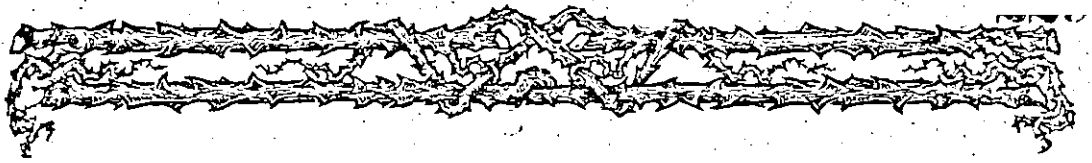


**THE CAPTIVITY
OF THE ITALIANS
IN AUSTRIA**

**UNIONE TIPOGRAFICO-EDITRICE
TORINESE = GIÀ DITTA POMBÀ**



THE
CAPTIVITY OF THE ITALIANS

IMPRESSIONS AND RECOLLECTIONS
OF MY CAPTIVITY



TORINO
UNIONE TIPOGRAFICO-EDITRICE TORINESE

(già DITTA POMBA).

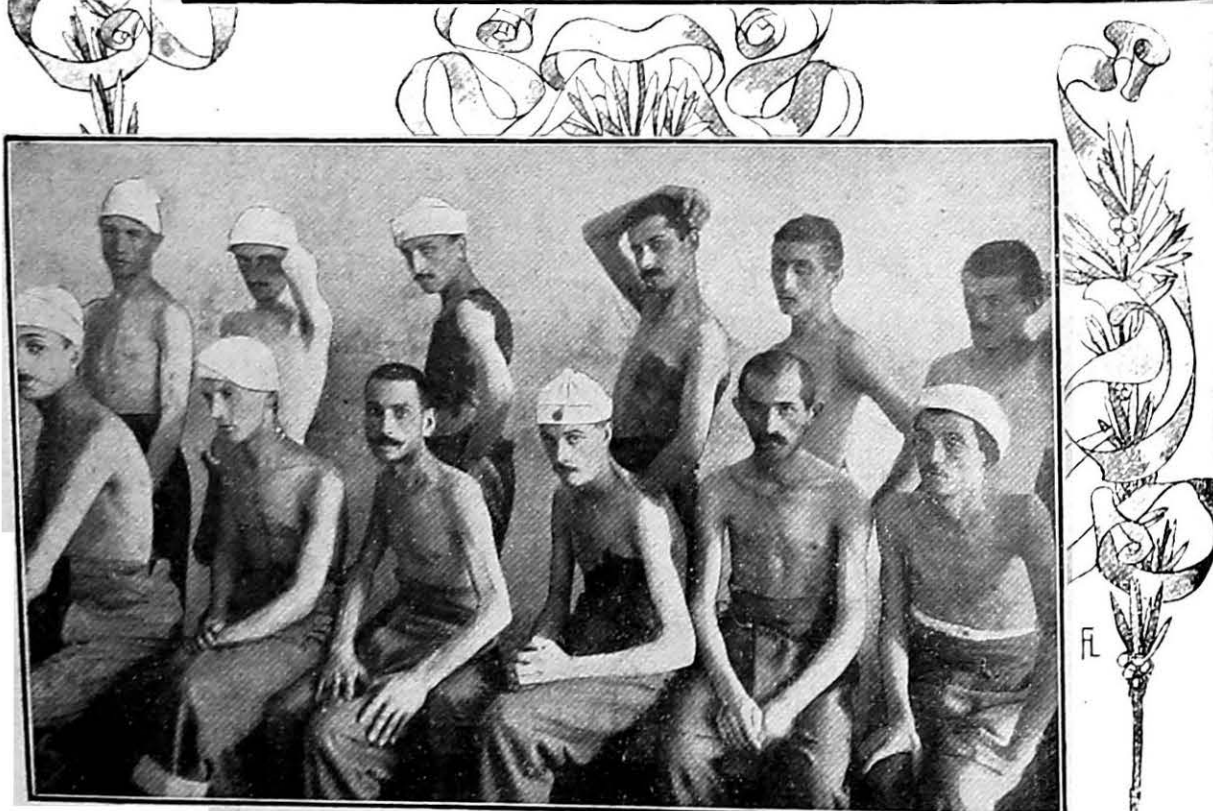
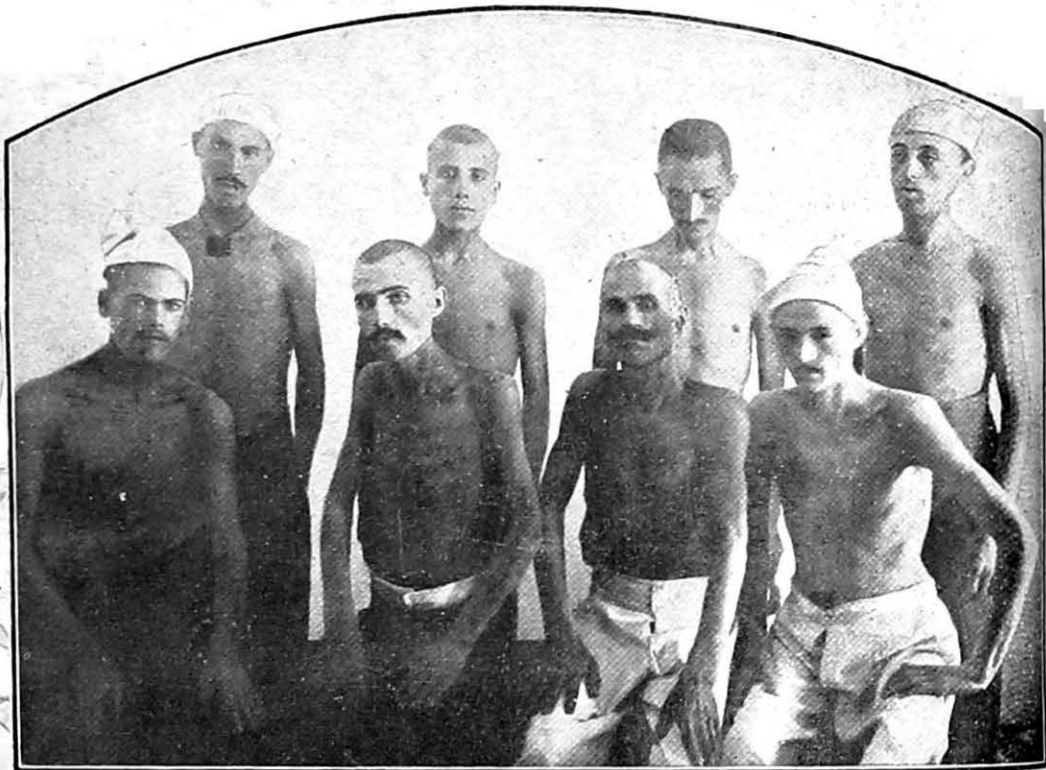
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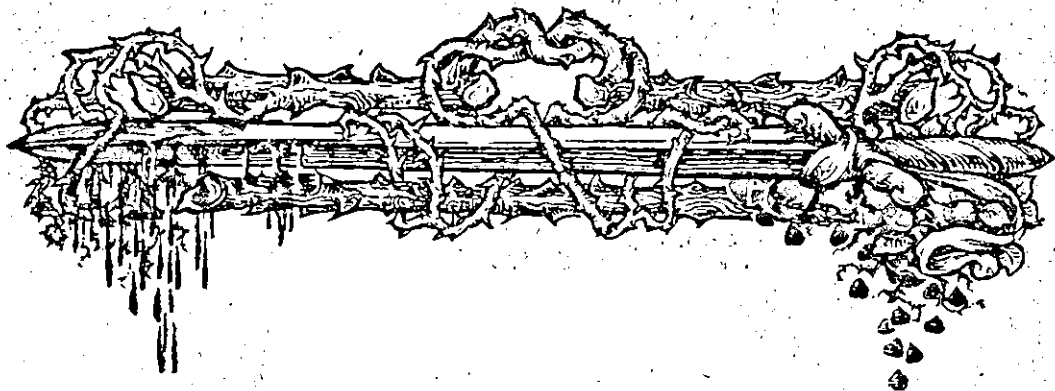


PROPRIETÀ ARTISTICO-LETTERARIA

Torino — Stamperia dell'Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese — 1918.



THIS IS THE STATE IN WHICH OUR PRISONERS ARE SENT BACK FROM AUSTRIA.



IMPRESSIONS AND RECOLLECTIONS

of my captivity

COMING HOME

I come from my sad captivity in Austria, and bring back to my Mother Country the echo of the anguish and tears of so many fervent hearts, who were torn from their native soil by an unfortunate episode of war, and thrown far away into a bitter exile, and who can never more take their part in the fight.

On the frozen foggy banks of the Danube, and in other prisoners' camps, I have left crowds of living spectres, scattered all about the hostile country, wearing out in toil and hunger the last drops of Italian blood.

Hundreds of miserable thin faces and meagre shoulders, driven mercilessly on by inhuman attendants, under the threat of terrible punishments, and even of death, are thronged together in workshops where every work of preparation and of assistance to the war of the enemy is going on, are dispersed all over the fields to produce a corn of which they shall not taste, are buried in the mines to hasten the consumption of their lungs.

IN ALBANY

By thousands the prisoners are scattered near the eastern frontiers and in the impracticable regions of Albany, to render the malarious regions salubrious, to break up the wilder zones of land, to build entrenchments for defence and resistance along the banks of the rivers,





in front of their Italian brothers, who, on the opposite shore, defend or guard a lawful just dominion.

We know of many of our poor soldiers who have been shot by the enemy, because in these zones they had attempted to escape; of others who have disappeared and were never heard of again. Some who, to fly from the enemy, had taken to a wandering life and strayed into the woods of Albany, have been found dead of hunger and misery in some nook of those mountains; others have been found barbarously tortured, perhaps by those same inhabitants to whom they had appealed for help and food, and who were sold to the Austrian cause.

'TIS BETTER TO DIE!

And how many, in the other fronts, who were working at the trenches, or carrying all kinds of materials, were killed by bombs of the Italians or the allies themselves! Some who had refused to work, have been forced to dig their own grave, and were then shot and buried therein.

All these atrocities have been related to us by the remnants of those expeditions, which, after their turn of work was done, brought back some life to the prisoners' camps. On their faces the marks of terror, hunger and of incessant effort are carved out. So great is their weariness that, when once they have thrown themselves down on the ground, they cannot get up again, and that when the new-comers, approaching them timidly, ask for news, they can but answer: « Don't you see how few of us have come back? Brothers! 'tis better to die! ».

Brothers! This is the only word of tenderness possible to those unfortunate men who cannot help each other in any way, who only can be brothers in pain and sorrow!

ATTEMPTS OF ESCAPE

When the time for new expeditions is approaching many prisoners try to avoid their hard destiny by flight. But what is the good of it? If they escape one day they will be caught the next! — On these occasions the Austrians surround the barracks with a chain of sentinels, and drive on by force all those who are condemned to death, while they shoot at those who attempt to fly.





From the officers' camp we often heard during the night the firing off of guns and, as we well knew its mournful meaning, we felt an irrepressible rage at the impossibility of helping our brothers. The daily attempts of flight made by officers and soldiers, who would run any risk in the hope of putting an end to their captivity, are numerous; but the distance from the frontier, the rigorous watch of the gendarmes — even in the less important passages —, the weakness of the fugitives' health, the want of food, have only consented to a very few fortunate ones to succeed. Almost all the fugitives were only able to keep for a few weeks out of the camp, and were then caught by the gendarmes or by the inhabitants themselves who, in this way, have more than once cowardly given vent to their hatred towards Italy.

And we saw them coming back one by one, those audacious men, back to the camps of concentration, accompanied by the gendarmes and the police-dogs, ragged, barefooted, with sunken eyes and cheeks, their body and limbs worn out by their long endurance of a life which almost seemed impossible. Yet these skeletons, which could hardly stand upright, had walked over hundreds of miles, at night rather than during the day, keeping away from the roads, crossing mountains and valleys, swimming across rivers and torrents so as to avoid the watch kept on the bridges, eating but some morsel of hard biscuit saved in long months of abstinence, drinking the water of the rivers, taking but some little agitated rest in the shelter of the woods.

And when they came, their fellow-prisoners crowded in pity and admiration around them to give them some little comfort and help; but the cell of the prison or the barrack of imprisonment was waiting for the unfortunate fellows, who had, besides, to pay a penalty for every day of absence!

The officers paid 20 crowns for every day.

The indomitable will of the strongest was not, however, weakened by any remembrance of sufferings and risks or punishments, and several of them tried more than once to fly, but — alas! — in vain!

Some have never come back! And not having heard of their reaching Italy, we had to believe they had been shot by the sentinels or the gendarmes, or had died of starvation along the road.

Before our declaration of war to Germany, some officers who were prisoners in Austria managed to escape and to reach Bavaria; but here, against the very first principles of international law, they were kept captives.





REGRETTING THE TRENCHES

All the prisoners regret the life at the trenches, and would run a thousand risks and even meet with a sudden death, with the unspeakable joy of having accomplished their duty, rather than live in that long agony which is worse by far than any sort of death. And one ought to hear especially those few unhappy ones, who are full of remorse for not having done all they could so as not to be captured; their suffering is the most terrible, for they cannot even find comfort, like the others, in the thought that fate and destiny have so willed it.

THE CONTEMPT FOR THE COWARDS

The Germans, this should be known by every one, the Germans, who only feel respect for strength and courage, and who in the trenches lure their enemies by all sorts of tricks and promises until they succeed in capturing them, when once they have attained their end, only have for their prisoners the most brutal and repugnant expressions of contempt. — We know of soldiers who have surrendered in the last retreat, to whom the Austrians had promised rest and peace, who were instead forced to carry projectiles and materials of every kind after the easy invasion of the Venetian soil; we know of scores of soldiers who have been shot on the spot, because, after having recovered their moral sense, they refused to help the enemy in the war against their worthier brothers, who had resisted and checked with the sacrifice of their blood the enemy's conquest.

Our enemies are not given to sentiment: their life, their mind is only turned towards all that is practical; they therefore take advantage of the volunteers of infamy, well knowing that the country they have forsaken will never give them any comfort or help.

THE RESPECT FOR THE BRAVE

On the contrary the following episode will show that the Austrians know how to respect bravery: the Emperor of Austria granted to Major Boffa the honours of war for the courageous defence which he and his alpine soldiers made during several days against numerous.





hordes of enemies who had surrounded them; the same respect is shown by the fact that they did not spare their praise to those régiments of ours who, though cut off from the rest of the army during last autumn's retreat, were able, at the risk of their lives, to open their way through the lines of the enemy and, sacrificing themselves, caused a great number of their forces to avoid prisony. Also the survivors of the 58th battalion of the 16th Regiment of Bersaglieri, taken prisoner on the 5th of November 1917 on the upper Meduna, had the honours of war.

In my captivity I have made the acquaintance of a young captain, a son of Sardinia, who at the declaration of our war, had come from Libia, to offer all his energy for the liberation of the national soil. And, though he lost an arm in the trenches of the Carso, this captain, as soon as he had recovered, did his utmost to go back to the front. The officers and soldiers of the glorious brigade « Lombardia » all know the exploits of this valiant officer. But he too, in November 1917, having come from the hills of Monfalcone with his regiment to cover the troops who arrested the march of the enemy, after a few days of heroic struggle, was taken prisoner. This splendid figure of officer and soldier, who had opposed to the enemy with admirable simplicity and natural self-reliance the twofold strength of his only arm, experienced at the enemy's hands the highest demonstrations of respect, and was shown as an example to the troops. An Austrian sergeant, who was very kind with him, told him that, had he not been afraid of being denounced by some of his fellow-soldiers, he would have helped him to escape!

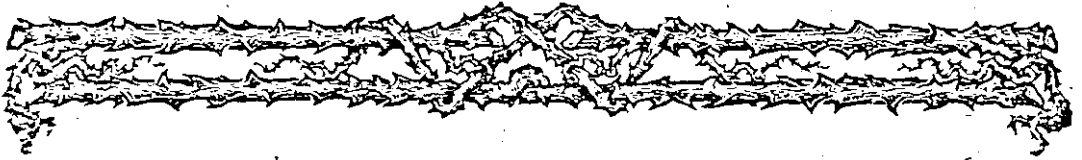
So strong is the admiration that bravery can inspire!

HOW TO AVOID PRISONY

As to the few cases of capture which torment the conscience of some prisoners, I will tell you that very often they do not depend from baseness or cowardice, but rather from the sense of surprise, of uncertainty, of confusion, which befalls the unexperienced before a new and unexpected situation, preventing a rapid, and sometimes not even perilous decision, which, if taken in time, might perhaps entirely invert the parts.

The best way to avoid being taken prisoner is always to keep calm, never to lose contact with the lateral detachments, and to be resolved





to affront the enemy in any situation whatever. Experience has shown that a dissolved and flying detachment, which consents the infiltration of the enemy in its positions, is easier taken prisoner than any other.

The cowardly soldier cannot save himself, but only imperils others. On the other hand every old soldier knows that the bravest and most compact detachments suffer fewer losses and are seldom taken prisoners.

Even in the most desperate circumstances the resistance and firmness of a group troubles the enemy and bewilders and terrifies his attacking masses. And this proof of courage and of firmness, whilst it produces in the soldiers the most precious conviction of their own worth and valour, which helps them to accomplish quite easily those deeds that seem wonders to others, makes them appear in the eyes of the enemy as if clad in a legend of invincibility, which spreads terror and awe before them.

The enemies know, perhaps even better than we do ourselves (for we do not always appreciate ourselves as much as we deserve), the valour of our most glorious regiments and divisions: and more than once, during our captivity, we have heard their name mentioned with respect and with terror.

In some single case we may even say that the capture has been a question of behaviour: those who are more resolute, even if their position is less strong and their means are few, carry the day. And it is indeed this resolute and aggressive behaviour that increases the consideration for our strength in the enemy's eye and makes him very often believe, even erroneously, that help and support from other detachments are immediately near or behind us. In this way, more than once, a single patrol has succeeded in taking prisoners whole detachments of hesitating or disunited enemies.

THE VOICE OF THE FAMILY

How great is the blessing of a word of faith, of encouragement to do your duty, when it comes to the trenches from the enlightened conscience of fathers, mothers, wives, not only in the interest of our country, but also in that of our dear ones!

An instance of the good example that the family can set, is given by the following episode, which I am happy to relate: a mother had lost one of her sons on the Carso; the other son came back to her, an invalid, from his captivity, and on seeing him she exclaimed: « My





son, in the great unhopèd-for joy of to-day, I feel a thorn in my heart and am sure you must feel it too: we cannot, in this happy day, send a flower to the tomb of our hero! ». — I am sure the words and the sorrow of the mother, not so much for the death of her son, a death she has had strength enough to bless, as for the offence that she feels is done to his body by the conquest of the enemy, have a much greater effect in urging on the soldiers, than a hundred speeches might have.

But I must go back to the life in prison and relate other terrible and important facts.

THE STAKE

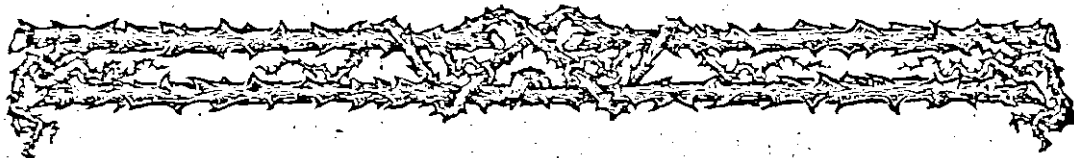
Every one, I am sure, knows what this punishment is, which has been for so long the terror of the captive soldiers.

The poor patient was tied to a stake, his hands behind his back, and his feet scarcely touching the ground; before the stake the Austrian hangman placed a basin of water and watched with pitiless care on every movement of the tortured patient, always ready to pour water over him, so that he might recover his senses, every time the poor fellow, tired by the atrocious suffering, reclined his head or lost conscience. Some have died during this torture!

HUNGER

And now I must speak of hunger. It is the prisoner's faithful, hateful companion from the very first day of his capture. Oh! how well I remember the feeling of weakness, of pining away, I experienced in those first days of marching, even though our pride, which had been too deeply wounded, and our soul, still bleeding for the sudden capture, quelled the sense of any physical want! But every suffering seems light if compared to the terribly sad lot which befell the prisoners of October and November 1917! These have been obliged to walk at forced marches, without food, under the rain, from the lines of the Isonzo and of the Tagliamento as far as Lubiana — hundreds and hundreds of miles — only drinking now and then a cup of a surrogate of tea at some halting-place, and eating what they were able to ransack in the country. Only a few hours of rest on the road,





thronged together under the incessant rain, and then on again, on and on, with an empty stomach, driven by the points of the bayonets, lashed on by a whip and by the most atrocious insults. Who can tell the suffering of those bodies, the anguish of those souls?

My comrades and the soldiers who had been there, told me that, when they caught sight of some little green spot in the fields, they threw themselves on it, like a cloud of grasshoppers, and that when the Austrian bayonets drove them on again, and the hungry mass resumed its way, on the field there was no more any green to be seen; all had been devoured: cabbages, potatoes, turnips, roots and leaves; so great was the hunger!

But also when the prisoners arrive at the camp, where they are given a ration of food, do you know in what their daily meal consists? — I think it best to give you some passages of a letter which a soldier of Palermo, who was a prisoner in Austria, managed to send by stealth to his wife, for I am sure that no statement, however well-ordered and documented it might be, could have the authority of his plain and yet striking expressions, which he certainly never thought might be published.

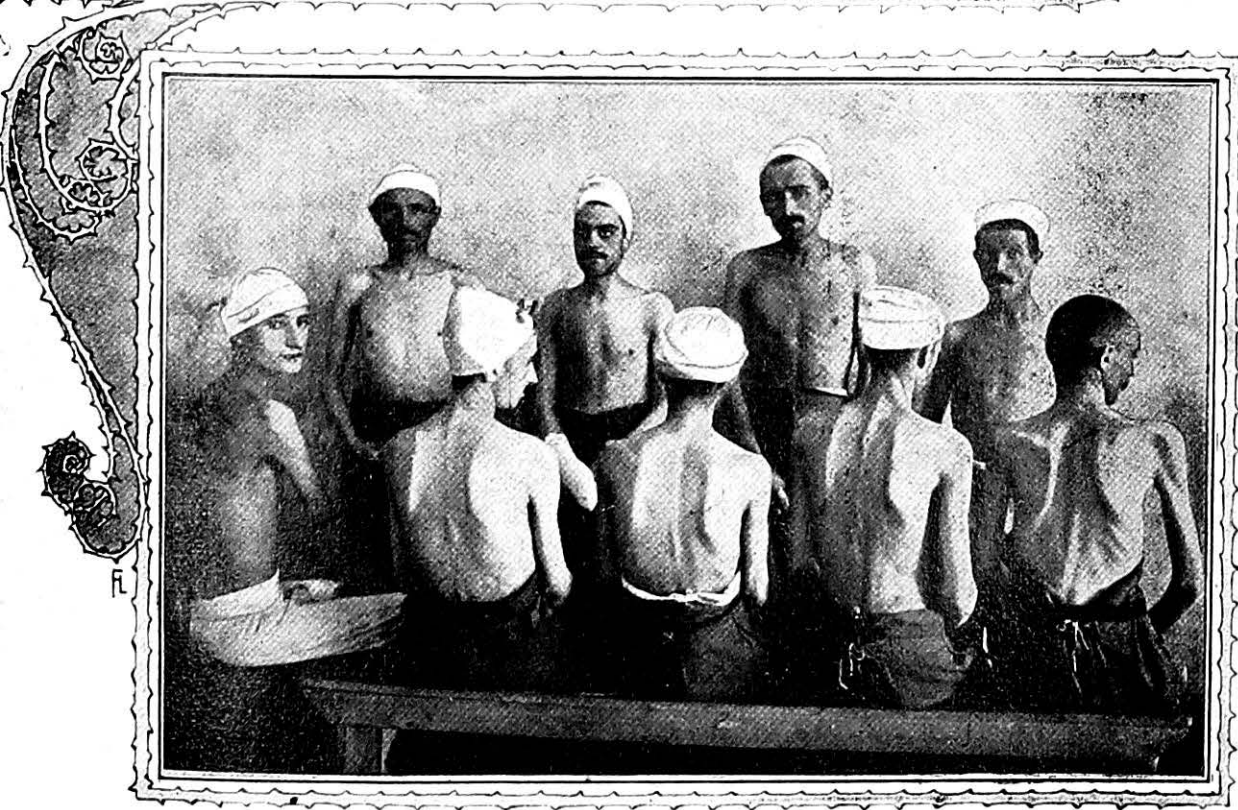
Here are his own words:

« From the place of hunger, 22nd January 1918.


« My beloved wife,

« These eight months my soul has been pining and suffering, and
« my body wasting away in the torments of captivity..... No human
« tongue, no pen of the best of writers can tell what we suffer in the
« prisoners' camps, which rather ought to be called camps of hunger
« and death. And indeed they are but such! For what do the Austrians
« give us to eat? How do they cure the sick? Alas for him who is
« taken ill! For though each camp has its hospitals, there are no
« medicines, no surgical instruments, no bandages, and more than
« once the bandages of one of the wounded soldiers are used for a
« second one. And I know besides that mostly these bandages are
« made of paper! One of my fellow-prisoners, an officer, who has just
« gone back to our country, assured me that, having been captured
« being wounded, he was sent into several hospitals, one after the
« other, and that more than once he saw the wounds of our poor
« imprisoned countrymen covered with worms ».





THIS IS THE STATE IN WHICH OUR PRISONERS ARE SENT BACK FROM AUSTRIA,



And the letter continues thus:

« The food, if we may call it with this name, is the same for all: « for those who are well, as for those who are ill. In the morning « some boiled water with a few leaves of elder-tree, which they call « tea; at eleven o' clock a slice of bread, that is no bread at all, but « only a mixture of straw, a little maize and sawdust; later on, in « the months of June and July, we have had three little bits of « scourge in some water and tallow, and at five o' clock in the evening « two spoonfuls of water with something in it, that they called potato- « flour; in August and September, in the morning, they gave us, « instead of the scourge, a cucumber, and in the evening, instead of « water and potatoes, a score or so of little beans: something like « our *calia* » (in Sicily they call *calia* a sort of toasted beans).

« From September on — says the letter — our usual meal consists « of a herring in the morning and half a potato in the evening ».

Mark these words: « A herring in the morning and half a potato « in the evening!

« How is it possible to endure this kind of life?

« A hundred times I have been on the point of committing suicide, « but the thought of you, your love, perhaps your prayers have had « the power to keep me from fulfilling this sad design ».

SUICIDE AND FOLLY

But I know of others, officers as well as soldiers, who have irresistibly been driven to this terrible step, more by the moral than by the physical torments; and let us not mention here the great number of those who in their captivity have irremediably lost their reason! And is there anyone among us, who, even after being home again, does not feel the fearful anguish of a trouble in his mind, when he thinks of the life he has lead there, and compares it to his present one?

An officer, who was a prisoner at the camp of Mauthausen, when the material conditions of the imprisoned officers were still bearable, cut his throat with a pair of scissors, and died in this way: he sat holding in his own hands — as long as he had strength enough — the basin into which his blood was trickling, and when at the bubbling produced by the blood flowing on to the ground some of his fellow-prisoners ran to him from the next room, he tore at his wound with those same scissors and rendered vain their efforts to save him!



In this cold unflinching purpose to die we see an ostentation of bitter stoicism, which only the utmost, the deepest contempt of life can give!

Towards the end of last year another officer was trying to kill himself by cutting open his abdomen, but help came in time to save his life; but whether his reason can be saved is more than I know.

Too great is the suffering of a prisoner who feels he is useless to his country as well as to himself. The physical misery, about which everybody speaks, is but the cause of those sufferings; we speak of it most because it is more perceptible, and because no word can render the *endless and undescrivable aspects of moral suffering*, which, this we are able to say, clutches the heart as in a screw that never relents, and leaves a petrifying poison in the veins that, afterwards, no mother's caress, no sweetness in life, no fervour of work, will ever be able to melt.

HUNGER AND MORTALITY

Let us go back to that soldier's letter: it is but a desperate appeal to his poor wife, asking her to send him parcels and parcels in great number, so that at least some of them may reach him. When he speaks of the time immediately following last autumn's German attack, when so many new prisoners came to his camp, and when on both sides the frontiers were shut, he adds: « That was the disaster! The « spectre of hunger rendered more fearful by the rigour of winter, « presented itself threatening to my eyes; moreover, that miserable slice of bread they used to give us, was once more reduced, « because in Austria there is no more any flour, and for the last week « the people has been rioting ».

And still another phrase, the most impressing one of the whole letter:

« Of the new prisoners arriving at the camp, a score and a half « are dying daily ».

Thirty deaths a day! The number has no need of explanations!

And every letter which the prisoners manage to send home repeats the same sad story!

How many among those poor unhappy fellows have I heard repeating: « Oh! had we but all that rice, all the paste we had in the trenches! ».

And the bread, the plentiful, soft, savoury bread, on which we rested as on a pillow, when the front was calm?





In the land of the enemy the prisoners' bread, which is so scanty that you must share every loaf amongst eight men, as we had to do during the last months, the bread is so unfit for nourishment, so bad is its quality, that even if the prisoners were given a larger share, they would only succeed in filling their empty stomach, and in feeling still weaker afterwards:

The strongest most splendid specimen of our vigorous Italian youth, who have boldly endured all kind of privations for months and for years at the trenches, without ever having lost any of their vigour, as soon as they are captured feel their strong health declining, and their shoulders, grown lean in the camp, shivering with fever.

PRISON WORK

A proof of the great weakness that befalls the war-prisoners in Austria, be they Italians or of the allied nations, is that for some work for which in normal conditions a single man would be sufficient, they must work ten at a time. How often have we seen long rows of Servian and Roumanian prisoners carrying each on his shoulders an only brick, because they had not strength enough to carry more, walking wearily step by step at the beating of a drum, marching ahead of them. All day long they thus marked their toil, and very often they even accompanied it with the sad melody of a national song!

Sometimes also the Italian prisoners try to render their labour less wearisome by singing some popular song. — Oh! how sadly the sweetness of our art thrills and palpitates in the land of the enemy!

I shall never forget one of the first scenes which struck me most on my arriving at Mauthausen. It was in the afternoon, one day of last summer; I had thrown myself on my straw-bed and was just falling asleep, when I felt a strange emotion stirring all my nerves, thrilling through all my veins; I rose to a sitting posture and kept anxiously waiting in the silence and darkness of my room, for the explanation of that strange thrilling in my soul; and then I perceived in the distance the melody of a subdued nostalgic song of our country: I heard the deep slow notes of that beautiful popular romance which sings of love and youth that fade and never come back again.....

I ran to the window and threw it open, anxious to discover the origin of that song, that in my excited phantasy, still a little clouded by sleep, seemed to me to come from some quiet troop of merry young





men coming home from their work in the fields or in the workshops of our country; but as soon as the dazzling sunshine allowed me to distinguish what it was, I saw on the road, on the other side of the wire-grating, a group of Italian prisoners, tied to very long ropes, who were slowly dragging a cart of refuse towards the open country. An Austrian sergeant pushed them brutally on, and, to feel their toil a little less, they kept singing that sad melody!

I shut my window violently and fell down again on my bed, dumb with rage and anguish, trying in vain to divert my attention from that voice of youth which was sadly dying away in the distance, bowed down under a labour which was not accomplished for our country!

CHARACTERISTIC EPISODES

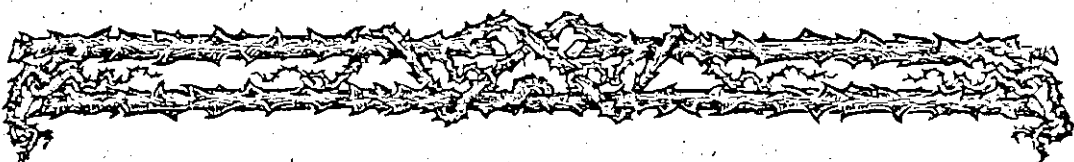
But I must leave sentiment aside and turn my mind to other scenes of horror which all of us who come home — a small number of lucky men among thousands and thousands of unhappy brothers — feel it our duty to point out, not only to the soldiers and to the people of Italy, but to the entire humanity. Last autumn a soldier of ours, who was trying to go out of the camp into the adjoining country, so as to find some fruit with which to appease his hunger, was caught by the sentinel in the act of passing through the wire-grating, and killed on the spot. The following day the Austrian Command reported the fact in the order of the day, to set an example to the other prisoners!

I have seen some soldiers taking off their clothes which the enemy had left them, and exchange them with the Austrian sentries against a morsel of bread, some apples or a herring. — It was not unusual to see the sick soldiers in the hospitals, when they had to get up to ease their nature, go out of the tents with their half-empty straw-bed around them, because they had nothing else to preserve them against the cold.

We saw all this and more! And money does not help you in any way, as commerce or any intercourse with the civilians is severely forbidden; besides the Austrians themselves eat but very little meat on very few days of the week, and generally a small quantity of vegetables, potatoes, turnips, a little wheat and surrogates of every sort. You may well believe that they would not sacrifice the smallest portion of what is necessary to themselves for the sake of the Italian prisoners!

During the retreat of October-November 1917 some nurses of the Red Cross were captured by the enemy whilst, regardless of the battle





raging around them, they had remained to nurse those soldiers whom, being more dangerously ill and wounded than the others, it had been impossible to move from the hospitals. But the enemy felt no pity for these heroines of duty and charity, and carried them to a concentration camp to starve like the other prisoners! — We have a proof of it in the request that those poor women addressed to their Italian brothers of other camps, asking them for some bread. Their appeal reached also our camp of Mauthausen, and we fretted and raged and suffered at being unable to lighten the misery of our poor Italian sisters as we should have wanted to do, grateful as we were for all they had done in accomplishing their noble mission.

THE PARCELS

One must not imagine that the parcels can mitigate in a great measure the terrible conditions of the prisoners. Alas! what the press has lately been repeating is but too true! Very often the parcels, instead of helping the unlucky prisoners, form the joy of the Austrian functionaries who are addicted to this service. And if a great number of parcels directed to officers is continually lost, how much more does this happen with those addressed to soldiers, whom it would sometimes be not only difficult but almost impossible to retrace, in their incessant shifting from one concentration camp to another! This shows how much more appropriate it would be to forward collective instead of single parcels.

Nor are the Italian and Austrian frontiers always open, and when they are not, every forwarding of parcels is arrested.

As regards the parcels, I would advise the Committees for War-Prisoners, as long as our Government will not think it fit to take the service into its own hands, to ascertain whether *every prisoner* has at least one suscription for bread. Some families, especially among the less enlightened population of the country, have thought it unnecessary to send off parcels, or to suscribe for the bread, perhaps because the letters of the prisoner assured that he was well treated, or because the means of the family did not allow their suscribing. But very often the good news are sent, even if they are not true, in order not to agitate the dear ones at home, and more often still, to make sure that the terribly severe censorship will allow the correspondence to pass.





It would also be opportune to inquire about all those prisoners who have not been unworthy of their native country, but in whom nobody in Italy takes any interest whatever. For these, especially, the Committees of Beneficence must provide, the beneficence which — be it well remembered — *is not intended to encourage some miserable fellow to let himself be taken prisoner*, but has the noble aim of preserving the life of so many unhappy sons of our country, who endure the horrors of captivity not as a well-deserved expiation of treachery or cowardice, but because an inevitable cruel fate has thus decreed.

NECESSITY TO PROVIDE

It is not only just, nay, it is everyone's duty, to direct all our activity, all our thoughts to supporting and developing all the forces which, in this decisive supreme moment, fight for or in any way are useful to our country: but it is well, *without in the least diminishing our help to these forces*, to turn sometimes our minds towards those thousands of lives that are still worthy of our Mother Country.

Those who will not die, will carry back to Italy such ardour of sacrifice for their country, which they have felt all the more strongly in the months and years of their sad exile, that Italy will be astonished in seeing what a force of love has been developed in those unhappy sons of hers.

And the longer their separation will have been, the stronger will they feel their thirst of sacrificing themselves for their country, to whom they have wished in vain to offer their lives in the hour of peril.

After that terribly sad death they will, on coming back to life and to their country, take this for their motto: let us give to our country — oh, Mother Country! — in all possible ways, tenfold, hundredfold if we can, more gloriously and with greater satisfaction, all the activity we have not been able to give her in those hours of war, which we have passed in our exile.

And now consider that a few kilos of bread every month can mean life to those poor unhappy men, who treasure up even the crumbs fallen to the ground.

But I am sure the Red Cross will soon obtain all required for arrangements, so that the parcels will not only regularly be forwarded from Italy, but also rightly distributed in the prisoners' camps; and then thefts, hunger, sickness and death will decrease!





UNPUNISHED THEFTS

I was in the camp of Mauthausen when the Austrian Command granted at last to Captain (not Colonel, as it has been erroneously stated) Polon of Pordenone, subsequently to the repeated protests of all the prisoners for the faulty distribution of parcels, to control the service at the shunting-station. — Well! A few days later Captain Polon was obliged by the Austrian Command to take again his place in the officers' group *because he had dared dutifully to denounce the thefts he had witnessed and given the proofs thereof!*

And in Italy mothers and wives make all sorts of sacrifices, yes, even *sacrifices that sons and husbands would never allow*, to be able to send those parcels that, instead of nourishing their dear ones, will but fatten our enemies.

OFFICERS AND SOLDIERS

We officers often saw the prisoner soldiers who came every morning from their group to our report to take up the sweepings and dirt; we often saw them rush at the gutter or at the boxes of refuse and gather fishbones and herrings' heads, the remainders of potatoes and all sorts of raw, dirty and rotten things. We ran to keep them from eating that beastly food, but before their lifeless eyes, their hungry faces, their arms stretched out as if in supplication, those arms that were so thin they seemed bony sticks to which some rags of sleeves had been attached, we felt our hearts choking, and a curse came to our lips, which we could not keep back. We officers too suffered from hunger and cold; but the soldiers' condition has some details which our tongue refuses to utter.

As long as the parcels arrived without their number being limited, the several Committees of beneficence formed by us officers of the several camps, daily collected bread, boxes of preserved meat, of condensed milk, money, and adding them to medicines, clothes and all kinds of useful things which were sent directly from the Italian Committees, we were able to relieve a little the miserable condition of the most unhappy ones.

The physicians, to whom the care of the hospitals in the concentration camps is entrusted, and some of the captured chaplains, who





were allowed to visit the soldiers, deserve all the gratitude of the Mother Country for their work of assistance, which may truly be called an apostleship.

AN OFFICERS' REVOLT

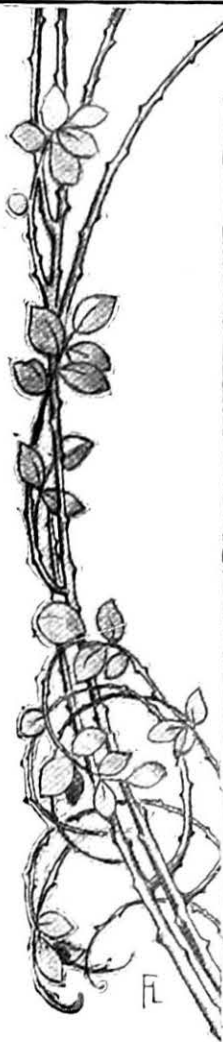
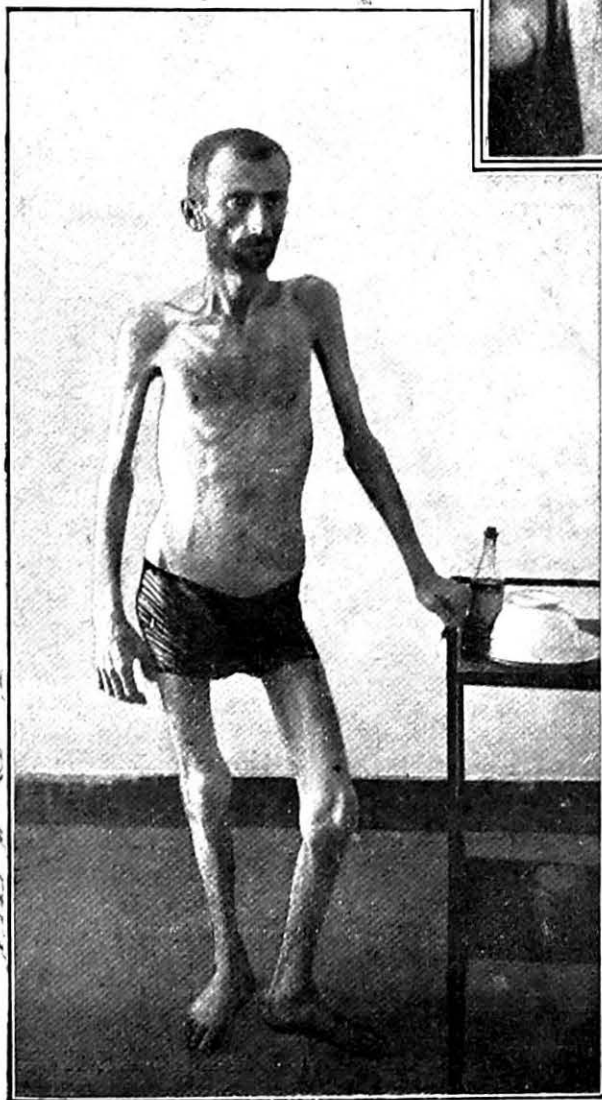
But when all the camps of Austria were filling with the new prisoners of October and November 1917, and when the frontiers were closed, the conditions of all of us became terrible. The last turnips and scourges of summer and the thinnest slice of meat were our only food for several months; then even these provisions came to an end, and on the 17th of December 1917, in the afternoon, after five days of almost complete fasting, hundreds of officers of the camp of Mauthausen, exasperated by hunger and cold, and still more by the rage at having to submit to such an inhuman treatment, rushed out of the tents, marched in perfect order towards the Austrian chancery, pulled down the wire-grating, threw the first sentinels to the ground and invaded the Command of the camp. — From every side of the concentration camp whole battalions of Austrian soldiers, lead by a colonel and a general who happened to be at Mauthausen on an inspection, came running towards us. — We do not know what the issue would have been if the enemies had tried to check our desperate act with the arms! But the Austrian general thought it best to advance alone towards us, and then a Commission of Italian officers presented itself to him and vigorously protested against the forlorn condition in which officers and soldiers were left.

Some promise was made to us and for that day we reentered our tents, but the prisoners' condition was bettered only for a few days, and afterwards it became still worse than before, especially that of the soldiers.

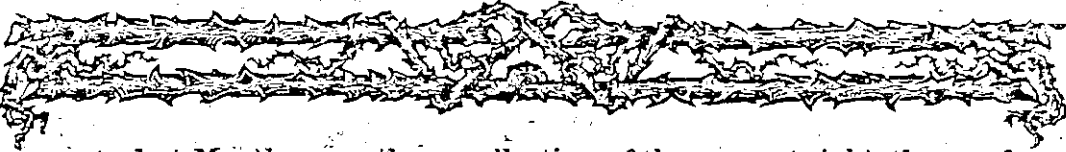
INSECTS AND EPIDEMIC DISEASE

Our physicians told us that, owing to the cold, the crowded state of the camp, the weakness consequent to want of nourishment, the lack of clothes — all circumstances which prevent the taking of prophylactic measures — the soldiers are covered with vermin, and that if these conditions should last, it would be almost impossible to prevent the outbreak of some serious epidemic disease.





ITALIAN SOLDIERS PRISONERS OF WAR.



And at Mauthausen the recollection of those poor eight thousand Servians (8000! but some say many more!) who died of petechial typhus is not yet lost!

On that occasion — so I was told by those officers who had long been in the camp — after the death of some of the Austrian doctors, whose sacrifice must be mentioned with reverence, the authorities of the camp put the poor Servians into the barracks, surrounded these with sentinels, and left all the prisoners to die thus, whether they were infected or no!

War has millions of victims and endless horrors, but let me tell you, the horrors of war fought on the field of battle, though much vaster and more striking, do not leave in the soldiers' mind such a terrible impression as these horrors, which are not necessary for the war itself. To these our mind cannot submit and thus we all become ferocious, may we be strong or weak, rude or gentle; and by instinct we wish for horrors more horrible than these, so that these may be avenged.

But history, who must not forget a single item, will remember and revenge the horrors of Mauthausen and of all the enemy's camps of captivity.

THE CAMP OF MAUTHAUSEN

I want to make a rapid description of this famous camp of Mauthausen, which has now become rather a camp of passage: there the newly arrived prisoners are shunted, and the invalid ones are assembled coming from every side of Austria, awaiting their turn to go back to their native country.

It occupies a broad plain on the left side of the Danube, on the east of Linz, and consists of a great number of wooden barracks, whose planks do but badly fit together, and in which on beds of straw the poor prisoners lie down tired and suffering.

Everything is sad in that camp, even its frame is lugubrious! On one side a low range of hills, on which guns and machine-guns are set to be ready for any case of revolt, raises its wild summits in a long bow to the grey sky, and stretches out the top of a few phantastic mountain trees to the wind. In front a thick little wood closes in the horizon towards east, and a little to the south the black gate of the prisoner's church-yard appears, showing an immeasurable field of crosses that the horrified sight cannot wholly embrace. On the south, beyond



the Danube, an uncertain everlasting mist hides from our sight the far away sky towards our beloved Country.

Thought, the only possession of the prisoner which is still free from the Austrian tyranny, often flies over the ditch, the iron grating, the sentinels' bayonets, beyond the Danube, the plains, the mountains, and alights on its distant Mother Country, their to live with the heart of mother, wife and children; but, alas! how short is the illusion! the harsh signal of an Austrian trumpet, or the shout of a beastly sergeant sending you back to your work, compels the thought to come back to sad reality.

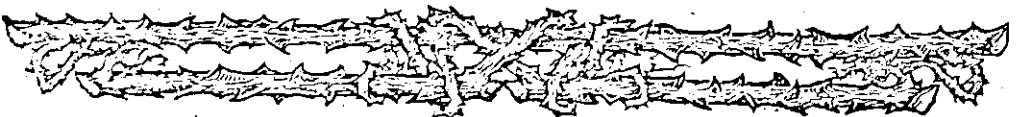
And in this gloomy prison, shut in among double ranges of iron network, where the hateful watch of the Austrian sentries placed at a few steps from each other never relents, life is miserably dragged on from day to day, from hour to hour, it is worn out in the slow passing on of time.

DAILY DEATHS

In this camp of Mauthausen, as in all the other concentration camps, and especially in the colder ones where the thermometer falls to thirty degrees and more of cold, day after day scores of unhappy prisoners are freed of their suffering.

When the Austrian corporal or sergeant used to get round the barracks in the morning to call the prisoners and drive them to their work, it often happened last winter that, whilst he brutally beat with the butt-end of his gun those who did not get up at his calling, some soldiers who had already got up seized him by his shoulders, and, beside themselves with rage hurled these words at his face: « Don't you see he is dead? ». And the expressive gesture and the threatening look made it clear to the Austrian that it was better not to provoke still more the bitter sorrow of the survivors. Some of them, the best friend or most faithful comrade, had got up during the night, had put his arms around the poor fellow trying to warm him a little, as a mother or father would do to their child, and when he awoke in the morning had found himself pressing a corpse in his arms!

Our doctors, astonished at the frequency of these deaths, more than once made the autopsy of the dead, but they found no trace of any illness whatever. They had died of cold and starvation!





AUSTRIAN CONFESSION

One of our sergeants, an invalid, who had come home with me on the 17th February, showed me the copy of an Austrian report which, by a strange hazard, he had got hold of.

It was the memorial of an Austrian doctor of the prisoners' camp, directed to the superior Commands, in which he described the miserable conditions of the Italian prisoners, beseeching the Commands to provide in some way, *to the only end of preventing illnesses and deaths, which would deprive the camp of the number of arms that were needed for the works.*

Just consider this: the enemies themselves are obliged to denounce their own infamy, not prompted by a humanitarian feeling, but only for the consideration of their own advantage!


HEART-RENDING LETTERS

I too have succeeded in bringing with me from Austria the last of many notes that a Sicilian corporal used to write to me by stealth, as he was in my same camp of Mauthausen but in another group. The note was written on the 3rd of February, and these are the last lines of it:

« Dear Lieutenant! Neither from home nor from the Red Cross
« have I received any parcel as yet, and to tell you the truth, my health
« begins to suffer. I speak with you as I would with my father, but I
« cannot go on any longer in this way. If you can afford to send me a
« little bread, I would gladly accept it. You may tell my family that, if
« I must continue with only the eighth part of a loaf, I shall be obliged
« to go out to the works next spring ».

But at the works, even if they have some little bread more, they cannot satisfy their hunger, and have to suffer such a lot of other privations, punishments and torments that nobody will ever know, as those who have suffered those horrors are no longer able to tell them. And the letter ends with the sad list of the usual deaths:

« Yesterday, in the second group, three men died in the barracks
« and eleven in the quarantine, and all of hunger. You may well imagine
« in what state we are all of us! ».



Fourteen had died of hunger in a single day in only two reparts of the camp of Mauthausen; how many may have died in the other reparts, and in all the prisoners' camps of Austria and Germany on that same day?

The slowly continuing number of augmenting deaths by consumption is already surpassed by the number of those who die of starvation.

THE TOWN OF THE DYING


I have often observed, especially in the icy calmness of a winter's twilight, the sad expanse of the soldiers' barracks, hardly emerging amidst the white snowy plain, and could but compare it to a town of dying beings; and the thick vapour which rose here and there from some chimneytop in the misty darkness of the evening seemed to elevate to heaven the pangs and pains of so many victims that were incessantly sacrificed on the altar of a heartless Nemesis!

And this image, to which the clear reality of the sufferings that were going on under those same roofs fully corresponded, poured such a sorrow into my heart, that no word can utter it, such a rage that in my weakness I could not contain it, such a bitterness that it sharpened more and more the anguish of living, slowly undermining life itself!

Who will ever be able to forget the heart-rending details of those scenes that the poor soldiers came to relate to us as soon as they could?

We had been used to quite different visions of death! In our memory we still saw the ferocious and yet magnificent scenes of the corpses accumulated in the positions we had just occupied, which seemed to build trenches against the fury of the enemy who came rushing back for a new attack; but the horror of those visions vanished in the sense of deep admiration which, in the same impetuous surging of the soul, embraced also the enemies crushed by the irresistible fury of our soldiers to which they were clinging in the spasm of death, death which at last had reached them, pressing and quenching the remnants of the hostile life.

The glorious remains of a hundred attacks, of long and heroic resistance — now they had fallen into the enemies' hands — were doomed to end their poor life in a useless horrible death.



MALEDICTION AND REVENGE

Some of these unfortunate that consumption had doomed to death, would suddenly fall down dying: as their poor limbs were convulsed they emitted a feeble groan which sounded like a last conscious farewell to the life that was leaving them; but before breathing their last, one noticed a shudder, as of rebellion, pass through their bodies, and from their eyes not yet closed in death, there shot a threatening flame, which outlived death!

Those miserable bones, which were often thrown altogether into a common grave, that even the worms were horrified to feed on, now form the basis of a curse that no atonement can ever cancel.

I have shouted it to the soldiers, brothers of that strong and gentle Italian race, who have already raised an altar on the Carso and the Alps, whose glory will never die; I shouted it to them, and I repeat it to-day, so that the mothers, wives and fathers may know it.

To the unconquerable knowledge of our incoercible right, to the unrevenged tears of the mothers, to the sacrifice of so many young lives left out on the now abandoned battle-fields of a hundred victories, to the call of their broken bones which are still quivering under the insult of the enemy's tread, to the cry of pain, of martyrdom, to the torture of old men, of wives, of children left to suffer unspeakable abuse in the country now lost to us, one must still add the curse that other brothers have planted in the enemy's soil, and one must impress it on one's mind, with the vow of revenge!

Human and divine justice must strike the barbarians of Austria and Germany who even now are perfecting their means of war, not for fair fight, but to enable them to murder, from the air, old men, women and children in our undefended cities.

Oh! if only our Country could have back all those thousands of prisoners who are groaning under the hardest of lives, caused by an unfortunate episode of war!

Oh! if all those sons of Italy could return to fill the trenches of Italy, their fury against the enemy would be irresistible!

They who know what captivity is, would never again fall into the enemy's hands; and would know how to value, to the last drop of their blood, to their last breath, their longing for vengeance.



LAST FAREWELL OF PRISONERS IN GERMANY

Before finishing I cannot help mentioning the last greeting we had from a hundred of our prisoners interned in Germany, during the journey which, in bringing us back to the Mother Country, brought us back to life.

We had already passed the Austrian frontier and entered Bavaria, on our way to Munich, when we saw stretched out in the distance along the railway line a curved line of black dots. As the train drew near, that dark line twisted, started, and then, when we passed quite close, and recognized in the spectral faces of those workmen the still vivid flashing Italian eye, and when we waved the Italian colours from the windows, we saw all those living shadows, all those death-like faces raise themselves in an attitude of invincible pride and taking no heed of the enemy's whip which recalled them to their work, stretch out their arms to the train, that was flying towards the Mother Country, and in the cry of « Italy » — a cry of agony and infinite longing — they spent all the strength which still remained in their burning breasts.

And we drank in that cry: we shut it in our hearts to bring back to the great Mother Country, and we gathered into the pleats of the three colours the long cry of that desperate grief!


Because we, who had lived that life, understood what bitter agony tortured those unconquered souls, under the perpetual strain of fatigue, hunger, cold and death:

To be obliged to confess to be living without aiding in any way the Mother Country, forcibly excluded from taking any part for the future in the world's great struggle which was never so vital, as at present, for the Mother Country!

THE SACRED DUTY OF THE FREE

But that which is denied to them is allowed to thousands, to millions of their more fortunate brothers, because they are fighting for their country: the old soldiers and the new, the strength which has been tried and is already surrounded with glory, and the virgin strength just now offered by the mothers, all long to prove their power. To them it is given to glut their hatred — in action — against the enemy.

Mothers, Fathers, be proud! At this hour every one of their short lives is glorified by a great destiny!



To-day not only the sacred memories of the past centuries rely on the soldiers and on the people, but they are entrusted too with the hopes and the fate of the centuries to come. This is a world's battle between right and wrong, between liberty and slavery, between the force of civilisation and overbearing barbarity.

From the sacred shores of the Isonzo, from every bloodstained rock of the Carso, from the rugged Alpine peaks, the ghosts of the fallen brothers rise up at night to hide themselves from the enemy's scorn.

The innumerable lines of martyrs turn towards the shrunken frontier, and whilst blessing the brave who arrested the enemy's advance, call anxiously upon Italy to give all her energy — old, new, lulled to sleep and new-born — for the resistance of to-day, for the reconquest and the revenge of to-morrow.

In the silence of night the spirit of the heroes passes rustling from mountain to mountain, from plain to plain, loitering in the suburbs and in the towns of the Mother Country, to revive and reunite the scattered flames of faith.

— Mothers, courage! — says that rustling spirit. — We live for ever!

But again the thrilling whisper: — Hurry, brothers! Produce, oh people: help, be patient, and we shall win!

Brothers! — In the whole Peninsula, on the waters and in the islands of our Mother Country — in the fervour of its war-work — must the solemn voice of the martyrs re-echo, that voice which is comfort and admonition and omen!

Let every one of us, man or woman, poor or rich, young or old, give with all our hearts every thing that is possible: affection and our blood, manual labour and brain work, assistance and love!

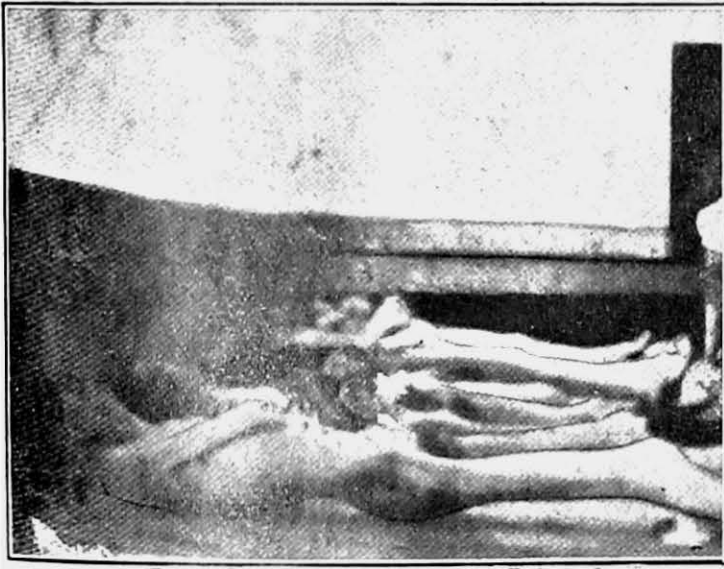
Only thus can Victory, the winged Victory — exhumed from the obscurity of centuries — take her flight at dawn with the heroes' last march, and alight — the triumph of right and civilisation — on the extreme summit of our Alps.

And there we shall see her one day, which is no longer far off, as the Poet prophesied:

..... splendid
In the midst of storms, proclaim to the ages:
Oh people, Italy reached here
Avenging her name and her right.

Palermo, 4th May 1918.

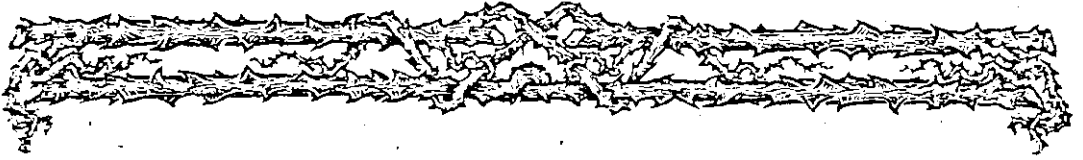
ATTILIO LOYOLA.



FUNERAL TRANSPORT OF TWENTY
COFFINS CONTAINING DEAD
ITALIANS.

DEAD ITALIAN PRISONERS, BEFORE
BURIED.

MONUMENT RAISED BY THE PIOUS CARE OF ITALIAN OFFICERS TO THEIR BROTHERS, DEAD IN CAPTIVITY
(P. MATTEUCCI, Sculptor).



ITALIAN PRISONERS' CAMP in Siegmundsherberg

EXTRACT


FROM THE REPORT OF CAPTAIN ANTONIO XIMENES

MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF PRISONERS.


VISITING every week the various groups and hospitals, I had the opportunity of judging with my own eyes the true conditions of the soldiers. The photographs (see the enclosed Tables) are only too tangible proofs of the denutrition in which the soldiers were found. The united stories of the military Chaplain Don Abbo and the doctor, lieutenant Cevolotto are terrible documents and are the absolute truth shorn of any exaggeration (see pag. 31 and 35). For the increased mortality reported in the statistics of Professor Cevolotto one must seek the cause in the ever increasing badness of the conditions of Austria and the increase in the number of prisoners.


Although these documents are more than sufficient to show the true conditions of the Italians in Austria and any other words from me are almost superfluous, nevertheless I can't keep silence as to the sad facts which I have personally come across: in the winter of 1917-18 Austria took away their clothings, their woollen garments and their shoes and gave them instead garments made of paper and wooden shoes. I have seen the return of Italian prisoners from Galicia and Carpathia: they were unshod with their clothes in rags, and many of them were idiotic from the fatigue they had undergone, the insufficient food and covering and the thrashings inflicted on them. During





the distribution at the hospital I was assailed by some soldiers who were lying on the straw at the last gasp, who regained the force of desperation at the sight of Italian bread and succeeded in snatching a piece from my hands; some hours after, owing to the organism being worn on by illness and the defective functioning of the digestive organs, death supervened. I saw amputations of frozen limbs without first providing anaesthetics for the patient, from want of the medicaments. Gangrened limbs seen to and then dressed with wood shavings through want of proper material. Some of the wounded in the offensive of Jamiano picked up by the Austrians were able to be given the medicine and material for medicaments that the Commission of Charity of Italian Officers had at its disposal: moreover the Commission provided for the want of the hospitals by making bandages from the sacks of linen in which the bread came from Italy. In January 1918, in order to enable the Italian soldiers told off to bury the dead to continue their pious task, the Commission had to give them a ration of bread or they couldn't have performed the hard labour on the small portion of food provided. The said soldiers could not dig the graves in time and often the coffins remained all night in the snow. On the last visit in the winter of 1918 made by S. E. Valfrè di Bonzo, Apostolic Nuncio at Vienna, to the groups and hospitals, the Austrians took away in the night bodies of those who had died during the day, so that the numbers should not be verified. I have seen soldiers who had become stupid from the obsession of death, who to every question replied by pointing to the cemetery. On some mornings in the hospital soldiers were found dead in the latrines; they had died in the night getting from bed to the latrine. In the months of December 1917 and January and February 1918 soldiers would wake up in the morning to find their companion dead by their side. He had died during the night of organic wasting and had not had the strength to call for help. He had died of misery and cold, wrapped up in a meagre covering, coiled up in himself. So in the morning would the pitiable bundle be found, resembling in no way a human being. In the month of March 1918 I was a witness of the saddest sight: they were manuring the fields near the groups and many soldiers, eluding the vigilance of the sentinels, leapt over the wires at the risk of being shot or receiving a bayonet thrust, and advancing like famished wolves, threw themselves on the ground and rummaged among the manure to find something to eat. I particularize because all this seems impossible: The military chaplains, Don Novati of Milan and





Don Nosella of Turin (the latter repatriated), with sticks in their hands got the soldiers away in order to prevent intestinal disturbances. Every week at the distribution to the groups I have witnessed heart-rending sights: the uniform of an Italian officer overcame them, they ran at me and snatched at my arm, they begged me to telegraph to their parents, they told me their grievances, they implored me to defend them, and entreated me to give them a piece of bread.

I send samples of food cooked in the concentration camps and water.

I could go on enumerating specific cases personally verified by me, but I think further discussion superfluous as it is now notorious in what a miserable state our prisoners are repatriated. Amid such misery and hunger, the Austrian Authorities forbid the Italians to ask for bread in their letters or to speak openly of hunger. Letters which contain such matter are not allowed.

Captain ANTONIO XIMENES


7th Infantry - Ex-prisoner of war
(Gorts, 7th August 1916).

EXTRACT FROM ENCLOSURE N. 4

ACCOUNT OF THE MILITARY CHAPLAIN DON ABBO DOMENICO

Finding myself for 22 months as military chaplain among the prisoners here, I have had the opportunity of knowing their manner of life even in its most minute details.

The number of sick has swollen beyond all proportion to the number of prisoners, especially the number of those seriously ill, so much so that many huts quite unsuitable for the purpose had to be turned into a hospital, and those huts capable of holding 250 men were filled with 400 or more, often including cases of the gravest kind and every day having several deaths. The hospital is completely full, and not of light forms of illness, that are in this year unusually tended in ambulatory way at the group, but of very grave cases of




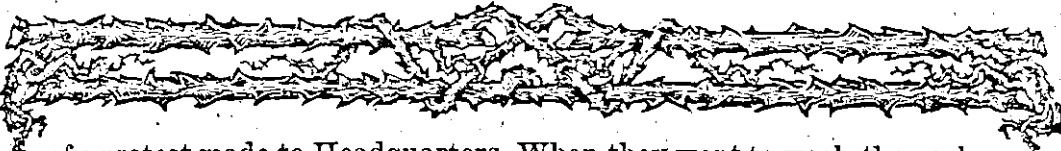
inflammation of the lungs, nephritis, pleurisy, consumption, and of serious forms of enteritis, probably due to the bad nourishment.

In front and in proportion to the number of illnesses is naturally the number of deaths, of which the monthly average, which from July 1916 to October 1917 never came up to 20, increased out of all proportion after the arrival of the last prisoners, so that while the number of deaths was 11 in September and 17 in October, they increased to 122 in November, 238 in December, 359 in January 1918 and 388 in February.

From the 21st November 1917 one observed a sad phenomenon which till then had never been verified. Two soldiers of the group died suddenly from inflammation of the lungs, as the autopsy showed, and from that day sudden deaths continued and always continue with dolorous and alarming regularity. To the number of these must be added the number of those who died almost as soon as they had come to the hospital, who had arrived there in such a condition as not to give time to the doctor and the chaplain to administer any aid either physical or spiritual, but who died some minutes or some hours after the arrival. The explanation of these facts is no doubt in some cases due to the desire of the invalid to leave the concentration camp at any cost in order to join the squads of labourers, buoyed up by the hope of meeting a fate which at any rate could not be worse, a desire which made him conceal the real state of his health; but on the other hand these sudden deaths were due in great part to the sad condition of the soldier fallen a prey to the half-stupidity that made him lie down without calling for help in the place assigned him surrounded often by companions who did nothing to help him or call on the sanitary service in case of need. In consequence of this state of things it was necessary to employ two doctors to make the autopsy of these unfortunate who had died suddenly.

The conditions of life in the group are as sad as it is possible to conceive. In the huts 50 men sleep together without any possibility, even in the severest weather, of warming themselves. Almost everywhere straw mattresses are wanting, and only in the advanced winter is one covering per individual provided. The confined space favours the breeding of parasites, from which the sufferer cannot rid himself because of the want of linen and soap. In some groups there was even no water for washing. The soldier's clothing is reduced to a minimum; at his arrival in camp all coverings and cloaks are taken away. These last were given back only in mid-winter in consequence






of a protest made to Headquarters. When they went to wash themselves, all the linen and the undergarments were taken from the prisoners and they were given back only: one shirt and a pair of drawers to the most fortunate, to others only a shirt, while not a few were left with nothing at all. In these conditions the soldier in going out of the hut, as he had to at night to go to the distant latrines, was exposed without any protection to the freezing air and some times individuals, already at the last gasp, fell dead in the latrines.

The food is absolutely insufficient. The quantity that each man ought to receive is judged less than the necessary minimum, and moreover those occupied in the camps with special tasks receive a more abundant ration which is taken from the total, so that the bulk of the soldiers receive less than is assigned to them in theory. The result is the malnutrition of the prisoners, which we have already spoken of, and that is impossible to describe with words.

According to international convention, a prisoner, if a soldier, should receive three half-pence a day, a corporal three pence, a non-commissioned officer five pence. Not counting the little sums kept back for soap (which in reality was never distributed), or on some other pretext, one must remark that the money is kept back on the slightest ground for damages or some other pretence. Thus several tens of thousands of crowns were arbitrarily taken away; we can remember, for example: for 50 straw mattresses which were missing, 15.000 crowns were kept back. And this happened every time the inventory was taken, because the missing objects were never replaced by the money thus kept back.

Having considered the conditions of the prisoners in the camp we now come to those to whom is assigned hard labour. The control of their lives is completely beyond us who remain in the camp. But we can guess how they are treated by their conditions when they come back from work and from their accounts. In more or less big squadrons they go into unpopulated regions to make roads, railways, or aid in the rearways of the fighting army. Often as there is no supervision by the Austrian Authorities, it happens that these unhappy creatures are left to the brutal rule of a man without any chance of making a complaint.

Their pay, which at most can come to five pence, is not enough to procure even a little better food than the ration. The accounts of those returned from work are piteous: hunger, cold, overwork, beatings, unheard of ill-treatment; if they complained, because of their very bad conditions of health, they were laughed at, or, if they were admitted



to the medical visit, it was agreed that they should not be recognized as ill, and, then, to intimidate the others, they were punished with the penalty of the pole, and the little piece of bread which was all they had to keep body and soul together was taken from them. A soldier is often found dead in the morning at getting up time, which even in the severest winter weather was very early, towards three or half past. The Austrian convoy to verify the death used the butt end of a rifle. The body was carried away like an object out of use and thrown in some stream or in a ditch at the foot of a tree without any indication that there lay the remains of an innocent victim. It is impossible to describe the barbarities which went on in these unlucky places where all is violence, injustice and cruelty.

It is difficult to give a faint idea of the moral conditions of our prisoner; all around him speaks of misery and horror.

He, who remembers the risks of the front, the sufferings of the trenches, he the involuntary victim of a sad fate, to the humiliation of finding himself on enemy soil, often has to add the cruel doubt as to whether others think he has done his duty or no. He is inclined to think himself abandoned by his far off native land from which he often asks a piece of bread, and I have often seen him weep and pray for death.

He sees himself the slave of masters who are most bitter enemies: who go so far as to deny him the right to live with the turnip water that they give him as the only means of daily sustenance.

In this state he has no one to turn to, to say a word by way of unbosoming himself, and he weeps, curses, swears! He sees himself forced to eat grass, or to beg charity from anyone he thinks can give him it.

DON ABBO DOMENICO
Military Chaplain.



EXTRACT FROM ENCLOSURE N. 5

ACCOUNT OF DR. GIORGIO CEVOLOTTO, MEDICAL OFFICER
OF THE ITALIAN RED CROSS

The undersigned came to the Lager of Siegmundsherberg, where are concentrated almost exclusively Italian prisoners, in the second half of October 1917, and reports as follows:

The conditions of the prisoners are indescribably sad owing to the privations which they undergo. They suffer principally from scarcity of food and want of clothing.

The food consists on the average of 400 grms. of bread, green stuff (cabbage or turnips) 100 grms., a herring. This calculation one must consider much greater than the reality. We have to say at once that really in the dietetic schedules a greater quantity would be prescribed, but owing to dispersions in favour of some categories of workers or employed, to whom a special ration is given, or to dispersions due to others motives, it only comes to the amounts given above. To this ration has to be added 100 grms. of horse flesh twice a week. Even in this calculation one must remember that bones are included in the weight, so that the amount the prisoners receive is really much less.

If we make a calculation of the nutritive qualities contained in the said rations, we find that they contain, roughly speaking: Albumin 38,6 grms, Hydratis of carbon 204,4 grms, Fat 6,5 grms; corresponding to Calories 1068,04. And in the ration of 100 grms. of meat we have: Albumin 18 grms.; Fat 8,5 grms; corresponding to Calories 82.

We are therefore very far from the 2580 Calories necessary to a man weighing kg. 64,5 (equal to 40 Calories per chilo). And perhaps the figure of 2580 Calories would be too low, if one takes into account the special needs of organisms which live in drudgery and through want of proper clothing lose an immense quantity of heat.

We ought also to notice that the food is often exceedingly deficient in quality. A great deal of vegetable furnished is absolutely uneatable, often in a state of putrefaction. In the case the prisoner's ration consists of hardly anything except the bread. But more often, when the food furnished is not absolutely rotten, it is decaying and very poor in nutritive qualities.



On arrival in camp all the prisoners had their coats and cloaks taken from them. This last was given back only at the end of the cold season after the insistent demands of the doctors. After the bath, only a shirt without undervest was given back to each individual: to one more fortunate person a vest was given back without a shirt. Hardly anyone had drawers. From all who had brought with them the woollen rugs were taken away.

In the unheated huts the majority of the prisoners sleep on wooden planks without straw mattresses; blankets were given only in severest winter and that also after urgent demands.

As the result of this system of living the mortality became very high. On November 21. there were two sudden deaths. At the autopsy they were found to be cases of inflammation of the lungs. These sudden deaths continued with such frequency, that it became necessary, in order to determine the cause of death, to establish a complete anatomical-pathological service, to which two medical officers were attached. At a rough calculation one may say that the deaths in the concentration camp and at the hospital immediately after admission before the doctor could make a diagnosis were about 300.

Such details I have been able to establish: The individuals taken to the section are in a state of the greatest denutrition. There is hardly any fat under their skin; the stomach is diminished in size. The secretive organs of the digestive apparatus are somewhat small, especially the liver. The most frequent illnesses come from cold, especially inflammation of the lungs, pleurisy and nephritis. The most frequent in the last period was tuberculous inflammation of the lungs.

Tenente, Doctor of the Italian Red Cross

DR. GIORGIO CEVOLOTTO

prisoner of war: Appointed Prosector of the Lager
of Siegmundsherberg.

