, whatever may be the case, certainly powerfully assisted. Nor is it the aim of this publication to excite warlike feelings: the Blackshirts know from the speech at Littoria (1) which is the kind of war preferred by the Italian People and the Fascist Revolution.

Rome, March 1933, Eleventh of Fascism.

(1) At Littoria, in the reclaimed Pontine marshes, Premier Mussolini, turning to a line of ploughs and tractors, had said: "This is the kind of warfare that we prefer". (Translator's Note).

Translation by E. COPE.

A NOTE BY THE EDITORS

YES, BUT THEY FLED AT GUADALAJARA

The Italians saved the Allies in the spring of 1915, and years later it was still the Italians who dealt the final blow of the Great War at Vittorio Veneto. Seven days after they had compelled the Central Powers to sign an armistice, the Allies were able to do likewise on the French front.

There was one main difference between the victory on the Italian front and the victory of the Allies on the French Front: that when the war ended the allies were fighting four to one, the Italians were still fighting against an enemy slightly superior in numbers.

Thus the Italians emerged from the world war with the reputation of the best soldiers and the most enduring — equalled only perhaps by their German and Austro-Hungarian adversaries.

Did the world learn this lesson? Presumably not, for when two years ago the Italians set out to conquer Ethiopia every military expert in the world sat down and wrote an article explaining that the thing simply could not be done. Other armies, like the French, had taken years to conquer less than a million Arabs in the Rif, how could the Italians conquer ten million Abyssinians in a country that made even the Rif look like a children's playground?

Those expert had merely forgotten that Italian were conducting the Ethiopian campaign.

The Italians are not conducting the Spanish campaign. But in that war in which every civilized Spaniard has taken up arms to rid his country of the Russians and international rif-raf lured by money to set Spain on fire, there are plenty of Italian volunteers who have come to the help of their Spanish brothers. It is with their help that Malaga was wrested from the communists and Russians. It is with their help that Spain will be soon free again. Recently however one of these advanced Italian units was attacked by superior forces and overwhelmed. Momentarily we might add, for they are now again pressing forward in that very sector.

But the reds and the anti-fascists of the world have been quick

seize the occasion. " The Italians turned tail Brihuega on the Guadalajara front " they clarioned with yelps of joy.

Ernest Hemingway is a name that needs no introduction. Need we add that Hemingway, who journeyed to Spain to observe the war from behind the red lines, is hardly suspect of pro-nationalist, or even less of pro-Italian leanings?

Ernest Hemingway saw the battle of Guadalajara, visited the battlefield when it was over, wired a full report to the New York Times. Let us hear from him the story of how the Italian " turned tail " in that battle.

... Reports that Brihuega was simply an air victory, with columns stampeded and panicked without fighting, are corrected when the battlefield is studied. It was a bitterly fought seven-day battle, much of the time rain and snow making auto transport impossible.

The untilled fields and oak forest are rocky, and the Italians were forced to build rocky parapets rather than attempt to dig the soil where a spade would not cut, and the horrible effects of shells — from the guns and the sixty tanks that fought with the [red] infantry in the Brihuega battle — bursting in and against these rock piles made a nightmare of corpses. The small Italian tanks, armed only with machine guns, were as helpless against the medium-sized government tanks, armed with cannon and machine guns, as Coast Guard cutters would be against armored cruisers.

The scrub oak woods northwest of the palace of Ibarra, close to an angle in the Brihuega and Utande roads, are still full of Italian dead that burial squads have not yet reached. Tank tracks lead to where they died, not as cowards, but defending skillfully constructed machine-gun and automatic-rifle position, where that tanks found them and where they still lie.

" Tank tracks lead to where they died... where they still lie." That is how the Italians made their escape at Guadalajara, the only kind they know of on the battlefield, the escape of death.

NOVISSIMA - ROMA

Ingl.