INTRODUCTION

BEFORE the war, two great principles of government seemed to have been established, in all the more progressive countries of the world, as essential marks of a civilized State.

The first was the principle of Sovereignty of Law: which implies the abolition of arbitrary power, by whomsoever exercised; the prohibition, by the authority of the State, of every wilful abuse of strength, whether by individuals or by parties or by mobs; and the enjoyment by every man of an assurance that his person, his rights and his property will be protected from illegal assault by the whole power of the community.

The second principle – embodied in the universal establishment of parliamentary institutions – was the belief that the ultimate control over all common affairs ought to rest with the whole people, acting freely through their chosen representatives; and that absolute government, whatever temporary benefits it might bring, was an insult to the dignity of free men.

Law and Liberty had become the presiding genii of Western civilization; and every serious student of history regarded their victory as the greatest triumph and proof of progress in human affairs.

Since the war there has been a strange reaction against these beliefs. In many countries both Law and Liberty are less respected than they used to be. In two great countries, Italy and Russia, they have been dethroned; and the apostles of the new regimes in both countries assure us that a belief in the sovereignty of law, a hatred of arbitrary power, and a respect for parliamentary government and the free movement of public opinion, are old-fashioned superstitions, cherished only by the despised *bourgeoisie*.

Wide as are the differences between the Russia of Lenin and the Italy of Mussolini, they are alike in this, that they have re-established arbitrary or extra legal power, that they use brute violence and terrorism as instruments of government, and that they have substituted dictatorship for self-government.

Whether we admire or detest these new methods, it is supremely important that we should understand them. But it is difficult to

do so, largely because it is a part of their procedure to prevent the dissemination of knowledge, and to suppress or doctor the facts. Much of what we are told about them is propagandist matter, carefully prepared for our consumption. In this book we have a study of the Italian experiment by an Italian citizen who has seen it at close quarters and lived under it. Professor Salvemini has two special claims upon our attention.

In the first place, he is a historical scholar of European reputation. His books are highly esteemed by the learned world. He has held the chair of history in three universities, and finally in the university of that magical city of Florence, which has long been the heart of the intellectual life of Italy. He has a scholar's training in the weighing of evidence, and a scholar's scrupulosity about the use of facts. The reader will observe that in this book he not only gives his authority for every statement he makes, but in most cases tells enough about the authority he quotes to make you aware of its bias.

In the second place, Professor Salvemini is an exile for his principles, who has taken refuge in England like his great compatriot Mazzini nearly a hundred years ago; and there can be no better proof of his sincerity. If he could have brought himself, as many others have done, to praise the Fascist regime – and there are things for which it can be praised if you will fix your gaze exclusively upon them – his fortune would have been secure. If he could even have held his peace, he might have gone on with his work and kept his post. He could not do so, because he believed that both in the methods of its establishment and in the methods of its maintenance, the Fascist regime had outraged law and betrayed liberty, and so had been false to the most vital principles of civilization.

He did not conceal his opinions. And, since free speech no longer exists in Italy – the suppression of free speech having been, as in Russia, one of the first signs of emancipation from the superstition of liberty – he had to resign his chair and leave his country, to wander in those other lands where this superstition still survives. The only charge brought against him (it was not pressed) was that he had expressed unfavourable opinions of the govern-

ment in one of those secret publications which always spring up when governments try to stifle the free movement of opinion.

Being an exile, Professor Salvemini is, of course, not absolutely impartial. He cannot take a calm, indulgent view of the system which has driven him out of his country for no offence recognizable by law. He has a definite bias – a bias in favour of liberty. He cannot judicially balance the advantages and disadvantages of arbitrary rule, because he is so constituted that even very great material gains would seem to him as dust in the balance in comparison with the loss of liberty and the weighing of the scales of justice.

This is a sort of bias that used to be very common among Englishmen. Perhaps it is still common. If it is, many Englishmen will read this book, wherein the flame of a passion for liberty glows through a mass of documents and classified facts put together with the punctilious care of a scholar.

I am proud that Professor Salvemini should have asked me to contribute an introduction to his book. But it ought not to need introduction, if Englishmen still care, as they used to do, to follow the fortunes of liberty in the world.

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