

**BENEDETTO CROCE
AND
ITALIAN FASCISM**

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Programme in History
York University
Toronto, Ontario

December 1999



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Benedetto Croce and Italian Fascism

by **Fabio Fernando Rizi**

a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of York University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

Despite the recognized importance, Croce's role under the fascist regime has received only episodic attention. This has left an impoverished image of Croce's anti-fascism, and favoured in some cases the inaccurate repetition that Croce was an early supporter of fascism, and only later became an opponent of Mussolini, limiting, however, his opposition solely to cultural matters.

This dissertation challenges that view, and argues that Croce's benevolence to the Mussolini government was short and always vigilant, and his contribution to the anti-fascist struggle was manifold and was expressed in public and private initiatives. The thesis is based on previously unexamined archival sources and Croce's diaries, and relies on Croce's political and historical writings, his published correspondence and the memoirs of his contemporaries. In its central part the narration follows a year by year approach in an attempt to show the connections between political aspirations and cultural activities.

The archival sources demonstrate that the fascist authorities regarded Croce as an enemy of the regime, and ordered the police and employed spies to keep his house, mail and movements under surveillance. Croce's diaries and police records show that Croce during the fascist regime

was in contact with the most important leaders of the democratic underground movements, and, for his part, was at the centre of a loose network of small but influential anti-fascist groups, scattered in the major Italian cities, keeping alive the flame of freedom in various ways. The evidence clearly suggests that a few of Croce's books, for the ideas they promoted, for the success they enjoyed and the reactions they generated, assumed the functions of political manifestos, both for Mussolini's followers and for the opposition movements.

The new and old documents lead to the conclusion that under the fascist regime Croce offered an example of political and intellectual coherence; the publication of his books and his periodical played a fundamental role in defending and promoting the ideals of the Italian Risorgimento, and inspiring many young people to anti-fascist Resistance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to all the persons and institutions, whose help made this dissertation possible:

The Mariano A. Elia Chair in Italian Canadian Studies for a scholarship enabling a research trip to Italy; The Resource Sharing Centre of York University, and the Archivio Centrale dello Stato for their friendly service; Nicoletta Vermillo for her cordiality at the Archivio; Filippo Taddei for his hospitality in Rome; Giovanna Colombo of Milan, Giacomina Calcagno of Genoa, and Bruno Caccavella of Sulmona, and Tiziano Vanola of Toronto for their valuable assistance; Marta Herling of the Istituto Italiano di Studi Storici in Naples and especially Alda Croce for graciously donating to the University of Toronto a private edition of her Father's diaries; Mariolina Franceschetti of the Italian Cultural Institute and Robin Healey of the Robarts Library for facilitating the acquisition of those six volumes;

My wife, Joan without whose support this work would not have reached completion; My parents, Maria and Pelino, from whom I first heard Croce's name; Now at the end of this labour, I dedicate this dissertation to my wife and my parents, with gratitude.

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Introduction: The Debate on Croce's Role Under Fascism

Benedetto Croce was one of the greatest Italian and European intellectuals of this century, and one of the few Italians to have made an original contribution to modern philosophy. With the frequent publications of his books and the regular presence of his own bi-monthly periodical, Croce dominated the Italian literary landscape for more than fifty years, at the end leaving a mountain of books, impressive for quantity and quality. He brought a new vitality to Italian culture, pointing in new directions, that assured the revival of idealism, and undermined the dominance of positivism. (1)

His ideas opened new ground in philosophical theory and introduced different methods of critical analysis, providing new concepts in literature, historiography and even political science. At the same time Croce offered successful examples and fruitful applications of his theories, putting into practice his ideas especially in literary criticism and historical interpretation. Some of his books became popular and a few even achieved the status of bestsellers. As a result, Croce's intellectual and social influence on Italian society has been enormous, giving him a position of moral leadership outside of cultural affairs. During the fascist regime, when political parties were banned and freedom of expression ended, Croce

emerged as the custodian of the Risorgimento liberal tradition, becoming the conscience of Italian anti-fascism and the symbol of the Resistance to the dictatorship of Mussolini. (2)

This part of Croce's life and the political role it played, was greatly praised in his time; was challenged and even denigrated after the war by his political opponents; and continues to be celebrated, once in a while, at the appropriate anniversaries. But that role, until now, has received only episodic attention and has not been narrated in full detail. Moreover this lack of critical investigation has left an impoverished image of Croce's anti-fascism. On the occasions when it is remembered, Croce's contribution to the struggle against Mussolini's dictatorship is often reduced to the writing of two historical books and the making of one speech in the Senate, as if he had not done anything else of political importance during those years.

Given Croce's central position in Italian intellectual life, it was natural for scholars to pay greater attention to his cultural activity than to his political involvement. As a result, despite the amount of scholarship filling library shelves on Croce's philosophical system, misunderstandings about his political activities still persist, and inaccuracies about his social life are often

repeated. This alone, not to mention the presence of documents not available in the past, points to the need for a new study of Croce's political and social activities, which would attempt to clarify the traditional misconceptions, and appreciate in a fuller way Croce's role under the fascist regime, with its shadows and its lights.

Using the new documentation and reading his old books with vigilant sympathy, a closer scrutiny of his multi-faceted activity during that period may show that Croce's benevolence toward Mussolini was rather short, his resistance to the fascist regime was active and not passive, and his opposition to the dictatorship was both cultural and political.

Croce's political activities deserve closer attention than they have received until now for several reasons. In the general view, and with justification, Croce is a towering figure for his contribution to Italian culture, and this has tended to limit the perception of his political activity. For many scholars he is a protagonist in the field of ideas, but only a marginal actor in party politics and most of them tend to relegate Croce's political importance to the background. This view needs to be reassessed, and deserves a major correction.

After the First World War, the presence of Croce in Italian political affairs was no longer marginal. He was a

senator for many years and was in close relations with the liberal elite that ruled Italy before fascism; in two crucial moments of Italian history he was a member of the cabinet. In 1920, he was Minister of Education under Giolitti, when fascism became a major force in Italian political life; in 1944, as a member of the Badoglio cabinet he was among the protagonists who shaped the new democratic life of Italy after the fall of Mussolini. Above all, during the fascist regime, especially after the death of Giolitti, in the absence of political parties, Croce assumed, so to speak, the role of leader of the opposition. A greater familiarity with Croce's activity will improve understanding of the whole period, and allow a rediscovery of the permanent value of the anti-fascist movement in one of its most fundamental aspects.

Finally and probably even more important, it is often impossible to separate in a neat way Croce's cultural and political activities, and to consider one independent of the other, as if they were two separate entities. More often than not the two activities went together, one influencing the other. A better knowledge of Croce's involvement in social and political events may be necessary to better appreciate his ideas and his intellectual evolution. From his own admission, many of his political essays, cultural polemics and historical books had their

origin in passionate contemporary interests, and had the constant aim of revitalizing the liberal tradition of the Risorgimento. This is particularly true for the fascist period. Under Mussolini's dictatorship, Croce's political and cultural activities coincided. During that time, Croce employed his books and periodical as instruments to express his political ideas, to manifest his opposition to the fascist regime, and to contrast the political and cultural ideals that Mussolini was promoting.

On the other hand, political passions and ideological motivations have also greatly influenced the opinions of Croce's critics, either when they challenged his philosophy or questioned his politics. In fact, immediately after the fall of Mussolini and the end of the war, old and new adversaries began to call into question Croce's political position during the regime, and accused him of having been a progenitor of fascism and an early supporter of Mussolini, even a tepid opponent of the dictatorship after 1925. In those passionate years, for partisan and personal reasons, both Croce's philosophical system and his liberalism were not only subjected to scholarly criticism, but quite often were dismissed outright and condemned as an expression of the conservative forces and agrarian interests that had dominated the history of Italy from the Risorgimento to the fascist adventure.

During the cold war, ideological divisions and Marxist influence on cultural affairs and historical research have been a major obstacle to a better appreciation of Croce's contribution to the struggle against fascism. During this period, for political reasons, to denounce the shortcomings of the bourgeoisie, to challenge the merit of the liberal economy, to show the need for radical reforms, finally to give legitimacy to the hegemonic aspirations of the Communist Party, Marxist intellectuals presented the Risorgimento as a failed revolution and the Resistance as a betrayed struggle. In this overarching view the faults of the liberal class were heightened and its achievements underestimated. Similarly, the participation of the communists in the anti-fascist struggle received great praise while the part played by liberals, socialists or Catholics was presented as marginal. (3)

Even before the end of the war, while admiration and respect for Croce were general, even among communist leaders, Marxist intellectuals were the first to subject the philosophy and the personality of Croce to a well orchestrated campaign of denigration. The charge was begun by Palmiro Togliatti himself, the leader of the Italian Communist Party. In 1944, while both were members of the Bonomi cabinet, Togliatti initiated the first of his

malicious attacks against Croce, questioning both his philosophy and his opposition during the fascist regime. In the very first number of his periodical, Rinascita, he claimed that under Mussolini's dictatorship Croce had enjoyed "a curious position of privilege", and had established "an open collaboration" with fascism against the communist movement and the Marxist philosophy. As a result of that tacit collaboration, and as a reward for his anti-communism Croce had been allowed by the authorities to direct, "once in a while", "timid arrows" against the fascist regime. For Togliatti that collaboration constituted "a moral stain" that Croce could not erase, and those who had suffered jail and exile should never forget.

(4)

Challenged by Croce inside the cabinet, Togliatti made amends, proffered excuses and wrote a letter of retraction, acceptable to Croce. But the damage was done and a pattern was established in the best Stalinist tradition of lies and innuendoes. A few years later in fact, writing about his governmental experiences, Togliatti returned to the subject and told the readers of his paper that during the cabinet meetings poor old Croce was often asleep, but the philosopher became fully awake, showing a keen interest as soon as "agrarian questions" were being discussed. Again it was a subtle but clear message to progressive intellectuals

to see, behind the high sounding ideas of Croce's philosophy, the prosaic interest of a great landlord of Southern Italy.

As a party leader Togliatti followed a well devised political strategy. By attacking and weakening Croce's authority, he gave the signal that the communists had no inferiority complex with liberal culture; he also wanted to prepare the ground for the influence of Marxism and above all to establish the hegemony of Gramsci, whose Letters and Quaderni were being published in those years to great acclaim. It was then that Marxist writers began to compare and to contrast the personality and the destiny of Croce with that of Gramsci, stressing the difference, not mentioning the affinities, and preferring to ignore the continuous dialogue of Gramsci with Croce, as it appears both in the Letters and in the Quaderni. (5)

Openly brutal or nuanced, this comparison remained a constant for many writers, like a guiding star: Croce was born into wealth, Gramsci belonged to a poor family; during fascism Croce remained free, Gramsci languished in jail; one wanted to maintain the dominion and the privileges of the bourgeoisie, the other fought for the creation of a new society without classes and social distinctions; Croce's philosophy reflected the tradition of the great Southern landlords, Gramsci was the founder of a revolutionary party

and the leader of the proletariat allied with the peasants.

Without the malice of the communists but with a mixture of rashness and generosity that was characteristic of him, in 1954 Gaetano Salvemini expressed reservations of a different nature about Croce's political activities. He recognized the positive role that Croce had played in the struggle against fascism and praised his personal courage, adding even, to avoid any misunderstandings, that "Italians should never forget the gratitude that they owe to Croce for his resistance to fascism from 1925 to 1943". Salvemini also noted the importance of Croce's opposition to Mussolini and the consequences it produced among the Italian people, pointing out that during the dictatorship the example and the teaching of Croce educated and encouraged many young persons "to believe in freedom".

Having recognized the value of Croce's opposition to fascism, Salvemini made qualifications that contradicted the previous praises, stressing instead Croce's political "ambiguity". To prove this point, Salvemini gave a long list of political contradictions and sins, that Croce had committed in his life before and after the fascist regime. In his youth Croce fell in love with Marxism, then in 1914 during the municipal elections of Naples he was part of a conservative bloc against the socialists. Before the First World War he supported Sonnino and Salandra against

Giolitti: wrote for their newspaper; approved the conquest of Libya; then in 1915, like Giolitti but unlike Salandra, he stood for neutralism. After the war, Croce was a "collaborator" of the nationalist periodical, Politica; condoned the violence of the fascists "with his silence"; and in 1922, "participated" in the fascist congress in Naples, and "from the stage" applauded Mussolini's speech. In the summer of 1924, "despite the murder of Matteotti", Croce in the Senate voted in favour of a confidence motion for Mussolini's government; he then refused to become Minister of Education in the new Mussolini cabinet, but advised his friend, Casati, to take the position which he had refused.

Croce's contradictions did not stop even during the dictatorship, according to Salvemini. In 1925, Croce "did not accept Mussolini's speech of January third" when the new and more authoritarian policy was announced, went into opposition and "put himself in jeopardy", writing the manifesto of the anti-fascist intellectuals; but in 1931 Croce advised university teachers to take the loyalty oath, while he himself refused that very request and resigned instead from academic societies, of which he was a member. When Mussolini invaded Abyssinia in 1935, Croce approved the war; handed over his "senator's medal", as "gold of the fatherland"; remained uncertain whether to approve or to

condemn the new war in 1940. After the fall of Mussolini, Croce became head of the anti-fascist forces, but accepted a compromise with Victor Emanuel, and served under Badoglio.

The long list of Croce's personal contradictions and political ambiguities was used by Salvemini to reach three conclusions. First, born into a family of great land owners, Croce always maintained the mental attitude typical of the landlords of Southern Italy, and like all of them, on social and political questions, he was a conservative, but Croce never liked to admit that "he was a conservative". Second, the general nature of Croce's philosophical and political ideas is almost an invitation "to quietism". Finally, and most important, for Salvemini the opposition of Croce to the fascist regime was a passive resistance and limited to cultural activity. Despite its moral value, that kind of opposition cannot be compared and should not be confused with the active resistance and the political actions of the young men of "Giustizia e Liberta'" and the militants of the Communist Party, who risked persecution, jail, exile, and even death. In Salvemini's vivid dictum: "there is a difference between Buddha, contemplating his navel, and Christ who dies on the cross". (6)

In 1955, Arrigo Cajumi, a writer with liberal democratic

views and a Voltairian spirit, joined Salvemini in his criticism of Croce's political heritage, adding new arguments in order to prove the conservative nature of his philosophy and the undemocratic connotations of his liberalism. The proofs of this claim are to be found in Croce's strong admiration for Hegel and Sorel, and his sympathy for German authoritarian ideas and disdain for the British and French liberal and democratic traditions. Without mincing words, Cajumi claimed that Croce had to be regarded as a progenitor of fascism and a supporter of Mussolini, long before he became his adversary. (7)

In Cajumi's view, Croce's condemnation of positivism had undermined the ideals of democracy and prepared the terrain for fascism; at the same time the constant criticism of Illuminism, the summary rejection of the principles of 1789, and the exaltation of power in politics had provided the ideas that Mussolini and the fascists used to destroy the liberal state.

Cajumi's views, in their essence, were similar to opinions expressed, at various times, by other writers, whether nationalist or democrat. For all these critics, many young fascists had been inspired and nourished by Croce's teaching, and Croce himself had to be considered, at least for a certain period, "a fascist without a black shirt", in Gentile's expressive words. For some of them

Croce's anti-fascism was more a question of personal temperament than a question of political principles, inspired and supported by his philosophy. (8)

The criticism of Italian writers found a favourable echo among American and British historians, and sometimes it was even anticipated by them. As was expected, after the changed atmosphere following war, the old admiration of Charles Beard, Carl Becker and Robert Collingwood for Croce's ideas and political position was shunned by the young turks, and was replaced by a new animosity, reflecting the feelings of hostility created by the conflict. As in politics and international relations, so in the cultural field, the new generation seemed animated by the desire to correct the mistakes of the old generation, challenging their assumptions and shattering their old idols with manifest delight.

Long before the Italian writers, the American historian Chester McArthur Destler, in 1949 and again in 1952, questioned both the political past of Croce and his intellectual honesty. He argued in the American Historical Review and the Journal of Modern History that Croce's opposition to fascism began only in 1925. Until that year Croce had been a progenitor of fascism, an inspirer of Mussolini and an open supporter of the Black Shirt regime in its formative years. For Destler, Croce's contribution

to the revival of idealism and to the demise of positivism had weakened the moral basis of liberal democracy. His criticism of the concept of causality had introduced relativism in morality and presentism in history, creating confusion and uncertainty in ethical and historical judgments. As a sponsor of Sorel's syndicalism and Vico's recurrent barbarism, as a champion of the essential amorality of politics and economics, Croce had created the climate in which an aggressive nationalism first and fascism later could thrive.

In Destler's view from 1914 to 1919, Croce also helped to undermine Italian liberalism and to damage constitutional democracy with his vitalistic conception of politics and his insistence that force alone was the basis of the state and international law. During the war, his emphasis on struggle and ridicule of pacifism, his constant criticism of democratic ideals and condemnation of Wilsonian internationalism contributed to lay a substantial portion of the intellectual foundations of Italian fascism. After the war, not only was Croce an early admirer and supporter of Mussolini, but once fascism conquered power, he praised the government's policies, was not alarmed by the increasing violence or the emerging dictatorship, approved the new anti-democratic electoral law, and finally gave a vote of confidence to Mussolini after the Matteotti

murder. More damning than anything, during the Matteotti Affair, Croce remained "favourable to a durable dictatorship", and gave "open and public support to Mussolini's bid for permanent power at the time". Destler even claimed that after the Liberation of Southern Italy in 1943, in a new edition of his occasional writings, Croce had doctored and altered critical parts of his original newspaper interviews of 1923 and 1924, with the aim of toning down or even denying that "he either supported or sympathized with Mussolini". (9)

Among English speaking historians, Denis Mack Smith between 1947 and 1973, has provided the longest account and the most detailed criticism of Croce's political activities and his relations with fascism. Smith amassed a long enumeration of Croce's political sins that dwarfed Salvemini's list and made his accusations pale in comparison. He maintained that in political affairs, for family background and personal inclination, Croce always favoured conservative solutions. He also argued that Croce's philosophy had been an invitation to contemplation rather than action, and had not been able to offer the tools for appraising the dangers of fascism in time. Smith attempted to show that Croce made a contribution to the ideological system of Mussolini and to the political ideas of fascism. His own ideal of the state was not too far from

the fascist conception of the ethical state, including a strong sense of loyalty to political authority and the belief in an historic mission for the fatherland. Many fascist intellectuals, in fact, regarded Croce as their spiritual father and for his part Croce admired the patriotism of fascist leaders. Croce rejected British empiricism as too pedestrian and instead had great admiration for German authoritarian ideals, and like Mussolini had not much use for the principles of 1789. For Smith, Croce and Mussolini had much in common. Both shared an undue enthusiasm for Sorel, Machiavelli and Marx. Both looked askance at humanitarian democracy, despised moralism in politics and had cordial antipathy for Freemasons. Croce's doctrine of politics as force and his separation of morality from politics, prepared the terrain for fascism and offered a justification for the violence of the Black Shirts. His relative judgment allowed no superiority to constitutional ways, and encouraged people to think that what happened was rational and also necessary.

Smith also maintained that Croce, in practical affairs, had a conservative inclination and on many occasions displayed "an armchair view of politics" that did not allow him to recognize danger. Before the First World War, Croce renounced socialism and became head of the conservative

forces in Naples; he welcomed the Libyan war and was pro-Germany in 1914, always maintaining animosity against the left wing parties. After the war Croce "volunteered" to write for the nationalist periodical, Politica; approved Giolitti's alliance with fascism, participated in the fascist congress in Naples in 1922, and "fervently" applauded the speech of Mussolini on that occasion, praising also his political ability. Once fascism conquered power, Croce justified the victory of the Black Shirts; "voted full powers" to the new government; agreed to be on the editorial board of the filo-fascist periodical, Nuova Politica Liberale; supported the policies of Mussolini; approved the new electoral law and hoped that the fascist list would obtain a strong majority in the elections of 1924.

Before the Matteotti Affair, Croce and in general the liberals failed to accept the challenge of fascism until it was too late. Croce sensed the cultural disease of fascism but remained blind to the dangers of its politics, and fascism remained for him, then or later, only a parenthesis in the history of Italy and a malaise imported from abroad. Smith recognized that after 1925, Croce from being "a conditional supporter of fascism", became "the leading anti-fascist" among those Italians who did not choose emigration and exile. But even after that date, Croce's

actions left something to be desired, had relapses and in general were more patriotic than consistent. Croce voted against the authoritarian laws, but in 1931 advised university teachers to take the oath of loyalty to fascism. He wrote essays for the Encyclopedia Britannica, but refused to collaborate with the equally famous Enciclopedia Italiana more out of professional jealousy than for political reasons. He sided with the Spanish republic and was critical of Munich, but in 1935 sent his senator's medal as his contribution to Mussolini's colonial war, and then "welcomed the incorporation of Ethiopia into Italy". When Italy entered the war in 1940, Croce, "with some reluctance", "stood by his fellow countrymen" as he had done in 1915 and 1935, wishing well to the Italian army, according to the old axiom: my country right or wrong.

Smith conceded that in the later years of fascism, Croce showed considerable personal courage, and became the conscience of the nation in its resistance to totalitarianism: in those years Croce's books and his periodical remained one of the few free voices to be heard in Italy. But he also claimed that Croce's historical writings contained much political propaganda, "relied on imagination rather than scholarly research", twisted the evidence, "inventing and exaggerating facts", presenting a false idealization of the Risorgimento, in order "to

reinforce the eulogy of liberal patriotism". In particular, Croce's two most famous books, History of Italy and History of Europe "were intended as a consolation to the opponents of the regime", and have to be regarded as a "splendid apology of liberalism", but some of their pages were more appropriate to polemical pamphlets than to historical analysis. Those two books did nothing to explain the causes of fascism and the weakness of the liberal state, muddying rather than clarifying the concepts of liberalism, democracy, and fascism; and in the end "did not assist the political education of the nation", leaving young Italians as confused as before.

In conclusion, for Smith the anti-fascism of Croce was only intellectual and never became a political force; perhaps it even helped to deter many people from more active opposition. The sacrifice of a Matteotti "contributed more to the creation of an anti-fascist myth" than many liberals, or many books written by liberals. Croce's activities were in fact discounted and ignored by the regime; the authorities left him in peace and recognized that his opposition was harmless for the conservative nature of his ideas and the restricted circulations of his writings. For many reasons Croce's opposition was even useful to the fascist regime, first of all as an advertisement abroad of Mussolini's tolerance and

then because Croce himself, on account of the foreign royalties earned by his books, was, in Smith's cryptic expression, "a considerable dollar asset"! (10)

During all this time Croce did not remain without defenders, nor his critics without rebuttal. (11) From 1950 until our time, against Italian and foreign critics, a long list of Italian scholars have come to Croce's defence, stressing his positive and relevant contribution to Italian culture and to the struggle against fascism. (12) Sometimes reservations expressed in the fifties have turned into a fuller admiration in the nineties, reflecting the changed political passions. This evolution seems quite evident in the recent writings of Bobbio and Garin. (13) During these years, from different points of view, Carlo Antoni and Raffaello Franchini, Federico Chabod and Walter Maturi, Vittorio Enzo Alfieri and Alfredo Parente, Vittorio De Caprariis and Giovanni Sartori, Aldo Garosci and Leo Valiani, Guiseppe Galasso and Gennaro Sasso have shown that Croce's idealism and historicism, with his postulates of dialectic and distinction, with insistence on freedom and creation as attributes of the human spirit, had little in common with the ideological system of fascism, assuming that there was one or that Mussolini had a coherent and well defined conception of reality. These writers also argued that Croce found in his philosophical concepts and

in his ethical values the elements to reject fascist ideals and the reasons to fight the dictatorship of Mussolini, or to condemn the racial policy. It was, after all, the nature of his own liberalism that compelled Croce to refuse the claim, put forward first by Gentile, that fascism was the heir of the Italian Risorgimento and the political realization of philosophical idealism.

But those authors, and the many more who dealt with Croce's literary criticism have paid little attention to the nitty gritty of his political activities. Even the few general biographies have been concerned more with his cultural contributions rather than with his political involvement. As a result there is no book, either in Italian or in English, that has analyzed in detail Croce's political activity. In English the promising beginning with the essays of Denis Mack Smith, followed by the short but dense biography of Cecil Sprigge, has remained without development. In French, an intelligent analysis of Croce's personality by Charles Boulay stops at 1911. In Italy, only Croce's activity as Minister of Education in Giolitti's cabinet has received close, if questionable, attention. A few good essays on some aspects of Croce's politics appeared in Rivista di Studi Crociani, Nuova Antologia, Il Ponte, Nuova Rivista Storica, Rivista Storica Italiana, and other scholarly publications with a small circulation. But

we are still a long way from a full account of Croce's political activities and a detailed narration of his social life.

Now the times may be more propitious to achieve such an aim, and also to give a fuller account of Croce's personality. During these last years more material has become available for research. To reach a more balanced interpretation of Croce's politics, now we can consult his correspondence with Antonio Labriola and Giustino Fortunato, Giovanni Gentile and Karl Vossler, Giovanni Amendola and Adolfo Omodeo, Alessandro Casati and Luigi Einaudi. We can also read letters that Croce exchanged with other political or literary friends. We have at our disposal the diaries of Croce himself, and finally we can have access to archival documents and personal memoirs that before were not available or had not yet been written.

Using materials now available, in academic libraries or in public archives, it is hoped with this dissertation to make a contribution to a better understanding of Croce's involvement in Italian politics, trying in particular to clarify the nature of his political actions during the years of the fascist regime. For this purpose, it has been necessary to pay greater attention to Croce's political activities from 1920 to 1929, especially from the March on Rome to the Conciliation between State and Church, that

really concludes an epoch of Italian history and also a period of the fascist experience. From 1930 to 1940 this dissertation deals only with particular episodes, in order to better appreciate Croce's position and activity during the fascist regime.

The aim is to offer an explanation of Croce's political involvement in those years, and to provide a rebuttal to Denis Mack Smith's judgments and to the claims of others, and a clarification of Salvemini's "ambiguities". For that reason special attention has been given to those events, sometimes not greatly important in themselves, that nevertheless have caused more controversy and still generate doubts and confusion. In its central part, a year by year approach is used in an attempt to show the connections, and the reciprocal influence, that may exist between cultural and political activities, hoping to indicate a more fruitful way when assessing Croce's political presence. Two general chapters, a beginning and an end, so to speak, have been added in order to offer a more complete view of Croce's personality to North American readers.

In dealing with Croce's personality and activity, it is simply impossible to ignore his philosophy; when necessary his general political ideas and philosophical concepts are mentioned but only to clarify his political actions and

his practical acts.

During this research Croce's major philosophical and historical books have been read and close attention has been paid to his biographical essays and occasional writings, which are dispersed in several volumes and in the issues of his periodical La Critica. Vigilant attention has been paid to dates of publication, new introductions to older books, and to small, but critical notes which Croce inserted into some of his books. The publication of Croce's correspondence is still in process but it has been possible to consult most of his letters, which have appeared in the national edition of his works, or in other editions and publications. The six volumes of Croce's diaries, Taccuini di Lavoro did become accessible in Toronto after their recent publication in a private edition. Several folders, where the authorities during the fascist regime had collected the reports of the police and personal letters, involving Croce, his family and his friends, available in the National Archives in Rome have been consulted.

These documents make it evident that the political authority regarded Croce as an enemy of the regime, while the diaries reveal that Croce was deeply concerned with political events during the fascist regime, and was closely involved with the leaders of anti-fascism in Italy or in exile. It is no longer possible to view Croce as an

Olympian philosopher, serenely contemplating the unfolding of the universe. The dissertation concludes that Croce's initial benevolence to Mussolini was rather short, and his opposition to fascism was rather active indeed, both in cultural and political fields. With his writings Croce defended the liberal heritage of the Italian Risorgimento, and inspired his readers to remain faithful to democratic ideas. Through his trips and his correspondence Croce was also able to maintain a link among small but influential groups, located throughout Italy and dedicated to keeping alive the flame of freedom.

Chapter 1: The Background to National Politics, 1866-1920

Benedetto Croce lived all his life in Naples, but he was born in 1866 in Pescasseroli, a small town in the province of Abruzzi, where his pregnant mother had returned to avoid the danger of cholera, then ravaging Naples. Both Croce's maternal and paternal families were owners of conspicuous wealth and belonged to the upper middle classes. Croce's ancestors had made their fortune, first by raising sheep in Abruzzi, and then by acquiring lands in the plains of Apulia, where they sent their huge flock during the winter months. Once wealth and reputation were firmly established in Abruzzi and Apulia, at the end of the eighteenth century, a branch of the Croce family moved permanently to Naples to increase the educational and social opportunities for new generations.

In the capital of the kingdom, the Croces became prominent in the legal profession and in the administration of the State, at the same time continuing to acquire land in the countryside, and real estate in the city. As was the expectation, Croce's grandfather attended the University of Naples, obtained a law degree, held important positions in the judicial system, married into the provincial aristocracy, and finally ended his career as a judge of the Supreme Court of the kingdom.

Unlike other relatives, Croce's grandfather and father

did not take part in the conspiracies of the Risorgimento, and did not embrace liberal ideas, but remained faithful to the old order and loyal to the Bourbon Monarchy. Even years after the unification of Italy, Croce's father, for political reasons, remained in less than cordial relations with his cousin, Silvio Spaventa, who had suffered imprisonment and exile under the Bourbons for his liberal ideas, and had become a prominent minister. Croce's mother and grandmother were particularly appalled by the behaviour of Bertrando Spaventa, Silvio's brother, a former priest, who had even celebrated holy mass in their home, and was now teaching Hegelian philosophy at the University of Naples. As a result, during his childhood, inside this traditional family Croce rarely heard mentioned without criticism and sarcasm the events of the Risorgimento and the names of the new leaders; instead his parents often defended the reputation and the good name of the former King and Queen, lamenting the Liberal accusations against the good old times. (1)

In this old-fashioned family the young Croce developed a natural antipathy to the Liberals and their activities, and at the same time acquired a romantic view of the Zouave soldiers, risking their lives to protect the pope and to assure his safety. This sentimental attitude began to crumble during his school years. After elementary school,

Croce finished his junior and high schools in a boarding college, run by regular priests. There Croce received a good education, solidly based on Christian morals, Catholic precepts and classical authors. He retained fond memories of those years, and remained in friendly relations with his former teachers and classmates, some of whom, years later, acquired prominent positions in politics, in the universities, and in the Church.

In high school Croce revealed an early streak of independence and a precocious critical spirit. A voracious reader by nature, encouraged at an early stage by his mother, during the last years of college, he indulged in extra curricular readings and extramural activities. He attended several lectures at the University of Naples; he read, and collected the best periodicals of the times; he translated works from foreign languages; and he did some erudite research and even had the pleasure of seeing a few of his essays published by papers in Naples and Rome. Outside the influence of school and family, Croce began to build the pantheon of his own Risorgimento heroes. Attracted by their fame, he read the essays on Italian literature by Francesco De Sanctis and the poems of Giosue' Carducci, a Nobel laureate later, but then, already the most popular Italian poet. The works of De Sanctis put Croce into early contact with the philosophy of Hegel and

Vico, and with the cultural tradition of Southern Italy. More important at the moment, in the political arena De Sanctis offered Croce, unlike his family, the example of constitutional opposition, liberal and democratic at the same time, demanding changes without nostalgic appeals to the past and without questioning the basic tenets of the new order. Carducci on the other hand, attracted Croce for his fighting spirit, fulminating with his verses against the corruption of the times, but celebrating with historical sympathy the heroes of the new Italy. In both of them, the young man admired the moral tension and the aspirations to a better Italy. (2)

Religious Crisis and Family Tragedy.

At 13, during his last years in the college, Croce had a religious crisis and lost faith in a transcendent god. The spiritual crisis began when the rector of the college subjected his pupils to a series of lectures on the philosophy of religion, hoping no doubt to strengthen their religious faith, but arousing in the process Croce's critical spirit. In time, Croce developed a totally humanistic conception of reality, a vision of human life without any metaphysics. But despite the rejection of a traditional and revealed religion, and the refusal of any reality outside of the human spirit, Croce never became anti-religious. In later years, he criticized the policies

of the Catholic Church, and opposed its interference in the political life of Italy, but he remained always respectful of religious life, and was sensitive to religious feelings. Often Croce expressed his ideas, especially on questions of morality, in Christian terms and used Catholic precepts, talking and writing almost like a father of the church, as a priest was once prompted to say. Some of Croce's best friends were Catholics; a few priests and prelates had cordial relations with him, and not solely for scholarly reasons. His wife was a practicing Catholic, and their marriage, in 1914, was celebrated in a church. Croce allowed his four daughters to have a Catholic education, and left them free to find their own way, respecting their conclusions. Throughout his long life, Croce retained a strong sense of religion, a religion without god no doubt, but with an inner voice no less demanding. (3)

While Croce was still amidst the torments of a religious crisis which had not reached a calming resolution, a natural disaster shattered his family life, depriving him of the presence and affection of his parents. On the evening of July 28th, 1883, Croce's father, mother, and sister were killed by an earthquake at Casamicciola on the island of Ischia, where they were spending the summer holiday. Croce himself remained buried under the ruins of the hotel until the morning hours, unable to move, but

still hearing the voice of his father, calling for help. When he was finally freed by soldiers, the doctors found that he had suffered a broken arm, a fractured leg, and bruises over all his body. That catastrophe remained in Croce's mind forever and left a deep impression. The tragedy caused moral anguish and psychological scars which never disappeared, but were rarely mentioned even to his closest friends. The disaster gave Croce a tragic vision of life and a dramatic sense of personal destiny. The presence of death will appear frequently in his writings and in his meditations; and so will the need for periodical self-examination, often expressed in the form of philosophical soliloquies, that have the sound and the intimacy of a prayer and a confession. To his acquaintances and friends Croce showed a sunny disposition and an Olympian calm, but the diaries and the private correspondence have revealed a man subject to anguish and black moods, showing that the admired harmony of his system and the positive attitude of his personality were not gifts of nature, but precarious conquests, reached after inner struggle. Those deep feelings reappeared frequently in Croce's life with painful effects, and were able to interrupt his work for days and even to stop the flow of his thoughts, especially during natural disasters in which friends were involved, or in national emergencies when the

destiny of the fatherland was at stake. (4)

The Roman Period.

After the tragedy Croce and his younger brother moved to Rome and lived with Silvio Spaventa, their father's cousin, who agreed to become their guardian, leaving the administration of their possessions to another relative. The two years that Croce lived in Rome, from his own admission, were the most unhappy of his life, entirely spent without friends and without social amusements, but often with the desire for death and even suicide. Once in Rome, following the advice of his uncle, who wanted him to become a diplomat, Croce enrolled at the university, in the Faculty of Law. At the university he was a rather distracted student, not interested in the subjects he had chosen, nor greatly impressed by the intellectual level of his teachers. Unable to establish a working relationship with his teachers, bored by their lectures, Croce preferred instead to spend his time alone in libraries, following his personal inclinations, doing independent research, and writing literary essays. During that academic year, Croce did not write any examinations; the following year he did not rejoin the university, and never graduated, causing grave disappointment to his uncle. In later years, Croce was often called professor, he received many degrees honoris causa, became a member of prestigious academies,

but he remained a man without a formal academic degree.

The Roman experiences have some importance in Croce's political and mental evolution. Silvio Spaventa was one of the most respected members of Parliament, and one of the leaders of the opposition. He had been a minister of the 'Destra Storica', the group of liberals, followers of Cavour, who had ruled Italy from 1861 till 1876, when they were defeated by a coalition of democrats, former republicans and disgruntled liberals, led by Agostino Depetris. Spaventa lived near the Parliament buildings, and his house was a gathering place for political leaders, university professors and newspapermen. It was there that Croce met for the first time Antonio Salandra, the future liberal conservative premier, and Antonio Labriola, the Marxist and socialist philosopher, then teaching at the University of Rome, whose sparkling lectures Croce had preferred to those of his own teachers. From then on, Labriola would be Croce's mentor, guiding his philosophical and political education.

In Rome, for the first time in his life Croce came into contact with national issues. Unlike the traditional atmosphere and concerns prevailing in his family, every evening in Spaventa's house he heard philosophical discussions, legal interpretations, financial questions and political comments affecting the business of the nation. In

the house of a leader of the opposition Croce often witnessed scathing invective against the government of Depetris and the practices of transformism, that peculiar Italian political phenomenon that results in the sudden and continuous absorption of the opposition into the government ranks. He also heard defences of the policies of the 'Destra Storica' and bitter lamentations for the defeat of 1876. Among the friends of Spaventa, besides political affairs, often the discussions verged on the very nature of Liberalism and Democracy and the differences that separated the two movements, and generated different policies. It was there that Croce came into contact with the ideas of Liberalism and the conceptions of the Liberal State. Years later Croce recognized that among the participants, Spaventa's personality offered him a model to be admired. Here was a man of action and of study, holding rational and passionate beliefs at the same time, familiar with political problems and philosophical issues; a liberal ready to defend the rights of individual citizens under the law, and willing at the same time to entrust to the State the promotion of the public good, a believer in free trade but also an advocate of the nationalization of the railways.

Under the influence of Spaventa, Croce began to elaborate his own brand of liberalism, moderate in politics

but based on idealistic philosophy, supported by a dialectical conception of history, and able to conciliate progress and conservation at the same time. It was from Spaventa that Croce retained the beliefs that the Liberal State, against clerical interferences, required control of public education, but at the same time assured freedom of expression, guaranteed freedom of science, and respected private belief. Spaventa also more than any other politician of his times preached the separation of State and Church, and fought for the independence of the courts and the autonomy of the civil service against political and government interferences. (5)

Return to Naples.

Unhappy with his situation, unwilling to attend university, after his younger brother had been sent to the military academy, Croce asked his uncle to be allowed to return to Naples and there to live an independent life by himself. From 1886 Croce's life revolved around Naples and he never changed residence again. Once in Naples Croce lived the life of a busy academic; he spent the entire day doing research in the National Archives and in public and private libraries. He joined the local Historical Society, attended the meetings of the old Pontanian Academy, contributing often to their publications or reading his papers in their placid meetings. Soon he would become the

most active member of these learned societies. With the help of other friends, especially the writer, Salvatore Di Giacomo, Croce was also involved in the publication of a periodical, called Napoli Nobilissima, that was devoted to the illustration of Naples' monuments but also to the protection and preservation of its artistic heritage against neglect and speculation. Slowly but surely, Croce began to make his mark in local history and to acquire a substantial reputation among the cultural fraternity.

During these years, already familiar with French and English, Croce continued to learn other foreign languages, and at the end he could read and write, but speak with a marked Neapolitan accent, the major European languages, plus Latin and Greek. When Croce wrote essays on European authors, he read their works in the original languages. He also regularly read foreign books and periodicals; his culture was deeply Italian, but was continually enriched by European influences. As part of his education Croce spent summer holidays in various cities and provinces of Italy, and at various intervals visited Austria and Germany, France and Switzerland, Portugal and Spain, and finally London, where he paid a visit to Eleanor Marx.

In Naples Croce did not live an active social life; his greatest amusements were long walks along the old streets of the city, and a few nights at the theatre. Many of his

friends were old men, conservative in politics, old-fashioned in culture, quietly doing erudite research on local history. Besides this circle of literates, Croce established a special relationship with Giustino Fortunato, a respected parliamentarian and author of important studies on the Southern Question, a man pessimistic by nature, but indefatigable in defending and promoting the interests of Southern Italy, inside and outside of Parliament. Fortunato adopted a paternal benevolence toward Croce, and kept urging him over the years to enter national politics, or suggesting his name for less demanding public offices. Through Fortunato, Croce came into contact with the intricate problems of the Southern Question and with the unequal development of north and south Italy after the unification. In Fortunato's residence, where the Neapolitan political intelligentsia regularly gathered, Croce met Francesco Saverio Nitti, the future prime minister and one of the most progressive politicians of liberal Italy, but then a young professor of finance at the University of Naples, already possessing a boundless faith in his own abilities and technocratic solutions. Despite their different personalities, the two young men established a warm friendship, that lasted a lifetime, surviving unchanged wars, exile and dictatorship. (6)

Wealth and Croce.

Once Croce left Rome and returned to Naples, reached the age of majority and became free of Spaventa's guardianship, he had to look after the administration of his land possessions. For a few years he was compelled to undertake inspections of his properties, to make decisions on cultivation, to enter into negotiations with tenants or to settle legal questions with leaseholders. But Croce cannot be regarded, then or later, as a gentleman farmer, let alone a traditional southern Italian landlord. He did not have the practical inclination to be a landlord, and, as he confessed later, always organized his business to have as little trouble as possible, leaving the care and supervision to others. As soon as his brother rejoined him in Naples, abandoning a military career, Croce entrusted to him the direction of their economic affairs, and devoted all his energies to studies and cultural activities, following his natural avocations.

Wealth, however not only allowed Croce to live a life free of economic concerns, it permitted him also to be generous with people in need. He built and then shared with other scholars a remarkable private library; he supported the publication of various cultural periodicals; he financed the printing of books written by his friends. Often he helped friends, sometimes even strangers, to the

dismay of Labriola. But despite economic independence, throughout his life Croce lived a rather Spartan existence, never indulging in luxuries, and sometimes avoiding even the comfortable things, instead spending long hours in his room "as a tenacious and silent worker", as he put it. Much has been said about Croce's wealth but those who knew him well and had close familiarity with him are in agreement that wealth did not influence his moral outlook or his political views. After the loss of faith and the tragedy of Casamicciola, Croce acquired a new moral order and gained a new vision of life, of which work was the foundation giving it meaning and value. In his adult life, work became for Croce a new religion, almost a daily devotion to an inner god. The diaries show on many occasions that even the simple routine of work was used by Croce as a therapeutic exercise to maintain or regain equilibrium, to fight the returning pains of anguish, to avoid the dispersion of energies, and to overcome the temptation of self-indulgence. In all his life, wealth provided a shield of protection, it offered opportunities, but it was work and the value of human work that gave harmony to Croce's life. (7)

Labriola, Marxism and Socialism.

By the early 1890's Croce had acquired the reputation of a scholar of great erudition. He had done research and

written essays on particular aspects of Neapolitan history. But often he was not satisfied with his work, and felt the need for a different direction, and a deeper understanding of history. The times were posing new problems and creating different conditions. Italy was undergoing great change, and the new conditions demanded more intense participation in political events. The increased pace of industrialization and emigration created social unrest and political agitation. New parties emerged on the left and on the right. In 1892 the Socialist Party was founded and in 1894 the Sicilian Fasci were crushed by Crispi, the energetic and erratic prime minister, whose colonial adventures and financial scandals added to the uncertainties of the times.

The critical mood of Croce was sharpened by the continuous advice he received from Antonio Labriola. After Croce left Rome, he remained in friendly correspondence with Labriola, who kept suggesting books and authors to read, continually urging him to pay deeper attention to philosophical problems and political issues, and generally to abandon erudition for more serious studies. On his own Croce wrote two critical essays, trying to better define and clarify the nature of history and the nature of art, and their relation with philosophy and with science. But the final push to embrace a new road began in 1895 when

"Marxism entered my life". That year, at his own expense, Croce became editor and publisher of Labriola's essays on Marxism and historical materialism. The reading of those essays gave a new direction to Croce's intellectual interests, and created a profound enthusiasm for philosophy and politics. In the next few months Croce read "with inflamed mind" all the available works of Marx, Engels, and other socialist writers, Italian or German. He also made an intensive study of the economists of the classical school to better appreciate or to criticize the economic theories and social provisions of Marx. The correspondence with Labriola acquired a more intense philosophical character; the discussion was also continued with visits to Rome and Naples, and even during the summer holiday in Perugia. Helped by Labriola, Croce borrowed papers from Engels himself and entered into correspondence with Sorel in France, Bernstein in London and Kautsky in Germany. In a short time, Croce produced several essays on historical materialism and Marxist economy, and his writings, to the annoyance of Labriola, became part of the revisionist movement, started by Bernstein in the German Social Democratic Party.

Croce's enthusiasm for Marxism did not last long, and practically came to an end in 1900. Croce and Labriola had a different approach to Marx and Marxism. For Labriola,

Marxism was almost a new faith; it provided a general vision of life, and represented the ultimate philosophy. For him, Marxism was the consciousness of the proletariat, and Marx and Engels were the prophet and the general leading the socialists to the creation of a new world and a new society, where the class struggle ended. For Croce, Marxism was just another philosophy, to be employed to clarify his mind, to be used for his own needs, and to be studied hoping to find solutions to his personal and mental problems. Marx, for Croce, was a revolutionary genius, a vigorous political mind, providing sharp tools for the working classes but not absolute truths or scientific laws. Also for Croce, the proletariat was an historical movement, and as a protagonist of modern society could not be identified with Marxism or even with socialism; and socialism did not necessarily need Marxism for the realization of its goals; finally a socialist society could not be regarded as the final solution to all the problems of the human spirit. At the end Croce reduced Marxism to a canon of historical interpretation, a guide offered to historians and to politicians to pay special attention to economic factors in the interpretation of the past and in the struggles of the present. But Marxism remained a fundamental moment in Croce's intellectual development, and made a lasting contribution to his philosophical system. As

a result of the importance given to economic factors by Marx, when Croce, in future years, elaborated his philosophy of the spirit, to the traditional three categories of the beautiful, the true and the good, he added a fourth: the useful, under which he included political and economic activities, and in general all those human actions that are the result of the volition of the individual. Marx compelled Croce to make a systematic study of philosophy and to deal in depth with the heritage of Hegel. From Marx, Croce acquired the concept of the Hegelian dialectic and the conception of life as a continuous struggle, but also a sense of historical realism and political concreteness, and, we may even add, a lasting sympathy for the proletariat. (8)

The study of Marx not only influenced Croce's philosophical development, it also generated, for the first time, a strong interest in Italian political affairs and even an emotional involvement in the socialist movement. Until then, Croce had had little sympathy for traditional Italian politics and was repelled by "the current Italian liberalism", as practiced by Francesco Crispi, the former associate of Mazzini and Garibaldi, once in power prone to authoritarian measures and to financial scandals. But now as a result of his study of Marx and interest in the socialist movement, everything seemed to change, "as when a

man falls in love for the first time". Socialism appeared as a liberating force, capable of generating a renovation of the present social order and of creating a new public morality. "I seemed to breathe a new faith and a new hope in the vision of a regeneration of mankind, redeemed by work and in work". In reality, Croce was never a member of the Italian Socialist Party; he never asked for a membership card, nor did he run for public office under its banner. But the general public regarded him as a member of the Socialist Party, and even Turati once referred to him as comrade, a mistake that Antonio Labriola, with more direct knowledge, never made. For him Croce remained only "half radical, half socialist and half Marxian".

It is true, however, that Croce had strong and emotional sympathies for Socialism, and for a few years publicly supported the leaders and the policies of the Socialist Party and the general aims of the movement. Croce was in correspondence with socialist leaders, helped socialist members in economic difficulties, and wrote essays for socialist papers. He made a large contribution to the founding of the socialist national paper, Avanti!. Croce condemned the colonial adventures of Crispi, criticized the suppression of the Sicilian Fasci, protested against the dissolution of the Socialist Party, and defended the rights of Parliament against the authoritarian measures of the

government. When a convocation address by Labriola was censored by the government and the university authorities failed to defend academic freedom, Croce stood by his old teacher and published Labriola's speech at his own expense. When Filippo Turati, the leader of the Socialist Party, was arrested in 1898, in the atmosphere and panic created by the food riots of Milan, Croce wrote a letter of solidarity to him, and publicly condemned the proclamation of the state of siege and the creation of special tribunals. He compared unfavourably the sentence of the Italian courts to that of the Bourbons, in which his uncle had been condemned, claiming that Turati in 1898, like Spaventa in 1848, had been sent to jail for his political ideals not because he had committed any crime against the law. When the government curtailed the activities of the opposition press, Croce with other liberal and democratic friends founded a political and cultural organization to discuss politics and to promote the education of the working classes. At the same time, with the economist Antonio De Viti De Marco and other university teachers, he tried to organize the publication of a political periodical, "to defend or to regain freedom of expression".

As had been the case with Marxism, Croce's passionate involvement with socialism first and with syndicalism later had a lasting influence on his political outlook. Even when

Croce lost enthusiasm for Marx and for Socialism, and criticized the contradictions of this system and the policies of the party, he continued to have a natural sympathy for the socialist movement, always regarded "as a beneficial movement of civilization and progress", and beneficial to Italian culture and society as he qualified that movement when he wrote History of Italy. For Croce the proletariat was an historical movement, a creation of modern society; as such it could neither be stopped nor rejected, but had to take its rightful place in parliament and in the political realm. For these reasons, Croce never had the fears about socialism that were typical of a Salandra or even a Fortunato. He continued to hope that the proletariat would imitate the bourgeoisie in its fight against the aristocracy and the ancien regime, and would display the same moral energy, the same cultural intransigence and political ability. In his writings Croce often seemed to indicate to the new movement the example of the Destra Storica in 1860, "a national liberalism, moderate and revolutionary at the same time", a movement and a leadership capable of destroying the old order and immediately building a new reality, avoiding chaos and anarchy, and willing to preserve historical continuity. For his part, Croce retained "sympathies for socialism", but gave his "adhesion to the liberal and radical movement", as

he said in his memoirs of 1902. (9)

Croce's Non-conformity.

From 1892 to 1900, not only was Croce's political position against the establishment and in favour of the socialists, but his private life was marked by non-conformity, and his personal conduct was that of a rebel against the prevailing social conventions. He often refused to take part in official ceremonies at which his presence was required by his status and family connections. On those occasions he always found good excuses to send his younger brother instead. In 1898, to protest against the policies of the government, he refused to attend the inauguration of a monument to his uncle, Spaventa. The monument was unveiled by King Umberto, who had just bestowed a high decoration on General Bava Beccaris for his role in crushing the Milan riots. The same year Croce avoided, by strategic delays, his participation in a book, written and published by Neapolitan writers in honour of the heir to the throne, the future King Victor Emanuel, then Prince of Naples. During these years, Croce showed interest in the women's movement, he contributed to feminist periodicals and even joined a league against "white slavery". More important however, for twenty years Croce lived a splendid romantic love story with a young woman of "Byzantine beauty". From 1893 until 1913, the year

of her death, Croce and Angelina Zampanelli lived as man and wife; they traveled and attended social functions together, but the natural marriage was never legally formalized. The traditional members of the establishment frowned on such unorthodox arrangements, and probably made known their displeasure. But such reactions did not bother Croce, nor his closest relatives and best friends, who regarded "Donna Nella" as the proper wife of "Don Benedetto", perhaps more impressed by the evident reciprocal affection and by the sincerity of feelings than by the lack of legal formality. (10)

Philosophical Maturity.

With the new century a new era began in Italy, characterized by economic progress and social reform. After the turmoil and the uncertainty of the last decade, the ruling classes rallied around the new King, Victor Emanuel, and accepted the leadership of Giolitti, who created a broad political consensus that lasted until 1914. Giolitti proposed a programme of moderate democratic reforms and tried to co-opt into the system the socialists and the Catholics, instead of fighting at the same time both "the reds and the blacks". Even Sidney Sonnino, the leader of the conservative forces, abandoned his programme of reaction, accepted the new course, and when in power, proposed a wide range of political and social reforms, that

in many cases were adopted and implemented by Giolitti.

During this period, Croce's political position changed and evolved, and the radicalism of his youth disappeared. After the enthusiasm for the socialism of Marx and the syndicalism of Sorel, he returned to a more moderate liberalism, in many ways closer to the political vision of Sonnino than to that of Giolitti. In the memoirs of 1902, Croce had been rather clear in the indication of his political orientation: "sympathy for socialism", and "adhesion to the liberal and radical movements". In an addition to those memoirs, written in 1912, political movements are no longer mentioned, instead Croce expressed cultural aspirations. The aim of that aspiration was "to continue the work for the formation of a modern Italian consciousness", which had to be "not socialist, and neither imperialist nor decadent", but able "to recreate in a new form that of the Italian Risorgimento". More than a political profession, this was a cultural programme; a programme that had inspired Croce's work during those years, and that in fact he had already in part realized.

The Giolittian era was one of the most creative periods in Croce's life. During this time he devoted much of his energy to philosophical study and to literary criticism. Compared to his cultural production, Croce's presence in political affairs was rather limited and without national

impact. From 1902 to 1914, at regular intervals, he produced the fundamental texts of his philosophical system. In future years there were continuous revisions, new elaborations, sometimes even relevant modifications, but the solid foundations remained in place. It is a system of complete immanentism and total humanism, a celebration of the human spirit in all its terrestrial activities. Near the end of his life Croce called his philosophy "absolute historicism", to indicate that history is the only reality for the thought and action of man. In many ways this philosophy was a reform of Hegel's idealism and Vico's historicism, accepting the dialectic, but rejecting metaphysics and refusing any teleology. This neo-idealism was also a reaction against the then prevailing philosophy of positivism, based on the ideas of Spenser and Comte. One of the characteristics of Croce's philosophy was the particular accent he gave to the distinction among the categories of the Spirit. Faithful to the secular tradition of Italian philosophy, he reaffirmed the autonomy of the individual forms in the activity of man, and in the circularity of the spirit, chief among them the fundamental distinction between thought and action, theory and practice, and morality and politics. (11)

Croce's continuous presence in academic debates, the regular appearance of his books and the ideas they

expressed had a tremendous influence on Italian society and culture. Before the outbreak of the First World War, he had achieved a dominant position in the intellectual life of Italy. The young generation and the future leaders, both of the right and of the left, were deeply affected by his ideas. Croce's achievements were greatly helped by the friendship, and the fruitful collaboration he enjoyed with Giovanni Gentile, then at the beginning of his university career, but already displaying a precocious philosophical maturity and a sharp critical mind. In practical matters, Croce's work was made much easier by the reciprocal trust he was able to establish with the publisher Giovanni Laterza, a shrewd businessman and a man of principles who remained faithful to Croce, in good and bad times.

But the most important instrument for the diffusion of Croce's ideas and for the acquisition of a position of cultural leadership was his periodical: La Critica, which began publication in 1903. Croce proved to be a brilliant editor, his periodical appeared with regularity every two months for more than forty years, and enjoyed a good circulation for a scholarly paper, reaching more than 1500 copies. La Critica was an attractive publication, appealing for the power of the ideas, the variety of the essays and the number of timely book reviews. It soon became a necessary instrument of work, a tool of reference for all

those involved in scholarly research. Often the essays of La Critica were republished, in an appropriate format, by national newspapers, thus reaching a wider audience, and increasing Croce's influence.

La Critica offered a coherent cultural programme, expressed with fighting spirit and biting form; its aim was "a reaffirmation of the spiritual synthesis" and "a reawakening of the philosophical spirit". The periodical promised to fight against "all the superficial people", who despised philosophy, and to oppose without quarter "all the mystical and reactionary movements, and the Jesuitical and Voltairian currents". Against the prevailing ideas of their time, the new idealism of Croce and Gentile tried to rekindle the philosophical ideals that had animated the generation of 1860, and that had been abandoned later for positivism, scientism, Darwinism and mysticism.

The reference to "the generation of 1860" showed that the periodical, besides philosophical concerns, had political aspirations, in the broad sense. Croce's main concern was to generate an intellectual and cultural renovation, but he was also hoping that this renovation would prepare the ground for a new political awareness and the emergence of new forces, which could bring a new vigour and morality to the political life of the nation. Often philosophical essays and literary criticism appearing in La

Critica had political implications and involved criticism or disagreement with political movements. In particular, Croce constantly aimed his arrows against D'Annunzio and nationalism, futurism, and clericalism, and, in general, against all those irrational currents that, after the war, coagulated into the Fascist Party.

But Croce also waged a relentless battle against what he used to call, with disdain, the "Masonic mentality". He meant less the actual members of the Masonic orders than the democrats and the radicals, who appealed to the Jacobin tradition and shared positivist ideas. All of these, according to Croce, possessed an abstract mentality, lacked an historical sense, and had a mechanical conception of life, that they borrowed from the mathematical sciences and tried to apply to social questions and moral problems. From 1910, this criticism also included socialism, which in Croce's view, had abandoned the original dialectic of Marx, had acquired a determinist idea of progress, and now shared the materialistic spirit of the bourgeoisie, in this new form no longer offering a new vision of reality, or the hope of a different society, let alone "the regeneration of mankind." (12)

Political Activities.

It was in 1911, in the same interview in which he declared "the death of socialism", that Croce announced his

new political stance, without, however, indicating a precise choice among parties or preference among the major leaders. After the throbbing experience of socialism, he claimed that his political faith was "something much older and much simpler". Despite the lack of clear indications, it is quite evident that the admiration for Giolitti's personal qualities and political leadership expressed in History of Italy, was now absent and came later, after Croce became a minister under Giolitti in 1920. It is also fair to assume that at this stage Croce had more admiration for the personal austerity and the political integrity of Sonnino than for the prosaic manners and the pragmatic ways of Giolitti. One has also to remember that from Naples the economic programme of Sonnino seemed to promise a more balanced development of Italian society, more equitable to Southern interests and less slanted towards the industrial and financial requirements of the North. Nor should it be underestimated that Sonnino's proposal to create a great Liberal Party appealing to the masses but ready to fight the socialists and the Catholics, held a special appeal to those who admired the policies of the Destra Storica and wanted to preserve the heritage of the Risorgimento.

But Croce's lack of enthusiasm for Giolitti cannot be compared to the militant antagonism of Gaetano Salvemini, a radical democrat, author of a book against Giolitti's

political and electoral practices. In this period, as in others, Croce was free from partisan positions, and did not follow a rigid party line, as we would expect from a professional politician. Even during this period, Croce had occasion to support social reforms introduced by Giolitti's government. For family tradition and ideological background, Croce had more cultural affinity with Salandra than with the leaders of the Giolittian democracy, all of them greatly influenced by positivist philosophy, and thus guilty, in Croce's eyes, of belonging to the "Masonic mentality". But when in 1902, the government proposed a divorce law, Sonnino and Salandra opposed it, while Croce approved of the project and campaigned for it, joining a Pro Divorce Committee in Naples that tried to counter the pressures of Catholic organizations. It is worth noting the difference between Croce's and Salandra's position on this occasion. For Salandra, at stake was the stability of the family, as a bulwark for the cohesion of society and the unity of the nation. For Croce, instead, divorce involved freedom of choice, and at stake was the lay character of the State and the interference of the Catholic Church in the political affairs of the nation.

As always Croce was never one to be afraid to challenge establishment conventions and government authorities. In 1908 Gentile applied for a teaching position at the

University of Naples, but despite his academic qualifications the appointment was given to somebody with lesser qualifications, but with the right family and political connections. Immediately Croce wrote and published at his own expense a polemical pamphlet, in which he denounced the dishonesty in the life of Italian universities and the favouritism in the appointment of university teachers. In 1912, just after the end of the Libyan war, Giuseppe Prezzolini, the editor of the periodical, La Voce, was brought to trial and accused of having damaged the reputation of the Army. In a series of articles for his periodical, Prezzolini had brought to light some racy actions of a few cavalry officers, that the military authorities and the political establishment felt better to keep secret. Croce was among the few public figures who came to Prezzolini's defence, appearing as a character witness at the trial, and then publicly defending the right of every citizen to criticize and to scrutinize the Army or any other branch of government. (13)

In 1903, Croce stopped his collaboration with the socialist papers and began an association with Il Giornale d'Italia that lasted until 1925, when the paper was taken over by a fascist editor. Until then this paper was the mouthpiece of the conservative forces opposed to Giolitti's programme; it was in fact financed by Sonnino and Salandra,

and was published by Alberto Bergamini, a conservative liberal and a gifted and innovative newspaperman. Croce was not a shareholder in this paper, as has often been implied; but at regular intervals the paper published some of his literary essays. The political significance of Croce's contribution to this paper should not be exaggerated. During this period, Croce encouraged and supported two other influential periodicals, La Voce of Prezzolini in 1908, and L'Unita` of Salvemini in 1912, giving them advice, making financial contributions and writing several essays. Different in editorial content and in the personalities of the publishers, the papers had in common the rejection of Giolitti's political system and opposition, most of the time, to his policies. The collaboration of these papers had political implications, but it was also influenced by personal relations and the social conventions of the times, that were less ideological in general than they became after the war. On specific issues, the editorial policy often contrasted with the personal views of single writers, and the difference did not create a scandal. In 1903, when Croce began his collaboration with Bergamini's paper, he was still under the spell of socialism and syndicalism. At that time Antonio Labriola too was a collaborator of the paper. During his legal difficulties, Croce assumed the defence of

Prezzolini, while Luigi Federzoni, the future nationalist leader, led a campaign of accusations against Prezzolini from the very pages of Il Giornale d'Italia. During the Libyan war, Salvemini opposed the war while Croce supported Giolitti's policy. (14)

In 1910, Croce was made a senator by Sonnino during one of his short governments. Under the Albertine Statute, Italy's constitution, the Senate was not an elective body, but a royal prerogative. Senators were appointed by the King at the recommendation of the prime minister, who was usually guided by political considerations. In reality Croce's real sponsor had been Giustino Fortunato, who had tried two years before, and failed, with Giolitti. On that occasion Giolitti was advised to reject the nomination on account of Croce's old contribution to the socialist paper, Avanti!, and probably, we may assume, because of his marital status. Fortunato, however, blamed the minister of education's resentment of Croce. This time, the presence in the government of Salandra, and the old friendship between Fortunato and Sonnino, was probably the deciding factor and clinched the outcome. Some historians have seen in the Senate appointment a sign of Croce's conservative evolution, or the beginning of a more moderate stance in politics, or a return to patriotic values. The Senate certainly increased Croce's social prestige, but it did

nothing for his political influence; he never became a parliamentary leader; with his usual diligence he took part in the most important meetings, but remained little involved in parliamentary activities, and always cast his ballots with an open mind. In 1912 he voted for Giolitti's new electoral law, that practically established universal male suffrage in Italy. Never an enthusiast of colonial adventures, Croce nonetheless supported the Libyan war, and then approved the Treaty of Losanne, that put an end to the hostilities between Italy and Turkey, while Sonnino and the nationalists opposed the peace and continued to preach more expansion. (15)

Municipal Activities.

Croce acquired senatorial dignity not because he was a famous philosopher, but "per censo", that is, because he was a rich man and had devoted time and energy to community work and public affairs without compensation. Croce's participation in municipal politics offers us a better indication of his political orientation and even party preference. In Naples Croce remained active mainly in cultural associations and academic institutions. But he also showed an early concern for ecological problems, and fought for the protection of the city's artistic heritage, often lamenting the neglect of historical buildings and the disappearance of public green. In the local chapter of the

Dante Society, he urged activities and provisions in favour of emigrants, who assembled in the port of the city before boarding the ships for their transatlantic destinations.

In 1901 the municipal administration of Naples was dissolved under a charge of corruption and was put under the care of a board of trustees. Thanks to Fortunato's recommendation, the central government, run by the Zanardelli-Giolitti coalition, named Croce director of the elementary and junior schools. This municipal experience reinforced Croce's dislike for left wing coalitions, whose administration of public funds often left something to be desired, especially in Southern Italy. Twice in fact, in 1901 and 1914, Croce was directly involved in municipal elections, and both times he supported an alliance of liberals and Catholics, opposing a bloc of the left, made of democrats, radicals and socialists.

In the elections of 1914, Croce was president of the electoral committee of the moderate alliance, wrote its electoral platform, and even made public speeches. Despite Croce's efforts the left bloc won the elections, and a duke, who happened to be Croce's good friend and old classmate became mayor. Finally in 1914, as a result of the changing political atmosphere and social agitation, a new political organization was created in Naples, and Croce was elected president of this Liberal Monarchical Association.

This is the clearest indication of Croce's political position for this period. "Monarchical" was the qualification used by the moderate liberals, followers of Sonnino and Salandra, while the friends of Giolitti were called "Liberal Democrats", and the "Democrats" were those who supported the more progressive policies of Nitti. (16)

This represents a definitive choice for Croce. From now on he regarded himself as an exponent of the liberal movement and spoke as a member of the bourgeoisie. A moderate liberalism reflected both his personal inclinations and his historical training; it expressed his respect for tradition, his preference for concrete and specific solutions, and his opposition to generic and general social reforms. But liberalism was for Croce not only a political movement, it was also the expression of his philosophy, and since this philosophy was based on a dialectical conception of reality, Croce's liberalism could assume positions or include features that his more conservative friends could neither share nor support. Despite the contradictions and the oscillations, an intellectual pattern emerges in this period. Croce displayed constant independence of mind in political affairs; his position lacked the rigidity of partisanship; he was willing to recognize the good from wherever it came. Good administration and personal honesty in public affairs

was part of Croce's fundamental idea. Freedom of expression, the lay character of the State, and the separation of Church and State were part of his liberalism. From Croce's writings, including his literary criticism, but also from the writings of Spaventa, De Sanctis and Labriola, which were collected and edited by Croce, his political position becomes more precise and his liberalism more concrete. He preferred political parties not based on religion, not founded on clientelism, and not preaching a class struggle, but able to stimulate moral and intellectual energies. He wanted a government of enlightened personalities, that promoted the general welfare and the education of the people, that did not appeal to sectoral interests, but tried to lower the economic distance between the classes. His model remained the liberalism of the Destra Storica: a liberalism aware of historical reality, faithful to tradition and open to reform; capable at the same time of maintaining order and of assuring progress. During this period he certainly had more sympathy for Sonnino than for Giolitti, but he was more progressive than Salandra; he was also clearly less radical than he had been in 1898. Youthful radicalism was over; from now on Croce will be part of the broad Italian liberal movement, sharing its contradictions, successes and failures.

The First World War.

With the First World War, Croce's participation in national politics began. When the great powers declared war, the Italian government proclaimed neutrality, which was approved by the great majority of the Italian people and supported by the entire liberal establishment. Many Italians were happy to be out of the troubles, and felt horror and pity for both sides. Croce approved the decision of the government, and this increased his respect for the political wisdom of Salandra. In June of 1914, as president of the Neapolitan moderate liberal association, he had written a telegram of solidarity and support to the government during the agitations of Red Week, and had praised Salandra for his firm moderation during that emergency and for his refusal to employ the Army against the riots.

Neutrality has been the first choice of Italian governments in European conflicts, since 1870. But geographic position, economic interests and political reasons make that choice hard to maintain when all the major European powers are involved. In the case of 1914, the political unanimity did not last long; soon the policy of neutrality was challenged outside of Parliament; in the country a movement arose for Italian intervention in the war, and parties and public opinion were split between

interventionist and neutralist factions.

When the interventionists began their agitations to win public support, Croce became one of the most prominent leaders of the neutralist movement; he helped to organize the association of the neutralist forces, Pro Italia Nostra, and then gave financial support to the weekly periodical of the association, Italia Nostra, for which he wrote several articles. Croce's neutralism cannot be confused with the pacificism of the socialists, but in many ways it was similar to the position of Giolitti. Opposed to the demagogic agitations of the interventionists, Croce, like Giolitti, rejected an absolute neutrality, and did not exclude a priori Italian participation in the war, if national interests required it. Until a political necessity became evident, Croce saw no need to increase public passion and social unrest, or to urge government and parliament to make a hurried decision.

Croce's position, clear on the general question, showed some incongruities and was open to criticism on specific issues. He, like the majority of Italian political leaders, was not psychologically prepared to face a sudden war of European proportions after many years of peace. In reality Croce preferred the continuation of the status quo. At first his neutralism was more sympathetic to Germany than to France. He was reluctant to break the old and tried

alliance for a new and uncertain one, assembling nations with different interests and diverging ideals. He even admitted that Italian permanent interests were with the Central Powers, and regarded an intervention against Germany as treason to the old alliance. He had no sympathy for Austria and her obtuse policies, but was also reluctant to take advantage of Austrian difficulties in gaining what Italy had always wanted. Croce had strong ties with German culture; and allowed these feelings, for a while, to interfere with his political judgment, and, despite his proclaimed realism, while war was raging, he continued to contrast German historicism with French Jacobinism, Latin superficiality with Teutonic seriousness. He was aware of German imperial aspirations, but seemed more concerned with the desire of England and Russia for expansion in the Mediterranean and the Adriatic. In Croce's writings of this period there was hardly any consideration for the future balance of power in Europe. He regarded as idle fantasies and a waste of time speculation about the consequences of German victory. But other reasons for Croce's neutralism were more solid and better reflected the reality of Italian society. He was convinced that the majority of the Italian people did not want a war, and only a minority was agitating for intervention. After the Libyan experience, he also considered the Italian Army unprepared for a new and

sudden war against old allies. Moreover he feared that Italy did not possess the material and moral resources to endure the sacrifices that a modern and protracted conflict required. Above all he was frightened by the political consequences of possible defeat. He had seen the results of Adowa, and remembered the dangers that could follow a military disaster. And recently, the social and political agitation against the military policy of the government, known as "Red Week" had renewed doubts on the cohesion of Italian society, and shown the fragility of national unity. During the neutrality period, Croce directed his criticism against both the democratic and the nationalist interventionists, and especially against D'Annunzio. He accused the poet of wanting the war not for Italian interests or for love of the fatherland, but from a spirit of adventure, for the fulfillment of turbid passions, almost for sexual gratification. He contrasted the present position of the nationalists with the ideals of the Italian Risorgimento, and pointed to the noble passions of Carducci and Garibaldi, who fought for the freedom and independence of other nations, not for their conquest. At the same time, Croce also accused the democratic interventionists of abstract idealism, misplaced humanitarianism, and naive internationalism, preaching the war for the triumph of democracy and the principle of nationality, but ignoring

the needs and the interests of the Italian people. Against these democrats, Croce defended the concept of politics as force, in the Machiavellian sense as energy of the will and coherence between ends and means. In the polemics against the interventionists, Croce used strong words, like everybody else in that fatal year. He denounced the childish vacuities of the democrats and condemned the shameful aspirations of the nationalists, blaming them both for a lack of honour. But Croce, unlike others, was also capable of equanimity, and not only towards old friends. In letters to Prezzolini, he defended Mussolini from the accusation of venality, lamenting only his lack of restraint and absence of modesty after the conversion. However, Croce was aware of French contribution to Mussolini's newspaper, and to Prezzolini and to Gentile he expressed pleasure that "our Salvemini" was not writing in Il Popolo d'Italia. In Croce's eyes, Salvemini was guilty of contradictory ideas, continually torn between Marx and Mazzini, but his personal integrity was never in question.

(17)

Croce and his friends fought hard for the maintenance of Italian neutrality, but one has the impression that he was always willing to leave to the government the choice between war and peace. Croce did not approve the demonstrations against Giolitti and Parliament organized

by the interventionists at the beginning of May 1915. He defended Giolitti's actions in those days and his right, as leader of the majority, to force a decision by Parliament. But, unlike Giolitti, Croce never questioned the loyalty of Salandra. During those manifestations, as president of Naples' liberal association, he sent a telegram of solidarity to the government expressing the confidence that the government would be able to defend the honour and the interest of Italy "with the agreement of the country and Parliament". With few others in "those radiant May days", Croce realized the damage done to the institution and the ominous precedent that the triumph of La Piazza over the wishes of parliament had created, making possible future repetitions.

During the War.

When Italy declared war on Austria, Croce stopped his campaign for neutrality, accepted the decision with fatalism, went to Rome and as Senator voted full powers to the government. He was easily helped to overcome his qualms, not only by the government's decision and the royal signature under the Treaty of London, but also by reading the 'Green Book', which persuaded him of Austria's bad faith in her negotiations with Italy. For a few weeks, asked both by Salandra and by the mayor of Naples, Croce was president of the municipal war committee, whose task

was to provide social assistance to the families of soldiers in economic need. With his prestige and personal relations, he was able to bring together liberals and Catholics, republicans and socialists. For a short period the committee worked well and collected a large sum of money, but the harmony among its members did not last long, and the good relations between the committee and the city administrators soon collapsed, and Croce felt compelled to resign, unable to avoid personal rivalries and political squabbles, and above all unwilling to use public funds for partisan reasons. Once Croce was free of involvement in the civic committee, he continued social assistance in a private capacity, or through the schools of which he was in charge.

But these social activities were not enough to satisfy his sense of responsibility, or to consume all of his energy. As always, even in the new circumstances created by the war, his main efforts were devoted and directed to cultural activity. In the middle of the war, Croce "hoped, feared and trembled", like any other citizen but he also tried to keep alive a scholarly tradition and to give an example of scientific independence of mind. He decided to continue his work as if the war were not taking place, refusing to be distracted by military worries and above all trying not to acquire a warrior mentality. He believed that

during a war military necessities had priority, but other works had to be continued as well, and scholars should not interrupt their work, indulging in idle speculation. He continued to do research, to write literary criticism and philosophical essays. At the end of the war these writings constituted a veritable "mountain of books". La Critica continued to be published with regularity, and was even read at the front by officers, keeping alive a critical spirit and cultural interests. These activities of Croce must have increased his popularity even among soldiers. In 1918, General Caviglia invited him to visit the front and to give a pep talk to his officers before the battle of Vittorio Veneto.

During these years, Croce assumed a critical position, to which he tried to remain faithful. In questions of science, unlike many others, he refused to acquire a partisan habit. Croce made a clear distinction between the duty of the citizen and the duty of the scholar, between the responsibility towards the fatherland and towards the truth. Even in wartime, according to Croce, truth and morality cannot be sacrificed to the demands of war: Caesar cannot have what belongs to God. This principle was often ignored by many European intellectuals, who waged literary battles of their own, while soldiers fought the real war at the front, and often, for propaganda reasons, Croce said,

"falsified truth, with the pretense of serving the fatherland". And though Croce was never guilty of such a sin, the contrast between the two loyalties remained, at least in theory, and was resolved completely only much later, when the category of morality acquired a new function in his system. From 1914 to 1918 Croce's cultural activity was guided by three principles: he defended the independence of science, reasserted the common heritage of European peoples and defended the authority of the State. First during the war, Croce fought a constant battle against the use and the abuse of propaganda, that tried to turn literature into a tool of war. He especially criticized those men of letters and science, who spread lies and calumnies against other nations and other intellectuals, and began that malignant habit that Julien Benda later called "la trahison des clercs". Croce defended the integrity of science, and warned against the danger of putting culture at the service of political, military and economic interests. In particular he rejected the nationalists' theories, and their subtle racial implications, which tried to attribute particular scientific and literary qualities to certain peoples and nations. In all his political writings, later collected into the book Italy from 1914 to 1918 Croce also defended the common heritage of the European peoples, and the

contribution of all nations to the character of that civilization. To French and German scholars who had carried war into science and literature, making disparaging remarks about each other's culture and civilization, Croce recalled the reciprocal and beneficial influence that each nation had received from the other. To the Italian nationalists, who liked to blame Hegelian philosophy for German imperial aspirations, Croce pointed out that during the Italian Risorgimento some of the greatest Italian patriots had been scholars of the German idealistic philosophy. In trying to preserve a common ground among European intellectuals, Croce's position can be compared to that of Romain Rolland; both in fact were strongly resented by nationalist writers, who called them "those two perfect idiots". Besides those two themes, during the war Croce waged a third campaign, and defended with equal fervour the authority of the State and the idea of force in politics. Croce especially criticized the policy of the Italian Socialist Party, unwilling to participate in the war effort, and unable to understand that the power of the State would be necessary even after a socialist victory, if the socialists wanted to be successors of the bourgeoisie, according to the teaching of Marx, and not simple destroyers. At the same time, against the democratic ideologies and their humanitarian internationalism, Croce reasserted the role of force in

political relations. In this polemic Croce never separated the concept of force from morality, nor did he ever identify force with violence, but the emphasis was put on force, and much less on morality. Years later, after Mussolini had conquered power, even Croce himself had to recognize that the passion with which he defended the concept of force and the authority of the State may have been excessive. He even allowed that he had dwelled too much and for too long on that argument, and in doing so perhaps had made a mistake. In reality, in the overwrought feelings of war time, rather than educating the democrats and the socialists to a more realistic approach to politics, Croce, against his intentions, provided more ammunition to the enemies of democracy, and increased the appeal of authoritarian ideas. (18)

During the war, compared to his cultural work, Croce's direct interventions in political affairs were rather limited, and can be characterized as patriotic and liberal. In 1916, after conflict with Cadorna and the Army High Command, while he was negotiating with Bissolati, trying to enlarge the support and to reassert the authority of the government also in military affairs, a coalition of former interventionists and Giolittians voted a motion of non-confidence and Salandra was compelled to resign from office. Croce immediately sent a letter of solidarity to

his old friend, expressing disapproval of the vote, which he regarded as a bad example and a political mistake. After the defeat of the Italian army at Caporetto, Croce wrote a letter to Orlando, the new prime minister, and urged him not only to organize a better distribution of food, but also to increase useful propaganda activities among the lower classes and the soldiers to counter the promises of the enemy and the political criticism of the socialists.

In September 1916 the Italian army conquered Gorizia; there was jubilation throughout Italy and flags were flown on public buildings. But the socialist administration of Ravenna refused to fly the national flag as a protest against the continuation of the war. Croce sent a letter to a newspaper, and reminded the socialists that in time of war the defence of the fatherland should have preeminence over party difference, even over the class struggle. Throughout the war Croce praised the choice of the German Socialist Party and criticized the policy of the Italian socialists, as expressed in their slogan "not to sabotage and not to support". But Croce's position should not be confused with the general anti-socialist campaign of the times. In Croce's criticism there is no hatred, not even animosity, but only the regret for what appeared to him a mistaken policy and confused aspirations. In reality the policy of isolation, imposed by the maximalist faction on

the Socialist Party, against the protests of Turati, during and after the war, proved fatal both to socialism and democracy.

While Croce criticized the socialists and expressed reservations about their policy, he began now to praise the bourgeoisie, and the contribution of the middle class to the sacrifices increasingly demanded by the war. At the time, many political commentators claimed that the main effort of the war was waged by the peasants; without denying the contribution of that class, Croce pointed out the number of officers, belonging to the middle class that had enlisted and then had been killed. In the praise for the peasants and in the denial of the bourgeois contributions, Croce saw a worrying sign of moral weakness on the part of the ruling elites and a lack of political energy.

Finally, Croce praised the action of the army for giving moral cohesion to the Italian people, through the education and the discipline imparted to millions of peasants. However unlike many other literati, he did not participate in the exaltation of military leaders, Cadorna first and Diaz later, celebrating their personality without restraint, and often invoking them as saviours of the country against the intrigues of political parties. In a friendly but firm way, in June 1918, Croce even urged

General Diaz, the new army chief, to concentrate on the military task at hand, and to pay no attention to the flatteries of the writers around him, and to ignore their free and useless advice, always politically motivated. (19)

Not only was Croce immune from flattery toward the military commanders, but even during the disaster of Caporetto, he defended freedom of expression and the right of every citizen to question the policies of the government and the actions of the army and the leadership of the generals. Croce regarded that disaster "worse than a mortal illness in the family", and the news from the front gave him pain and anguish, lasting for days. For the occasion, he wrote a short message to the Italian people, inviting all citizens to organize a fierce resistance, and to fight against the invading enemy with resolution and unity. In the same message there is also a veiled criticism of the Socialist Party and their pacifist propaganda. Despite this polemical spirit, for Croce Caporetto was part of a long historical tradition, that included Novara, Custoza and Adowa, and revealed the moral and political weakness of the old Italy, that the ideals of the Risorgimento had not yet been able to overcome.

Others, less aware of historical traditions, preferred to put all the blame on socialist propaganda and on the defeatism of the soldiers. In the polemics that followed

Caporetto, Umberto Cosmo, a teacher at the University of Turin, a democrat and a socialist, dared to put forward a different opinion. In a series of articles, which were published in La Stampa of Turin he pointed out that at Caporetto military mistakes had been made and there had been disagreements among the generals, and concluded that it was rather unfair to blame the socialists and the soldiers and to absolve the generals. The nationalists of Turin staged a press campaign against Cosmo, demanding his removal from university, an immediate inquiry into his political activities and a trial before a military tribunal. Croce came to the defence of the beleaguered Cosmo, defended his patriotic intentions, rebuked in public his main accuser, another colleague at the university, and finally wrote a letter of reference to the tribunal. At the end Cosmo was not prosecuted and did not lose his teaching position; but years later, under a different regime, he would not be so lucky. (20)

After the War.

Victory in November 1918 was a pleasing moment for Croce, but did not cancel the pain of Caporetto. The most responsible liberal leaders felt pride in the achievements of the Army, and in the endurance of the Italian people. For all of them the war had been an historical trial, the crowning event of the Risorgimento. The success of that

enterprise had finally shown that the Italian nation was capable of sustaining the efforts required by a long war, and Italian soldiers had proved that they were able to fight against great armies, overcoming the old tradition of disorder and cowardice. All of them believed that Italy had acquired the rightful status of a great power. Some of them were also aware that Caporetto had shown the fragility of the Italian State. Others, in the euphoria of the moment, forgot the financial and economic dependence of Italy on the Allies. Victory did not give Croce the sense of national exaltation then common to the elite and to the general public. His thoughts went to the defeated enemies, to the destruction of old empires, to the death and ruin common all over Europe. Croce's mind was agitated not by dreams of territorial expansion, but by the difficulties of the future. He felt a great deal of nostalgia for the old and familiar world that the war had destroyed or greatly undermined. For that reason he asked the scholars returning from the front to shed the prejudices acquired during the war, and to work for new European co-operation, to recreate the patrimony of ideas and traditions, that was the common heritage of all European peoples before the cataclysm of the war. (21)

In 1919 Croce, judging from his writings, was not unduly worried by the social agitations that followed the end of

the war, nor did he share the nationalist fever that inflamed public opinion about the Dalmatian Question. But he and the majority of the Italian people greatly resented the way the Italian delegation was treated by the American president in Paris. Croce, like Giolitti, like most of the Italian leaders, was not pleased by the outcome of the peace conference for what concerned Italy and was disappointed with the Treaty of Versailles in general. He wanted moderation towards the enemies, and did not approve a punitive peace, offending the sensibilities of the defeated peoples. Croce did not have much faith in the future of the League of Nations, and its ability to maintain peace in Europe, or even to foster co-operation among its members. He disliked Wilson's intransigence to Italian requests and general behaviour in Paris, and expressed solidarity to Orlando, when the hapless premier returned to Italy after Wilson's unfortunate appeal to the Italian people over the heads of the Italian peace delegation in Paris.

Until the very end of the Paris conference, Croce continued to have faith in Sonnino's ability and wisdom. He, like others, failed to appreciate that in the changed international environment the idealism of Bissolati was more realistic than the legalism of Sonnino. The majority of Italian political leaders did not grasp the nature of

the open diplomacy and the missionary zeal of American foreign policy. Prisoners of the old ways, they failed to see the changes, created by intervention in the war by the United States and by the presence of Wilson at Paris. Many preferred to blame Wilson or Bissolati for Italy's difficulties, and ignored the divisions among the Italian delegation and the contradictions of the Italian diplomatic position.

On the vexing question of the eastern borders, Croce showed more moderation than many others and was ready to accept, as he wrote to Gentile, "the request of the military and naval experts", "that is in the vital interests of our State", which is more or less, what Giolitti and Sforza achieved in 1920 with the Treaty of Rapallo, supported by Croce inside the cabinet. (22)

Croce's feelings after the war, and his opposition to nationalist agitations found expression in the letters he wrote to his German friend, Karl Vossler, Professor of Romance Literature at the University of Munich. Reopening the correspondence after the interruption caused by the war, Croce expressed his pain at the material and spiritual ruin brought by the conflict. He hoped now for a period of peace, and for a common effort of reconciliation among European nations. He longed for the creation of "a new scientific brotherhood" among European intellectuals, free

from the poison of nationalism. After years of fighting and destruction, Croce wished that every man recognized that "the world now needs a period of reciprocal tolerance, Christian charity and love". In the moment when many Italian writers were inflamed by the Dalmatian adventures of D'Annunzio, Croce assured his friend that he was preaching instead and practicing "a sort of Christian humility", as a necessary preparation to the difficult times ahead, during which there would be a great need of "calm", "reason" and "good will". This, in fact, sounds no different than "the naive internationalism" of Bissolati that Croce so much disliked. (23)

From this correspondence we also learn that the social agitations of that year annoyed Croce, especially when the postal workers went on strike, and his mail suffered interruptions, affecting the normal flow of his work, but in general he was not unduly worried. He was convinced that in Italy there was no danger of a revolution, either from the right or from the left. He also tried to reassure his German friend, and other Italian friends, afraid of socialist agitations, that England and Wilson, for the protection of their nation's economic interests, would not allow the triumph of a socialist revolution in Western Europe. On the other hand, he remained convinced that the war had created the conditions for a socialist victory at

the next elections; and he only hoped that Italian socialists would follow the example of the German socialists and would not try to imitate the Russian revolution. In this period Croce was full of admiration for the constitution of the Weimar Republic, and urged Laterza to translate and publish the books of Walter Rathenau and Max Weber.

Croce and Politica.

This desire for international co-operation may appear to contrast with Croce's "collaboration" in the periodical Politica, founded in 1918 and published by the nationalist leaders Francesco Coppola and Alfredo Rocco, Mussolini's future Minister of Justice. In that short collaboration both Gramsci and Denis Mack Smith have seen a sign of Croce's affinity with the nationalist ideology. Nothing can be farther from the truth. After the first issue, Coppola asked Croce for some writings for his new periodical and Croce obliged; Gentile and Fortunato did the same. The episode had little political significance and has to be regarded as an accident of friendship, and a sign of Croce's usual readiness to help publications, that promised a contribution to the cultural debate. Coppola was a Neapolitan like Croce, and in cordial relations with the philosopher. On that occasion he assured Croce that the periodical would be a review of political science and

philosophy, offering "a larger vision" than the programme of the Nationalist Party. Croce's opposition to the ideology of nationalism was well known and of long standing; already in 1907, he had rejected the nationalistic views of D'Annunzio and the political creed of Enrico Corradini, one of the founders of the Nationalist Party.

In his letter of November 1918, Croce repeated to Coppola his criticism of the nationalists' "political exaggeration" and their penchant for "decadent literature". During the first month of 1919, Croce sent Politica only six short articles, most of them had been written months before, others appeared almost simultaneously in other papers, and none of them shared or supported the basic ideas of nationalism. In any event the collaboration did not last long. When Politica, contrary to Coppola's assurances, became in 1919 the official organ of the Nationalist Party, Croce immediately stopped any further dealings with the periodical, publicly stating his disassociation through letters to the press and to his friends. He did not want to leave the impression, as he told Gentile, that after years of disapproval, all of a sudden he had become a member of the Nationalist Party. For the same reason, Gentile and Fortunato followed Croce's example. Over the years, thanks to personal friendship with

the editors, articles by Croce had often appeared in various papers that followed different political courses. But in the ideologically charged atmosphere after the war, Croce was "a little unwise", as he himself said years later, to associate his name with well known nationalist writers. His collaboration gave prestige to one of their publications, and was bound to create confusion among the general public. Many could honestly believe that Croce had come to share the political views of the nationalists, especially since in the periodical he reiterated his old opposition to the "masonic mentality" and to the Jacobin ideology, and criticized the political position of the Socialist Party and the Democrats. (24)

While Croce's writings, during and after the war, may show signs of oscillation, offering opportunities for criticism, his brief and occasional contribution to Politica cannot be used to confuse the patriotism of Croce with the chauvinism of the nationalists, or to forget the gulf that separated Croce's ideas from the ideology of nationalism. For Croce, but also for Gentile, the nation was an historical creation, while for the nationalist ideologues the nation was the result of natural forces, geographic elements and ethnic heritage. In 1919, no nationalist reader could share the ideas and the feelings, that ended the little history of Montenerodomo, the

ancestral village in Abruzzi, from whence Croce's forefathers had moved to Naples. Standing in the public square, looking at the surroundings, Croce felt almost a stranger to the buildings and the lands, that once had belonged to his ancestors, and concluded that perhaps man more than "filius loci" is "filius temporis", more than to a place man belongs to the universal spirit.

Croce's general political ideas in this period were even better reflected in another work on Southern Italy, especially in the historical essays, that he devoted to the Poerio Brothers, the liberal patriots, who had been active under the Bourbons in the first half of the nineteenth century. The essays, written in 1917 and 1918, were published in 1919 in book form under the title: Una Famiglia di Patrioti. In the reconstruction of their lives, Croce not only paid tribute to the Poerios's personal qualities and political activities, but one feels that he was proposing their programme and their ideas as an example to contemporary Italians. During the passions generated by the war, Croce confessed that he had been attracted "by their genuine and refreshing personalities", and had wanted to contrast their frank and sincere nature with "the charlatanism and the vulgar nationalist demagoguery". (25)

The central essays of the book, A Moderate Tradition in Southern Italy, shows that Croce was aware of the

shortcomings of that political heritage and the elitist character of the liberal movement. As a solution to overcome that problem, to meet the challenge of modern times and the existence of mass parties, Croce, following in the footsteps of the Poerios, called for an alliance between the liberal bourgeoisie and the people. The historical experience had taught the Poerios that: "If the sane part of the country had united itself with the people ..., from the combined energy of those diverse forces, something great for the welfare of Italy would have been generated". To avoid the weakness and the failures of the past, and to attract the support of the general population, the programme of the new liberal movement had not to be an imitation of foreign models, but had to be born from the "needs and the customs of the people", and had to respect the history and the traditions of the country. At the same time, the new liberal leaders, to be successful, had to refuse "geometric government", oppose the "abstractness of Jacobinism", and avoid "the vacuities of the nationalists". Unlike the Bourbons, who had kept the people in ignorance and had favoured the status quo, the new leaders had to make "the force of culture and civilization" participant to the affairs of the State, striving to create in the country a general "system of political ideas" and "a conscience of public duties". Besides this devotion to the

public good and civic duties above all the leaders of a modern liberal movement had to show "a tenacious faith in free institutions". (26)

Outside Italy, for a concrete example of a modern party able to perform the functions of a ruling elite, as a general class, Croce looked with sympathy to the German Social Democratic Party; he approved their policies and lauded their achievements. To a man like Croce, in 1919 the German socialists appeared capable of maintaining social unity, and at the same time of realizing social reforms and of achieving institutional changes, thus demonstrating that they, according to Marx's dialectic, were the true and worthy heirs of the bourgeoisie. These personal aspirations, present in private letters and in public writings, explain Croce's political activities in this period. He gave his adhesion to Roman Rolland's appeal to European intellectuals, inviting them to work for European reconciliation and to avoid national passions. Croce agreed to become president of the Association for the Interests of Southern Italy, the organization founded by Fortunato, and devoted to building public libraries, technical schools and day care centres in the southern provinces. Finally in 1919, after the resignation of Orlando, Croce voted for the Nitti Government, and in 1920 participated to the last Giolitti cabinet, as Minister of Education.

Those were the two liberal leaders and the last two governments that tried without success to solve the problems created by the war, to revitalize liberal institutions and to meet the aspirations of the new times. The tragic failure of those attempts, should not obscure the fact that Nitti and Giolitti, in their different ways, along with Croce and the majority of the liberal leaders, wanted to give a democratic solution to the convulsions that were then shaking Italian society.

Chapter 2: From Giolitti to Mussolini, 1920-1922

The First World War destroyed ancient empires, and changed the course of European history, creating the social and economic conditions for revolution in several nations. The new realities brought by the war compelled people to change personal habits, and to acquire new political beliefs or to abandon old aspirations. After the war Croce had hoped to return completely to his normal studies and to resume his usual laborious intellectual life in Naples. Instead the political turmoil in Italy and the challenges faced by liberal institutions forced him to pay increased attention to political problems, and made it impossible for him to refuse the invitation of Giolitti to join his cabinet, as Minister of Education. The failure of that experiment, and then the victory of fascism and the triumph of Mussolini compelled Croce to clarify his liberalism and to better define his theory of politics. Under pressure of political events Croce changed from a moderate liberal, with an almost Hegelian conception of the State, to a liberal democrat. At the same time his theory of politics also evolved, and became more nuanced. In the new conception morality replaced force as the dominant element. Finally in practical politics his original benevolence towards Mussolini disappeared and was replaced by an uncompromising opposition to fascism.

The most important event in Croce's life after the war was his participation in the last Giolitti government, as Minister of Education from June 1920 to July 1921. Croce was a man devoted to scholarly pursuits, undertaken with missionary zeal, relentless energy, and methodical organization. But he was not a monk, immune from the passions of the world. He was socially active and personally involved. In Naples he never refused civic obligations. When asked he took administrative tasks, and discharged them with competence and good results. But Croce remained reluctant to accept political appointments, let alone to seek ministerial responsibility, feeling, with some reason, that he did not possess the necessary qualities to be a successful politician. The few times he broke his rule were moments of national emergency, when he felt compelled to accept the political burden out of civic obligation, as a sort of military service. The Giolitti Cabinet, in the middle of the political strife and social agitations that followed the end of the war and the elections of 1919, was such an occasion. (1)

The general elections of 1919 were a disaster for the liberal groups; almost two thirds of their candidates, many of them parliamentarians with long experience, went down to defeat. The results had been a triumph for the Socialist Party and for the Catholic Popular Party. The forces and

the classes excluded from the process of the Risorgimento came back into the political life of Italy as protagonists; the workers and the peasants were now claiming the right of full citizenship. Together the two parties controlled Parliament, and no majority could be formed without the participation of one of them. The liberals still retained the political leaders capable, by reason of experience and tradition, of forming national governments. But the old leaders had thus lost their freedom of manoeuvre in Parliament, and the monopoly of power in the Cabinet. More ominous for the future, the ideals of the Risorgimento, and the institutions shaped by those ideals, were rejected by the Socialists in the name of a future proletarian revolution, and questioned by the Popolari, appealing to a different tradition and to an outside authority. At the same time, the two parties could not agree on common action, since they were divided by ideology and separated by a different political programme. Many liberals, for their part, feared the presence of a sectarian party, that maintained ties with the Vatican, and resented the decentralization proposals and the education demands made by the Popular Party, finding them a threat to the unity and the authority of the Risorgimental State.

Furthermore, the socialists made the situation more complicated for the liberals, and at the end, fatal for

themselves. On principle, they refused to assume ministerial responsibility, and even to support with their votes in Parliament any coalition government. At the 1919 national congress in Bologna, against the Reformist wing, lead by Filippo Turati, the Maximalist majority reconfirmed the old revolutionary creed and continued to preach the violent conquest of power, meanwhile ordering the parliamentary group to reject government collaboration with bourgeois parties. To maintain the unity of the party, Turati and his reformist friends, who were the majority in the socialist group in Parliament, conformed with this suicidal policy, until it was too late to repair the damage done. The socialist policy of intransigence and isolation weakened the position of Nitti and Giolitti, their natural allies in those circumstances, but above all it nullified their parliamentary strength, and reduced the Socialist Party to watch with fatalism the unfolding of events. (2)

Minister of Education.

In these conditions of fear and disagreement, it became very difficult to find a stable majority in parliament and to form a lasting government around a coherent program and under a strong personality. The fifth Giolitti cabinet was the last attempt by the liberal groups to restore the authority of the State and to bring the financial problems under control, finding at the same time acceptable

solutions to the social agitations. Giolitti formed a centre-left coalition, supported by the old liberal and democratic groups, and by the Popular Party. He tried to overcome the bitter divisions between the neutralists and the interventionists, and toned down or abandoned much of his original criticism about the conduct of the war. With a programme of progressive taxation, financial stability and industrial incentives, he hoped to gain the support of the moderate and enlightened elements of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. To broaden the popularity of his government, Giolitti chose as ministers experienced parliamentarians, who were liberals or social-democrats, radicals and Catholics, but he also brought into the cabinet independent personalities with national prestige. Benedetto Croce was one of them. (3)

Croce did not know Giolitti personally, nor had he been an enthusiast of Giolitti's political system before, and during the war had even written a protest against one of Giolitti's rare political interventions. Besides this lack of personal and political relationship Croce also assures us, in his memoirs of 1944, that he had always admired the old statesman "for the bold wisdom of his policy", and over the years Croce had found himself defending the policies of Giolitti against the criticism of his "rather conservative friends of Destra Storica". After a moment of hesitation,

encouraged by his wife, in 1920 Croce accepted Giolitti's offer, when the old statesman appealed to his patriotism and to his sense of duty, stressing the dangers of the situation and pointing out to Croce that "Italy was in such trouble that all of us have to make efforts for her salvation, though I am not sure we shall succeed". (4)

The letters to Karl Vossler reveal the reasons which compelled Croce to accept Giolitti's invitation. "I have accepted this heavy burden", he wrote, "because, had I refused, my conscience would have bothered me". (5) Once in his new position of responsibility Croce discharged his obligations with his customary scrupulous punctuality, and without even interrupting his studies. But the new work did not give Croce much joy, and the feelings of uneasiness were reinforced by the political conditions prevailing then in Italy and in Europe. "The public events", he confessed, "not only of our nations but of the entire world, frighten me". In this condition of spirit, Croce carried his new duties "without that joy, which is generated by a unified spirit and by hope in the present and in the near future". (6)

The ministry did not last long enough for Croce to make a personal and long lasting impact on the future of education in Italy. (7) Unlike Gentile in different circumstances, Croce was not able to implement a coherent

programme. The few reforms he proposed to Parliament were rejected or defeated in committee, often for reasons that had little to do with education policy. In the parliamentary debates Croce revealed a good knowledge of the problems of Italian education, as they affected in different ways teachers, students, and school buildings. But the debates showed that he was not attuned to parliamentary niceties, necessary sometimes to win votes and to gain support for proposals. The speeches of this period, inside and outside Parliament, revealed also a strong faith in the liberal method, proclaiming "the proud acceptance of free competition without fear in all aspects of practical life, in economy and in education". (8) There is also faith in the ideals of the Risorgimento, and the desire to defend and protect that heritage against the assaults or the wishes of the clericals.

Croce's practical actions as minister and his speeches show that he had an aristocratic conception of education. For him as for Gentile the principal aim of the schools was the creation of a ruling elite, morally and intellectually conscious of its public responsibility; to achieve this result an education based on liberal and humanistic studies was essential. Only in this sense was a classical education regarded as superior to technical schooling. Following his austere conception of life and of education, as a minister,

Croce wanted to restore discipline in the administration of schools and to reintroduce severity in studies at all levels so only meritorious students could advance to higher education. The instrument to achieve the selection of students, to control the performance of teachers, and to maintain the authority of the State were standard national examinations, introduced at the beginning and at the end of each school cycle, administered by a board of examiners, and applied with equal stringency to private and public schools alike, thus assuring their equality.

But one should not exaggerate the elitist nature of Croce's education policy, nor should one regard it as inspired by class interests. His ideas were motivated only by intellectual considerations. Croce's major speech in Parliament showed that he was aware of the changed nature of Italian society created by the war, and of the new needs required by the economic transformation brought about by industrialization. On that occasion he promised to continue the fight against illiteracy, to reduce the number of classical lyceums, increase technical institutes, hire more teachers, build more schools and repair old buildings. Above all he accepted the necessity to lengthen the years of obligatory schooling from 5 to 8 years, requiring children to remain in school until the age of fourteen from the present age of eleven.

During the parliamentary debates and question periods Croce often expressed sympathy with the proposals of his scientific colleagues in the Senate and agreed with their arguments to increase scientific education, aware of the technical needs of modern society. But the financial constraints of the time and cabinet solidarity, compelled Croce to tone down his programme and to postpone some of his proposals until better times arrived. In agreement with the general policy of government to reduce the national debt, Croce concentrated his efforts to control expenditure under his administration, "proposing and promoting economies" with a puritanical zeal and "opposing useless expenses", generating as a result great resentment and animosity among employees, and even among his direct collaborators.

As a member of the cabinet, Croce had influence in the general policy of the government. Giolitti himself recognized that "this philosopher has much good common sense". In internal affairs, Croce always defended the authority of the State, and opposed the disorders created by the strikes and the violence. He supported and admired Giolitti's moderation and cool behaviour during the occupation of the factories; and a few months later inside the cabinet Croce approved Giolitti's tough instructions to all the prefects, ordering them "to apply the sanctions of

the law" against all violence. The civil servants' partial strike during the elections of 1921 was practically handled by Croce alone. With the agreement of Giolitti, absent from Rome because of his wife's death, Croce took charge of the negotiations and of the government's public relations. For that purpose, Croce wrote in his memoirs that he "visited the editorial rooms of Rome's newspapers", "suggested and sometimes even dictated articles" against the strikers. With a combination of firmness and moderation, a small pay increase and good publicity, the agitation came to an end.

(9)

In foreign policy, as Minister of Education, Croce pushed for the restoration of scientific and intellectual cooperation among European scholars. Against many nationalist university professors he fought for the restitution to Germany and Austria of their cultural institutions, sequestered by Italy during the war. Inside the cabinet, Croce supported Giolitti and Sforza during the negotiations for the Treaty of Rapallo which brought to an end the hostilities between Italy and Yugoslavia, and closed D'Annunzio's adventure in Fiume. (10) In 1943, Sforza himself acknowledged the support he had received from Croce in his policy of friendship with Albania and other Balkan nations. (11)

The Giolitti government incurred the displeasure of

nationalists on other occasions. As Minister of Education, Croce reminded them that the European people belonged to a common civilization, and were "united by science, tradition and even good manners". Against the protest of local conservatives Croce defended the autonomy of a community college in Calabria, allowing it to teach the Albanian language. The same moderation he showed toward the German and the French languages in Alto Adige and in Val D'Aosta. The nationalists resented Croce's refusal to allow patriotic ceremonies and nationalistic propaganda in schools, and they could neither accept nor share Croce's explanation that love of fatherland cannot be separated from general education, and that "it is not useful and could be dangerous to cultivate and stimulate one separately from the other". (12)

Croce's ministerial experience also increased his animosity against the Socialists and the Popolari. Their attitude toward the government and their parliamentary behaviour offended the traditions of the Risorgimento in Croce's eyes, and strengthened his political antipathy towards them. Croce's memoirs of 1944 reveal the admiration for Matteotti, for the courage of "this valiant and inexorable accuser of fascist violence". But the admiration of 1944 does not hide the disappointment felt in 1920, when Croce was observing the behaviour of the socialists in

parliament, Matteotti included. (13) In one of his speeches Croce's disdain for the socialists became quite evident. He accused them of being able only to criticize, never willing to praise what the government was doing, always demanding miracles instead of possible solutions, supporting the requests of the teachers but ignoring the needs of the students and their parents, and the schools in general. Croce always referred to Turati with respect, but the socialist opposition to his education proposals was dismissed with sarcasm, as an action to be expected by a bunch "of little teachers of elementary schools", still tied to the positivist philosophy, and prisoners of "the masonic mentality". When Giolitti fell, Croce noted with amused irony the disorientation of the Socialists, admiring Giolitti but unwilling to support his policies, and ending in joining his and their enemies. (14)

After the advent of fascism, Croce became a friend of Luigi Sturzo, visited him in London, and admired the dignity he constantly maintained during his long exile from Italy. (15) But in 1920-21, Croce resented the demands of the Popular Party and the enterprising spirit of its leader. Like Giolitti, and for the same reasons, Croce did not approve of "the interferences" which the little Sicilian priest, though not even a member of Parliament, "pretended to exercise in the affairs of the government,

which traditionally and constitutionally belonged to Cabinet". In the memoirs of 1944 Croce left no doubt that the veto of Sturzo against a new Giolitti government opened the way to fascism. The resentment and the condemnation for that action was extended to the Vatican, in no uncertain terms. "In truth, the political actions of the Vatican were pernicious to Italy, and opened the doors to fascism, setting obstacles in the path of Giolitti's return to power". (16)

In general these criticisms and reservations against the socialists and the popolari have some historic validity. But Croce and Giolitti failed to realize that the presence of mass parties in modern society had changed the nature of politics, demanded new programmes, and required different methods of governance from those adopted in the past, successful as they had been. It was no longer enough, as in the past, to satisfy the ambition of a local notable to assure the stability of government. After the war new classes demanded to be brought into the system and be given a permanent share of power. The liberals failed to organize their own mass party, and thus found themselves in an inferior position to the socialists and the popolari. Besides other considerations, the resentments of the liberal leaders was also an expression of this failure.

Croce's participation in the Giolitti government was an

important experience in his intellectual and personal development, offering him new elements to better understand political problems and the general history of modern Italy. (17) In a letter to Giolitti in 1922, Croce confessed that during his participation in government he had the opportunity to have experiences which he lacked, and "which are useful to the studies themselves". (18) One is tempted to say that his ministerial experience allowed Croce to better understand the nature of politics, and to share Giolitti's conclusion that "to achieve a better order of the country", it was necessary to find "accord between the ends and the means". (19) Moreover, until 1920 Croce's most important political friends had been from Southern Italy and from the old Destra Storica, all of them men of classical education and agrarian background. In the Giolitti cabinet Croce came in contact with the political elite of Piedmont and their different ethos and background. These were men of action and practical ability, faithful servants of the State, equally devoted to the Crown and to Parliament, and, at the same time, able to retain personal independence.

The new experiences and friendships, the admiration for Giolitti and his policy, probably compelled Croce to read Giolitti's memoirs, published at the end of 1922, with warmer sympathy and deeper understanding. The fruit of this

new critical disposition will find expression when Croce writes History of Italy from 1871 to 1915, years later. In that book Croce, changing in many aspects his previous views, gave a positive assessment of the Giolittian era, and at the same time redeemed from old accusations the policies of the historical left, stressing instead its achievements. The observation of Giolitti's actions at close range gave Croce a better appreciation of Giolitti's personality and a deeper understanding of his political inspiration. The critics continued to accuse the old premier of "simple empiricism", but Croce now recognized that Giolitti's policy was instead characterized by a "constant and dominant line", inspired by "faith in freedom", and guided by "the effort to bring Italy to the same level as the other modern European nations". (20)

The memoirs of 1944 show that, for Croce, looking back at the turmoil of the twenties, Giolitti had become the symbol of the ideal politician and the embodiment of a modern liberal programme, almost, one is tempted to say, the incarnation of the Poerios' ideals, needed by the times and appropriate for a confident and progressive bourgeoisie. Croce admired in Giolitti "his quick intuition and common sense"; "his great political wisdom", and "the sure judgment" required in the man of action, and equally important, for the positive conclusion of political action,

"the steadiness of his will". Croce was also impressed by the personal qualities of Giolitti, faithful to his friends, free from recriminations, and able to be "generous and respectful towards loyal adversaries", like Sonnino.

(21)

Croce also approved Giolitti's social programme and his progressive policies, the tendency, in economic disputes, to favour the poor against the rich, his constant willingness to protect the working classes, and to ameliorate their social conditions. Croce was greatly impressed by Giolitti's public contempt for war profiteers, and his determination to tax the profits realized by "the sharks" during the war. Above all Croce admired Giolitti's sense of the State, the display of authority, the cold determination and the ability to maintain essential order without using violence, as shown when he brought to an end the occupation of the factories, or solved the Adriatic question, isolating D'Annunzio, making use of force, but without creating further disorder and avoiding a bloodbath among Italians. (22)

This admiration for Giolitti, for his governmental method, and for his social programme found eloquent expression in a brief speech, given by Croce, on the 25th of September 1920, in his capacity as Minister of Education, to the national meeting of Italian philosophers,

during the occupation of the factories. In his speech Croce seemed to answer the criticism of Italian industrialists and in particular of Luigi Albertini, who was waging, in Corriere della Sera, a strong campaign against Giolitti's alleged surrender to trade unions. Against those who criticized the government's policy and accused the bourgeoisie "of weakness, meekness, suicide and resignation to its own death", Croce defended "the historical sense of the government and of the ruling elite". For Croce the times were now mature "for profound social transformations", and, after the war, these were not only necessary but were also beneficial. The duty of the government was to achieve these transformations "necessary and thus beneficial" "without at the same time the destruction of the State", since this will always be essential to the affairs of men, even in changed forms. The philosophers were invited to work for a new social consciousness, to approve the government's policy rather than to blame it, to have faith rather than to succumb to despair. (23)

The Elections of 1921.

In the Spring of 1921, Giolitti made a capital error that proved fatal to liberal institutions, and put an end to his political career. Believing that the resolution of the Fiume adventure, and the peaceful ending of the

occupation of the factories had increased the government's popularity, he advised the King to dissolve Parliament and to call an earlier election. With the aim of weakening both the Socialists and the Popolari, the old leader encouraged an electoral alliance among the Liberals, the Democrats and the Fascists, united under the banner of National Blocs. From the elections Giolitti hoped to obtain a stable majority, and then to be in a stronger position to form a new government, supported by a chastised Popular Party or even by a more reasonable Socialist Party, or at least by its Reformist wing.

In the elections of 1921, Croce was in a rather awkward position. He was an independent member of the government, but he was a personal friend of Nitti, the leader of the opposition. To avoid any accusation of favouritism, he had decided to remain neutral during the electoral campaign, and he made known that he was not willing to do anything that could harm or favour Nitti. During the campaign he did not make any speeches, nor did he participate in the organization of the National Blocks. He was among the few ministers who remained in Rome throughout the election period, minding the government's affairs. But despite his best intentions, and even though he was not involved in the organization of the election, Croce could not avoid being embroiled in electoral polemics. Two friends, Amendola and

Castellano, complained that he was allowing employees of his ministry to work for government candidates, and to hamper the followers of Nitti. Few episodes of electoral fraud and political violence are mentioned in Croce's correspondence of this period. But the letters to his two friends show clearly that he was dealing with the traditional methods employed during electoral times in Southern Italy. But in one of Croce's letters we find expressions that reveal the gravity of the situation, showing the novelty of what was happening. He reassured Castellano that "the government has done everything possible to put brakes to the excesses of the fascists". But a few days later he had to confess the failure of the government's intentions: "The government can try to impose the observance of the law, but cannot change the nature of men and their passions." (24)

The government indeed had taken some measures and given extra power to key prefects, moving the most energetic of them to strategic cities, but those new measures had not proven their efficacy yet, nor stemmed the tide. Less in Southern Italy and more in other parts of Italy, political violence different in nature than those of the past was happening against the opposition candidates, especially against the Socialist Party. Responsible for that systematic and organized violence was the fascist movement:

the new protagonist of Italian political life. During the Giolitti government, especially after the end of the occupation of the factories, fascism became a major force in Italian political life. The elections of 1919 had been a humiliating rejection for Mussolini. After those elections, fascism continued to be a small movement without a clear political objective, made of a few thousand restless veterans, 'interventisti' of 1915, and 'arditi' of the war, grouped around Mussolini and his newspaper. The majority of the first fascists were former socialists or republicans, veterans of the syndicalist and futurist experiences. But between the Fall of 1920 and the Spring of 1921 the Fasci changed completely in nature, organization and ideology. From an urban phenomenon fascism became an agrarian organization; from the cities the centre moved to the countryside; and the influence shifted from Milan to Bologna.

In this new and more violent incarnation fascism increased its strength and became widespread, especially in Central Italy. In these regions, then dominated by agriculture, the Socialist Party had scored recently impressive political gains, and the peasants' trade unions, employing numerical clout and sometimes plain violence, had been able in 1920 to negotiate with the employers new and more onerous agrarian contracts, in the process creating

great resentment among all the propertied classes. It was with the support of these classes, after the conclusion of that bitter social confrontation, that fascist squads began the onslaught against the socialist organizations in the Po Valley leaving ruin, death and fear in the aftermath.

Fascist violence was tolerated and sometimes helped by the local police and military authorities, despite the constant orders from the central government to protect the security of all citizens. Challenged with impunity, the authority of the State began to weaken, and many citizens lost faith in the ability of the government to maintain law and order. At the same time the prestige of fascism was increased when its members were invited to participate to the next elections in the National Blocs, sponsored by the government.

Faced by a new movement, unleashed by the passions created by the war and by the turmoils that followed the end of the war, Giolitti made recourse to old tactics that had been successful in the past, or seemed to have been successful then. As he had done before with other movements, the old leader tried to absorb fascism into the constitutional life of the nation, hoping to blunt its radicalism and to channel its ambition. But in dealing with Fascism and with Mussolini during the elections of 1921, the Liberals made fatal mistakes. They failed to realize

that fascism was a novel beast, endowed with voracious appetites, unlike the old movements difficult to pacify or to satisfy. Moreover not for the last time, the liberal leaders also made a dangerous miscalculation, underestimating the ability and the ambition of Mussolini.

The electoral results did not change the parties standing in Parliament very much, but introduced a new dynamic into political life. The elections increased the prestige of Mussolini, and gave new impetus to fascism, creating at the same time more complicity between fascism and the official authorities, especially at the local level. The Socialists were marginally weakened, but the Popolari increased their numbers, and the Fascists won thirty-five seats. Giolitti did not gain the working majority he had sought; Parliament became more fractious; and the formation of a strong and united government was made more difficult than before. Having failed in his gamble, Giolitti resigned, and never regained power, leaving a vacuum at the centre of the political system that his lieutenants were not able to fill. With the elections of 1921 and the departure of Giolitti from power began the agony of the liberal State. (25)

Before the March on Rome.

After the election of June 1921 the Giolitti government resigned. Ivanoe Bonomi, the new premier, made a futile and

rather lukewarm attempt to retain Croce in his cabinet. But Croce refused and returned to Naples, devoting his energy full time again to his studies. Under the impact of political events his interests were now moving from literature to historical and political problems. This new direction was a sure sign that he felt the need for clarification, that there was some uneasiness in his mind, and a discrepancy between theory and practice had to be bridged. Croce's presence in the Senate did not stop entirely, but became more sporadic. The letters of this time to his closest friends did not offer comments on political events, nor did they show any concern for the violence of the fascist squads, perhaps because the city of Naples was the least affected by political violence. According to his closest friends, Croce was not a regular reader of daily newspapers. Usually to keep abreast of current events, he relied on conversations with his more mundane friends. Most of them certainly were not fascist, but they had little sympathy for the socialists.

But Croce, even if he wanted, could not be completely removed from the turmoils of his times. During the summer of 1922, asked by the French-Belgian art historian, Jacques Mesnil, Croce wrote a letter to Mussolini in favour of Luigi Fabbri, a teacher and an anarchist, who was persecuted by the fascists of Bologna, and was in danger of

having his house and his valuable library burned. Mussolini replied with a deferential letter to Croce, promising an end to the harassments of the unfortunate teacher, and the library of the anarchist was spared any further damage.

(26)

In August 1922, the Senate debated and voted a motion that praised the rather energetic intervention of the Fascist Party against the legal general strike, hastily called by the Socialist Party and their trade unions as a national protest against the violence of the Black Shirts. Croce did not take part in the debate, as was usual for him, but voted for the motion, forgetting, like the majority of the Senate, where the violence was coming from, blinded by the patriotic rhetoric of the fascists. The strike was legal, but it was, at that conjuncture, politically ill-advised, and misfired. Organized to show the force of the socialist organizations and to gain sympathy for their plight, it revealed their weakness and isolation. In Turati's apt definition, the general strike turned into a "Socialist Caporetto", and unfortunately for the socialists and for Italy it was not followed by a new Vittorio Veneto. Already weakened by the communist schism of January 1921, the failure of the strike left the Socialist Party in disarray and reduced them to political impotence. After that, only the parliamentary group was

left intact as a viable force of the once mighty socialist organizations. At the end even this strategic reserve was never employed, neutralized by the disagreements between the maximalists and the reformists, the ones dominating the executive of the party, the others the parliamentary group.

The success of the Fascists against the strikers revealed their strength, and demonstrated their ability to gain mastery of the streets. The Senate motion showed that the fascists were able to gain sympathy in the traditional establishment, but it also showed that their audacity was generating worry and apprehension. In the same motion in fact the Senators expressed the pious hope that "the vital forces of the nation would be able, in their manly struggle against the actions of the subversive parties, to refrain from excesses of any kind." (27) Having destroyed the organizations of the Socialist Party precisely with excess, from then on Mussolini bent all his energy to consolidating his gains and to achieving his aim, using violence when necessary, but at the same time trying to reassure the moderate forces with pleasing expressions.

In October 1922, a mere week before the March on Rome, Croce was invited, with other Neapolitan Senators, as was and still is the tradition, to attend the congress of the Fascist Party, held in Naples. Various accounts have been given of Croce's reaction to Mussolini's speech; many

accusations have been made against him because of his presence in that gathering; his extemporaneous remarks have been changed, enlarged and turned into damnable offenses or indictable crimes. Croce's presence at that event has little political meaning, in reality. Two years before, for the same reasons, Croce had been present at the congress of the Popular Party, and Don Sturzo, the leader of the party, as a sign of respect, had even invited Croce to sit at the head table, where he remained silent. In his memoirs of 1944, Croce explained that he accepted the invitation, went to the San Carlo Theatre, sat in the box reserved for Senators, and heard the speech of Mussolini, "believing it useful, and in a certain way, even dutiful to acquire a more direct knowledge of a political party, the importance and force of which was growing in Italy day by day". (28)

It is, in fact, essential to keep in mind the political strengths and the organizational force of the National Fascist Party, in order to understand the political situation of Italy in October 1922, and to truly appreciate the policy of the liberal leaders during that year, and that fateful month.

Mussolini's speech at San Carlo, like others in other cities during the Summer and Fall of 1922, was meant to reassure the silent majority of Italy, and to win over the moderate forces of the establishment. In Naples Mussolini

said much that could please Croce, and little that could worry or offend him. He pleased Croce's Risorgimental ideals, when he promised to defend the unity of Italy and to oppose the movements for the autonomy of various regions, then rather strong in Sicily, Sardinia and in some parts of Northern Italy. To better reassure the royal feelings of Southern Italians he praised the Monarchy and its role in the history of Italy; defended the independence of the Army; and promised to retain Parliament and not destroy it. On that occasion Mussolini assured his audience that he desired to put an end to violence and wanted to achieve a national pacification. To achieve this aim, he asked for new elections and a new electoral law, as was then requested also by liberal leaders. He gave the impression that a coalition government, in which fascists had five ministers, could be an acceptable solution to him. To this government he gave an historical mission, almost the completion of the Risorgimento. "The question is to bring into the liberal state, which has accomplished great tasks, and which we are not forgetting, all the vigour of the new Italian generations, which were born from the war and from the victory". (29)

When Mussolini touched on ideological problems, he used words and concepts borrowed from Sorel and familiar to Croce, and, within certain limits, shared and approved by

him. Mussolini stated that when interests and parties are in mortal conflict force may be the only solution available. He rejected democratic principles not for practical reasons or for their social content, but for a question of "mentality", "method", and even "mythology". "Democracy believes that principles are immutable, and can be applied in every time, in every place, and in every situation". In the same speech Mussolini gave a definition of nation closer to the Mazzinian ideals rather than to the beliefs of Rocco, Corradini or Federzoni. "For us the nation is spirit, and not territory, ... not only numbers". To make his point clearer he added: "The Roman Empire is a creation of the spirit". (30)

While Mussolini tried to appease the fears of the moderate forces, at the same time he hoped to reassure the workers about the intentions of fascism. "The working classes exist in the nation. They are a great part of the nation, are necessary to the life of the nation in peace and in war". For that reason the State "should not and could not reject them", but had "to protect their just interests". The experiences of the soldier and the memories of the former socialist were evident in these statements. But a Giolitti could easily approve and share those intentions. Croce too in those years had preached the need of "social unity" in the life of the State, and had praised

the German Socialists for their ability to achieve, in his opinion, that worthwhile aim. (31)

One can understand why Mussolini's speech at the San Carlo Theatre could be reassuring to Croce and to the other Senators. But that speech was only one aspect of the gathering, and Croce missed the other part, which was perhaps even more important. That weekend more than forty thousand black shirts and twenty thousand workers poured into Naples. Most were armed. All behaved in an orderly fashion, and later paraded with military discipline. To his faithful, gathered in the public square, Mussolini spoke a different language and used a different tone. On that occasion he did not mince words: "Either they will give us the government or we will take it by marching on Rome". Once in the eternal city, the fascists, if necessary to achieve their aim, "will grab by the throat the miserable ruling political class". (32) The presence of such a large number of armed people and the behaviour of Mussolini should have alerted the liberals that they were facing a novel political phenomenon, not easy to appease with a ministerial combination or with traditional methods, but they preferred the reassurance of words to the eloquence of deeds.

The Strength of Fascism.

The participation in the general elections of 1921 in

the National Blocs, sponsored by Giolitti, had increased the importance of fascism and the prestige of its leaders, breaking their isolation and establishing contacts with the ruling elites. The results were a personal vindication of Mussolini, who was elected both in Lombardy and in Emilia, coming first in both electoral districts. In 1921 he received more than two hundred thousand votes, a far cry from the less than five thousand he had obtained in 1919. Fascism sent to Parliament thirty-five deputies, could count on the support of the ten Nationalists and the conservative liberals of Salandra, for a total of one hundred members. This was a block of votes to be reckoned with in Parliament in any ministerial combination, given the animosity between the Popolari and the Liberals, and the traditional opposition of the Socialists and their suicidal refusal to join or to support any bourgeois government.

More important than that electoral success, in October 1922 the National Fascist Party had become a mass party and without any doubt the strongest in the country. It had a membership of more than three hundred thousand members, and was still growing. It was already larger than that of any other party. It was organized in thirty-four hundred Fasci, concentrated mainly in Central and Northern Italy, but also spreading in Southern Italy among the middle classes, eager

to replace the prominence of the Liberals, or critical of their long dominion. Every major city had a fascist paper, printed on a modern press, and all were connected to Mussolini's Il Popolo d'Italia. The party's financial situation was healthy, with a regular cash flow assured by regular contributions from agrarians and industrialists, but also from rank and file normal membership dues. (33)

Above all, beside the regular party organizations common to other mass parties, the Fascist Party had a military apparatus. The original "action squads" of the first Fasci had been organized into a Militia along army lines with former generals as inspectors and local Ras in command, thus providing at the same time unity and local initiative. In 1922 fascism was able to undertake military expeditions like a regular army, capable of mobilizing thousands of black shirts, and of terrorizing entire provinces, unmolested by public authority, and sometimes even helped or protected by them. After similar events in Central and Northern Italy, in October 1922, the gathering in Naples brought together sixty thousand fascists from all over Italy, as a general rehearsal of the upcoming March on Rome a week later. (34)

Because in 1922 Fascism was strong and armed, it was no longer possible to suppress it without the employment of the Army. That event meant the possibility of a civil war,

with unforeseen and frightening consequences, for the Monarchy, the bourgeoisie and the ruling classes. Fascism was no longer a question of police; it had become a dramatic political problem. For this reason, during the summer of 1922, all Liberal leaders, from the right and from the left, tried to negotiate with Mussolini, hoping that he would accept a coalition government, be satisfied with a junior position, leaving to the old leaders the real levers of power. The King expressed the general feeling when he wrote to Premier Facta: "... the only effective means, to avoid dangerous shocks, is to associate fascism with the government through legal means". (35)

For Croce, after his government experience, the position and the political indications of Giolitti were more important. But even Giolitti had come to the conclusion that fascism was no longer a simple police question, but had become a political problem, demanding a political solution, sanctioned by Parliament. For him fascism had become too strong, and if a civil war was to be avoided, the only solution was to constitutionalize it; to control the force of fascism, it was necessary to bring it into the government. Giolitti made his position clear, as he explained it in a speech: "A new party has appeared in Italian political life. It has to take that place to which the number of its followers gives it the right; but in

legal ways, the only ones which can give a true and lasting authority to a party in our constitution; the only ones through which can be realized the fundamental programme of that party, which is to restore the authority of the State". (36)

The other liberal leaders agreed with Giolitti's analysis. None of them ever contemplated an anti-fascist coalition; all entered into direct negotiations with Mussolini, sharing the illusion that it was possible to normalize fascism, to break its impetus or to control its revolutionary ambitions. Very few of the leading politicians realized in 1922 that Italy was on the threshold of a dangerous venture, or understood the true nature of fascism. We now know that the liberal leaders harboured a pious illusion, and that their hopes had no real foundation. But we should also remember that, then, possibilities were, or at least appeared wide open and no solution was yet predetermined. At the end only Giolitti's absence from Rome, at the most critical moment, tipped the balance in favour of Mussolini.

It is also true that in 1922 many fascist supporters and some important fascist leaders did not want a dictatorship, wishing only law and order and a return to tranquility. Perhaps even Mussolini had not clear in his mind a future programme and a predetermined solution; certainly his

speeches and actions did not point straight to a totalitarian and personal regime. Even Togliatti, in his Moscow lessons on fascism in 1936, remarked: "It is a mistake to believe that fascism started in 1920, or even from the March on Rome in 1922, with a definite plan, devised in advance, of a regime of dictatorship, as afterwards the regime became organized". (37)

Croce shared the political views of the other liberal leaders, his position was no different than that of Giolitti, whose political wisdom he had come to admire, to respect and to follow. Croce was never deeply involved in day to day political events, nor did he follow the newspapers. The letters of the period to government officials reveal that his main public concern was the relocation and the reorganization of the national library of Naples. Living in Naples, one of the cities least affected by political violence, Croce had no direct and personal experience of fascism and its peculiar methods of action.

In the biographical notes of 1934 and 1944, Croce agreed with Giolitti and Salandra that cooperation with fascism was necessary and beneficial. He believed that fascism had to be brought into the government because it seemed beneficial that: "New and younger forces were introduced into Italian political life, to give a new vigour to the

political class, which the long war and the postwar period had impoverished and worn out". Croce, like other liberal leaders, did not fear that fascists could or would destroy the institutions created by the Risorgimento, because in his mind he regarded fascism not as a lasting phenomenon, but only as "an episode of the war period, a youthful and patriotic reaction, which would have disappeared without causing much harm, and perhaps leaving something good behind". (38)

In those fatal months, Croce shared the illusion, common to all liberal political leaders, that the institutions were safe, and that freedom was not in mortal danger. "It never crossed my mind that Italy would allow freedom to be snatched from her hands: that freedom, which had cost so much effort and so much blood, and which my generation regarded as a conquest lasting forever". (39)

But in 1950, reflecting on those years, Croce confessed that his opinion that fascism would be a transitory episode was held "to tell the truth" "with little sagacity". Also in 1943 immediately after the fall of fascism, Croce republished the three press interviews, which document his support of Mussolini's government. In the introduction to the book Croce recognized the reason for the mistake. "Men of my generation were used to judge things with the mind accustomed to the peaceful events of parliamentary

disputes", and even in 1922 "hoped and believed that the political crisis would be milder than it turned out to be in reality". Because he harboured those hopes, Croce recognized that he could not avoid the charge of "easy optimism and not enough political foresight". (40)

Like Croce, despite the violence, few of the political leaders were aware of the true nature of fascism; many continued to underestimate it until it was too late. None of them suspected that the crisis would be fatal both to government and opposition, to Catholics and Liberals, to proletarian and bourgeois freedom. (41) The liberal leaders belonged to an older generation, and had matured before the war; they took political freedom and the traditions of the Risorgimento for granted. They never suspected that liberal institutions could be violated and destroyed by the veterans of the war, fought in the name of the Risorgimento. Years later, Croce recognized this attitude as a fatal weakness. "The concept of freedom had disarmed, so to say, during the liberal age, which was the time of youth and maturity for the men of my generation, because freedom, conquered by our fathers, had been a pacific possession, which we thought could never again be subverted, certainly not destroyed and vilified". (42)

In the memoirs of 1934 one notes a tone of personal regret. Before and during the war Croce had fought against

the abstractness of democracy, and the utopias of socialism. He had also rejected the theories of nationalism and condemned the claims of irrationalism. But in the theory of politics he had stressed the concepts of force and power, had praised the realism of Machiavelli and Marx. Against the illusions of his democratic adversaries, Croce had ridiculed "the seductions of the goddess Justice and Humanity". But he had yet to elaborate a conception of liberty; his philosophy did not offer a general and coherent conception of political life. Before fascism his attention had been taken by other problems and he faced different adversaries. Only under the impact of fascism and different opponents, did Croce's speculation turn to the problems of freedom. Then in the theory of politics he began to stress morality and ethics. In philosophy he offered "a speculative theory of freedom" and defended the concept of freedom with "vigorous affirmation and logical demonstration". In the opposition against fascism, and in the dispute with Gentile, Croce developed the theory of history, as history of liberty, and liberty assumed the connotation of a modern religion, for which it was worth fighting and suffering and dying. Then democracy also received a different justification and a more positive value. (43)

The March on Rome.

On October 28th 1922, rather than waiting for parliamentary combinations, the leadership of the National Fascist Party organized the March on Rome, and boldly attempted to achieve political power with a popular insurrection. Faced with a challenge against the State, the liberal leaders showed a lack of unity and political determination; instead they tried to appease fascism, and offered various ministries to Mussolini in a coalition government. When the King refused to employ the Army against the insurrection, and the offers of coalition under a liberal leader were rudely spurned, Mussolini was invited to Rome and asked to form his own government. The royal invitation first, the vote of Parliament later, gave to the new government a constitutional character, despite its extra-parliamentary origin. The adhesion of all parties to the new political compromise with the exclusion only of the Socialists and Communists; the participation of liberal, democratic and popular ministers in the coalition government of Mussolini showed that the compromise and the government enjoyed a great deal of popular support in the country and was approved by a wide majority in Parliament. Despite the shock of the event and the remaining fears, many people believed that the crisis was over, that wisdom had prevailed, that a solution had finally been found and

that now the new coalition government would return the country to normal times.

Benedetto Croce shared these hopes, or better these illusions, common to most of his political friends. He too was convinced that "the breaking of the dikes" had been a bold act but an occasional occurrence, and that the new government would soon repair the broken walls and make them even stronger. Entries in his diaries from the 16th to the 20th of November 1922 indicate that Croce was in Rome, went to the Senate, saw Gentile, the new Minister of Education, spoke with Olindo Malagodi, a confidant of Giolitti, did historical research in the library of the Senate and participated in the sittings when Mussolini and the new government appeared before the Upper House. (44) On this occasion, Mussolini spoke with deference to the institution and avoided the arrogance and threatening tone employed in the House. As a result the Senators, reassured by the niceties gave him almost unanimous consent. It is almost certain, that Croce in the Senate like Giolitti in the House, voted the motion of confidence to Mussolini's government.

Certainly that vote expressed a benevolent expectation, even a positive disposition, but should not be regarded as an uncritical adhesion to fascism or as an abdication of liberal principles, at least not for Giolitti, nor for

Croce, nor for the fledgling Liberal Party itself. The executive and the national council of that party in those days recognized the gravity created by the insurrection, wished for a return to legality and an end to rebellion, and invited the new government and Parliament "to safeguard freedom in all its forms". (45)

Typical of this attitude of new hopes and old reservations was also the behaviour of the Liberal Association of Naples, (La Monarchica Liberale), to which Croce belonged and that he had helped to establish before the war. In a meeting called after the March on Rome, like thousands of other associations throughout Italy in that period, it sent a telegram of support to Rome, wishing the new government well. But in the same meeting the majority of the membership first rejected a motion of full adhesion to fascism and applause to the insurrection and to Mussolini, then it adopted a second one that reaffirmed the values of liberalism and expressed faith in the liberal institutions and loyalty to the Monarchy. (46)

Croce and Fortunato.

The March on Rome is not mentioned in Croce's letters, at least in those so far published, nor does it appear in his diaries. This is not surprising. Until 1925 the diaries have only an intellectual purpose; they are used as a registration of books read and essays written, and are not

concerned with political matters. But on rare occasions, political events and feelings generated by political news make a sudden appearance. One of those moments happened at the news of Caporetto. Then the invasion of the fatherland and the disaster of the Italian Army caused mental anguish, sleepless nights and distraught days. Nothing of the kind happened in October 1922. Evidently for Croce the March of Mussolini was of a different nature than the rout of Caporetto. The diaries however register heated political discussions during those fateful days, without mentioning names or assigning paternity to opinions expressed. Those discussions in his house, during the traditional weekend gatherings, left Croce tired and upset and "with my head deafened".

In that period Croce was deeply involved in writing and researching the book that became The History of Naples, one of his masterpieces. Probably political events and the debates that they generated interfered with his historical meditations, causing unwelcome intellectual distraction without relieving the mental tension, which was one of the main functions of those traditional gatherings. In the absence of direct mention in the diaries, a good place to find Croce's reactions to the March on Rome and its aftermath is the correspondence of Giustino Fortunato, the old and trusted friend, with whom Croce was in constant

touch then, especially on account of historical research for his new book.

Fortunato despised fascism, opposed violence, condemned the March on Rome, had no faith in the new leaders, did not trust Mussolini, and despaired of the future. The letters of this period are full of foreboding and condemnation against "the illegality", "the violence", "the rebellion", "the last folly", "the fruit of the democratic war". Had he been able to overcome his illness, and been strong enough to travel to Rome he would have voted against Mussolini's government in the Senate "with a resounding no". Fortunato lamented that "in these sad and dark days", "full of so much vileness", he remained, "almost literally alone in the entire city of Naples" "to think and to grieve", and "to deplore the unimaginable tragi-comedy that has occurred", while "all are raving with joy, applauding what has happened and is happening". In a sad and suffering letter to Gaetano Mosca on November 18, 1922, he confessed that sometimes he had "the sensation of dreaming", "since even B. Croce has approved and approves of Mussolini". (47)

Luigi Russo, a younger but equally trusted friend of Croce, and faithful to him during fascism, writing in 1953, confirms that Croce and Fortunato clashed in November 1922 about the meaning of the March on Rome and its implications for the future of Italy. "Croce rejoiced when Mussolini's

movement began", and "I witnessed a truly dramatic row, a stormy exchange between Croce and Fortunato". While Fortunato lamented, with his proverbial pessimism, that the March was "the end of the Bourgeoisie", Croce invited him "not to forget what Marx has said, that violence is the midwife of history". (48)

The disagreement must have been strong and painful for both friends, if their letters from then on no longer begin with the affectionate "my dearest...", but went back to the more formal, though still friendly "dear". Fortunato returned to the incident even years later; writing in 1924 to Turati and in 1925 to Salandra, he reminded them that "in November 1922, in my house I had a disagreement with Croce about the victory of fascism". On both occasions Fortunato seemed to be eager to warn his friends that his proverbial pessimism had served well in the past, and was again proving him right then about the intentions of Mussolini and the danger of fascism. (49)

The contrast between Croce and Fortunato opens a window into the ethos of the old ruling elites of Southern Italy, and shows the different role that moral and economic interests played in their political choices, at least among those of them who had deep ties with the ideals of the Risorgimento. For family traditions and personal habits, Fortunato much more than Croce can be regarded as a

Southern landlord. His letters of the post war period are full of lamentations against the agrarian measures of Nitti and Giolitti. As a Minister, Croce approved some of those policies without worry or qualms. When fascism conquered power Croce saw some positive elements in the new government of Mussolini and even in the fascist movement itself. Fortunato instead with his wider political experiences and different philosophical outlook opposed fascism from the beginning and reaffirmed his political opposition even when he had personal reasons to be pleased with the economic policy of Alberto De Stefani, the new Minister of Finance. In different ways political aspirations and intellectual ideas were of paramount importance for both of them and overshadowed economic considerations of a personal nature. According to Russo, who knew him well and was familiar with his deep feelings, "Croce was not attached to landed properties", but he "felt strongly the possession of ideas", and "the moral problems that are behind politics". (50)

In the name of those ideas, Croce had a different quarrel in the house of Fortunato with another common friend. That same Sunday, as Russo reports, Francesco Torraca affirmed that "had Francesco De Sanctis been alive, he too would have been a fascist". Torraca was a former pupil of the Neapolitan literary critic, but now had become

"an enthusiast of Mussolini". Immediately Croce rejected Torraca's affirmation, showing his resentment and disapproval with some acrimony, and strong words, feeling immediately that more than "literary taste", as Russo simply claimed in 1953, was involved in their disagreement.

(51)

With his claim Torraca was making a direct link between fascism and the Risorgimento. De Sanctis with Spaventa was one of the tutelary deities of Croce's moral and intellectual pantheon. At stake was, then, the interpretation and the heritage of the Risorgimento. To support a coalition government, to admire even the audacity of a modern condottiere, was one thing, to surrender the ideals of liberal Italy to fascism was a different question altogether. As a moderate liberal Croce could and did accept the first as an historian and philosopher he was not ready or willing to concede the second. From this early date till 1924 we will see a clear distinction in Croce's political and intellectual attitude. Croce will show a benevolent expectation for the Mussolini government, but he will express criticism of fascism as a cultural and ideological movement. After a few months the first will disappear and the second will become total opposition.

Reasons for Supporting Mussolini.

The reasons which explain Croce's political benevolence

towards Mussolini can be found in his memoirs written in 1944. First, Croce shared "the general feeling of trust and relief", "which spread throughout Italy", when it became known that Mussolini had formed a coalition government, supported by liberal and democratic parties, in which their ministers held important positions. (52) Secondly, Mussolini, on various occasions proposed to restore the authority of the State, and stressed his opposition against violence and disorder, even against those committed by fascists. Croce tended to accept the reassurances of his friends, who described Mussolini to him, "as a man of the people, impetuous, even violent, but generous and devoted to the fatherland". (53) Above all, for Croce and other Italians, the presence in the new government of General Diaz and Admiral Thaon de Revel, "trusted by the nation and faithful to the King" was "a pledge of security". Having allowed the two top officers of the Armed Forces to serve in the new positions, and given his past reputation, it was natural for Croce and others to believe that "the King, would never allow the liberal constitution to be destroyed or diminished". Certainly Croce was not alone in the assumption that the King "as head of the Armed Forces, the Army and the Navy, to him faithful, held in his hands the key to the situation". (54)

It did not occur to the liberal leaders then that it

would take a long time before the King could decide to turn that key in the right direction. In placing an excessive faith in the determination of the King a fatal mistake was made in those chaotic days. The memories of the past and the successful outcome of the crisis, that had shaken Italy at the turn of the century lulled the old politicians into complacency and false expectations. After the murder of his father and during the Giolittian years, Victor Emanuel had acquired the reputation, for many reasons deserved, of "a liberal and democratic King", as Croce put it. In the new crisis, sure to be in a position to repeat the success of the past, after a brief disarray, the liberals put all their hope in the hands of the King, forgetting that even in the past freedom had been first defended in Parliament and fought in the streets by the press and by popular movements.

But at the time besides these reasons, common to the general public, Croce had a personal reason to be pleased with Mussolini's coalition government: the presence in the cabinet, as Minister of Education, of his old friend Giovanni Gentile. Croce and Gentile had been responsible for the revival of Hegelian philosophy in Italy. Under their vigorous attacks the old positivism had been mortally wounded, the Italian literary landscape had been reshaped, and a new cultural movement had been established. Gentile,

more than Croce, was familiar with the problems of education and the needs of Italian schools; he also had the temperament to carry out a general reform. In his new position of power, more than Croce under Giolitti, Gentile was in a position to implement the pedagogy of idealism, and to transform Italian schools, giving them a new coherence and a new direction.

The personal pleasure felt by Croce found first expression in a special telegram that Croce sent to Gentile the day of his appointment as Minister of Education. Not only did Croce offer his congratulations, but, using the English words, he called Gentile "the right man in the right place". Croce expressed the same feelings in various letters, written in those days to common friends. In all of them he praised Gentile for his preparation, ability, competence and devotion to the cause of public education. The hopes for great accomplishments were high for Croce in those days, and so was his faith and confidence in Gentile. (55). Not only for Croce, but also for many other Italian intellectuals, liberal or democrat and even anti-fascist, the presence of Gentile in the government and his education reform inspired a great deal of expectation, that obscured other weighty considerations and transcended political reservations.

Croce's Reservations.

Despite confidence in the moderation of Mussolini, and friendship with Gentile, Croce refused to accept any official position in the new administration. He declined to be named effective president of the National Council of Education, when Gentile offered him the position, the most important in the administration of Italian schools after the Minister himself. In his memoirs of 1944 Croce explained his decision, writing that "there was in myself a secret instinct of reluctance, which compelled me to refuse all offers of political office". (56) This cannot be regarded as a political reservation toward fascism or the government's policies. But it reveals the constant reluctance of Croce to take time away from studies for political activities, for which he felt he did have the vocation.

Even the participation in the last cabinet of Giolitti had not been a happy experience. Croce had acquitted himself rather well, he had gained useful experience, and had received the praise of the old master himself, but he realized once again that he did not possess the qualities and the natural predispositions necessary to be a successful politician. In 1922 or later, Croce probably would not have refused a call from Giolitti. Only the direct appeal and the authority of "the old servant of the

State", and of "a man venerable for age and experience" could have succeeded in bringing Croce back to public life. Gentile's invitation carried, evidently, far less weight. After Croce's refusal his friend Casati was named to that position.

Not only did Croce not accept any official position offered to him by the new government, he also refused to have a personal meeting with Mussolini, despite several requests made by common friends. The reasons given by Croce in his memoirs lead to an interesting historical consideration. To the emissaries Croce replied that he had "no reason not to esteem Mussolini", and he certainly "wished him well in his work", but a meeting between the two of them would be useless because Croce and Mussolini were "for social environment, for family and for cultural formation of a different origin". Experience had taught Croce that "men agree or disagree and understand each other more for the similarity of their education than for the similarity of their abstract ideas". In that condition, Croce was convinced that a meeting with Mussolini would be awkward, almost a dialogue between deaf people, unable to understand each other. (57)

Giolitti too had a similar difficulty with Luigi Sturzo, the leader of the Popular Party. The old liberal elite was divided by political interests, but shared a common

heritage and common values, and they had a great deal of knowledge, memory and feeling in common. The war had accelerated social change, and brought to the fore new ideas and new leaders. Even styles, taste, and manners created a barrier between the old and the new. Mussolini, a man in the know for this matter, caught this new mood quite well in one of his speeches, when he remarked that "the people who fought the war have instincts, passions, aspirations and hopes, which are unknown to the people who did not fight the war". The new politicians acted in different ways and used novel methods. The old leaders, well mannered and well educated were baffled by this intrusion of new elements, and often had difficulty coping with them. Unprepared for the new times, they would be out-manuevered by the brashness of the new generations. In 1922 and in 1924 the calm behaviour and proper proceeding of Giolitti, unperturbed by events, was not a match for the energy and the audacity of Mussolini, his ambition unrestrained by traditional bounds or by moral inhibition.

Chapter 3: Between Support and Criticism, 1923

In 1923 neither the present nor the future appeared in a clear light, for all the players of the drama the way out of the impasse had not appeared, the clarification had not happened, the future was still in the hands of the inscrutable Fates or sitting on the wide knees of Jupiter. As Togliatti said, "in those two years neither the anti-fascists nor the allies of fascism, nor the fascists themselves had a clear sense of the institutional transformation, which would be realized from 1925 to 1928".

(1) Giolitti continued to believe that only a cabinet led by Mussolini had the force necessary to restore law and to maintain social peace. The other liberal leaders still hoped that they could control Mussolini, and compel him to remain within parliamentary practice and the constitutional system.

During the first months of his administration Mussolini showed signs of prudence and constraint. Despite occasional intemperance of language, and the usual reference to the inexorable rights of the revolution, he seemed sincere when he appealed to moderation and preached normalization. When acts of violence did occur, he reiterated his intentions to restore law and order against all, and authorized the police and the prefects to use force even against the violence of fascists, displeasing his more radical

followers. Luigi Einaudi praised the economic policy of the new government, and called it a return to classic liberalism. Albertini's Corriere della Sera approved the privatization of nationalized industries, and encouraged the continuation of the deregulation program and the return to the free market economy. The financial measures and the abolition of wartime economic controls were well received by the northern industrialists and by the agrarians of central Italy. As a result of government measures there were encouraging signs of increased economic production and new investments. In foreign affairs Mussolini followed a policy of moderation and traditional alliances, with periodic oscillations between France and England, and between intransigence and understanding toward Germany, but always within the guidelines established by Sforza, and closely guarded by the old undersecretary Contarini.

The admission of the fascist elements in the administration of the State proceeded at a slow pace, and with a selection of good people in many cases. A decree to limit the freedom of the press, after the protest of Salandra, was shelved, remained unpublished, and was not applied, at least for the time being. By the vote of Parliament in November, and by royal assent in December 1922, the government was given not "full powers", as many historians, Croce included, have repeated, but, more

traditionally, the authority, for a year only, from January to December 1923, to issue orders in council for the reorganization of the Civil Service and finances of the State. These laws increased the power of government and gave a more authoritarian character to its actions, but were in keeping with an established tradition, and fell within the limits provided by the Statute.

Two new institutions were created, which were outside of the liberal tradition: the Grand Council of Fascism, and the Voluntary Militia for National Security, better known by the initials MVSN. These were ominous novelties indeed, which should have alarmed the liberal leaders and kept them on the alert, since both infringed on royal and parliamentary prerogatives, especially the MVSN, whose members swore allegiance not to the King like all the other corps of the armed forces, but only to Mussolini, and were placed under his direct command like a pretorian guard. But even these two institutions appeared, with some reason, to many liberals and to moderate fascists, as a way to normalize the fascist squads and to put them under the control of the government, and later under the command of the Army. The centralization of the Fascist Party could be regarded as the necessary means to restrain and to destroy the anarchy created by the personal powers of the local Ras. In 1923 the liberals had some reason to hope for a

return to normal political life, despite the continuation of some violence, which they could believe happened without Mussolini's knowledge or even as a reaction to his moderate policies by the radical elements in the Fascist Party.

Support of Anti-fascists.

Still, despite the hopes of the liberals and sometimes the wishes of Mussolini, acts of violence continued. Croce made known his protest against the recurrence of fascist violence in public and in private. In the first months of 1923 he wrote a letter to Giornale d'Italia, lamenting "the daily torments" and the "frequent insults" inflicted by fascists on the name and the reputation of Nitti, "and rectifying false statements and showing my distaste for the ignoble accusers". In normal times, writing a letter to the editor of a paper does not have great significance, but in those times it could be dangerous, and it took courage to be associated with a man despised by fascists, and regarded as an enemy of the regime. Giovanni Amendola, in fact, who had emerged as the true leader of the opposition, realized immediately the value of that "noble manifestation" and felt compelled, after a long silence, to write to Croce and to praise him for having spoken "the first free and generous words" in favour of Nitti in a long while, and among the silence of others. (2)

In February 1923, not for the last time, Croce

intervened with another public letter in favour of Piero Gobetti, when the young publisher and the most intransigent of Mussolini's opponents was illegally arrested for an alleged violation of the press law. In 1923 the communist paper, Gramsci's Ordine Nuovo, was suppressed by the authority. The police claimed to have found arms and ammunition, hidden in the building where the paper was printed. All the editorial staff were arrested and brought before the courts with the accusation of sedition. During that trial Croce went to Turin and appeared as a character witness in favour of Umberto Calosso, an old friend and one of the accused. Thanks to the independence of the courts, still able to resist government pressure and, in part, to the intervention of a liberal senator, that time a communist newspaperman avoided jail and was set free, able to continue his literary career but also his anti-fascist activity. (3)

In November Amendola was assaulted and badly wounded by a fascist squad. Croce's reaction was immediate. He wrote a letter of solidarity, hoping that the general indignation "would create, as a result, repugnance for deeds of this sort". (4) In 1923, it was natural for Croce, given the close nature of their relation, to discuss with Gentile the political situation, and to manifest to him his disappointment "about the news of new violence and

insolence perpetrated by fascist groups". The long and close friendship allowed Croce to remind the Minister of Education that "Italy without freedom would be ruined", and to use, in order to make his point more cogent, a more vivid and colloquial expression of the Neapolitan dialect.

(5)

On these occasions Gentile, then still "an old and staunch liberal", reassured Croce that this violence "was the last spark of a dying fire and that freedom would remain intact". Croce's reaction to Gentile's explanations and assurances confirms Croce's political naivety, and perhaps even Gentile's. Croce accepted the reassurances of Gentile because "I was not able, even for hypothesis and imagination, to represent in my mind an Italy, which would resign herself to lose the freedom, for which she had fought during a century, and which she had enjoyed for more than sixty years, crowned by a victorious war; that freedom, which was her reason of life and her title of honour". (6) It was this faith in freedom, taken for granted, after a long tradition, which blinded many liberals to the dangers of the moment. For them the assault against liberal institutions could come only from the parties of the left, sometimes from Catholic plots, but not yet from the new subversives of the right.

Gentile's Reform of Education.

In 1923 Croce's most important contribution to political life was his public defence of the reform of education undertaken by Gentile during the first months of the year. The Gentile Reform offered a coherent and rigorous design to rationalize the Italian education system from elementary school to university. The aims of reform were to restore a national ethos to education, to give severity to the studies, to strengthen the humanist tradition, to reinforce the powers of the academic authorities, and the control of the central administration. It introduced national examinations at all levels of advancement, giving thus parity to confessional schools; it required students in both public and private schools to write standard tests and to be examined by external teachers, designed by the ministry. The reform favoured the classical schools over the scientific and the vocational institutes. The classical Lyceum received new prestige, only its students could accede to university, and, after a severe selection, could hope to become part of the ruling class of the nation. To strengthen the classical tradition history and philosophy were united under the teaching of the same teacher; the principles of idealistic pedagogy were adopted, and religion became a propaedeutic moment to philosophy.

The reform was defended or opposed with equal fervour by

fascists and anti-fascists, by democrats and by conservatives alike, and for basically the same reasons. It favoured the elites against the masses, it emphasized the classical tradition over the scientific method, it ignored the needs of modern society and modern industry. Many democrats placed great value on the reform, hoping it would spark a renovation of Italian civic virtues. The new emerging classes and the old aristocracy wanted a less severe selection, so their children could reach university, and enjoy the political and economical rewards associated with high education. Many fascist leaders, Farinacci among them, wanted more schools, to satisfy the needs of modern times; they also demanded more local control to increase their personal power. Trade unions and businessmen favoured the creation of more professional schools, able to produce the qualified workers, needed by the new industries and the expanding service sector. (7)

In the Fall of 1923 the reform of education came under attack from the liberals and the democrats, and also from the fascists and the Catholics. The criticism was strong, and the defence weak and lukewarm. Gentile became disheartened, and feared that Mussolini might abandon the reform, leaving him no choice but to resign as Minister of Education. It was then that Gentile asked Croce to intervene in his favour and in defence of the reform. Croce

wrote a personal letter for Mussolini, and sent an article to the Il Giornale d'Italia. The letter was never delivered by Gentile, but the article appeared as an editorial on November 3rd, 1923, and probably saved the day for the Reform and for Gentile. Croce's defence, in a very civilized manner, followed the traditional style of political dispute. He accused Gentile's critics of preferring the status quo for personal interests and for intellectual laziness. He lamented that the true reason of the opposition was political rather than technical; it was more against the general policy of the government, and less against the reform of Gentile. The reform was approved by those who were concerned with the future of education, and was opposed by those who hoped to create political difficulties for the present government. (8)

Despite marginal reservations, Croce did not have any doubts about the merits and the value of the proposed reform. Instead of the chaos of the old days and the musty smell of the old system, "thanks to the work of Gentile, we now have a solid system, rational and coherent, directed to the rejuvenation of thought, the character, and the culture of Italy." Since many of the attacks against reform were directed against the person of Gentile, Croce defended the integrity and the personality of his old friend. He praised the pedagogical competence, the administrative ability, the

passionate zeal, and the dedication to education of Gentile, a man "who had devoted to the problems of the school the best of his mind and his heart". (9)

Mussolini was impressed by Croce's arguments, refused Gentile's resignation, had Croce's article reprinted in his own paper, as the leading editorial, and from then on called the reform of education, realized by Gentile, "the most fascist of the fascist reforms". Some historians continue to follow the Duce's lead and to share his judgment. In reality, the inspiring principles of that reform had been proposed and debated during the liberal age, when fascism was not yet born. Some parts of that program had been proposed by Croce himself, when he was Minister of Education under Giolitti. Even the national examinations, the cornerstone of the new reform, had been first requested by the Popular Party, accepted by Giolitti, and introduced to parliament for the first time by Croce. The reform has to be regarded as a mature fruit of the idealist philosophy, of which Croce and Gentile had been the major leaders. Even some of the key men, appointed by Gentile to implement the reform, were democrats and known anti-fascists. The fact that it was accepted and defended by Mussolini, and could be realized by Gentile only under the fascist regime, shows that fascism and its leader are a more complex political phenomenon than it was once

fashionable to admit.

Press Interview.

Beside the timely intervention in defence of Gentile's Reform, Croce's other major public statement about the political situation in Italy took place in October 1923 with an interview to Giornale d'Italia. The interview took place in the middle of a lively political debate, and among the renewed discussions on liberalism and fascism, the reasons of one and the merits of the other and their possible relations and connections. The interview reveals that on the nature of politics Croce had not yet reached a clear conclusion; politics was still dominated by force, as during the war. At this stage, he still held that "all States are always one State, all governments are one government, that is a group of men who dominate and govern the majority; and all governments perform, while they last, a public function". The indifference to political forms was reconfirmed, and no importance was given to the institutions appropriate to liberalism. The distinction between a government promoting freedom and one imposing authority was not yet made. Nor has the distinction between the interpretation of the historian and the action of the politician appeared in the philosophical system of Croce. He still believed that "political forms are abstractions of theorists", as such they are "indifferent to the historian,

in his interpretation of history and to the man of action, who regard them more or less as respectable prejudices".

(10)

Despite the theoretical reservation, the interview is quite important, because it makes Croce's position quite clear in other respects. With that interview Croce reconfirmed his support of the government, but at the same time he began to make a public "affirmation of the liberal faith", associated with the defence of the Italian Risorgimento, and the denial that fascism had the ability and the necessary ideas "to found a new regime in Italy".

(11)

On the political situation of the moment, however, Croce made some heavy handed comments, that a good liberal should not make, and a modern reader could not share. Croce showed that he was aware of the many criticisms against the new government, but he added that it would take a while for anybody "to exceed the sum of mistakes (bestialita`) committed in Italy during the first years after the war". At that moment for him there was not a question of choosing between liberalism and fascism, because there were no political forces that could take the succession of the present government and offer a better policy. "I see instead a great fear of an eventual return to the parliamentary paralysis of 1922. For this reason nobody,

who has any wisdom, wishes a political change now". (12)

Despite his support of the present government, Croce left no doubt that he preferred liberalism to fascism, and wanted to remain faithful to liberal ideals of the Risorgimento. He felt liberal, he said to the paper, for the same reasons, "that I feel as a Neapolitan and a southern gentleman", because "personally, I am and could not be but a liberal", since "my entire moral and intellectual personality has come out of the liberal tradition of the Risorgimento". From now on as he looked back to that tradition and confronted it with a different present, a constant note of nostalgia begins to appear in Croce's writings, together with a celebration of the achievements of that past. "And how could one not feel liberal", he continued, "who had been educated during the first fifty years of the new liberal and united Italy, and has breathed in that air, has taken advantage of those initiatives, of those disagreements, of that rapid growth and modernization of Italian life". (13)

This was a positive assessment of liberal Italy, that will reappear again in the future in modified forms. But, given the historical judgment, at this point one could have asked Croce, as in fact the newspaperman did, if he did not see a contradiction between his liberal faith, and his support of Mussolini's government. His answer did not solve

the contradiction, for the moment, but left the door open to a different position in the future. "No contradiction at all", he said, "if the liberals did not have the force and the virtue to save Italy from the anarchy in which it was involved, they should blame themselves, should recite the mea culpa, and meanwhile recognize and accept the good from wherever it has come, and prepare themselves for the future". (14)

The last part of the interview has a polemical tone, not easily apparent, that reflected the debates among liberals and inside the Liberal Party itself between the filo-fascists, charmed by Mussolini, and the others, who wanted to retain more autonomy for themselves and for the party. Speaking in a time when many liberals were abandoning the old faith and making professions of fascism, Croce began now to censure that practice and to make a veiled criticism of Gentile. (15)

In Croce's opinion, to prepare themselves for the future, the liberals had the duty to overcome their present divisions, to regain the old moral vigour, and to stress their "devotion to the fatherland", he told the newspaperman, in reality speaking to Gentile, "but I do not believe that they have the other duty to become fascist, that is to wear the personality of men who have another disposition, have traveled a different experience, and

belong in the majority to a younger generation". (16)

Without denying their support to government, Croce wished that the liberals would remain liberal, and would not become fascist, because their conversion would not help anybody and would create only confusion. "They would be bad fascists, he warned, because fascist in bad conscience, instead they could remain good liberals, and could render useful services to Italy in the present and in the future". (17)

Gentile's Adhesion to Fascism.

The interview certainly was not a call to opposition, but it cannot be denied that it was a profession of independence. But to fully understand Croce's position in that interview, and to appreciate the meaning of his statements, one has to remember that in June 1923 Giovanni Gentile had become a member of the Fascist Party. Like Mussolini, but unlike Croce, Gentile had been an interventionist in 1915. Until he joined the Fascist Party, his political orientation had been that of a conservative liberal with an Hegelian conception of the State and ties to the Destra Storica of the Italian Risorgimento. From 1923 till his tragic death in 1944, Gentile put the vigour of his mind, his passionate heart, and his formidable organizational talents at the service of fascism and of Mussolini. (18) Gentile's decision to join the Fascist

Party, together with his flattering letter to Mussolini, and on that occasion his claim that now true liberalism was represented by fascism, generated criticism and resentment among liberal leaders. In protest, Salandra joined the fledgling Italian Liberal Party, and made known his disapproval of Gentile's letter and his adhesion to fascism. Writing to Salvemini, Fortunato qualified as "shameful and foolish", "the letter, unimaginably hateful, of Gentile, now gone to fascism". (19)

Gentile's decision was reached without discussion or consultation with Croce. There is no mention of that event in their correspondence or in Croce's diaries. But Croce must have discussed Gentile's action and expressed reservations with some of his liberal friends, as appears evident in the correspondence of Giustino Fortunato. In June 1923, again in a letter to Salvemini, Fortunato made a cryptic and revealing remark; "no doubt, B. Croce is in a very curious state of mind. He is annoyed that Tom, Dick and Harry of the new generation have started to make, as he says, some Borbonismo". With that expression, no doubt, Croce and Fortunato meant the sudden change of loyalty in 1860, for personal gains, of the Neapolitan political elite. (20) Later, in a tormented letter of 1925, Croce regarded Gentile's decision as "deplorable", but also probably as a necessary expedient to save and to protect

the education reform from the attacks of fascists, like Farinacci. (21)

But Croce's true feelings and disappointment in 1923 for Gentile's choice were clearly revealed by his letters to Sebastiano Timpanaro. Timpanaro was an old and common friend, in the past closer to Gentile than to Croce, but now shocked by Gentile's claim and by his adherence to fascism, asked Croce's opinion about "the relation between fascism and liberalism", as if he was seeking a reassurance for himself. Croce's reply was short and to the point: "For me fascism is the contrary of liberalism". With a direct reference to Gentile, then Croce invited Timpanaro "to use his intelligent interpretation" and to remember that in the history of nations "a Lucretia violated is worth more than a Messalina prostituted". (22)

Those last words, indeed the entire episode shows that the old confidence between Croce and Gentile was now under considerable strain, and the long friendship was reaching a breaking point. From then on Croce began to distance himself from Gentile, trying to clarify better his position in theory but also in practice. As the friendship between Croce and Gentile declined, for the same reasons the personal closeness and the political affinity between Croce and Francesco Ruffini increased. In the Senate Ruffini was then a strong defender of traditional liberal values, and

in the future he would continue to be a valiant antagonist of the regime. In 1923, the official liberal association of Turin became dominated by filo-fascist businessmen, supporting the government and approving fascism without any reservation. In disagreement with that position, Ruffini and other more independent minded liberals resigned and founded a new liberal group. To show solidarity with Ruffini's position, Croce was present in Turin when the office of the new organization was inaugurated and came into function. The local fascist did not like the independent spirit of these dissenting liberals and few days later the new office was assaulted and destroyed by the black shirts. (23)

Contrasts with Gentile.

Croce and Gentile not only assumed a different position on some practical politics but also on ideological matters. They held different views on the nature and function of the State, the relation between fascism and the Risorgimento, and even more important about the future direction of the fascist movement. During 1923 in the intellectual community there was a lively cultural debate about the nature of fascism, its origin, and its future. In general, fascism had been a state of mind, a manifestation of feelings, the expression of a certain undefinable mentality. Among the new ideas and the ideals of the postwar period, fascists

privileged activism over sedentary life, giving the supremacy to will over reason, to action over thought, to violence over compromise. Once in power Mussolini and some party leaders felt the need of a theoretical clarification, *rebus ipsis dictantibus*, and to elaborate an ideology to contrapose to liberalism, democracy and socialism. (24)

The debate revolved between the moderate and the radical elements of fascism, and had practical implications, and could affect the normalization of political life or the continuation of the fascist revolution. The main contrast between the two wings of fascism concerned the nature of the state that the fascists wanted to defend or to create. Now, as in the future, Bottai and Grandi were for a return to constitutional practice and for a renovation of liberal institutions. Farinacci instead preached "a second wave", and favoured the creation of new institutions coherent with the spirit of fascism. Mussolini stood in the middle, now encouraging one faction, now applauding the other, always trying to maintain the unity of the party and with that his title to the possession of power.

In this debate Gentile and his pupils had a leading role, and joined forces with the moderate elements of fascism, but their interventions had a special connotation, and reflected the philosophy of Gentile, his Hegelian heritage, his conservative liberalism and his

interpretation of the Italian Risorgimento. For Gentile fascism coincided with idealism; fascism was the realization of the ethical State, it provided the synthesis between the individual and the State, and it assured and made possible the unity between the rights and the duties of the citizen. Fascism was the true liberalism; in the twentieth century it was the revival of the policy of the Destra Storica, purified of all democratic corruptions. Finally, for Gentile, fascism was the heir of the ideals of the Risorgimento, especially the religious aspirations and moral renovation espoused by Gioberti and Mazzini. At the end, for Gentile, not liberalism but fascism became a total conception of life, almost a religion, and the State assumed the incarnation of concrete morality, creating as Croce noted with scorn, almost a governmental morality.

Croce's position was, in many respects, completely different from that of Gentile and of his pupils. Croce too was for moderation and wanted a normalization of political life. In the field of practical politics, Croce had shown benevolence toward fascism, and approved the policies of the Mussolini government to restore law and order. But in the realm of theory he never had such a benevolence, nor did he show any weakness. Against the naivety of judgment about things pertaining to politics, there was always clarity and the security of judgment about the cultural and

moral aspects of fascism. From the beginning of 1923 Croce criticized the philosophy of fascism, and denied that fascism was the realization of idealism and the continuation of the Italian Risorgimento.

On the Origins of Fascism.

Croce did not like the attempt made by Gentile and his pupils to identify idealism with fascism and with the liberal traditions of the Risorgimento. Against Gentile's efforts to establish the identity between thought and action, Croce maintained that political action was not the outcome of a philosophical theory but the result of an individual choice and personal feelings. These points were expressed in short essays, which appeared in his periodical La Critica from January to December 1923, and were included later in the new edition of his book, Cultura e Vita Morale. These ideas were expressed at the same time in letters to his friends or to other correspondents. In March 1923 Croce reminded Gentile and his pupils that idealism was a dialectical philosophy, and as such was the foundation of liberalism and the denial of fascism. "The idealistic theory of reality and of history", he argued, "because it is dialectical, is liberal, and recognizes, with the necessity of the struggle, the office and the necessity of all political parties, and of all the different men". (25)

While the theoreticians of the ethical State believed that fascism had realized the unity of thought and action, and some of them even supported the use of the cudgel to achieve political consent, Croce reminded them that life itself was "a union of opposites", and stressed the positiveness of political disagreements. "The parties and the individuals are divided, they fight, they struggle against each other", he then added: "Woe! if it were otherwise; woe! if to our individual actions would be lacking the counterbalance, even the ballast, of different and contrary actions". (26)

In a time when leaders of the totalitarian movements claimed special insight, and were given the right to impose their will against other opponents in the name of the nation, the class or the revolution, unlike other intellectuals, Croce stressed the equal dignity of all men and emphasized the moral responsibility of the individual in history and in politics. "To the conceited presumption to possess the political truth", he warned, "we have to substitute in our mind the humble conscience to play the part that the internal voice commands us to perform in the drama of history: the part which is not the whole, and knows that it is not the whole, and does not want to be the whole, but at the same time it knows to be indispensable to the whole, and in this knowledge attains its dignity". (27)

Not only in his periodical but also in private correspondence Croce rejected the attempt made by Gentile and his pupils to identify idealism with fascism. In a letter, written in March 1923 to Ugo Spirito, the most gifted of Gentile's pupils, Croce denied that identification in bitter words, Spirito possessing an uncommon gift to arouse Croce's fighting blood. "When one identifies idealism with fascism, either one makes a wrong decision, or one is dealing with a principle badly conceived: because it is evident that the assertion is a stupidity". In the same letter Croce rejected the philosophical unity as Gentile had elaborated it in his "actual idealism". Croce reminded Spirito that he too had theorized the unity of life and philosophy, but in a different manner and in a dialectical way. "I refuse to understand it in the foolish way, of which I have seen a recent example in the new and deplored political periodical". (28)

The last remark was a reference to Nuova Politica Liberale, a periodical of political studies, whose editor was a pupil of Gentile, Carmelo Licitra. The name and the programme of the new paper had been devised in 1922, before the March on Rome, and the first issue appeared in January 1923. The original aim, it seems, was to compare and to contrast the theory of liberalism and the praxis of

fascism, and to find a connection, if any, between the ideals of the Risorgimento and the aspirations of fascism. But in the first number Gentile and Licitra identified liberalism with the ethical State, stressed the unity of idealism with fascism, and praised the personality of Mussolini as the heir of the Risorgimento ideals. Croce with Gentile and other personalities, even known anti-fascists was a member of the periodical's editorial board; but he never wrote anything for the paper and after the first number withdrew his name from the board with some indignation. Soon after he expressed his disagreement with the ideas of Gentile and Licitra in an essay, published in his own periodical, La Critica and later included in a book. (29)

In that case as on other occasions Croce poured scorn on those who disturbed history and philosophy to find the origin of fascism. For him the origin of fascism was not in the idealistic philosophy, nor in the liberal tradition of the Risorgimento, but in the futurist movement. In an essay written in 1924, commenting on a boutade by Marinetti, Croce made his position quite clear, displaying a literary verve, that may have carried his argument a little too far. But in their essence similar ideas can be found elsewhere, earlier and later, in other writings. "Truly", he wrote, "for those who have a sense of historical connection, the

ideal origin of 'fascism' is to be found in 'futurism': in the resolution to go down to the piazza, to impose one's own feelings, to shut the mouths of those who are dissenting, to be unafraid of commotions and riots; in the eagerness of the new, in the desire to break every tradition, in the exaltation of youth, which was proper to futurism, and which spoke to the heart of the veterans, offended by the political skirmishes of the old parties, and by their lack of energy against the anti-patriotic and anti-statal violence". Marinetti, in Croce's opinion, deserved a resounding Bravo! for having called the reform of education: "anti-fascist and passatista", and he was correct to qualify it as "old news" from the point of view of futurism. But Croce was not ready to extend a similar approbation to those who were trying to find a noble pedigree, "a golden coat of arms", for fascism, and were disturbing history and philosophy, "and making use of Gioberti and Mazzini, idealistic philosophy, actual idealism, and similar things and names, which remain surprised when they find themselves in this new company, in which they have been brought by force". (30)

Croce was among the first to have pointed to futurism as an important component of fascism. But, to use one of his favourite expressions, that was a part and not the whole. The presence beside Marinetti of Gentile and of Mussolini

himself under the same roof shows the influence and the convergence of other currents and elements in the fascist movement, where they brewed and coagulated into an explosive cocktail.

The History of the Kingdom of Naples.

Another proof of the complexity of fascism is offered by Croce himself in his newest book, where we find new arguments against nationalism and where Croce points to the pernicious influence on Italian society of that movement. During the last months of 1922 and the first of 1923 Croce was writing The History of the Kingdom of Naples. This book offered the first example of Croce's ethico-political history, which assigns preeminence to the moral and intellectual forces in the life of a people. The relation between the book and the contemporary events was sometimes quite evident, and natural in Croce's conception of historiography as contemporary history, according to which in the contemplation and narration and evaluation of the past the historian reveals his personality and his position in the present. By Croce's own confession, The History of the Kingdom of Naples would not have been "written without my political passion of the present and of the past". (31) This political interest in the present is also mentioned in a letter to Casati. In March to his friend Croce wrote: "I am busy writing the chapters on the history of Southern

Italy . . . , it is also a philosophical work, under the guise of a regional history"; but adding, "perhaps I may be wrong, but this little work could be useful in civil life".

(32)

The last chapter of this book offered a celebration of "the great nobility" of the Italian Risorgimento: a political movement without "fanaticism of religion", "pride of race", and "narrow nationalism", but, at the same time, "animated and moved by moral dignity", "inspired by intellectual light", and "fraternal towards other peoples". With a direct reference to the present, Croce wished that the Italians of his days should know better "the truth" of those ideals and "the nobility" of that tradition, in order "to feel again its generous influence". "A thing especially beneficial now", he said, "that the purity of that tradition is threatened, and a bad and pernicious literature is trying to introduce in our feelings a turbid and gloomy and sensual nationalism of foreign origin". (33)

The last point was a reference to the literary and political influence of D'Annunzio but also of the French writers, Barres and Maurras; all of them very popular among fascist and nationalist politicians.

A history of Southern Italy could not avoid touching on the Southern Question. For the solution of that knotty and troubling problem Croce did not appeal to the government

and did not put his hopes in the Fascist Party, as many were already doing, to Fortunato's great disgust and amusement. Instead, anticipating ideas later elaborated by Guido Dorso and Antonio Gramsci in their different but concomitant concepts of hegemony, Croce made an appeal to the individuals and especially to the intelligentsia of Southern Italy. He appealed to the "responsibility", and the "duty", of the educators, urging them to follow the examples of their ancestors and like them, with work and study, endeavouring "to prepare and to open a better future" for the country. (34) No wonder Fortunato, who had read and commented on the manuscript, when the book finally was printed, was full of praise, calling the work "vigourously thought and rendered with a magisterial exposition". Above all, he said: "I am infinitely happy for the vindication of liberalism". (35)

Gaetano Mosca.

Another re-vindication of liberalism and Risorgimental patriotism can be found in a review that Croce wrote for a new edition of Gaetano Mosca's famous book, Elements of Political Science. In that review of 1923, Croce claimed that, despite the recent experiments, in Italy or elsewhere, "the liberal state was still the most mature form of European political life", and "its inspiring principle was sound". But he also argued that the ruling

classes of the liberal states had to become "more confident and more courageous", above all they needed to acquire a more robust faith. Croce agreed with Mosca that to maintain political cohesion in the life of a nation a religious faith was required, and that in modern times, after the decline of traditional religion, only patriotism offered such a faith and was able to generate that cohesion. Croce hastened to add, however, repeating concepts that he had used against the nationalists before the war, "provided that patriotism is understood in an ethical way, and not in a nationalistic, ethnical, brutal, libidinous and capricious manner, as is common among the different nationalisms". "Understood in an ethical manner", he continued, "patriotism is the concrete and historical form of the moral idea, the only one now possible, and around which it is given to unite all efforts, which ennoble human life". For Croce it was this kind of patriotism that in the last century made possible that a Neapolitan became an Italian, and which could make possible in this century that an Italian could become a European. (36)

The same ideas and the same ideals were expressed in a speech given by Croce in the city of Muro Lucano, for the inauguration of a public library, named after a close friend, who had died in the war. On that occasion Croce invited "the learned classes" and "the bourgeoisie" to make

a special effort and to get involved in public affairs. Once in the political arena, he urged them "to show a universal aspiration"; "to produce something objective"; "to promote a higher and new morality"; "to change society for the better"; and to rely on individual forces. Once again one notes the contrast with the fascist ideas, and with the appeal of the fascist leaders. For Croce "the bourgeoisie and the learned and the educated class of our regions have the duty to love and to encourage others to love the fatherland". But unlike the nationalists, for Croce, then, the fatherland was identified not with the borders, the rivers, the sky, and other natural features, but with the idea of morality itself. In that speech there was also a polemical note that needs to be stressed, given the importance that the argument had played in the post war period, and continued to play in fascist propaganda. While the fascists and Mussolini pretended to be the only heirs of the war and claimed the monopoly of its heritage to the exclusion of everybody else, Croce reminded his audience that the war had been fought by the entire Italian people, and now families of the veterans and the fallen showed the same pain and shared the same hopes, and were entitled to the same dignity, whatever their present political affiliation. (37)

Chapter 4: From Benevolence to Opposition, 1924

In 1924, before the political elections of April, Mussolini offered an image of moderation, and his government followed a policy of prudent administration. The financial problems of the immediate post war years had been brought under control and the national economy continued to improve, following favourable international trends, but also as a result of government policies. The financial measures introduced by De Stefani, the free-market Minister of Finance, provided welcome relief to the middle classes, helped industrial activity, and encouraged productive investment. Wage settlements favoured the industrialists and the agrarians, but employment increased, while inflation and the general cost of living went down, protecting, in some measure, the purchasing power of the working class. In foreign policy, despite the occasional nationalist outburst, the government pursued on the whole a reasonable defence of national interests. Despite the contrast of ideology, Mussolini's Italy was among the first nations to reopen diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Mussolini signed a friendship treaty with Yugoslavia, improved relations with other Balkan states, and finally obtained the return of Fiume to Italy, putting an end, for then, to the Adriatic question.

In these circumstances, with some truth, Mussolini could

claim to have succeeded where others had failed. The financial and diplomatic policy of the government had a certain coherence, it encouraged productivity and investments at home and economic expansion abroad, thus creating a powerful block of interests around fascism and around Mussolini. As a result of the diplomatic and economic success the popularity of Mussolini and the support for his government had increased since 1922. The acts of violence that still happened, did not dent the support for the government; when they occurred they were soon deplored by Mussolini, and as promptly blamed on the radical fringe of fascism or on provocateurs. The continuous professions of moderation and the improved economic conditions, increased hope among the general population of a lasting political normalization, and the next elections were seen as the last act necessary to achieve that aim, once and for all and in the most legal way.

General Elections of 1924.

The undeniable popularity of Mussolini and the continuing expansion of the Fascist Party, plus the fear of personal defeat, persuaded the liberal and moderate political groups to accept Mussolini's invitation to fight the next elections under the same banner, and to join as candidates the government list, or *Il Listone*, as it became

know, with a note of deserved sarcasm. An electoral alliance among different political forces was made advisable or even necessary by the rather unusual mechanism of the new electoral law. Approved by Parliament in 1923, despite disagreements and reservations, with 223 votes in favour and 123 against in the House and 165 to forty-one in the Senate, the law featured a majority premium, that should have remained unpalatable to any democrat or liberal of whatever shade or colour, even if the law, as was the intention of the majority, and the promise of the government, should have been used for one legislature only. The new law assigned two thirds of the seats to the strongest party or list of parties, provided it gained at least 25 percent of the popular vote. The rest of the seats or the remaining one third were divided among all the other parties of the opposition in a proportional fashion. In a Parliament of 536 seats, the future majority party was assured 356 members. (1)

The approval of the electoral law in 1923, the formation of the national list in 1924, have to be regarded as operations of "transformism" in the long and well established tradition of Italian politics, and in the perennial and elusive search to achieve a larger consensus among small and different parties on questions of national import. The new compromises were dictated by different

aspirations, not all of them dishonourable. Many liberals and democrats hoped to create a stable majority in Parliament, and to avoid the endemic crises, that in the past had made governments usually weak and inefficient. With their adhesion to the government list the liberal and moderate politicians tried to retain their local power base and to maintain their national influence, but they also, together with many moderate fascist leaders, wanted to achieve a lasting normalization of Italian political life, hoping to turn fascism into a moderate force and to reduce the influence of its radical wing.

Mussolini instead hoped to polarize the fight, to isolate the opposition and to bring all the moderate forces under his leadership; he also wanted to use the prestige of the local notables to achieve a plebiscitarian victory and to assure an hegemonic position for fascism in the country and in parliament. Negotiating from a position of strength and supported by a mass party, Mussolini was bound to achieve his aims and to make his personal position stronger, and not easy to be challenged in the future, either by the moderates or even by the fascists.

Croce's Position.

Croce's position during the first half of 1924 did not change; he remained on the sidelines of active politics, and continued to maintain the same position toward fascism

and Mussolini. He was not in the Senate when "the shameful electoral law", as Fortunato aptly called it, was approved. But Croce's position, it is fair to assume, was similar to that of Giolitti, who had been the reporter of the bill in the house. Unlike Giolitti, who ran on a liberal independent list, Croce, however, as Senator, did not have to worry about re-election. He did not participate in the electoral campaign nor did he make any political speech during the period. Croce's only significant political act before the April elections was a press interview at the beginning of March in Corriere Italiano, a newspaper with close connections to the Fascist Party, in particular to its administrative secretary, Giovanni Marinelli.

The ideas expressed by Croce on that occasion have to be seen as part of the political debates generated by the upcoming elections and by the electoral alliances; and they also reflected the hopes and the aspirations that the liberal groups assigned to the results of those elections. Croce's interview in fact followed two very different speeches, made in Naples by two prominent fascist leaders, Francesco Giunta and Michele Bianchi; one promised moderation, power sharing, and a quick return to constitutional ways; the other instead spoke of "intransigence" and "renovation", favourite concepts of Farinacci and of the radical faction of fascism, which

wanted a future different from the past and the present. It is worth mentioning that in the provincial riding of Campania, Croce's own riding, more than one third of the candidates in the Listone were former liberal parliamentarians, including Enrico De Nicola, the speaker of the house. (2)

In that interview, Croce repeated his two different positions concerning the fascist movement. He approved the policies of the government, but criticized the ideology of fascism. Croce assured the readers of that paper that he did not fear the effect of the new electoral law. Instead of dangers, he saw "the spontaneous beginning, thanks to the political elections, of a return, as it now is called, to legality, that is to constitutional practices". With a view to the coming elections, he expressed the wish that "... people would feel the necessity not to compromise the work of political restoration underway". For Croce "the treatment which fascism had imposed upon Italy, had produced, was producing and would continue to produce good effects". However, chief among these beneficial effects, Croce considered particularly important the increased participation of the Italian people in political life, and the "shaking out of the old indifference" to public affairs among Italians. For these reasons Croce hoped that at the next general elections the government list would win "a

compact majority". (3)

The reasoning behind Croce's wish, but also of Giolitti and Salandra, was that once the Fascist Party had a parliamentary majority of its own, the emergency would come to an end, and a return to normal life without violence would be possible. "When the dominant party itself in the new Chamber will have a new majority", he said, "it is clear that we will have returned to legality and to the good constitutional system". Leaving aside possible and easy reservations and criticism about the fallacy of the arguments and the misplaced expectations, the political substance of Croce's whole interview was evident: "the hope of a return, through the elections, to the constitutional system". (4)

In the rest of the interview Croce was particularly generous with "the heart of fascism", as he called it, and was ready to recognize that fascism was animated by love of the fatherland and by feelings for the safety and authority of the State. However, he had no hesitation in passing a negative assessment on "the head of fascism". In the theoretical realm, Croce said "I am skeptical about the ideology of fascism". He denied that fascism had the ideas necessary to create something original, or could be capable of replacing the liberal system with "the new fascist State". From intellectual curiosity, Croce had read fascist

publications, had also analyzed the practical acts of fascism, and neither in the writings nor in the facts had he seen the signs of "the new morality", "the new thought", or "the new philosophy", and had come to the conclusion that there were no "new principles". "I fear that a new thought is not there, and I believe that it is not there because it cannot be there". (5)

This rather stark view of "the head of fascism" remained unchanged in Croce's future writings, and has reappeared after the war, especially in the writings of Norberto Bobbio, to affirm the intellectual and literary sterility of the entire fascist period. Others have argued against that view. At the moment it is important to note that once again, and this time in a fascist publication, Croce rejected "the ideology of fascism" and did not fail to defend the ideas of liberalism, while many liberals and democrats were denying their past, and were begging Mussolini for a place in the Listone. To the wishful thinking of a new fascist State, Croce opposed the concrete reality of the liberal State, that had been created in Italy and in Europe in the course of the last century, while other intellectuals then dreamt impossible returns to the Middle Ages or longed for absolute monarchies or even new alliances between the throne and the altar. Finally, it has to be noted that in the course of the interview a

polemical comparison between fascism and liberalism was evident, even amid the praise for "the heart of fascism". Liberalism too like fascism was able to assure the authority of the State, but unlike fascism, Croce asserted, liberalism welcomed political disagreements among different parties, and assured the general interest, continually maintaining a healthy balance between freedom and authority. (6)

The interview, in fact, was not well received by fascists, the criticism of the "head" did not amuse most of them and some of their newspapers replied in kind. A Roman paper, Il Tevere, with close ties to the futurists, and edited by Giovanni Preziosi, a former priest who became a supporter of the racial law, asked a rhetorical question "is there anybody more idiotic than Bonomi?" The answer with futuristic bravado was quick and without reverence: "yes, Benedetto Croce". (7)

The press interview was Croce's only intervention in the electoral campaign of 1924, but not the only political act of some significance. In the last month of 1923 and the beginning of 1924, he held several meetings in his house with other friends and helped to organize a "Club of Political Studies", that was sponsored by veterans and by students and teachers from the University of Naples. The political significance of the society lies in the fact that

it was completely independent from fascist influence; it gathered only liberals, democrats and social-democrats; and it tried to keep alive the cultural tradition of Southern Italy, especially the political heritage of De Sanctis and Spaventa. The society's independence, membership and activities were not liked by fascists and a few months later it was compelled to close by government intervention.

The society's activity also represented an important point in Croce's philosophical evolution. In a speech to the club on political theories just after the general elections of 1924, Croce not only urged his audience to acquire a clear knowledge of political reality, but he also invited them never to forget that in politics "prudence" and "morality" go together, one reinforcing the other, as essential elements. This revealed something new in Croce's mind concerning the nature of politics, that before had not received the same emphasis. The organization of the club itself reflected the ferment of ideas of the period, and also showed the desire of people to gather among congenial spirits, and to reflect on the events and the changes that were taking place in Italy after the war. During the first months of 1924, Croce had been deeply involved in writing political essays that indicate a change in his political theory. The speech for the society was one of the first public manifestations of what Aldo Garosci has called "the

turning point of 1924", in Croce's political evolution. (8)

The Results of the Elections.

The general elections of April 1924 were a success for Mussolini personally, and for his government and even for fascism. The success was too great and widespread to be attributed only to violence, as the opposition claimed. Despite the many acts of intimidation, participation increased from 58 percent in the 1921 elections to 63 percent in 1924; and in Northern Italy the opposition parties together gathered slightly more votes than the government list. The government obtained strong majorities in the Central regions, once the stronghold of the Socialist Party. In Southern Italy, the support of the notables, more than violence, proved decisive for the fascist success. But even there a close look at the results showed that a significant shift had taken place; in the last elections Salandra obtained more than one hundred thousand votes, and came first in his riding of Apulia. In 1924 only ten thousand people voted for him and he placed fourteenth, well behind the new and younger fascist leaders, none of them with a national reputation. (9)

Over all, the fascist list won 65 percent of the popular vote. The Popular Party came second with only 9 percent, less than half of what they had obtained in 1921. The Unitary Socialist Party of Turati and Matteotti was third

with 6 percent. Combined together the two socialist parties, into which Italian socialism was now bitterly split, had lost two thirds of the votes gained by the Italian Socialist Party in the elections of 1919 and 1921, while the Communist Party received less than 3 percent of the popular vote. The composition of Parliament actually reflected the popular vote. After all, Mussolini did not need the mechanism of the electoral law to obtain two-thirds of the seats! When Parliament reconvened after the elections, the opposition had 161 seats, while the government had 375, and of these 275 were card carrying members of the Fascist Party. In a House of 536, then, Mussolini and fascism had a majority of their own, independent of the support of the liberal notables. (10)

The Matteotti Affair.

It is quite important to keep these numbers in mind to understand the actions and the behaviour of Italian political leaders, inside and outside Parliament, during the next political crisis, that suddenly jolted Italy and the Italians into chaos and turmoil, and almost toppled Mussolini from power. In its political development the Matteotti Affair showed the Machiavellian ability of Mussolini and the strength of the fascist movement; it revealed the weakness and the divisions of the opposition; finally it made manifest that the liberal leaders had lost

power forever. Soon after the convocation of the new parliament, and after a strong speech of opposition, delivered on May 30th, the young leader of the Unitary Socialist Party, Giacomo Matteotti, on June 10th, was murdered; and Mussolini entered the most crucial period of his political life, his government and his power in danger of collapsing at any moment for the next few months.

Matteotti was one of the most intransigent anti-fascists, a political leader of the younger generation, among the few to have direct experience of fascist violence in his own riding in the Po Valley, and among the first to realize the true nature of fascism and its unwillingness to return to legality and to constitutional ways. The authors of the murder belonged to an infamous fascist squad, called Ceka; some of them had close ties to Mussolini and easy access to his office. There is no doubt that the death of Matteotti was a fascist murder, the fruit of the mentality and the atmosphere created by fascism, the result of propaganda and contempt against adversaries, the expression of the cult of violence. But historians are still debating the direct involvement and the personal responsibility of Mussolini. Salvemini had no doubts about the direct responsibility of Mussolini; others have formulated a Thomas a` Becket hypothesis. Renzo De Felice, the major historian of fascism

and its Duce, reduced the responsibilities of Mussolini and blamed the members of Ceka, and the zeal of his collaborators. Leo Valiani has challenged those conclusions. (11)

The historical significance of the Matteotti Affair lies in the political reactions to the crime of the opposition and the government. Mussolini was not only the Prime Minister, he was also Minister of the Interior, and as such responsible for public order and the safety of citizens. The kidnaping of Matteotti first, after a scuffle, on a city street, in full daylight, not far from Parliament, showed that he had failed in his ministerial duties; the police investigations into the crime later revealed that he had entertained, until recently, close relations with the very people whom the prosecutors charged with the murder of this Member of Parliament. During the investigations, he continued to proclaim in public and in private his ignorance of Matteotti's fate, after he had been made aware of the murder and its organizers. In other nations with a long and well established tradition of parliamentary democracy, "Ministerial responsibility" alone would have compelled Mussolini to resign, and be replaced by another leader, enjoying the confidence of the House.

Also from the beginning of the crisis the duty of the opposition would have been clear to all: fight with

determination inside the House, as Bissolati had done in 1898; without any hesitation press the government bench daily to tell the truth; reveal the complicity of public officers and party leaders; show the untenable position of Mussolini; appeal to the fairness of the other side; introduce a motion of censure or make use of all the rules and regulations of parliament to show that Mussolini no longer enjoyed the full confidence of the House, indicating in this way to the King that he needed to call somebody else to carry on the business of the nation. But in Italy public affairs have been conducted in a different manner and according to different rules. Ministerial responsibility, and even personal accountability, rarely has cut short a political career and seldom, if ever, has brought down a national government. As a result, the train of events after the murder of Matteotti unfolded with a logic different than would have been the case in England, France or Canada.

The Aventine Secession and the Senate.

Soon after the murder of the socialist leader the opposition, led by Amendola, left parliament, formed the Aventine Secession, and swore never to return while Mussolini remained in power. At the same time Giolitti remained in parliament in a position of watchful independence and Salandra continued to support the

government, still fearful of socialism. At the most crucial moment, the liberals split into three groups, and were unable to devise a common strategy, or to fight united behind a single leader. Once again, their divisions, their uncertainties, and their fears favoured Mussolini, and allowed him to overcome his difficulties, to gain time, and to consolidate his power. In the middle of the crisis, on June 13th, with a master stroke, the new Speaker, Alfredo Rocco, adjourned parliament until the next November. The Secession first and the adjournment later deprived the opposition of its best instrument, in a parliamentary democracy, to press its moral advantage to a positive conclusion, exploiting the difficulties of Mussolini and the disintegration of the government majority. The great press campaign waged by the opposition parties, following the murder of Matteotti and the Aventine Secession, proved not enough, by itself, to compel the government to resign and Mussolini to relinquish power. (12)

With the adjournment of the House, the focus of attention shifted to the Senate, where a motion of confidence was debated between the 24th and the 25th of June. Even that occasion did not create a great deal of difficulty for Mussolini. Despite great speeches from the few Senators of the opposition, at the end the government received a vote of confidence, 226 Senators voting in

favour and twenty-two against the motion. That outcome may have disappointed public opinion, but probably did not come as a surprise to the political and cultural elites. Since the time of Depetris, the Senate had lost political initiative and had surrendered its parity with the House. It had become the accepted norm that votes in the Senate could not create a political crisis, and a government was not required to resign after a defeat in the Senate. Senators were then appointed by the Crown; most of them were old and very deferential to tradition; only a solemn intervention of the King in the crisis, or his discreet invitation through unofficial channels could have persuaded them to take an unusual initiative. But to take such a step the King had to be advised, perhaps urged by all the senior leaders of the House, and had to be assured that a majority of the House was ready to replace Mussolini with a new leader. But the old leaders, Giolitti among them, were reluctant to involve the Crown in partisan politics, afraid to cause irreparable damage to the monarchy, and the King himself was afraid to repeat the mistake of his father in 1898, when political intervention had been fatal to the monarch. In the absence of a royal initiative, and in the absence of a ready alternative in the House, the Senate could only do what it had done in the past: listen to great speeches and then vote innocuous but well crafted motions,

preaching goodwill and inviting all parties to national reconciliation, but making no reference to ministerial responsibility and personal accountability. (13)

Croce's Position.

The murder of Matteotti and the Aventine Secession created "a great disorientation" in Croce's mind, according to Nicolini, his friend and biographer. Luigi Russo confirms that Croce at that time assumed "the colours of Caporetto", "I have never seen Croce so gloomy as after the Matteotti murder". (14) Yet despite the horror at the murder and the impression made by the Secession, Croce in the Senate on June 25th voted a motion of confidence in Mussolini and his government. For that generation it would not have been easy to admit that the Prime Minister of the Crown had been involved in a political murder, especially when the murder was clearly against his political interest, and came after an election victory. The murder was clearly in contradiction to the mood, set by Mussolini in his first speech made to the new Parliament, on June 7th, 1924, a week after Matteotti's great opposition speech. On that occasion Mussolini had been moderate in tone and conciliatory in substance. He defended the role of Parliament, recognized the necessary function of the opposition, and invited the collaboration of all political parties. He assured that the liberal State had not and was

not going to be destroyed, and that freedom was secure. He promised a constitutional transformation of the Militia, and spoke against all violence, including the illegality of fascists. (15)

According to his memoirs of 1944, Croce believed that Mussolini had nothing to do with the murder. "I was persuaded that he was not the author of the murder, and that the bad people around him had perpetrated it without his knowledge. And, truly, it seemed folly even against his style that he could have ordered it". During the debate in the Senate, Croce trusted Mussolini's sincerity, when "with grieved and repentant air" he made "the solemn pledge" of wanting "to return to legality and to constitutional rule". Croce also trusted the promise of Mussolini and of the Senate majority leader, when they assured him that government's aim was not only "normalization", but also the "reestablishment of freedom". More easily, Croce accepted Mussolini's promises, since his liberal friends in the government were also reassuring him that a return to the liberal way was sure and imminent. (16)

In the Senate Croce was not an active member: he voted regularly on important questions, but spoke rarely and usually only on cultural matters. He had never been, and certainly was not then a leader of the majority, as sometimes has been suggested. Among Senators he enjoyed

great respect, but had little authority in political questions, and sometimes even in cultural affairs his advice was ignored. A few months before the Matteotti Affair, despite a good speech and some discreet lobbying, Croce failed to sway enough votes to assure the confirmation of his close friend, Salvatore Di Giacomo, a well known Neapolitan writer.

In that special session of the Senate, as on other occasions, Croce did not take part in the general discussion, unlike his friends Sforza and Albertini, who spoke strongly against the violence of fascism and the policy of the government. In defence of Croce, and to better understand the Senate's vote, one has to remember that in that debate Mussolini rose to the occasion, delivering a masterful speech on June 24th. He deplored the murder of Matteotti with sincerity, condemned all violence, and assured that justice would be done. He made all the right promises: a change in the direction and composition of government, a continuation of the policy of moderation, a reorganization of the Militia within the constitution, a willingness to work with the opposition. He told the Senators that it was his intention "to obtain, with every means, and with the respect of the law, political normalization and a national pacification". He also promised to free fascism of any illegality, expelling from

the party the violent elements. At the same time he invited the Senators to avoid a deepening of the crisis by a vote contrary to the electoral results. He reminded them of the efforts he had made to restore legality after the March on Rome, when the fascist squads had obeyed only his personal appeals and authority. He accused the opposition of wanting a return to the tensions of the past, and blamed them for creating at the same time new dangers to the institutions. He put before the Senators the possibility that a new government and a different leader would not be able to control an eventual reaction of an aroused fascist movement, deprived of its electoral victory, and still strong with more than eight hundred thousand members.

This was a very astute reminder on Mussolini's part. The possible resumption of violence by the fascist squads and the resurgence of Republican sympathies, inside and outside of fascism, together with the old fear of socialism blinded the judgment of many people in those days. The spectre was adroitly agitated by Mussolini and his supporters in the circumstances and achieved its effect. The danger of a leap in the dark troubled many Senators, making it easier for them to accept at face value Mussolini's promises. Those promises were repeated the day after to the fascist parliamentarians in the House, and were even published, in a point by point format, in Il Popolo d'Italia on June

25th, the day of the Senate's vote. As a result, many Senators trusted Mussolini's sincerity, and believed that he and the other fascist leaders truly had the intention "to make parliament work with regularity", "to make fascism return to legality", "to be disposed to purify the party", and finally at the end of the list, "to be ready to follow a policy of national reconciliation, that ignores the past, that ignores the fights and the violence of the past". (17)

Yet despite the solemn promises made by Mussolini, many Senators were not completely reassured and remained with doubts and worries. For that reason, when the time came to vote, Croce and Lusignoli, the former prefect of Milan, friend of Giolitti, in particular, criticized and rejected the original motion of confidence presented by the government side, compelled the majority leader to draft a new one with more binding language and with clear reference to specific policies, which the Senators wished to see implemented. The original motion of confidence used the traditional formula of the case: "The Senate, having heard the communications of the government, approves them and moves on to other business". After the protest of Croce and Lusignoli, and with the consent of Mussolini, Senator Melodia, the majority leader, proposed a new motion, which sounded very different from the first one. "The Senate, having heard the declarations of the Prime Minister,

approving the declared aims of intending to proceed with utmost energy to the restoration of the integral rule of law, to the necessary expulsions from the party, and to the pacification of the nation, expresses confidence in the actions of the government, and moves on to other business".

(18) Even this motion was voted by many Senators and by Croce himself without enthusiasm and "with a great interior struggle", as he wrote in his diaries. Yet despite the remaining qualms at the end the majority of the Senators did vote for the confidence motion, which carried by 226 yeas against twenty-two nays. Croce's vote, unfortunately was not among the nays. He had chosen to trust Mussolini and, like others, remained unconvinced of the advisability of precipitating another political crisis at that moment.

(19)

Croce like Giolitti still harboured illusions about the future. With that motion, he and his friends hoped to control Mussolini and to compel him to keep his promises; they also believed themselves to be in a position to defeat the government at the opportune moment. These views were expressed by Croce in a meeting on the same day before the senate's vote with Giorgio Levi Della Vida, one of the very few university professors who refused to take the loyalty oath in 1931. According to Levi, Croce said: "After a long discussion, following the speech of Mussolini, we have

decided to vote the confidence motion. But, mind you, it will be a conditioned confidence. In our motion we call upon the government to restore legality and justice, as Mussolini himself has promised in his speech. In this way we are keeping him as a prisoner, ready to deny him confidence, if he does not keep the promises made". (20)

Mussolini was not a man to quibble about words, or to refuse promises in a time of difficulty. In those summer months of 1924, not nice words and well drafted motions were needed, but political force ready to do battle, and willing to take full advantage of favourable occasions, in Parliament and in the streets. But no political leader proposed a decisive and appropriate action, able to carry the majority of Parliament and the majority of the country. The general impression, common to all political leaders, expressed even by Amendola to Croce, was that "The Moral Question" by itself would compel the fall of Mussolini, and soon after, within a few months, fascism would collapse and disappear forever, like a bad nightmare.

A New Cabinet.

Soon after the vote in the Senate, three ministers resigned from the government as their contribution to social pacification and to give Mussolini the chance to form a ministry of national reconciliation. In the reshuffled cabinet Mussolini included four liberals, as a

guarantee of the promises made in the Senate, or so believed Croce and his liberal friends. Croce was invited by Mussolini, through Gentile, to become the next Minister of Education. He refused the offer without hesitation: "I told him that I felt an insurmountable reluctance to sit around the same table with Mussolini". Croce was urged to accept Mussolini's invitation also by other friends, Casati among them. "But I repeated that I did not want in any way to be a part of that combination". Instead he and Gentile suggested the name of their common friend, Alessandro Casati, who was a moderate liberal and also a Catholic and had acquired great prestige in the war as a valorous officer. (21)

Casati's name and his political background fitted rather well with the general strategy that Mussolini was following to overcome his difficulty and the disarray of his party. To remain in power, to control the moral indignation of the moment, Mussolini appealed to all the moderate forces; he sought the support of former nationalists, who enjoyed the confidence of the King; he asked the help of the moderate liberals; and finally he courted the clerico-moderate politicians, who had strong ties with the Vatican. At the same time he kept the Fascist Party ready and well oiled. The liberals, on their part, invested great hope in the ability of Casati and his three liberal colleagues. Inside

the cabinet they had the huge task of guaranteeing a policy of moderation and a return to legality, keeping Mussolini faithful to promises made in the Senate. (22)

At that moment the majority of liberals were not willing, nor did they have the strength, to issue a direct challenge to Mussolini, and compel him to resign. Some of them, like Salandra, feared that the collapse of the government and the disintegration of the Fascist Party would have caused a violent crisis, possibly a bloodbath, followed by a proletarian insurrection, and then the triumph of a revolution like the one in Russia. Others like Giolitti and the moderate majority of the Senate, continued to support Mussolini, hoping to be able to control him, to condition his policies, to restore legality, and, at the opportune moment, when times were quieter, and the danger passed, compel him "to go without shocks", choosing the occasion and avoiding unpleasant consequences to the nation and to the institutions. Many believed that in the fall, when Parliament reconvened, Giolitti, Orlando and Salandra would declare their opposition, and the liberal ministers, followed by the nationalists, would resign. These moves would give the King the legal means to call a new premier, Federzoni perhaps, charging him to form a new government and to call new elections: a strategy appropriate for calmer days but not for times of violent passion and

dominated by mass parties. Mussolini and Fascism used the time to recover and to reorganize. In the fall he and his party were again masters of the situation, and regained the old confidence. (23)

The other strategy, the Aventine Secession, proposed and led by Amendola, to abandon Parliament, and never to return to it, until the moral question and the indignation of the country would compel Mussolini to relinquish power, proved to be even less successful. It stood as a witness to nobility; it acquired great moral value; it created martyrs; it prepared the ground for future resurrection by bringing together for the first time Catholics, liberals, democrats and socialists, but was not crowned by political victory. Like Giolitti, Croce did not approve of the Aventine Secession, and like Giolitti kept urging Amendola to reconsider the decision, to return to Parliament, and to organize the opposition inside the House.

Without a modern political organization in the country, the liberals had lost control of Parliament first, and were removed from the power of government later; now men like Croce and Giolitti, even Amendola, were compelled to put their faith in the hands of the King, hoping for his intervention to resolve the situation. But the King gave all of them "a first grave disillusion", after his return from Spain. As Croce recognized in his memoirs of 1944,

instead of providing "a solution to the entangled knot, and instead of trying to cut it, he kept it intact, to the salvation of fascism, recommending to all Italians, without making a distinction, mutual understanding". (24) The liberals were under the illusion that in 1924 they could repeat with the same success the tactics of 1898, when a vigorous press campaign, good speeches in Parliament, Zanardelli's secession from the government majority, and a young King had been able to impress a new course on Italian politics.

Croce's New Political Attitude.

The crisis created by the Matteotti Affair generated something new in Croce's mind, and changed his attitude towards Mussolini and his government. In the meeting with Levi Della Vida, immediately before the Senate vote on June 25th, Croce's changed political position had become quite clear. As Levi put it in his rather succinct recollection, Croce said to him: "You see, fascism has been a good thing, now has become a bad one, and it must go. But it has to go without shocks". (25)

The other and major manifestation of his changed mind and feelings was the interview granted to Giornale d'Italia on July 6th, 1924. In the interview the tone became harder, the criticism harsher, praises fewer and reservations more general. The interview seems to close a period and to open

a new chapter; it shows disillusionment for the past and new aspirations for the future. Once again Croce defended his vote in the Senate, and this time used more precise arguments; and again he reiterated that besides past and recent "liabilities" fascism had some positive aspects and had done some good things in the past. For that reason, he said: "It was not possible to expect nor to desire that fascism should fall at once and suddenly. It has not been an infatuation or a little joke. It has answered serious needs, and it has achieved many good things, as every fair minded person recognizes. It advanced with the consensus and among the applause of the nation". (26) These comments seem to have the sound of revisionism ante-litteram: still they should not be lightly dismissed, but rather taken as a reminder, in historical assessment, that fascism has not been "an infatuation and a little joke" in the history of modern Italy and Europe.

Despite this positive point, in the rest of the interview the reservations and the rebukes to the ideology and the policy of fascism were more numerous and more severe than ever before. Once again Croce expressed a negative judgment on the ideology of fascism and made sharp criticism of fascist writers. For him fascism was "sterile of new institutions, incapable of shaping ... a new type of State". Fascism should have been only "... a bridge of

passage for the restoration of a more severe liberal regime, in the context of a stronger State", and should not have had the ambition "to inaugurate a new historical epoch". Instead of concentrating their efforts on restoring the vitality of the liberal State, the fascist intellectuals wasted their time searching "for the ideal fascist State" and for "new and original fascist institutions". (27)

In the political field too the fascist leaders had wasted time in wrong policies. "Giving signs of moderation", Croce said, they should have returned to the liberal ways long before this choice was "imposed by an uprising of public indignation", created by "this horrible murder, which upsets and wounds our hearts". The Matteotti Affair, besides the human tragedy, Croce continued, "has a specific political meaning, and is indicative of a wrong policy, which in the extreme brings consequences like this". For Croce it was evident now that fascism, unable to find its legitimacy in the Liberal State, needed violence to maintain and to protect its power. "Because fascism is not able to create a new constitutional and legal order, which could replace the liberal order, it needs to govern with the same violent means through which it was born, continuing what had to be occasional and transitory". In this situation, he argued, even the fascist leaders seemed

unable to control, let alone to stop the violence of fascism: "In the series of these violent proceedings, it is impossible to determine exactly where and when to stop. The insults and the violence belong to the same series, and they pass from one to the other by more or less sensible gradations". (28)

Croce did not seem to note the evident contradiction between his condemnation of fascist ideology and fascist violence and the vote of confidence given to the government in the Senate. He defended that vote and called it "a prudent and patriotic vote", "given not in a rush, but after long pondering", and "out of a sense of duty and without enthusiasm". In choosing a middle road, Croce said, he and his friends had not been alone: "Even the strongest speeches by the opposition, like those of Albertini and Abbiate, seemed to indicate a middle way, to which we have adhered, repressing our personal inclinations". With their vote the Senators, "following and interpreting public opinion", Croce argued, "wanted to protect the good that fascism had created", "to avoid a return to the weakness and the indecision of the past", and finally the vote intended "to give time to the process of the transformation of fascism". (29)

For this evolution of fascism into a moderate party, accepting the liberal way and the constitutional method,

Croce relied on the contribution of leaders like Grandi and Bottai and others of the moderate wing of the Fascist Party, then engaged in polemics with the radical faction, lead by Farinacci. "This transformation will depend on the wisdom, the intelligence and the will of the best elements of fascism. If they will accept the inevitable return to the liberal regime, they will be able to save fascism as a strong and salutary element of the future political competition. They will have destroyed a transient and dictatorial fascism, in order to create a lasting one". Events were going to prove that this hope also was misplaced, and bound to shatter the expectations of Croce and his friends. (30)

The last part of the interview was not really connected with the murder of Matteotti, and the immediate political situation, and it has been usually ignored by historians. But that part revealed Croce's inner feelings, it expressed well his general mood against the *tristitia temporum*; and it showed his changed position towards fascism and its leaders. The last two elections had seen the defeat of many old politicians that greatly changed the composition of the Italian political class. This trend had continued in the last election, in which many young fascists, without political experience and often without much ability, had been elected while great parliamentarians and former

ministers had been defeated or did not have a chance even to run. This was the reason why now Croce lamented the disappearance from public life of so many politicians of the older generation, "all of them still young", "men with experience", "skilled parliamentarians", "faithful servants of the State". Croce confessed to having no sympathy for those who had suddenly replaced the old liberals and "to feel diffidence" towards "the new and improvised politicians", "this other product of the postwar period", "like the new rich". (31) The last expression was rather revealing of Croce's feelings, it indicated in those years, with a note of public opprobrium, those businessmen who had made huge profits out of State contracts during war-time. To the war profiteers Croce now associated the young turks of fascism.

Reactions to Croce's Position.

The opinions expressed by Croce in this interview were not liked by Mussolini and by the fascist Press. Il Popolo d'Italia, Mussolini's own paper, reacted with acrimony and called Croce "a walking ghost", and "a corpse four days old", and similar niceties. But the sharper tone of Croce's judgments about fascism was noted and praised by others. Among the latter, Luigi Ambrosini, an old friend of Giolitti and a newspaperman with La Stampa of Turin wrote a letter to Croce, and expressed his pleasure with Croce's

latest opinions. "I have read your recent interview, Ambrosini said, and your new orientation gives me pleasure, because, to be frank, your vote in the Senate made me uneasy". (32)

In his reply to Ambrosini of July 14th, 1924, Croce defended again his vote in the Senate, and even denied that his vote was in disagreement with his new position. The vote, he wrote, "was dictated by love of country". "I felt that were I to vote against, I would have pleased my own feelings, I would have achieved my own satisfaction, but I would not have given proof of devotion to my country". This was a rather questionable justification, and showed a residual Machiavellism, that later will disappear from his political theory and practice. But at this point Croce made some observations which warrant some historical considerations. In his letter to Ambrosini Croce argued: "To vote against meant to ask for an immediate crisis, to determine a conflict between Parliament and the government; it meant to excite the country: and which were the forces ready for this struggle? Political situations cannot be improvised". (33)

This political observation and this historical evaluation by Croce about the effectual reality in the summer of 1924 has been often ignored, and seldom mentioned by historians. After the last war, many historians believed

that during the Matteotti crisis a victory of the Aventine and a defeat of fascism was possible, but for the mistakes of the opposition. Some blamed the defeat of the democratic forces on the fears of the Liberals and their distrust of the masses. Against the pusillanimity of the Liberals and the velleity of the Socialists, especially Marxist historians praised the wisdom of Gramsci, and his proposal of a general strike as the necessary condition for a popular insurrection against fascism.

Recently that historical position has changed, and a more objective evaluation has emerged. A contribution to a better understanding of the events of 1924 was provided by the book of memoirs, published in 1975 by Giorgio Amendola, the elder son of Giovanni Amendola, in his youth and in his maturity, a formidable leader of the Italian Communist Party. Unlike the Marxist historians, the communist leader remembered a different political situation. "My personal memories show how false is the representation, often given, of fascism already defeated in 1924, and surviving only on account of the inertia of the anti-fascists, afraid of the struggle of the masses". At the end Amendola Junior offered an historical assessment more consonant with the reality of the times. "The masses, in reality, were not available in that situation for a fight necessarily difficult, and in a period of growing economic expansion". (34)

In 1981 Giorgio Candeloro, a Gramscian intellectual, author of one of the best general histories of modern Italy, agreed with the evaluation offered by Giorgio Amendola: "On the whole, despite the great indignation created by the murder of Matteotti, the situation was not favourable for a mass action". For Candeloro, the reason was quite simple; in the summer of 1924, he wrote, "none of the anti-fascist political parties was politically and organizationally prepared to undertake an action of force". While the situation was different for Mussolini, as Candeloro pointed out: "The menace of the fascist squads and the police repression were still pressing; the violence had not abated or decreased, the force of fascism was still intact and persistent". (35)

In reality in 1924, inside parliament and in the country the opposition was weaker, and fascism was stronger than in 1922. The political forces necessary for a change of direction and a new majority were not available. The three socialist parties were divided, and fighting against each other for the purity of the doctrine. The Popolari had lost the support of the Vatican, and were weakened by internal dissension, and by the forced resignation and exile of Sturzo. The liberals were in disarray; Amendola chose to lead the Aventine Succession, Giolitti remained in Parliament, Salandra supported the government. On the other

side, despite the first disarray and the apparent difficulties, the position of fascism remained solid. In the House, even after the Aventine Secession, some defections and an attempt of Fronde by nationalist members, fascism still controlled a majority of the seats. More important the party had continued to grow in the country and had become a truly national mass party. The fascist squads were still in existence, and were ready and eager for action. Mussolini controlled the powers of the State, and was not willing to abandon power without a struggle, and had kept the party in a fighting mood. Only the direct intervention of the King could have changed the situation, and only the unity of the opposition could have compelled the monarch to intervene, and to employ the Army, if necessary. But the opposition failed to achieve unity and the liberal leaders and the Monarch failed to rise to the occasion, to seize the opportunities and to discharge the responsibility of their office.

The Beginning of the Opposition.

Croce's political evolution against fascism and Mussolini continued during the summer months of 1924. For this new attitude there is ample evidence in the letters, which Croce wrote to Alessandro Casati, the new Minister of Education in the second cabinet of Mussolini. To him, Croce complained about Gentile's actions, protested the illegal

dismissal of civil servants, and showed annoyance against Mussolini, when the Duce claimed that his government remained fascist despite the presence in the new cabinet of four Liberal ministers. The letters to Casati during July and August show that Croce was becoming more and more disillusioned with fascism, with Mussolini, and with Gentile. He remained confident and hopeful that the presence of the liberals and especially of Casati in the government would avoid further dangers.

After Gentile became president of a constitutional commission to elaborate new laws for the reformation of the State, in a letter to Casati in July, Croce criticized Gentile for his recent profession of fascist faith.

"Meanwhile, it seems to me that Gentile would do well to put a gag on himself and on his pupils. What are all these declarations of his, which are making the rounds of the newspapers, that he has resigned as minister because fascism was threatening to abandon its intransigence? That he is the philosopher of fascism? That he is going to elaborate and bring to perfection the principles of fascism?" (36)

In August Croce warned Casati about the dangers of the new laws and possible constitutional changes, which the fascists were proposing. "I would like to discuss with you the political situation; and I would like to recommend to

you that you be wary of constitutional reforms based on syndicalism. They tend to weaken the ethico-political forces of the country, to concentrate the debate on the economic interests of various classes and groups, and make the State the prey of a coterie, a faction, or a despot. Principiis obstat. So it seems to me. And you Liberals cannot allow to be changed that which is the moral foundation of liberalism". (37)

In the same month Croce complained about the fact that teachers were being fired for political reasons, and were denied the right to appeal and the opportunity to defend themselves from government accusations. "You know that I regard these acts as hateful: hateful and impolitic, as were those under the Austrians and of the Bourbons". In this letter Croce, using irony, again contrasted fascism with the ideals of the Risorgimento. "But perhaps the fault is mine, because I know a history of the Risorgimento different than the one written by fascist historians". (38)

In September Croce praised Casati for his "beneficial work" inside the government, and advised him to press for the withdrawal of the decree that gave government power to curtail freedom of the press. That decree had been issued by an order in council, had been shelved after a protest by Salandra, but was still on the books, ready to be used at

the next opportunity. In July the National Press Council had asked for its abolition. Croce agreed with that request and wrote to his friend: "Think about my advice on the press decree: hateful and useless. To keep it is only a caprice. Take advantage of a moment of calm and let's abolish it". (39)

In the same letter there was a sad confession of uneasiness about the political situation of Italy. The same feeling of "depression and discomfort" was expressed in the diaries during the summer of 1924, especially after reading the news in the papers or after meetings with Ruffini and Giolitti, who probably expressed similar fears, increasing Croce's worries and further depressing his spirit. (40) It was evident that Croce, like his other liberal friends relied on the presence of Casati for the protection of freedom and for a course of moderation in government policy. When Croce heard that Casati might resign from the government, he immediately sent a letter of discouragement. "I have read in the papers the possibility of your and Sarocchi's resignation ... Quod Deus averruncted". (41)

Croce's political evolution was in harmony with the position of other liberals and was parallel with the changed attitude of the Italian Liberal Party. At the national congress in October 1924, the majority of the party rejected a motion of unconditional support of the

government, reaffirmed instead the classical principles of liberalism and invited the government to return to normal and constitutional ways. Unhappy with this motion, the filo-government minority left the party, formed its own movement and later joined the Fascist Party. (42) In this period Croce's relations with his liberal friends, critical of fascism and unhappy with Mussolini became closer and he had more frequent meetings with them, while his friendship with Gentile became strained and less intimate.

The Defense of Gobetti.

A sign of this new orientation was the support that in September Croce offered Piero Gobetti, the young and energetic editor of the anti-fascist periodical, Rivoluzione Liberale. Commenting on the many schemes, devised or dreamed in those days, Gobetti, with an unfortunate sequence of words, open to a double interpretation, qualified as "moral abortions" the proposals of national pacifications, associated with the name of Carlo Del Croix, a moderate nationalist member of parliament, a war hero, who had lost both his eyes and his arms in action. In the overwrought emotions of the time, transferring Gobetti's criticism from the proposals to the man, the fascist press organized a campaign of denigration against Gobetti, accusing him of having offended a national hero. In vain Gobetti protested his innocence, and his

respect for Del Croix, regretting the misunderstanding. Not all the friends of Gobetti, when invited, agreed to appear before the special jury that had been convened, or to defend publicly his good name. Some, like Amendola agreed with the fascist interpretation, and invited him to write with more precision and to avoid personal insults when dealing with national politics. Others, Nello Rosselli among them, refused to intervene, not for personal fear, but for not wanting to increase the damage already done to the opposition, or to avoid new pretexts for more fascist violence, always a possibility in those days and at the least provocation.

Croce's reaction was completely different; asked by Gobetti, he immediately wrote a letter of reference to be used as Gobetti pleased. Not only did Croce offer a favourable interpretation of the text in question, excluding any personal criticisms, but then he put his own personal reputation on the line, claiming that in a recent meeting in Turin Gobetti had expressed great respect for Del Croix and his political proposals. Croce's solidarity towards Gobetti was more significant when one remembers that at that time Gobetti, with his usual energy, was organizing in the major urban centres anti-fascist groups, using his periodical as a link of coordination, to better fight his political battle against fascism. For his

political activities and constant criticism, Gobetti had gained Mussolini's hostility, and already had been a victim of fascist violence. The jury accepted Croce's literary interpretation, but when the verdict came, Gobetti again had suffered another aggression, that greatly undermined his health. (43)

The Break with Gentile.

But in 1924 the most important manifestation of Croce's changed political orientation was the breakup of his friendship with Giovanni Gentile. After Gentile heard from Casati that Croce wanted to break their friendship, because he had become dissatisfied with him, "and unhappy for moral reasons", he asked Croce for a note of clarification, and for "two clear words, whatever they are going to be, but which come from the bottom of your heart". (44) The day after, on October 24th, 1924, Croce wrote back to Gentile what was going to be their last letter after almost thirty years of friendship. The calm tone of the words hid the gulf now separating the two old friends and their different political orientation. "To be sure, Croce wrote, for many years we have been in a philosophical disagreement, which was not such as to have a bearing on our personal relations. But now to that, has been added another one of a practical and political nature, nay, the first has been converted into the second, and this is more serious. There

is nothing we can do. The logic of the situation has to develop through the individuals and despite the individuals". (45)

So ended, on a sad note, destroyed by fascism, a fraternal friendship and an intellectual collaboration, which had lasted for more than twenty years and had been beneficial to Italian culture. Together Croce and Gentile had brought a new vigour to Italian philosophy and given new directions to literary and historical studies. United in common battles, however, since the beginning they had shown different intellectual personalities and had taken different approaches to philosophy and politics. But until then philosophical disagreement and political difference had never affected their personal relations and their reciprocal affection. But in 1923 under the strain of political events, the friendship began to deteriorate. In June of that year Gentile became a member of the Fascist Party; Croce was surprised by the sudden decision and by the lack of prior consultation "with a trusted friend about such a grave decision". Little of these political differences appear in their correspondence, and probably remained confined to private conversations. But by 1924 the disagreements must have become known and even discussed among their common friends, as is revealed in a letter of Giustino Fortunato in February: "Croce has not been well

disposed toward Gentile lately, and it has not been for some time and for various reasons;..." . (46)

In the crisis generated by the murder of Matteotti, the political differences between Croce and Gentile became more evident and more public. For Croce the government had to follow a policy of moderation, had to make possible a return to constitutional rule, and had to undertake a restoration of liberal practices. For Gentile the only moral question was "to save Italy", and the only duty of a true liberal was to give his support to Mussolini, to strengthen Fascism, to avoid any compromise with subversive forces, and to prevent a return to the corruption and confusion of the past. Committed to this programme Gentile refused to change course and rejected all the appeals made by some of his closest friends, urging him to break his ties with Mussolini and with fascism and to resume his independence. (47) Croce too must have given the same advice and made the same appeals. In the letter written in 1925, addressed to an unknown reader, Croce criticized Gentile for making in these months following the Matteotti murder, "a profession of fascist radicalism and extremism", for becoming "head of a commission to change the Italian liberal statute in a reactionary way", and for supporting the radicalism of Farinacci and his stand against moderation. (48)

Croce broke his friendship and his relations with Gentile, when Gentile became the philosopher of the regime, and put his philosophy and his intellect at the service of fascism, becoming guilty of a double treason. In the diaries of 1944, at the news of Gentile's tragic death, Croce wrote: "I broke my relation with him because of his adhesion to fascism, made worse by the contamination of philosophy with it". That contamination was particularly offensive to Croce, as he had confessed in a letter to Casati in October 1924: "Above all it offends me that the white robe, with which in my eyes philosophy goes dressed, love of my youthful years, has become a mop for the kitchen of fascism and for any kind of policy". In Croce's eyes, Gentile deserved reprobation for many things that he had done or written, but, as he said in his letter of 1925, nothing was comparable "to the betrayal of the cause of Italian freedom, and to the cause of the dignity of science". (49)

The personal and political break between Croce and Gentile was another sign, in many aspects the most significant, that after the Matteotti Affair, fascism and Mussolini were splitting Italian culture asunder; it was then that in Italy the moral divide was created between fascism and anti-fascism. More or less at the same time of his break with Gentile, and for the same reasons Croce

refused to become a member of the Italian Academy, that was formally launched in 1929 but was set in motion in 1924. The new institution was modeled on the French Academy, and was inspired by the same national reasons of prestige. Croce was invited by Mussolini through "a high officer of an heraldic institute", and was promised the first place among the Immortals. But Croce rejected such an honour with an eloquent, if not too elegant, old Neapolitan folk saying. (50) Others took a different course, however. Bitter with the behaviour of the opposition and critical of the democratic ideology, blamed for all the troubles of Italy, Luigi Pirandello, the great playwright and future winner of a Nobel prize, in the fall of 1924 joined the Fascist Party and expressed admiration for the personality of Mussolini.

Philosophical and Political Evolution.

The break with Gentile was the result not only of a different political orientation, but also the manifestation of a deep philosophical conflict. In 1924 as in 1923 there was an evolution in Croce's philosophical system. Under the impact of political events, and under the challenge of Gentile, Croce felt compelled to offer a clarification of his political concepts, and to express a new formulation of his theory of historiography. Expressions of this evolution and new position were the political and historical essays,

written in 1924, first published in his periodical La Critica, reprinted in newspapers, the same year, and later collected in his books Elementi di Politica and Storia dell'Eta' Barocca in Italia, which appeared in 1925 and 1929 respectively. (51)

In political thought, Croce reasserted the theory that politics was force and utility, but at the same time he introduced a new relation, in his system of distinctions, between politics and morality. Before the war he had affirmed the autonomy of political action, now, confronted by new and violent ideologies, which gave ethical value to the sanctions of the State, he stressed the superiority of morality, even in the political realm. The first occasion for a clarification came when Federico Chabod published a new edition of The Prince by Machiavelli. In a review of the book Croce noted that even in politics the force or the virtue of Machiavelli's Prince "represents an aspect necessary and eternal, but only one aspect of the totality and integrity of man". From then on, force was dethroned from its former position, and morality became the hegemonic element even in politics, necessary to achieve a consensus and a lasting success. For Croce, the ideal politician was no longer "The Prince", endowed with virtue, but the "vir bonus agendi peritus". (52)

In these new writings Croce continued his old polemics

against democratic and socialist political conceptions, still regarding their concepts of justice and equality as abstract and anti-historical. But now the centre of his interest moved against the authoritarian conceptions of the right, and his criticism was directed against this new and more dangerous enemy of the liberal state. For Gentile the State was the supreme incarnation of the morality, and for him the moral life of the citizen coincided with the morality of the State. Croce refused to elevate the State or any other political institution to a moral category, or to a philosophical idea. For him the State coincided with the governing group, and expressed only "a process of useful actions by a group of individuals", as such indistinguishable from other actions by other groups. The State was only an elementary and narrow form of political life, which could not contain the full richness of human life. Beside and sometimes against the life of the State, for Croce, there was always the life of the "anti-state", the "church", "society", and above all "history" with all its infinite creations. "This embraces in itself the men of the government and the men of the opposition, the conservatives and the revolutionaries, and these more than the others, because more than the others they open the ways of the future, and cause the progress of human societies".

Already we have seen that Croce's concept of patriotism had acquired an ethical connotation in contrast with the naturalistic elements of the nationalist conception, now as a result of this new and larger vision of political life, the concept of the ruling class also changed and became less exclusive. For Croce, the ruling class was now a moral formation, a confluence of individuals without economic ties, but animated by common ideals and values; it included the government and the opposition; it constituted an ideal middle class, sitting at the centre, and fighting against both the extremism of the right and of the left. The democratic aspirations of the masses were no longer rejected as utopian but regarded as an essential stimulus to political life and as a continuous renovation of the ruling class itself. (54)

Croce's political and philosophical evolution was also evident in his historical works. The History of the Kingdom of Naples was the first expression of his new theory of historiography, in which moral and intellectual ideals acquired preeminence over economic and practical forces. The other major historical work of this period was The History of the Baroque Age in Italy. This book was published in 1929, but the essays that make up the volume were written in 1924, and in 1925, and appeared at regular intervals in the periodical La Critica, from 1924 to 1928.

(55) Of particular importance, to better understand Croce's political feelings in 1924, was the opening chapter of the book, where Croce dealt with the Counter-Reformation, as it appeared in the periodical before it was revised for final inclusion in the book. The last section of this chapter reflected ideas and feelings of the present and made a comparison between the present and the past. The reference of the present to the past not only was evident but had a passionate note, strident with an historical judgment, which explains why the section was omitted later. This little literary incident also showed that without the events of 1923 and 1924, and the new meditations on politics and history, The History of the Baroque Age in Italy would have been a history of literature without reference to religious life. But the inspiration of an ethico-political history enabled Croce to see better the nature of the Counter-Reformation, and its relation with the Reformation and the Renaissance.

For Croce the Renaissance and the Reformation were two ideal categories of the Spirit, the symbols of the eternal contrast between the city of God and the city of man, reflecting the religious and the profane aspirations of man. In history both were positive, incarnating two different moments of human life; the supremacy did not belong to one against the other. The Counter-Reformation,

on the other hand, was not an ideal category, it was only the defence of an historical institution, and could only be regarded as the symbol of a conservative action, of political ability, of discipline and obedience. As a simple defence of an historical institution the Counter-Reformation lacked moral energy, and creative force, which were present in the Renaissance and the Reformation. This negative judgment needed to be stressed again, Croce concluded, especially now "when from members of the dominant party are heard frequent invocations to the Counter-Reformation, and instigations and intentions to return Italy to the standards of life, which were proper in the age". For Croce the appeal to the Counter-Reformation was another sign of bad literature, and decadent mentality, worthy to be condemned. Those who were proposing a return to the ideals of that age showed not only their conservative inclination, but also their "decadentism" and "muddy aspirations", typical of "crude minds" and "turbid souls" full of bad literature but empty of sane political concepts. (56)

In an earlier book review, Croce had expressed the same disapproval against those Italians of his days, who "for the new greatness of Italy", "for an imperial Italy" were invoking, like Machiavelli, a new Prince, and were asking for "a return to the discipline and the hierarchy of the

Counter-Reformation and of absolute Kings". Croce reminded these Italians longing for the past and proposing a new course for Italy that "the good and solid policy creates the new, but a new which is richer and more comprehensive, not poorer and more narrow than the pre-existing reality".

(57) Evidently the ideas preached by the nationalist writers left something to be desired when compared with the ideals that had inspired the Italians of the Risorgimento and liberal Italy.

End of Benevolence.

All these critical expressions against ideas and "members of the dominant party" showed that Croce's political benevolence towards Mussolini and fascism had come to an end. The war and the events, which followed the war, forced Croce to clarify or to elaborate anew some of the fundamental concepts of his philosophical system, involving especially the nature of politics and the meaning of history. From 1922 to 1924 expression of his ideal evolution were his political and historical essays. The essays and the books did not defend the policies of fascism, nor did they approve its ideology, but offered a deeper and, in some cases, a new elaboration of the concepts of freedom and morality, and their relation with the other forms of the Spirit. These books, and the ideas they expressed, have to be regarded rather as a

continuation of Croce's intellectual programme, which he had proposed to himself as his mission in 1912: "To continue the work for the formation of an Italian modern conscience, neither socialist nor imperialist, nor decadent, which may recreate that of the Italian Risorgimento". (58)

Croce's intellectual evolution that the essays made manifest was followed by a new political position. As Gobetti recognized in 1925: "After the murder of Matteotti one of the most important facts of Italian politics is the passage of Croce to anti-fascism". Gobetti's opinion found confirmation in Croce's memoirs of 1950. "In the second half of 1924, he wrote, after a series of fallacious promises and vain hopes in the restoration of freedom, I moved openly to opposition". (59)

The newspaper interview of July 1924, the letters to Casati after that date, the break with Gentile in October showed that the benevolent expectations of Croce toward fascism and Mussolini had lasted for less than two years, with all the limitations that have been noticed. The best judgment on that period of his life came from Croce himself, and can be found in a letter which he wrote to Gioacchino Volpe in 1927. Volpe, one of the best modern Italian historians, had been a friend of Croce, and, during the regime, became, with Gentile, one of the most important

intellectuals of fascism, displaying a first class organizing ability in cultural affairs. "I have seen, Croce wrote, an article in which you have written that I had flirted with fascism. You know that this is not true, that I never caressed, flattered or in any way ever offered myself to fascism, and always refused the advances made to me. I have for a short time hoped and believed that fascism would not deviate substantially from the liberal way of Italy". (60)

On other occasions, as has been noted, Croce had qualified what "he hoped and believed" during that "short time", as dominated by "an easy optimism" and "lack of political wisdom". Against the traditional criticism, it is not difficult to accept those conclusions and the blame that they imply, but also with the candour that they reveal.

Chapter 5: The Anti-fascist Manifesto, 1925

On January 3rd, 1925 the crisis, that had begun with the murder of Matteotti ended. With the speech of Mussolini to Parliament that day, the illusions of the liberal leaders were shattered and their hopes crashed down in ruins. With a bold move, Mussolini overcame his previous vacillations, put aside his promises of reconciliation, imposed a radical solution, and achieved complete victory without facing challenge or meeting resistance, to the dismay and surprise of his adversaries. He took advantage of the divisions among the opposition parties; he exploited the fears of the traditional forces; and with the spectre of a civil war was able to neutralize the King and the Army. The coalition government came to an end and assumed the character of a truly fascist one. Alfredo Rocco took over as Minister of Justice, and used his formidable legal talents for the destruction of the liberal State and the constitution of a fascist regime.

From January 1925, the creation of the new authoritarian State, and the establishment of the personal dictatorship of Mussolini began. In the new situation many gave up the fight, and retired from public life in fright or in disillusionment; others abandoned their pasts, joined the growing crowd and applauded the victorious faction. Benedetto Croce was not one of them. He was perturbed by

the new events, but not cowed by the new masters.

Immediately, he showed a fighting attitude, and assumed a public opposition against fascism, both in the political field and in cultural matters. When "the true and criminal nature" of fascism became clear, Croce abandoned "any restraint" and entered "into a continuous and resolute opposition." (1) In 1925 he wrote the Manifesto of the anti-fascist intellectuals. He joined the Liberal Party and participated in its executive meetings and national councils. He used the newspapers to express his views and to criticize the policies of the government. In the Senate he voted against all the bills that destroyed the liberal State and created the fascist regime. He also refused any collaboration with the new cultural organizations created by the government, and broke personal relations with old friends who became supporters of the regime. His resistance was not passive but active and not without risk and danger to him and to his family.

A sign of this fighting mood and changed attitude are the letters which Croce wrote to Casati in 1925. In their correspondence during the second half of 1924 Croce's disillusionment with Gentile and his concerns with government policies were evident. Now the illusions disappeared, and his condemnations were immediate and without equivocation. In a letter of January 4th, after

Mussolini's speech, Croce wrote: "I do not know whether or not you are still a minister, I cannot wish that you stay on, in this moment so shameful for Italian life." After Casati resigned from the government, as a protest against the new political course, Croce wrote to him again expressing his approval: "I am glad that you are out of that company." (2) Luigi Russo, who was with Croce in Naples in those days, noted Croce's "dreadful despair" at the news of Mussolini's new policy, and the changed attitude from "the previous illusion" to "bold anti-fascism", and Croce's refusal to accept the new situation with passivity or with resignation: "It is impossible to think that from today Italy is without freedom." (3)

Member of the Liberal Party.

In the first months of 1925 Croce increased his participation in political activities. For the first time he became a member of a political party, and joined the Italian Liberal Party, which then, a little too late, was making efforts to overcome the divisions among the old leaders and to achieve a more modern organization in the country. Croce's decision came as a result of trips to Milan and Turin and discussions there with other political leaders, who also joined the Party at the same time. Croce's participation in the activities of the Party has to

be regarded as an exceptional contribution to the political life of the nation, motivated by the same reasons that compelled him to accept Giolitti's invitation to join the cabinet. Aware of the gravity of the situation, with his increased political involvement, Croce tried to make a contribution to the defence of liberal institutions and to avoid the ruin of the liberal State. In April 1925 Croce received an official invitation to join the Liberal Party. To the president of the Party he promised to devote time and effort to the liberal cause: "My forces are modest ... But whatever they are, I put them at the disposal of the Party." (4)

Four days later, Croce made public his decision, and to give it more publicity, he sent a letter to Il Giornale D' Italia, announcing the event. The political reasons for his decision were made evident; the reference to the gravity of the situation was explicit. "In the present moment, I have decided that my duty is to belong to the Liberal Party, even as a modest member." The invitation to kindred spirits to follow his example was also apparent, since he reminded the readers of that paper that in the past he had defended the liberal idea with books, but now was time to defend it also with action. (5)

During 1925 Croce made brief speeches and appearances in favour of the Liberal Party in various Italian cities,

trying to boost its organization and the spirits of the membership. The diaries reflect his increased political participation. Besides the usual titles of books read and essays written, we find notes "of political discussions", or "visits of political friends", taking place either in Naples or during his trips to other cities. In the politically charged atmosphere of the times, even cultural lectures acquired political meaning, and were turned into occasions for expressing support for the leaders of the opposition and for condemning the programme of the government. In March, during a lecture in Milan, Croce received "great applause", and then after the lecture, "a train of admirers" followed him "in Galleria", where he received more applause from the public. The same thing was repeated in Turin and in Bari; after a lecture in these cities, a crowd of friends followed Croce to the houses of his hosts for further discussions. On the other hand, political leaders visited Croce in Naples, and other friends went to his house for political reasons. In June Croce's residence was used for a public meeting, when "politicians and young people" gathered in Palazzo Filomarino "for the constitution of the Neapolitan section of the Italian Liberal Party". This new initiative had become necessary, since the old liberal association was "in the hands of so-called fiancheggiatori" or fascist

supporters. Meetings continued to be held in Croce's house, no doubt to save him time but also to avoid the nuisances devised by the police for those occasions. (6)

During this period Croce participated quite actively in the meetings of the national council and the executive of the Liberal Party. The speeches for these occasions reveal that Croce had become aware of the changed nature and new requirements of Italian politics, after the introduction of universal male suffrage and the advent of mass parties. A brief note in his diaries shows that now Croce realized that even the Liberal Party needed a mass organization, if it wanted to remain as an effective political force; in order to survive, the party could no longer rely only on the presence of strong personalities, or limit its activity solely to well sounding slogans of protest. In a meeting of the executive in May, he urged the party to embark on a new course, increasing the organizational effort, and stepping up opposition in parliament. "I have proposed that, instead of repeating general affirmations, we should think of organizing riding associations, and criticizing the acts of government from the parliamentary tribune". After the Aventine Secession, the opposition in Parliament was greatly weakened, though the small group around Giolitti was still carrying on a spirited fight. (7)

The need for the liberals to possess a stronger

organization, a united leadership and finally a new programme was repeated in a letter to Giolitti, that Croce wrote on behalf of the party's executive, inviting the former premier to the next national council. "We know that the liberal idea is the only one which gives hope for a civil and progressive life to our fatherland. We also know that it must be strengthened, made more efficient and adapted to the times." (8)

But the effort of Croce and others to give the Liberal Party a new structure failed; the party remained divided as before, and without an efficient organization. At least a clarification was achieved. In February 1925, the executive of the party passed a motion against the government. Immediately the conservative liberals, but without Salandra, founded a National Liberal Party and supported the new course of Mussolini, while the Italian Liberal Party, under the leadership of Giolitti in the House and of Ruffini in the Senate, played the role of the opposition in Parliament, while it remained possible. (9)

At the national council of the Liberal Party, in June 1925, Croce delivered one of the best speeches of his political life. The speech revealed the resolution of the politician, and showed the insight of the historian at the same time, but the words acquired the tone of the prophet, who knew that a battle had been lost, and the time had come

to stand firm in order to prepare for the future. To strengthen the faith of the doubtful and to avoid the wavering of the timid, appeals were made to the great spirits of the past. "We, like all those who fight for an ideal, need to repeat the words of Luther before the Diet of Worms: "Here I am. I can not do otherwise. God be with me. Amen!" (10)

Croce reminded his political friends that in the present circumstances the Liberals had to continue in opposition while laying the groundwork for a future alternative. "We do not need to muse on the results of the struggle, and on the probability of the next victory, but we have to maintain our position and fight". (11)

At the same time Croce began to look at fascism with the eyes of the historian, and tried to understand the meaning and the deep reason of "what has happened and is happening in Italy". Croce offered ideas and explanations on the nature of fascism, which he later would elaborate in his historical works . The concept of fascism as a moral illness made one of the first appearances in this speech. On this occasion, as on others, we can see that the concept of fascism as a moral illness is not a vague and empty formulation, as his critics have maintained, but it is rather concrete and specific: it makes references to political forces and cultural ideas, it does not ignore

economic interests, and it includes the greedy demands that characterize modern capitalism and the new imperialism.

(12)

For Croce "the wickedness and the extravagance" which could be blamed on this or that political party "were not sufficient to explain an historical process". He attributed the immediate victory of fascism in Italy to the composition and the divisions of the Italian Parliament, unable to express a coherent majority, but also to the wrong judgment of the Liberals, when they had to deal with fascism. A criticism of the liberal leaders but also of his own position was quite evident here. "All of us know the conditions, not so much social as parliamentary, which produced in Italy the fascist movement, and which convinced all, or at least many of us, to accept it as a crisis, which we hoped beneficial, but as all beneficial crises, temporary". (13)

But for Croce fascism was not a peculiar phenomenon of Italy only; it was an historical problem common to all European nations: the expression of a moral illness and the manifestation of a crisis of modern times. "But we have to keep in mind that the illness and the crisis, and the new illness produced by the crisis, is not something particular to Italy, but it belongs to all European life". (14)

The crisis of values and the illness began before the

war, when the ideals of liberal societies were challenged by new movements. "The Liberal regime was, before the war, in great difficulties, because of the enormous growth of anti-liberal forces, which opposed it: above all because the effect of socialism and of anti-socialism; because of anti-liberal dispositions, which were in the ideals and in the practice of socialism, and because of the new forces of capitalism". (15)

The difficulties of liberal societies were increased by the war, and made sharper by the passions unleashed by the war. After the war new facts and new theories further undermined the institutions of the liberal State, and weakened the moral energy of society, inducing many people "to seek other ways outside the liberal regime" in order to overcome the crisis and find a solution to the chaos. The attempt was successful in Italy, "but had been tried and proved more or less and in a fragmentary manner in all countries ... of Europe". (16)

At the end despite the present difficulties of liberal societies, and despite the claims of the new experiments, Croce wished "a restoration of a true liberal regime". For Croce Liberalism still offered the best political alternative, and the liberal State was still "the system most open, the structure most solid and at the same time most elastic, which the historical experience had created

to moderate social struggles, and to allow a normal development". These expressions make evident that Croce was not advocating a simple return to the past, and that liberalism was becoming for him a meta-political ideal.

(17)

Presence in the Senate.

Croce repeated in private what he said in public. A German scholar was assured that in Italy and in other parts of Europe, a new form of nationalism, different from the old patriotism "with a human and Christian background", "was now celebrating its success". Against this extreme nationalism, full of Nietzschean and decadent literature, that instigated hate among nations, those who had "a European conscience" had to take their position in the rank of the opposition, fighting "with prudence and patience", without the hope of immediate success but sure that "the future did not belong to nationalism". (18)

In May 1925, Croce was named with Gaetano Mosca and Francesco Ruffini the official representative and the spokesman of the Liberal Party in the Senate. Already in April, on his own accord, Croce had asked Casati to enlist him in the Liberal group of the Senate. The correspondence with Casati and the letters to Ruffini reveal that Croce agreed with these friends on his activity and his presence in the Senate. Often Croce went to Rome on a quick call

from his friend to cast his vote against a government bill. In the new political atmosphere, Croce had come to dislike the Senate. When he went there he tried to avoid the old acquaintances; the empty rhetoric of many made him "nervous"; he felt "enervated" by the prevailing servile behaviour. Still he continued to appear in the Senate out of a sense of duty to show political solidarity with his friends: "I have come to make an act of presence, in accordance with the example offered by Giolitti". In the last years of his long life the former premier, as a faithful servant of the State, was often in the Chamber among his few remaining friends, to show that Parliament had to remain the central institution of the Kingdom for the salvation of Italy. (19)

From 1925 to 1929 Croce spoke only twice against government proposals, and rose once on a matter of personal privilege. But he was present at all the crucial moments, sat beside Albertini and Ruffini, sharing with them the sarcasms of the fascists, while they defended the old Statuto and condemned the laws of the new regime. With them and a few others, Croce voted against all "the laws which suppressed freedom of association and of the press, against the special tribunal and the death penalty, and others similar, and against the so called electoral reform, that destroyed the electorate". In 1929 when the Senate debated

the Lateran Pacts, Croce "delivered the only critical speech heard in the Italian Parliament against the Reconciliation and the Concordat with the Church of Rome".

(20)

In February 1925, Croce rose in the Senate on a matter of personal privilege to rebut a statement made by Gentile, and to explain the reasons he had supported the reform of education in 1923. During this brief speech, Croce accused the government of having abandoned the principles that had inspired Gentile's reform. He also accused Gentile of defending government practice against which he had fought in the past, and which were in contradiction to his philosophy. The new Ministry of Education had initiated some substantial changes, which contradicted the spirit of the original reform and which Croce judged deleterious to the good administration of that department. Now university presidents and deans were no longer elected by members of the faculties, but were appointed by the government. Also, faculties, on their own authority, could include or exclude candidates in the competition for filling academic vacancies. It was all part of the authoritarian character given by Rocco to the administration of the State. But, in Croce's opinion, the new methods would open the academic positions "... to arbitrariness, caprices, and injustices". By implication Croce was accusing Gentile of hypocrisy,

preaching union of thought and action, but condoning favouritism and corruption for the love of fascism. (21)

In May 1925 Parliament discussed and approved a new law on the discipline of associations, following the anti-liberal and nationalistic principles of Alfredo Rocco, the new Minister of Justice, and a strong believer in the supreme authority of the State. The law forbade civil servants and military personnel from belonging to secret societies. It required all associations to notify the prefects, or to present on request their statute and their membership lists. The law mortally wounded freedom of association; it offered a powerful tool to police authorities to harass, to curtail or to destroy the activities of any political organization, deemed inimical to the interests of the government in power. Official propaganda, to make the bitter pill more palatable, presented this illiberal law as aimed only against secret associations, and especially against the Masonic Order, always an easy scapegoat in times of difficulties. (22)

During the discussion of the law, fascist writers used Croce's name, quoting from essays that he had written in the past against what he called "Masonic mentality". The aim of the fascists was quite evident; they wanted to associate Croce's ideas with the intentions of the law, invoking his authority to justify their policy. With a note

to the Neapolitan newspaper, Il Mattino, Croce clarified his position, and stressed the difference between his former intentions and the present aim of the government. He reminded the readers of the paper that he had criticized the Masonic mentality "in the name of the liberal spirit, which loves the light of the sun, and is repugnant to secret and clandestine sects". With his writings he had fought for "a more profound culture", while the fascists with "the methods of the present struggle", now wanted only "to inflict damage on the political opposition of the regime". At the end, the occasion offered Croce the opportunity to criticize the whole construction of the new regime and the new ideas behind that construction, and to defend liberal ideals. "The polemic, that I and other men of good will waged, was not aimed at substituting a masonic order with another masonic order, the triangle with the fascio, the scratching of the hand with the theatrical Roman salute, but at removing superficial and simplistic conceptions, and at contrasting the powers of the sects and factions, of all the sects and factions, in the social and political life of Italy." (23)

In November Tito Zaniboni, despite his military training, utterly botched an attempt against the life of Mussolini. Betrayed by a police spy, he was arrested before he could even load his gun. With the excuse that Zaniboni

was a member of the Masonic Order and a member of Parliament for the Unitary Socialist Party, both the Masonic Order and the PSU were summarily dissolved, while acts of vandalism and violence were perpetrated against known anti-fascists and members of the Masonic Order. In this charged atmosphere, the law on the associations came before the Senate for discussion, and the final vote. Not cowed by threats and violence, the liberal senators spoke against the law. Croce repeated the arguments he had used in the newspaper. He stressed the difference between his past cultural intentions and the aim of the government in the present, "when public liberties were greatly disturbed", and the fascists were "proclaiming with ferocious joy the destruction of the liberal system". While fascists rejoiced, the law, Croce wrote in the diaries, gave him "great sadness" (24)

The Anti-Fascist Manifesto.

In the cultural and political field Croce's major and the most famous activity in 1925 was the "Protest against the Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals". In a meeting in Bologna of all the fascist cultural organizations, at the beginning of April, Gentile had written a "Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals to the Intellectuals of all Nations", which had then been signed by the major intellectuals of fascism. Later the two essays

have become known as "The Anti-Fascist Manifesto" and "The Fascist Manifesto", or are even referred to as "Croce's Manifesto" and "Gentile's Manifesto". (25)

The request to write a protest against the manifesto of Gentile came to Croce from Amendola, but the immediate dislike felt by Croce against the ideas expressed by Gentile found expression in two letters, which he wrote to Gioacchino Volpe and to Casati, refusing his collaboration in the Italian Encyclopedia, then in the organizational stage, under the direction of Gentile. In a third letter, written to Giuseppe Lombardo Radice on April 1st, 1925, Croce's resentment towards Gentile was even more evident. Lombardo Radice was a common friend, familiar with their philosophies and political differences. Croce reminded him that Gentile's pronouncement in Bologna had created a new astonishment. "Have you seen where we have arrived? No more truth, morality, art, culture; but it is fascism that has to create a fascist truth, a fascist moral, a fascist culture". These reservations and condemnations against Gentile's political and cultural positions explain Croce's prompt acceptance of Amendola's proposal, and reveal the animus with which he wrote the protest. (26)

Croce's protest was a rejection of Gentile's philosophy, a criticism of fascism, and a defence of the Risorgimento. Gentile had claimed that fascism had realized the unity of

the intellectual and of the citizen. Croce, in agreement with his philosophy, made instead a clear distinction between the duties of citizens, and the responsibilities of intellectuals as men of culture. "Truly, if intellectuals, that is lovers of science and art, as citizens, exercise their right and fulfill their duty with membership in a political party and faithfully serve it; as intellectuals they have only one duty, with the work of investigation and criticism and with the creation of art, to devote themselves to elevate equally all men and all parties to a higher spiritual sphere, so that these can fight their necessary battles with ever more beneficial effects". (27)

For Croce the contamination of these separate spheres already had produced great damage in the life of the nation. For that reason, intellectuals should not confuse their political activities and their intellectual efforts; they had to keep separate their civil passions and their artistic inspirations. "To cross these limits of the office assigned to them, to contaminate politics and literature, politics and science is an error". Especially, in the present circumstances, when such a mistake and such a confusion meant "to support deplorable violence and insolence and the suppression of freedom of the press..." (28)

Gentile claimed that fascism had given to the Italians a

new religion, and united them in a common faith. For Croce, instead, fascism had created only hatred among Italians, and divisions that created hatred. "To give the name of religion to hatred and rancour, kindled by a party, which denies to the members of other parties the name of Italian, and regards them as foreigners, . . . , to confer the nobility of religion to the suspicion and to the animosity spread everywhere... is an assertion that sounds, to say the truth, as a lugubrious jest". (29)

For Gentile fascism had created a new unity of thought and action, and given coherence to the political life of the nation. Croce showed that the very action of government negated that claim, appealing, and embracing, as it did, different ideas, and thus able only to create confusion and contradiction. "On the other hand, the reality, in its mute eloquence, shows to the impartial observer an incoherent and bizarre mixture of appeals to authority and to demagoguery, of professed reverence for the laws and of violation of the laws, of ultra-modern concepts and musty old trash, old regime attitude and bolshevik dispositions, irreverence and courting of the Catholic Church, abhorrence of culture and sterile attempts at producing a new one, languid sentiments and cynicism". (30)

Against the new religion proposed by Gentile and the demagoguery and the medley practiced by fascism, Croce

reaffirmed his faith in the ideals of liberalism and in the tradition of the Italian Risorgimento. "For this chaotic and unseizable "religion" we do not feel that we can abandon our old faith: the faith that for two centuries and one half has been the spirit of Italy in her resurrection, the faith of modern Italy: that faith which was composed of love and truth, aspiration to justice, generous and human civic sense, intellectual and moral zeal for education, solicitude for freedom: strength and support for every progress". (31)

Gentile affirmed that fascism was the heir of the Risorgimento; Croce denied that fascism had any ties with the tradition of the Italian Risorgimento. "We turn our eyes towards the images of the men of the Risorgimento, of those who worked, suffered and died, and we seem to see them offended and disturbed by words pronounced and by deeds done by our present adversaries, and gravely warning us, so that we continue to keep their flag strong in our hands". (32)

Gentile accused the liberal State of agnosticism and called the modern Italian state, as it had emerged after 1875, a degeneration of the ideals of the Destra Storica, dominated by a minority foreign to the majority of citizens. As he would do later in History of Italy, Croce defended the policies and achievements of liberal Italy,

especially the attempt to bridge the gap between the minority and the majority. "The liberals were not pleased with that situation, and always tried with all their power to involve more Italians in political life". But unlike fascism today, the liberals never tried to deny freedom to Italians, and to return political life to the times of absolutism, and of the ancien regime. "But it never was in their thoughts to maintain the majority of the nation in passivity and indifference, satisfying only a few material needs, because they knew that in this way they would have betrayed the reasons of the Italian Risorgimento, and would have returned to the bad arts of the old and absolutist regimes". (33)

At the end of the Protest, the passion of the politician seems to have anticipated the judgment of the future historian, expressing what has to be regarded the main heritage of anti-fascism: a new and deeper love of freedom. "The present political struggle in Italy will be able to revive the value of liberal ideals and institutions, and to make them better understood in a more profound and concrete way and will be able to make them loved with a more conscious devotion." Croce's belief in the positivity of history becomes evident at the end. "Perhaps one day, looking back to the past with serenity, the test which we are now sustaining, hard and painful to ourselves, will be

regarded as a stage that Italy had to go through in order to give new vigour to her national life, to complete her political education, to feel in a more severe manner her duties as a civilized people". (34)

The publication of Croce's Manifesto had great success and created quite a stir in Italian cultural and political circles. It was first published by Amendola's paper, Il Mondo, and was then immediately reproduced by all the major Italian newspapers, and debated in all papers, liberal or fascist. Croce himself helped the publicity with a note to a Neapolitan newspaper, timely placed a few days before the actual public release of the document. To help readers reach a better understanding of the nature of the protest, to place that document in the proper cultural context and to assure it a political meaning, Croce in that note reminded all of his earlier polemics with Gentile and called attention to his recent membership in the Liberal Party.

Croce's Manifesto became the occasion to organize a public protest against the incipient regime. In each major city literary personalities, alone or in groups, organized the collection of signatures in support of the document. Luigi Albertini in Milan, Salvemini in Florence worked to assure the success of the occasion. At the end Croce's Manifesto was signed by the best writers of Italian

culture, belonging to most parties, liberal, democratic or socialist, friends or adversaries of Croce. It was no longer a protest, it had become a census of anti-fascist intellectuals. (35)

Reactions of Gentile and Mussolini.

The success of Croce's Manifesto greatly annoyed Mussolini, and was deeply resented by Gentile. Those who signed were blacklisted, and later were harassed or discriminated against in their careers or promotions. Their signatures were never forgotten, even when, in some cases they repudiated their adhesion. The Manifesto of Gentile was completely overshadowed by the Protest of Croce. The product of a committee, Gentile's Manifesto lacked the coherence, the literary finesse, and the pathos of Croce's. Written to prove that fascism cared about culture, and to rebut the accusation that fascism was a barbarian movement, it failed in its intent, and was not able to dispel the accusation, leaving historians still debating whether fascism produced a culture or remained only a political movement based on violence.

With the writing of the protest, Croce "si mise allo sbaraglio", put himself in jeopardy, in Salvemini's happy expression. After the publication of the Protest, attacks on Croce by fascist newspapers increased in frequency and in virulence. They criticized Croce's political position,

or ridiculed his statements, some even blamed him for the misfortunes of Italy, past or present. The futurists and the radicals of Farinacci were the most violent, while others, Gentile among them, more charitably, claimed that Croce's philosophy, in its deepest sense, made him "a fascist without a black shirt", and his opposition to fascism was the result of a personal pique or the outcome of a difficult character. It was evident that Gentile deeply resented Croce's Protest against his own Manifesto. He referred to it always with a certain disdain and open scorn. Even in the late twenties and thirties he mentioned it with a tone of deep anger, in the process revealing a personal wound, deep and still bleeding. (36)

Annoyed by the success of Croce's Manifesto, and by the resonance of his public positions, Mussolini, too, joined the crowd of Croce's detractors. At the national congress of the fascist party, in June 1925, for his own political purpose, to distance himself from the moderate wing of fascism, he declared, to thunderous applause, that he had "never read a single page of Croce's publications". It was a boutade typical of the man, but Mussolini unwittingly offered Croce the opportunity to send to the Il Giornale D'Italia an amusing letter, which gave him an easy and small victory, soon making the rounds throughout Italy, and providing momentary relief to the hard pressed adversaries

of fascism. Croce reminded Mussolini that it was always better to know the opinions of adversaries, otherwise one could incur curious accidents. With tongue in cheek, Croce went on to show that "the professed and complete abstinence from the effects of my works... could not keep even Mussolini immune from my judgments on literary things". He then clinched his argument and closed his trap. "Here I have in front of me a beautiful edition of The Betrothed, published by the fascist Father Pistelli, and I read on the front page of the volume three epigraphs on Manzoni: one by Goethe, another by Verdi, and the third by the Honourable Mussolini. But that of Mussolini has been taken literally from one of my own writings on Manzoni". Immediately the case became a popular news item, and other writers joined the fray, in defence of Mussolini. (37)

One should not read too much into this incident, and certainly one should not come to the conclusion that Mussolini was a man of little culture, as claimed then or later. Mussolini was not reluctant to use exaggeration when it fitted his purpose. Later to a professor of the University of Naples he claimed the reverse, emphasizing that Croce had been one of his favourite authors, and one of the most important in his intellectual formation. On this occasion Mussolini was only an innocent victim; he put his signature, probably without reading it, to a piece of

paper prepared by a secretary in his office, who was unable to conceal a blatant plagiarism, as Croce, in a letter to Fr. Pistelli, had previously indicated. But the incident revealed that Croce had the courage to poke fun at Mussolini, and was not afraid to incur the resentment of his followers, in a time when people were beaten or punished for much less, and after Mussolini himself, during the congress, had promised a new policy towards the opposition, "more ferocious" than in the past. One has also to remember that Croce was calling attention to Mussolini's personal frailty, when many intellectuals, Gentile among them, were eager to sing paeans to the genius of the Duce, and had begun to call the leader of fascism, "the Man of Providence", long before Pius IX would lend his pontifical imprimatur to the expression.

Soon after that episode, and for more serious reasons, Croce entered into polemics with another fascist leader in a position of power, Franco Ciarlantini, who was a member of Parliament, and responsible for the promotion of Italian culture abroad. In this capacity he was in a position to dispense favours, and for this reason was greatly courted by many writers. Ciarlantini had been one of the organizers of the fascist cultural gathering in Bologna, now in his new capacity as promoter of Italian culture among foreign nations he wrote a piece in a Bologna newspaper, outlining

his ideas and proposals for the creation of a new "Italian spiritual empire", as he put it. Unfortunately for him, his enthusiasm for the job was not equal to his knowledge of Italian history. While he was immediately applauded by the many sycophants in the cultural business, his literary blunders and historical confusion offered Croce another occasion to ridicule a nationalist zealot, and to condemn the oppressive atmosphere created by the new policies of the government.

In an article, published by Il Giornale d'Italia, Croce showed that many of the new "exporters" of Italian culture "were ignorant of Italian traditions", and often confused, "making foreigners laugh", "the Renaissance with the Risorgimento", and the period of Italian decadence with the time of France's hegemony. Passing from the personal to the general, Croce also criticized the atmosphere being created by the fascist regime. If the fascists cared about works of art and poetry, Croce wrote, they should stop celebrating, "violence" and organizing "parades" every day; they should also realize that "bad words" and "noisy events" and "sport activities" were not propitious nor favourable to cultural achievements. (38)

Solidarity with Amendola.

During 1925 the correspondence between Croce and Amendola, the leader of the Aventine, increased, and their

relationship became closer than before, reaching the stage of a warm friendship, mutual respect and political collaboration. In February, Amendola proposed to Croce the creation of "a great committee of opposition made of Senators", inviting him to be "the leader of such an initiative together with other senator friends of ours". The aim of such a senatorial committee would be to help the leaders of the Aventine to fight fascism with more efficiency in Parliament and in the country. As was to be expected, Croce promised his co-operation in the activities of such a committee, but refused to take the initiative or to become its leader. "It is superfluous to say that I would be happy to take part in a committee such as you are proposing, and give to it my contribution. But I do not live in Rome, and moreover I do not have enough familiarity with the present politicians, so I could not take the initiative or the leadership of it". There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Croce's intention. His reluctance to assume positions of political leadership was then well known, and it would reappear again in later years. (39)

In July Amendola asked Croce to be a character witness in favour of Emilio Scaglione, a reporter, who in his periodical, Il Mondo, had accused Giovanni Preziosi of having been involved in political and economic fraud, in order to gain control of a Neapolitan newspaper, until then

fighting the good cause in the anti-fascist camp. In the early months of 1925 the cotton industry of Naples was the subject of a bitter dispute, as the biggest owner tried to reorganize and to downsize his business at the expense of the workers. The fascist leaders of the local trade union movement appealed for help to the Fascist Party in Rome. With the instruction to bring an end to labour turmoil, and to find or to impose a settlement, Roberto Farinacci, the general secretart of the Party, sent to Naples Giovanni Preziosi, then a member of the national executive. A settlement was, indeed, achieved, as a result of Preziosi's efforts and presence: wages were reduced, workers were laid off, and the industrialist was able to report a good profit at the end of the year. Soon after, however, Preziosi became editor of the second most important paper in Naples, Il Mezzogiorno, owned by the same cotton industrialist, and immediately fired all the anti-fascist reporters. By this strange coincidence of events, the anti-fascist cause lost an important support, and Farinacci and his friends gained another ally for their radical policies.

Scaglione, with the help of a rival fascist faction, turned the labour settlement into a political scandal of the first magnitude, with accusations and counter-accusations, with innuendoes on every side, until the matter ended before the courts. Unafraid to walk into

this nest of wasps, or to step on the toes of a vitriolic former priest, Croce accepted Amendola's invitation and appeared before the tribunal to give his support to a courageous reporter harassed by powerful interests. Unable to say anything specific about the case, or to point out concrete evidence against Preziosi's mischief, Croce, in his brief statement, praised instead Scaglione's good reputation, pointing out to the jury that Scaglione was "an idealist" and "a young man of burning faith", who enjoyed "the esteem" of all and those who knew and worked with him. In an indirect way, and not too subtly, Croce was telling the jury that Preziosi could not claim the same reputation, and deserved a different consideration from them than the idealistic young man. (40)

When Amendola, in July, during his vacation in Tuscany, was the victim of a treacherous ambush and was severely beaten by a fascist squad, Croce immediately sent a letter of solidarity, and lamented the event with other friends. In September, from France, where he was recovering, Amendola expressed his resentment against the insults and abuses that the fascist press, instructed from above, was daily hurling against Croce, especially after his criticism of Mr. Ciarlantini's initiatives: "As an Italian, Amendola wrote, I am humiliated, when I read so many vulgarities and such gross banalities against you and your work". (41)

In September 1925, Croce wrote the last letter to Amendola. The letter showed the political strategy that Croce preferred and the political forces he now counted on for the preservation or the re-conquest of Italian freedom. Croce advised Amendola, as he and Giolitti had done before, to return to Parliament, and to fight the battles from inside the House. "I understand the sacrifice of pride which this decision requires; but not all battles are won, and this has been lost; in order to regain strength, we have to accept the accomplished fact. We should not abandon ourselves to feelings of disdain, annoyance, or renunciation. This the strong people do, when they lose a battle or even a war; you should do the same". Croce indicated the political forces that he regarded as necessary for a possible future victory. "In my opinion, there is now the elementary question of freedom, and this should unite in a block all the constitutional parties, from the moderates to the democrats and the reformist socialists". The last sentence demonstrated the evolution of Croce's political position. Liberals were no longer the only vestals of freedom, democrats and social democrats had become their natural allies, essential to the promotion and restoration of freedom. These were going to be the groups with whom Croce maintained close relations during the fascist regime, sharing hopes of a better and different

future. (42)

Amendola refused Croce's suggestion, as he had refused Giolitti's urging before. At the time of this letter, Amendola no longer had the physical strength to undertake any new political initiative. A few months later he died in France, as a direct result of the beatings suffered in July. Croce and Amendola had two different personalities, and were inspired by different philosophies. It was natural that they proposed and followed different ways to oppose Mussolini and to fight against fascism. At this time Croce seems more realistic, and Amendola shows more intransigence. But in reality from their letters and from other writings one feels a sense of pessimism, and at the same time the realization, now that the fight for freedom was lost, that a different duty was incumbent upon them: the duty to testify to their faith, as the only way to prepare the ground for a future resurrection. In the same letter Croce confessed to Amendola: "I can do little, and perhaps nobody can do very much at the present, but that little I shall not stop doing". In conversation with Giolitti, or in letters to Turati, Amendola kept repeating more or less the same thing with insistence: "We have chosen this road now and we shall travel it to the end". A year before, during the Matteotti crisis, the same sense of duty was well expressed in a conversation with Levi Della

Vida: "The only thing that we can do, that we have to do, that we will do is to give witness to our faith". (43)

The Italian Encyclopedia.

In the changed political conditions Croce became closer to leaders of the opposition and often supported their activities. In 1925 he made a large monetary contribution to the Giacomo Matteotti Institute, which had been organized in December 1924 to honour the martyr, and to publish biographies of socialist leaders and trade union activists. At the same time, from the beginning of 1925 Croce refused to have anything to do with the new organizations created by the regime or with the institutions directly under the authority of the government. In October 1925 Croce resigned from the Board of Governors of the University of Naples and from the administrative council of the Fine Arts. The government authorities, on their part, with a pretext, dissolved the administrative council of the libraries and the archives of Naples, of which Croce was president. But the most important fact was Croce's refusal to collaborate in the Italian Encyclopedia, then under organization. (44)

The liberal governments had been rather indifferent to cultural activities, and preferred to leave them to private initiative, or to the enthusiasm of strong personalities. Mussolini and his government showed from the beginning a

new sensibility towards culture and cultural organizations. In 1925, Italy saw the foundation of several academic institutes. But the Italian Encyclopedia was and remained the most significant example of these new creations. (45)

In the intention of Mussolini, the Encyclopedia was part of the creation of the new totalitarian State, and an instrument of fascism to achieve consensus among the cultural elite or to keep the intellectuals within its orbit and its influence. But the Encyclopedia responded also to an old aspiration of the Italian cultural elite. After the war many wanted the creation of a collective work capable of standing beside or even surpassing the Britannica, to show the new maturity of Italian culture, and to shed the old inferiority complex. In this connection collaboration on the Encyclopedia created a moral problem for some anti-fascist intellectuals.

The Encyclopedia was prepared between 1925 and 1929, and was realized between 1929 and 1937 with admirable regularity. The driving force beyond this monumental task was Giovanni Gentile. From the beginning Gentile proclaimed the apolitical character of the Italian Encyclopedia, and he stressed his willingness to call the best scholars in each field without regard to their political affiliations. In his intention the Encyclopedia had to be "the faithful and complete mirror of the scientific culture of Italy".

(46)

Despite a few refusals, Gentile was able to attract and to retain, the collaboration of the major representatives of Italian culture. Many known anti-fascists worked there; liberal, democratic and even socialist scholars enjoyed freedom of expression in their field of expertise. During the realization of that work, Gentile had to defend the integrity of his creation from clerical and political interference. He was often subjected to criticism and personal attack from the radical wing of fascism, which did not want the collaboration of anti-fascists in a fascist enterprise, especially those who had signed Croce's manifesto. But in the end, despite his best intentions, Gentile had to accept a scientific compromise and to pay a political price. Gentile protected the anti-fascist scholars that he had enlisted, but he was compelled to proclaim the fascist nature of the institution, and to stress the fascist spirit animating the work and its realization. (47)

Croce was invited to participate, to be a member of the Board of Directors, and to give his contributions to the Italian Encyclopedia. Unable to invite him directly, after the rupture of their friendship in 1924, Gentile used the offices of their common friend, Alessandro Casati, for the purpose. After the failure of Casati, Gioacchino Volpe, one

of Gentile's right hand men in the Encyclopedia, was asked to issue a more formal invitation. Once again, on April 7th Croce refused without hesitation, stating the political reason this time. He could not "work under a director, who had dared to proclaim in Bologna, during the meeting of the fascist cultural organizations, that culture had to be fascist". Under the circumstances Croce's collaboration was impossible: "There is no need even to talk about it". (48)

Croce's refusal to collaborate on the Encyclopedia under the direction of Gentile reappeared in his correspondence with Casati, and showed a certain satisfaction when events justified his previsions. But the personal and political reasons for his refusal were even better explained and elaborated in a long letter, that Croce wrote in late April 1925, to Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, Gentile's right hand man during the reform of education. The long and common friendship gives the letter added importance and a special meaning. Croce stated flatly: "I refused, for the single reason that Gentile was head of the enterprise". He did not trust Gentile's "assurance of impartiality", "based on the experience of the recent past". Croce was sure that "at a certain point, the Encyclopedia would become the cultural monument of fascism and we would appear as the caryatids of this monument. That is what he did for the reform of education". (49)

Croce's words may reveal a personal animosity and may even sound a little too harsh. Colapietra, who discovered the letter, hastened to add that Gentile directed the Encyclopedia with a "liberal spirit". Many democratic collaborators of the Encyclopedia have expressed a similar judgment, and have attested to the generosity of Gentile towards anti-fascist scholars. But others had different opinions. After the Lateran Pacts, at the end of 1929, Adolfo Omodeo was compelled to end his collaboration in the Encyclopedia in the name of scientific freedom. He found the clerical interference in the section on religion unacceptable. In his last letter to Gentile he confessed that the "painful experience" of the Encyclopedia persuaded him that he did not have "the gift of adaptation". Even Giorgio Levi Della Vida, engaged by Gentile despite his anti-fascism and retained by him after his refusal to take the loyalty oath to the regime in 1931, had to confess that "I would feel better with my conscience if I had persisted in my original refusal". (50)

But even without his presence inside the organization of the Encyclopedia, Croce had a great influence on its outcome and final product. His refusal encouraged other scholars to reject Gentile's invitation and not to succumb to his charms. Croce's example forced those who became contributors, to maintain academic standards and not to

compromise their scholarship if they wanted to retain his admiration, and in many cases, his friendship. They knew that their literary weakness would be noted and exposed in La Critica. It was because the best scholars defended their integrity and refused academic compromise in their fields that the Italian Encyclopedia became a great collective work under Gentile's leadership.

Literary Activity as Political Opposition.

Despite increased political involvement, Croce's literary activities continued with accustomed regularity. In his writings Croce often made Gentile the object of his criticism, accusing him of misusing philosophy in defence of fascism. As in the past the aim of these new essays was also the same: to clarify the nature of liberalism, to defend the heritage of the Risorgimento, or to deny that the fascist regime under construction was superior to the liberal State. The importance of these essays was increased by the role they played. Croce first published them in his periodical La Critica; later they were adapted and revised as editorials for Il Giornale d'Italia, reaching a wider audience and becoming part of the general political debate, and finally were included in the new edition of his book, Cultura e Vita Morale. At the same time, Croce's political writings influenced the new generation of socialist leaders, and encouraged them to meditate on the

shortcomings of the old Socialism, to reject the mechanical tenets of positivism, and to give a new emphasis to the concept of freedom. (51)

One of the most interesting essays was on liberalism. It contains philosophical principles, historical evaluations and political ideas. It is important for the evolution of Croce's political position, but also because Croce rejected the claim of fascism that in the present time, after the Russian Revolution, the fight was only between fascism and communism, and that those who rejected communism and cared about Western civilization had no choice but to join the fascist movement and to support the government of Mussolini. Croce rejected communism for its totalitarian nature; he always recognized the tragic magnitude of Lenin's experiment, but was among the first, in his History of Europe, to predict its internal implosion, when the Communist Party would not be able to satisfy the natural demands of freedom from the Russian people. But in the conditions of Italy during the fascist regime, for Croce, as for Salvemini and for Matteotti, the rejection of communism was a necessary aspect of their opposition to fascism in the name of freedom, and also an essential element to deny to fascism its own claim to political legitimacy. (52)

Croce rejected the claim of fascism, stressing instead

that the choice was always between freedom and authority imposed from above. Faithful to a dialectic conception of life, Croce recognized that both socialism and conservatism were expressions "of eternal needs of human societies", and represented, on one hand, the natural aspirations to social justice, and, on the other, the equally powerful necessity of law and order. But only liberalism provided a philosophical doctrine and a political conception that: "looks to the life of society as a whole", as such the only one able "to make conflicts beneficial" not only to particular groups but to the entire community. Among political movements only liberalism was not afraid of freedom but welcomed the open interplay of individual aspirations as the necessary condition to assure both progress and stability. (53)

As he had stated before in other essays, Croce identifies liberalism with the "party of culture", requiring "historical sense", and "moral and mental finesse". For Croce, then, liberalism is the natural party of the centre, able to promote progress and to preserve tradition, open to requests for social justice and at the same time, among political differences, able to maintain social discipline. From now on it becomes clear that when Croce talks of liberalism he does not refer to a particular historical party with a definite programme. He is offering

a philosophical conception of life, and espousing a meta-political view of practical action, in which morality and utility are united, but in which one is subject to the other, the moral aspirations giving shape to the actions of the political man. The good politician becomes the 'vir bonus faciendi peritus' and freedom assumes the character of an immanent religion. (54)

From this essay one begins to note a different tone when Croce expresses his view on socialism or on nationalism. Criticism of socialism is sharp but respectful, historically motivated and based on philosophical premises; the movement's positive contributions to western societies are always recognized. Criticism of nationalism has a spiteful dimension, denoting a personal and harsh antipathy. Croce noted, with reproach, that many fascist intellectuals had been Marxist, and had emigrated directly from syndicalism to fascism making an easy and uncritical jump. He accused the nationalists of being foreign to Italian tradition, borrowers of foreign ideas from Barres and Maurras. He pointed out that the Italian nationalists were all decadent literati, had a superficial culture, were ignorant of history, and unaware even that social oppressions imposed by authoritarian regimes always generate "more terrible explosions". (55)

The essay also had an historical dimension. As he had

done in the Manifesto, Croce defended the achievements of liberal Italy, and denied that fascism was creating a better form of the State than the liberal one that it was destroying. "It is fashionable now to vituperate Italian life in the years that preceded the war, talking of it as a period of laxity and cowardice. But those like me, who have shaped themselves in those years in free competition, and have shaped others with the energy of thought and with the practice of discussion and persuasion, will not share that slight judgment, that easy condemnation, that unworthy insult". Against accusations of fascist writers Croce stressed that "everything good that we have today has been produced or prepared in that time of freedom". (56)

At the end of the essay, there was an evident political note; Croce tried to give encouragement to the faithful, to dispel their doubts, and to bring new hope to the hard pressed opposition. Quoting a refrain that De Sanctis used to sing to himself while in jail under the Bourbons, Croce concluded the essay reminding the skeptics that freedom always achieves victory even when it suffers momentary defeats. This faith in the immanent success of freedom will return as the dominant theme in his History of Europe, while defence of liberal Italy will inspire the History of Italy. (57)

In other essays Croce poured scorn on the cultural

efforts of Gentile and other fascist intellectuals, noting their lack of success and the indifference of the general public. He practically accused fascism of being indifferent to culture, hostile to its requirements, even fearful of its results. Croce offered an almost Marxist interpretation of fascism on this occasion: "... because fascism has been a movement in defence of the social order, supported first of all by industrialists and by agrarians, and, as such is not only indifferent to culture, but intimately hostile to it, feeling that from culture and thought have come the dangers ... to the social order, but unable to realize that from culture have also come the strength, progress and honour". The article was an indictment of fascist intellectuals; Croce accused them of having become servants of the party, of having promised "docility and submission ... to the iron discipline of the party", and of having abandoned "the independence and the dignity of men of study and thought". (58)

Croce's negative feelings against nationalist intellectuals remained constant during the regime, and were also present in the literary and historical essays, which were mostly written in 1925 and published in La Critica, and were later included in the book, History of the Baroque Age. (59) In those essays Croce maintained the negative judgment of that period, in open polemics with some modern

historians, who were proposing a revision of that traditional opinion. For Croce "the concept of the Baroque" did not designate "a new and original moment of thought, art or social life", but retained a negative connotation. The book certainly does not fail to indicate the positive aspects of the age, especially in social and natural sciences, but as a whole the age is characterized as an historical period lacking creative energies. With reference to the present time, the book, Croce said, has to be regarded, as "a protest against flirting with the Counter-Reformation, the Absolutism, the rule from above, sensual art and decadent literature", that was "flourishing" in the twenties, especially among intellectuals and writers favourably disposed towards fascism and nationalism. (60)

New Friends.

The increased political activities of Croce, his continuous criticism of Gentile, his open opposition to fascism gained him many insults from the fascist press, but also many favourable appraisals from other writers. In March 1925 we have the first letter of Adolfo Omodeo expressing solidarity with Croce, and condemning the insults hurled by the nationalists against him. "No greatness of Italy can be expected from those who forget the duties towards men, which have honoured Italy before

the world. This too is a sad fruit of that very nationalism, that ignores the history of Italy, and that you are scourging with good reason". (61)

In July Gaetano Salvemini, writing a letter to the wife of Luigi Albertini, the editor of Il Corriere della Sera, had high praise for Croce and for his political stand. Already then, Salvemini was in trouble with the regime for his anti-fascist activities in Florence, had been in jail for a few weeks, and was followed in his movements by two policemen. During the summer he went to Naples to see his old mentor, Giustino Fortunato. While in Naples, Salvemini also saw Croce and the three men discussed the political situation, created by the new policies of Mussolini. In his letter to Piera Albertini, Salvemini offers very perceptive insights about the present and the future developments of Italy. But in the difficulties and uncertainties of the time, Salvemini had clear in his mind one idea: "Never come to terms with the communists or with the fascists, and be ready to pay personally in order to acquire the confidence of honest people ...". This was necessary so that when the collapse of fascism came, the democrats could rightfully claim the political succession. For Salvemini the only hope for the safety of Italy, in the present and in the future, was "the emergence of a group of men of strong character, ready to stand fast against fascism, willing to pay any

price for their ideals, even to go to jail or to face a worse fate". These ideas Salvemini discussed with Croce, and the two men remained in agreement on how to oppose fascism. In fact Salvemini concluded the letter: "Croce was in agreement; and I believe that, should he be called on to stand the test, he would sustain it with strength and dignity". In the letter it is clear that by "the test", Salvemini meant jail and the danger of death. (62)

In September 1925, Piero Gobetti wrote one of the most insightful articles on Croce, that characterized well his personality and his position as a public man. Gobetti recognized that: "after the Matteotti murder one of the most important facts of Italian politics is the passage of Croce to anti-fascism". With great perception he also added that, in the present political crisis, "the constant preoccupation of Croce is to offer a concrete example of personal behavior" as a man and as a citizen rather than as a philosopher and as a politician. When Gobetti considered the anti-fascism of Croce he made useful distinctions between his political and cultural opposition. In his political opposition, Croce showed preference for moderation. "In his adhesion to the Liberal Party, in his discipline as a member of this party, Croce is practicing a sort of ideal Giolittism", faithful to parliamentary institutions, to traditional forms and devotion to the

State. But for Gobetti there was another aspect of Croce's anti-fascism. Beside the reasons of the Italian of good taste there was "the rebellion of the European and of the man of culture". This demanded a different posture, "in a time in which we are witnessing one of the most radical attempts to break the Italian connection with the European intelligentsia, the cultural position of Croce had to become one of political intransigence". In this context a firm stand had to be taken, "his impartial and even handed mind had to put itself on one side only, totally and rigorously". In this new position, for Gobetti, Croce was fighting not only for the present but also for the future. "His preoccupations are geared towards the future: with trepidation and commotion he realizes that in today's battle are involved great destinies; he feels painfully these dangers to civilization". Gobetti had frequent talks with Croce, he was familiar with his ideas and feelings, not surprisingly, he concluded that "in the security of his own intransigence and in the belief of his own faith", Croce has found "the just tone of the rebellion to the present", and the "ability to stand fast". (63)

Gobetti's intuitions and judgments found a resonance in Croce's own Autobiographical Notes of 1934. There he confessed that his political and cultural activities in opposition were undertaken "without any hope of practical

and immediate effect", but with the desire to defend the ideals and the heritage of liberal Italy. (64) Croce's ties to the ideals of the Risorgimento and his desire to defend them were well expressed in a long letter that Croce wrote in October 1925 to Vittorio Enzo Alfieri, then only a student, already in political trouble for his anti-fascism. Croce's comments have more importance since they were made to a young man of nineteen, not yet a friend of his and in response to a private letter. "History will put me among the victors or will throw me among the vanquished. That is not my concern. I feel that I have a place to defend, that for the good of Italy that place has to be defended by somebody, and among these I am called to that office. That is all". He assured the young man that his opposition had its origin not only in philosophical thought but also in his personal feelings. "My liberalism is something which I have in my blood, as a moral son of the men who made the Italian Risorgimento". As an heir of that tradition he felt he had a duty to fulfill and ideals to defend. (65)

The Changed Nature of the Diaries.

With the advent of the dictatorship, among other things in Croce's life, the nature of the diaries also changed. Until now the diaries offered an intellectual account of his readings and writings; exceptions to this rule were rare. From 1925 on, comments on political events and

revelations of personal feelings appear more frequently, and sometimes will replace the other annotations completely. In October and in December 1925, Croce confided to the diaries the sense of oppression, created by the political situation, but he also expressed the resolution to continue his opposition against fascism. (66)

In October 1925, during a trip to Turin and a meeting with Senator Frassati, Croce learned the pressures employed by FIAT to acquire control of La Stampa, and he was also apprised of the maneuvers devised by Mussolini to change the political orientation of that faithful Giolittian paper. Soon after in fact, Frassati was compelled to sell his paper, and Luigi Salvatorelli, among the first to realize the true nature of fascism, lost his job as editor. The discussions of that meeting kept Croce awake for a full night and generated one of the most sorrowful meditations in the entire diary. "The trip to Turin and the meeting with Frassati kept me awake until the morning in sad meditation. Painful sense of suffocation at the suppression of freedom of the press: rebellion of the mind at this injustice, violent and hypocritical at the same time. I have examined again the present situation in all its aspects; this examination would have left me in the sadness of depression, if I had not remembered something about which I have reasoned as a philosopher: of the mistake,

that is, to pose the political question in the extrinsic term, looking to Italy, and fearing or hoping for Her: while the only way to pose those problems is the personal and the moral one, which seeks and finds the solution in the determination of the individual quid agendum, of one's personal duty. And it has not been difficult to be strengthened in the resolution, that it is my duty to continue to do that which I can do, whatever may happen...". Croce was concerned that in the future he would no longer be allowed to publish his books in Italy, and thus be deprived of his accustomed intellectual dialogue, and "conversation with the contemporaries and fellow countrymen". He was upset and nauseated "to see around so many transactions and so many treasons", for momentary and personal advantages. But despite the fear of a painful future, he also felt comforted by the thought that, among so much corruption, he was not alone: "I know other Italians, who feel and think and do like myself". Among these feelings, came the strength to continue the good fight: "Let us, then, go on with courage and with faith".

(67)

With the progression of the authoritarian regime, Croce's meditations in the diaries become more gloomy and even more dramatic especially in December 1925. That month in three days the Senate debated and voted the law that

destroyed freedom of the press. Croce went to Rome to vote against the law; he was disgusted by the show of servility offered by the Senate, was tempted to return immediately to Naples, instead he remained "... in order not to leave alone the few friends that are speaking against the law". In the middle of that debate, he entered another sad note in his diaries after spending "the evening and part of the night in painful thoughts, usual by now. The struggle of the opposition is no longer possible now, because of the suppression of the newspapers. In the Senate I will vote against the laws before us; and that will be all". At this point, he posed a tremendous dilemma to himself and to others in similar situations. "But it is also impossible to accept the situation; and one cannot choose to die, for the duties that bound us to family, to studies, to society". Croce found a solution out of this dilemma in a stratagem, devising an "honest dissimulation", as the moralists of the eighteenth century called it, "the deception that one has the duty and the right to impose on himself in order to bear the difficulties of life." Out of this stratagem, Croce found his resolution: "We have to live, then: to live as if the world went or were starting to go according to our ideals... This way we give an order to our inner life, there remain the difficulties and the dangers of external life. But these are things that we do not control and for

which it is convenient not to worry but rather to trust in Providence". By ignoring external dangers and trusting instead in Providence, Croce remained faithful to his ideals and maintained the integrity of a free man. (68)

This appeal to personal responsibility, this faith in the individual conscience, as the spring of life and self-reliance, gives a special charm and pathos to the writings of Croce during fascism, and explains his appeal and moral influence during those years, when people often had to face dramatic choices alone.

Chapter 6: Invasion of Croce's House, 1926

Once put into motion, the march of oppression continued with inexorable progression. 1925 was the last year for independent papers, and in 1926 freedom of the press came officially to an inglorious end. In a few months one by one the most important papers came under fascist control. The owners were compelled to sell under economic or political pressure. All the liberal editors had to resign and then were replaced by more accommodating men. The party papers ceased publication one after the other. In December 1925 new decrees tightened the screw even further on freedom of the press. Editors had to be recognized by the courts, in order to be able to assume their positions; newspapermen were required to belong to a professional organization, controlled by the State and run by fascists. From then on Italian papers neither published nor sought Croce's opinions; they tried to avoid mentioning even his name. When that was impossible, literary euphemisms were used. From a subject, Croce became an adjective, as he jokingly put it.

At the beginning of 1926, the suppression of freedom of the press involved Croce personally on two occasions, and both times he took a position against the policies of government and in favour of its political opponents. In accord with the government, the Crespi brothers, making

use, with fraudulent intentions, of a technical clause in the contract, in 1925, acquired control of Corriere della Sera, and then compelled Luigi Albertini to sell his shares of the society, and to resign as editor of the paper. In 1926 Ugo Ojetti, a well known writer, but a more pliant man and a friend of Mussolini became the new editor of the paper. During a luncheon in Casati's house, in March 1926, Ojetti invited Croce to collaborate in the new Corriere, writing literary essays. Croce's answer came immediately and was unequivocal. "I refused for reasons of political coherence, for respect towards the Albertinis, the former editors, and also, to avoid future difficulties for Ojetti himself, sure that after a while he would have been compelled to stop publishing my essays". (1)

The other case involved La Stampa of Turin, whose editor Alfredo Frassati was an old and faithful friend of Giolitti. In this case the government was directly involved, the prefect had closed the paper with the excuse that one of its leading writers had violated military secrets, reporting on army maneuvers in Piedmont. For the reopening of the paper, the government demanded a change in its policy and the expulsion of all the culprits, which meant in particular Senator Frassati himself and the editor-in-chief Luigi Salvatorelli. In his battle to retain control of the paper, and to refute the phony accusations,

Frassati asked and received the help of Croce and Ruffini. He asked the two senators to appear before the court as experts and to offer to the judges deciding the case their historical and legal opinions on the matter. But the assistance of Croce, as an historian and of Ruffini as a professor of law was not enough against the pressures of the government and the financial resources of the FIAT empire. Frassati lost the case and his paper, and Salvatorelli his job. (2)

La Critica's New Function.

No longer able to collaborate with newspapers, from then on Croce used his own periodical, La Critica, to express his political ideas and to continue his opposition to fascism. Between the end of 1925 and the beginning of 1926, he wrote two essays on Spaventa and De Sanctis, and turned those occasions into political battles, making those authors his allies against the policies of the government.

In the Spring of 1926 a monument to Francesco De Sanctis was erected in Rome. Croce suggested in an essay that a better way to honour De Sanctis was to read and to meditate on his political writings, published in newspapers between 1876 and 1878. Like the present times, Croce wrote, the years that followed the fall of the Destra Storica, were times of general delusion and personal confusion, lack of faith in Parliament and disdain of political parties, moral

skepticism and fatalism at the same time. The words of De Sanctis were used by Croce as a warning against the dangers of these feelings, and the dangerous solutions that they encourage, making possible "the rule of illiterate and violent persons, with all the consequences that history teaches...". On the origins of these feelings and the policies that they encourage, and hence on the origin of fascism in Italy, Croce, at least on this occasion, seems to accept the theory of fascism as "a revelation": the victory of fascism had revealed the traditional weakness of the Italian nation: "It has to do with the old Italy, ... with Italy of the decadence that we are still carrying with us, ... with unrestrained appetites ... and indolence and disillusionment of the people, ... it has to do with a superficial and vitiated culture...". (3)

During De Sanctis's times there had been a failed attempt against the King. Frightened by that event the conservatives of the day had clamoured for drastic measures against freedom of expression, demanding its curtailment in the press and even in Parliamentary debate. In the Spring of 1926, the same measures, even stronger, were proposed and enacted, with the approval of the nationalists and the conservatives, after a failed attempt against Mussolini. The quotations of De Sanctis were used by Croce to criticize in a direct way the nationalist writers, who had

proclaimed that the original sin, from whence all the troubles began, was freedom of thought, "which was attained many centuries ago and was favoured by our greatest writers", as a conquest for modern Italy. (4)

During De Sanctis's time and in Croce's period, the reactionary intellectuals were busy criticizing Parliament and demanding its abolition, as responsible for all the scandals and corruption. Croce and De Sanctis offered a different opinion, praising instead the value of debate and political differences: "On the contrary, I have the firm conviction that these institutions, if they cannot produce all the miracles that we expect of them, are creators of morality, when they are served with sincerity and in the proper spirit. Parliamentary struggles create character, they induce courage and initiative...". Against the present situation Croce, like De Sanctis, urged not violent reaction, but constant opposition. "I want resistance day by day, which is difficult, but also necessary". At the end of his essay one also finds a sense of self-criticism, Croce confessed that reading the old essays of De Sanctis "... was bound to give us a sense of mortification and of regret, showing us that we have not been prudent, and have not heeded the warnings of those men who were conscious of the dangers fermenting in Italian society". (5)

On another occasion soon after, Croce used the letters

of Silvio Spaventa to criticize Gentile's assertions and his defence of fascism. In 1926 Giovanni Castellano published a collection of Spaventa's letters, and Croce wrote an introduction to the book, that first appeared in the last number of *La Critica* of 1925. In Croce's intention the essay was "a protest, because recently we have seen Silvio Spaventa presented as the man and the thinker to whose doctrine the theory and the practice of the party that now is dominant in Italy go back". Against that assertion Croce stressed that Spaventa "in words and deeds was not, and never wanted to be, and never thought to be, anything but a member of the moderate party, founded by Cavour, and a loyal believer in parliamentary government, with the duality of constitutional parties, with the criticism and the control exercised by the opposition, and the alternation of the parties in government responsibility". Croce also reminded the supporters of a one party State that Spaventa, faithful to liberal ideas, regarded both parties of the Risorgimento as national, and never called his adversaries anti-national; when he criticized parties or opposed the government, he never asked for the end of freedom, or the abolition of the parties. (6)

To better appreciate Croce's criticism, one has to remember the legislative activities of the government. In

1925 under the legal leadership of Alfredo Rocco, the Minister of Justice, and with the enthusiastic approval of Gentile, the powers of the State were immensely increased, changing the nature of the civil service, curtailing the independence of the courts, and greatly reducing the equality of citizens before the law. Amid the return of absolutism, Croce reminded Gentile and Rocco that the constant aim of Spaventa, as a politician and a magistrate had been "... to assure equal justice to all citizens, and to avoid, or to restrain, the arbitrary acts of the party in power". Had Spaventa been alive today, as Croce wrote, "he would have been an opponent, as he had been in his time, of the kind of thing that has been happening in Italy in the last few years, and of the dangers and threats that are being prepared against the independence of the courts and the dignity of civil servants". Finally, Croce reminded his readers that Spaventa had a different conception of the State than Gentile and Rocco, pointing out that Spaventa certainly praised "the State", but for him the State was the public good, and not an idol and "he never subscribed to the conception that those governing are the expression of morality, and he was always sensible of the rights of the individual". (7)

New Means of Opposition.

In the unfortunate political situation of Italy in 1926,

without freedom of the press and with political debate greatly curtailed, it was still possible to play an opposition role, to say yes or no, and to make personal views known, at least to those who had the courage to remain in opposition and who were not afraid of persecution. Croce employed several novel methods of expressing his political opinion and of making known his opposition to government policy. In February 1926 the liberal association of Turin organized a public ceremony in honour of Francesco Ruffini, "to express the gratitude of all members for the defence of liberal ideas made in the Senate of the Kingdom". Croce was invited and, unable to travel to Turin, sent the organizers a message, which was then read during the ceremony. "Please, consider me spiritually present at the ceremony on the 20th in honour of my friend and colleague, Ruffini, to whom we all owe a deep gratitude for the nobility and firmness with which he has defended in the Senate and outside the Senate our common ideals". (8)

Croce had a special affinity with the liberal leaders of Turin, and in 1926 he often participated in the meetings of the local Liberal Association; some of his best friends taught at the university and were notoriously anti-fascist; quite a score of future underground leaders were pupils of those teachers and regarded Croce as their moral guide.

During the summer months, while on vacation in the Piedmont countryside, Croce often visited Turin for family and study reasons. On these occasions he saw all his anti-fascist friends, old and young, had political conversations with them, and they walked together about town, visiting bookstores and other public or private places, always followed by police agents. However, despite the lack of official invitations, through common friends, Croce maintained some contacts with Maria Jose`, the liberal minded Belgian wife of Umberto. At her initiative, and with the complicity of the director of excavations, early one morning in 1931, Croce and the Royal Princess had a clandestine meeting at Pompeii, where they discussed general political questions. (9)

During fascism not only in Turin but also in Milan Croce enjoyed a good following and always found a receptive audience. In the Spring of 1926, Croce read an historical essay at the congress of the Italian Philosophical Society, held at the University of Milan. Many people gathered in the university's auditorium to hear him speak, more for evident political reasons than for a particular interest in the culture of the sixteenth century. That evening the Liberal Association of Milan organized a reception in Croce's honour, and several speeches were made by Croce and others, despite "the great display of policemen and

carabinieri". Unhappy with the free discussion taking place at the congress, the fascist participants created disturbances, and the prefect and the Minister of Education abruptly suspended and dissolved the congress. That same night, another dinner at which Croce was feted, turned into a protest against the arbitrary measures of the authorities. (10)

In 1926 the Academy of Italy was formally established, though it began its full operations in 1929. Once again Croce was invited to be a member and again he refused, and advised his friends not to succumb to the "allurements of that academy", and to resist the appeal to "their vanity". Others, instead, struggled to have a place among these Immortals, attracted by the perks and privileges of that position. (11) In Naples, Croce helped to maintain the independence of the Pontanian Academy. At the annual election for the reelection of the executive, in February 1926, despite the efforts of the fascist faction, the sudden presence "of members never seen", and "a great deployment of political forces", the fascist candidate was soundly defeated, and "our candidate", an old liberal became president. (12)

The creation of the fascist regime, the violence, the persecutions, the violations of private domiciles caused a political exodus from Italy. Many Italians were compelled

to seek political freedom and safe refuge in other European nations, especially in France. Once there, they recreated political parties, founded newspapers and went on to criticize the Italian government, to Mussolini's annoyance. After the attempt against Mussolini by Gino Lucetti, who had just returned from France, Mussolini raised the question of the political activities of Italian immigrants with the French ambassador, demanding repressive measures against them. In Italy, fascist newspapers organized a campaign of insults against all those, who were in exile, 'I fuorusciti', as they were called with contempt. One newspaper in Rome, even sent a letter to all known members of the opposition, asking them, in no uncertain terms, to express their opinion on the activities of the 'fuorusciti', and their anti-national behaviour. The instructions were also precise; the letter had to be returned duly signed. Croce refused to answer the letter "out of a question of decency", and immediately advised his friends to follow his example. He regarded the request of the newspaper, as he said in his letters to Gaetano Mosca and Alberto Bergamini, "gratuitous and offensive", and "unworthy to be answered, precisely because it contained ... an imposition and a menace". Some followed his advice, others became frightened, cowed by past violence, and sent the letter back with derogatory remarks about the exiles.

The paper published the politically correct answers received with some relish, but in a separate column printed the names of all those who had refused to answer the unusual survey. The list of the reprobates was followed at the end by the old cry: "We will see you again at Philippi". As we will see the promise was kept shortly.

(13)

Sometimes even the refusal to express personal views could be a rather eloquent expression of one's opposition to the regime. In June 1926, Croce was asked by the American periodical Survey Graphic, to collaborate on a special issue on fascism. Croce replied with a short note. "I would like to satisfy your request, but in Italy now the manifestation of free discussion on the arguments you mention is forbidden; and I cannot decide to take this discussion before a foreign audience. It is necessary that everyone of us resists and fights as he can, for what little he can, but here in Italy". In that simple way and with that short reply the American readers were told what was the political situation in Italy, and the American tourists learned what was the price for making the trains run on time. (14)

Private Correspondence.

In 1926 militant politics were no longer possible, nor were newspapers available for political debate or cultural

polemics. Besides his paper La Critica, Croce used private letters to make his views known, despite the fact that censorship was already established, mail was intercepted and letters opened. Both Croce and Fortunato, and some of their friends, were aware that their private correspondence was tampered with by police authorities. Both men continued to write freely and to express their opinions without hesitation. Often Croce used personal letters as an instrument to support, to encourage, to reassure friends in need or to condemn a weakness and sudden changes of position.

In the new and difficult political situation, many who had at first joined the opposition became discouraged, and went to the other side, and then tried to find excuses and justifications for accepting the new reality. Mario Missiroli was among the first to cross that bridge, announcing his conversion in a famous essay, that immediately became infamous. (15) Missiroli was a brilliant newspaperman; he had been a friend of Croce and Sorel. In his better days, he had turned Il Resto del Carlino, the leading daily of Bologna, into one of the most lively papers in Italy, giving it a liberal flavour. It was there that he had characterized fascism as "agrarian slavery". That was in 1921, but now in 1926, discouraged by the turn of events, unable to endure isolation, he announced, with

his usual pyrotechnical elegance, that it was time to accept the victory of Mussolini and the legitimacy of fascism, to recognize that fascism was "a popular movement" and that Mussolini had remained a socialist. When the article, Fascism and Monarchy, was published, Croce made known his negative views on the sudden conversion, writing to Missiroli: "I would not be sincere, if I were to tell you that your famous article gave me pleasure. There are moments, dear Missiroli, in which there is no need to rationalize, but to accept and to sustain the positions that one has taken; to change them is not useful under any regard." The trouble with Missiroli, Croce had said on another occasion, was his inability, unlike monuments, to stand still. (16)

Sometimes Croce had to write to trusted friends to reassure them, trying, with his authority, to overcome their sense of solitude and depression. Roberto Bracco, a well known playwright of this period and an anti-fascist member of parliament, complained to Croce that, among the literate elite of Naples, only Croce and Bracco had been excluded from the Committee established to organize the centennial celebration of the Neapolitan painter, Domenico Morelli. Croce replied half jokingly, citing an historical anecdote and advising Bracco not to worry; during the meeting of the committee and even during the public

celebrations both of them "would shine for their absence", and then everybody would enquire about their whereabouts and the reasons for their exclusion. (17)

On another occasion the tone had to be more solemn and the advice more austere. In a gloomy moment of his life, made gloomier by a conversation with Giustino Fortunato, Bracco received from his friend the right words to restore and to fortify his faith. With his usual and prophetic pessimism, Fortunato had assured Bracco that fascism would last for another twenty years. The tone of the prediction had plunged him into a state of sadness and created a feeling of "profound solitude". With his usual common sense touch, Croce reassured Bracco that the future lies always on the capable knees of Jupiter, and that nobody, and not even Fortunato with his pessimism, knew how long fascism would last. But long or short, during that period they had to keep faith in their ideals and had to continue in their opposition, as the only condition to create a different society. The letter acquires a religious tone, and sounds almost like a confession. "The opposition is now apparently weakened or even nullified. But only apparently. The fascists are doing their share to keep it alive and to increase it by offending the most jealous feelings of man's dignity". Croce invited Bracco to believe and to rely on the virtue of moral forces. For that reason "the men of our

generation and of our faith have to continue in what we are doing: give the example and stand firm". "We shall or we shall not see better times, this is of secondary importance: for the moment, we have them in our heart, and this is enough to comfort us and to reassure us". (18)

During the Spring of 1926 Salvemini was practically expelled from the University of Florence for his political activities against fascism, and decided to emigrate to London, before it was too late. Croce and Salvemini had different characters and personalities, agreement was not always possible. Their relation has known periods of cordiality, often followed by bursts of acerbity, sometimes unjustified on both sides. Even in this period, Croce was, perhaps, a little too supercilious when he refused to sign a petition in favour of Salvemini with the excuse that it was an exaggeration to call Salvemini, as his colleagues in Florence did, "one of the greatest historians in Europe." Despite this not too propitious incident, when Fortunato, on behalf of Salvemini, asked Croce for a letter of reference to British academic authority, Croce agreed to the request without hesitation. In June Fortunato informed Salvemini that Croce "... read to me the not short but efficacious ... piece, which is a critical appraisal of your abilities as an historian and teacher of history. The piece is very sincere and he is going to give it to

Raffaello Piccoli, to be translated into English." (19)

Not only was the testimonial sincere, it was also a model of its kind; the praises were concrete and not vague, and reflected the personal qualities of the subject.

"Gaetano Salvemini holds one of the foremost places in the most recent phase of Italian historiography". Croce reminded the British authorities that he had written an essay on Salvemini in 1915, praising his achievements.

"Salvemini brings to his work a happy union of philological discipline with political, economic and social experience, and a constant effort to discover the reality concealed under the usual formulas and generalizations, in a spirit of great impartiality and open mindedness". Croce did not hide his different philosophical ideas. For him history required a union of philosophy with politics and economics. But the contrast was used, Croce said, only to enhance his praise and esteem for Salvemini. "I shall only add that he brings to his historical studies a deep feeling of humanity and enthusiasm for morality and justice, which can be truly called Mazzinian". Croce did not fail to mention the qualities of Salvemini as a teacher, and the reason for his political troubles. "All his students consider him as the best of teachers; and as to the causes of his leaving Italy, these are to be found in the conditions of the present political struggle, in which he has kept faith with

his old liberal and democratic ideals". Not surprisingly, in thanking Croce, Salvemini expressed his satisfaction: "You have said in it everything that I could have wished". (20)

Sometimes it was Croce, who expressed sadness and depression in his letters, and needed the comfort of his friends. In March 1926 Gobetti died in Paris, and the following month Amendola died in Cannes, both victims of political persecution and fascist violence. In April Croce confessed to Casati, now his fraternal friend: "I am very sad at the news about the health of Amendola"; and then continued: "It is a great sadness: it seems there is little hope". But despite the preparation, when he received the news of Amendola's death, he was stunned by grief, and as usual in such cases, he remained unable to write or even to concentrate for a few days. In this depressed condition, more than help from a friend, it seems, Croce needed to express his sorrow to a kindred soul. "And now I have gone back to my routine: that routine which is my salvation, now. But in the depth of my soul I have the image, as a reproach, of poor Amendola. Why to live, when others die like this? When our friends are thus sacrificed? I will overcome even this pang; but it is a pang". (21)

Help to Anti-Fascists.

After the death of Amendola a group of liberal friends,

under the leadership of Nitti and Albertini, organized a trust fund to provide financial assistance to his family and a good education to his three sons. Croce and Fortunato gave a generous contribution to the fund, and when the sons moved to Naples into the house of an uncle, offered them their friendship and intellectual support, and welcomed them in their homes. The affection and support of family and friends became a necessity in the struggle against the fascist regime and the government's repressive measures. This kind of solidarity was vital especially among liberals, democrats and socialists, who could not rely, for their basic necessities, on the resources of a well organized party, or the support of a foreign country, or the assistance of the Catholic church's organizations. But anti-fascism was more than organized political opposition. The resistance to the fascist regime demanded a daily fight within each person, and required the acceptance of years of solitude, social ostracism, and personal persecution. To continue the struggle, to remain faithful to the ideals, to have hope in a different future required personal commitment and moral energy. The letters of anti-fascists to their families or to their friends reveal that strength of character and a religious devotion to the cause was essential to philosophers, to workers, and to simple people. To keep his sanity and to regain tranquility, Croce

relied also on work and an iron daily routine, which allowed him to overcome bouts of depression, sadness and personal sufferings.

Invasion of Croce's House.

In 1926, at the end of October, in Bologna, the fourth attempt against Mussolini in that year occurred. During a parade to celebrate the anniversary of the march on Rome, Anteo Zamboni, a young man of sixteen, fired on Mussolini, missing the target. The attempt was regarded with suspicion then and has remained mysterious, and been enriched by sordid elements later. Some thought that the incident was organized by the radical faction of fascism, others regarded it the work of a disgruntled local leader, recently dismissed from the party; the police preferred to blame Zamboni and, it seems, with good reason. The poor young man was killed on the spot, fifteen stabs were counted on his body; the same night the killer was seen proudly showing his bloody dagger in a fashionable restaurant. More important for the future of Italy was the reaction of the government and of Mussolini himself. The government used the case, and the emotions created by the case, to further destroy the liberal State, and to abolish the few remaining fundamental liberties. (22)

That same night, writing on a piece of paper and in pencil, Mussolini issued draconian orders to police for the

protection of the fascist regime, thus contributing to an overwrought atmosphere, and almost inviting and sanctioning violence against the leaders of the opposition. Within days, the government approved, and Parliament ratified almost without discussion, a series of resolutions for the defence of the State. As a result of these new laws, all political parties of the opposition, their papers and organizations were dissolved and banned; members of the Aventine Secession were formally expelled from the House and lost their parliamentary immunity; old passports and those recently issued were revoked; the opponents of the regime in exile were subjected to blackmail at the whim of government, they could lose their property in Italy and their citizenship, if deemed engaged in "anti-national activities"; the police was given the power to deny new passports, to fire on those crossing borders, and to banish opponents of the regime to small towns or, in the jargon of the time, to confino; the death penalty was reintroduced for crimes against the State and for attempts against the person of the King and the Prime Minister; a Special Tribunal for the Defence of the State was created outside of the normal courts, empowered to deal with political crimes and to apply military law; it was run by fascists of sure faith, and its sentences could not be appealed. (23)

When the news of the Bologna incident became known in

the rest of Italy, the fascist party organized "retaliations" against the leaders and the parties of the opposition. Catholic organizations and even a few bishops suffered the same treatment, prompting even the Pope to condemn "the tempest of violence and devastation against people, property and institutions...". That night and the following days, with egalitarian zeal, fascist squads invaded and destroyed the offices and newspapers of the opposition parties. People were assaulted and beaten in the streets or inside their own houses, and often compelled to leave their residences. The city of Naples was not spared and had its own share of violence. Between the night of October the 31st and the morning of November 1st, among others, the houses or the apartments of Amadeo Bordiga, Roberto Bracco, Benedetto Croce, and Arturo Labriola were invaded and ransacked, papers were burned and books damaged. The initiative came from the fascist party. The public authorities allowed it to happen, though they, it seems, did not encourage it. When the news of the incidents was known policemen were sent to protect the house, where the sons of Amendola were living, showing that no accident was wanted there. But no other measures of protection were taken. Once again the events proved that during the fascist regime a citizen had no legal protection against violence organized or sponsored by the fascist party or even by one

of its factions. On many occasions the aim of the violence was not to kill an opponent, but to generate fear among the population, to humiliate the victims, to destroy their will for resistance and finally to cow them into submission. Like their comrades in other Italian cities, the Neapolitan fascists wanted to give Croce a lesson, as then it was fashionable to call these actions against the opposition of the regime. (24)

Croce's house was invaded at four in the morning by more than a dozen individuals, arriving in a truck, while Croce and his family of eight women were deep in sleep. The invaders deceived the doorkeeper, then terrorized with guns the domestics, and compelled them to open the doors. Once inside the house, they broke doors and windows, smashed glasses and vases, and damaged paintings and a piano. No person was hurt, nor was the main collection of books touched. When Croce and his wife appeared, those in command shouted fascist slogans, and hurled insults and menaces against them. By all accounts Croce remained calm, the women did not show fear, but Adelina Croce behaved rather bravely. She found the right tone and posture, and spoke words of rebuke and reproach against the intruders, who, believing they had accomplished their task, or feeling ashamed and afraid to be recognized, turned off the main light switch and fled in the confusion, leaving the family

to contemplate the ruins. (25)

The police were immediately called by neighbours, and arrived five hours later. Soon after, the danger passed, army soldiers appeared and were put on duty to protect the house against a repetition of the violence. During the day the prefect, who was in cordial relations with Croce, visited the residence, and expressed the excuses of the government, at the same time promising a full investigation and severe punishment of the culprits, once arrested. The majority of those thugs, some of them belonging to middle class families, were already known to the police, but were left undisturbed during the regime, and only after the war were charges laid against them, but then Croce refused to bring legal action. The damage to the house was estimated at twenty thousand lire at the time by Fausto Nicolini. More important than material damage was the offense given in cold blood to the man and his family, and to Italian culture. (26)

The government ordered a press ban, but the news traveled fast, and the impression was great throughout Italy. The shock was bitter especially among the cultural elite, and among friends, old and new. But no one was more shocked and more saddened than Giustino Fortunato, and not only for his paternal benevolence toward Croce. He was then almost blind and enfeebled by illness, but he was among the

first to arrive at Croce's house, once the incident became known. He visited Croce during the following days, to show support, and to offer his affection. He wrote to several correspondents; to all he praised Croce's "great serenity", condemned the "despicable case", and lamented "the offense received". In his letters Fortunato contrasted the nobility of Croce with "the foolishness" spoken in those days by fascist leaders against Croce and other intellectuals, who had signed his Manifesto the year before. The opportunity of a visit to the King was discussed and soon discarded. On his own, Fortunato sent a letter of protest to Tittoni, the president of the Senate, pointing out the injury done to the institution itself besides the personal offense to Croce. Prodded by Fortunato, Tittoni was compelled to speak to Mussolini, and then write to Fortunato a hypocritical letter: Mussolini deplored the incident, had assured the President of the Senate that the case was the work of unknown elements, which the police had been unable to identify yet. No wonder the old politician lamented to all "the terrible nature of these interminable hours". (27)

The incident offers another instance of Croce's iron discipline. In his diaries, at the end of the description of the night's events, we find this revealing note: "in the morning, I resumed historical readings, and took notes from books previously read; but there was such a throng of

friends, who came to ask news about the facts of last night, that I could barely continue the work, from which I had resolved not to be distracted". The historical readings were those out of which came History of Italy. The notations in the diaries for the following days also show that Croce, despite the turmoil caused by the invasion, tried to carry on with his normal routine, but without much success, until, unable to endure any longer the benevolent interruptions, he closed himself in his library, and left to his wife the task of dealing with the visitors and their questions. (28)

Despite continuous distractions and interruptions that day and during the week Croce wrote letters to his closest friends, informing them of the incident, and also reassuring them of his safety and that of his family. Giolitti was among the first to be informed. The letter is important because it showed how close the friendship between the two men had become, but also it provided a better understanding of Croce's feelings and ideals, which motivated his opposition to fascism and gave inspiration to his next book, History of Italy. "While I inform you of this incident, it is sweet to turn my thoughts to you, representative of the old, honest and liberal Piedmont, and to renew in my mind the sentiment of Italian brotherhood, which united the patriots and the liberals of Piedmont

with those of Naples, to whom I feel united not only by historical memories but also by family ties. It seems that now in our turn we are called to sustain the same trials, that they suffered at the time of the "Holy Faith"! (29) As was to be expected the letter to Casati had a different tone, and even contained some levities. Croce gave him all the details with great sobriety, and without exaggerations of any sort. He even noted, so to speak, the moderation of the intruders. "They could have beaten me; I was in pajamas and barefoot; they did not do it; therefore this was not among their orders". He could not resist, however, a polemical joke about the philosophy of Gentile, as the theoretician of the ethical State. "I console myself with the happy idea that finally I had the honour of receiving a visit from the ethical State". (30)

Besides the joke, in this letter, and in others one cannot fail to notice a more intimate tone, unusual in Croce's correspondence. For the first time we come across expressions of affection for his wife and his family, though expressed with modesty: "Adelina and the girls rose to the occasion". The same feelings of admiration were expressed to Alfieri, a much younger friend than Casati: "The house has suffered significant damage: but luckily my wife and my first little daughter, who saw the havoc, behaved bravely and did not allow themselves to be cowed by

the scene". Months later, Croce was recounting the events to Luigi Russo, and mentioned the quick wit of his wife that night, when Russo was surprised to hear Croce saying "I really love Adelina". (31)

During the fascist regime the political struggle destroyed close friendships, and broke relationships of long standing. It hardened feelings. It introduced something harsh into personal relations. At the same time it also brought some people closer. The relations with trusted friends acquired new meaning, and became deeper. For those in jail or on the run the love of a woman was the greatest gift and provided a shield to lean against the blow of fortune. In the sadness of the times Croce, like others, found in the affection of his family a refuge, the constant support of his wife giving him new strength to continue his fight.

The invasion of Croce's house was felt by all not only as a violation of private domicile, but for what it really was: an offense to culture, in its most outstanding representative. It was a sign of the returned barbarian times, a warning to all that in the new Italy under Mussolini there were no sanctuaries, and no individual was safe or protected by special immunity. After the incident many wrote to Croce, expressing solidarity, inquiring about the safety of his family, deploring the event, condemning

the violence and openly blaming the government. Others went to see him personally, as a sort of political pilgrimage. For Croce, the incident became a moral and political victory.

Casati went to Naples as soon as he received the news of the invasion. He went not only as an old friend, but also as the official representative of the Liberal Party, to offer Croce the political solidarity of his party. With Casati, Croce expressed the wish and discussed the possibility of leaving Naples and going to live in Turin, his wife's home city. But his wife opposed the move with the argument that Naples, despite everything else, offered Croce a more congenial atmosphere than Turin. The presence of his friend must have heartened Croce. A few days later he wrote a new letter assuring him that he had regained his normal attitude. "The usual disposition of the spirit has come back, as it is expressed in the old saying: do what you ought to, come what may". In the same letter Casati was told that Croce had resumed his work, and was immersed in research for History of Italy. (32)

The incursion into Croce's house had international repercussions, as we can gather from the letters between Croce and his German friend, Vossler. Vossler expressed his astonishment at what had happened to Croce and to other Neapolitan intellectuals, some of whom were also his

friends. He informed Croce about the reaction in Germany and other nations among scholars, and told him that liberal intellectuals in Europe and in America wanted to organize a public protest and an international show of support. "I have had with Springarn an exchange of telegrams. From America they would like to send a protest against this violence". In a more personal note, Vossler informed Croce that his old friend, Joel Elias Springarn, the American educator and social crusader, for many years professor of comparative literature at Columbia and later President of the NAACP, had phoned his wife, who was vacationing in Paris, and had asked her to go to Naples, and to offer the Croce family whatever assistance was needed. (33)

To understand Croce's reactions during those days and also to gauge the reactions of other people Vito Galati's memoirs are an important source. Galati was an old friend of Croce and a literary critic of some repute; he was also a member of Parliament for the Italian Popular Party. As soon as he heard the news of the incursions, he went to Naples. When he arrived at the railway station a common friend advised him to avoid Croce's house, for the simple reason that at the door: "There are policemen, who monitor those who enter and those who leave". Galati remained undeterred, he went and noticed the policemen, he found Croce saddened by the experience, showing in his face the

signs of the offense received: "the insult done to the inviolability of his domicile". During the discussion, Croce expressed the desire to resign from the Senate. Galati was quick to dissuade him, and to point out the inopportuneness of the gesture. "I believe you should not do it. The position of Senator offers a little personal guarantee against future violence, still possible; also, we need somebody who can speak in the Senate". Croce agreed that future violence was a real possibility, and he never resigned from the Senate. Galati for his part suggested the possibility of expatriation; something he had been contemplating for himself. Against that possibility Croce's response was immediate. "No, it is not possible. We need to remain here, in our country. We need to fight where the struggle is most difficult". But there was also another reason, militating against that eventuality for Croce. "I cannot tear my family from its normal environment. My daughters need to be educated in an Italian climate, with its tradition, with its customs, and its sensibilities. It is necessary to remain here." Galati too never emigrated, after that discussion the thought disappeared from his mind. (34)

The ravaging of Croce's house created a shock not only among Croce's friends and admirers, but also among those fascists, who had retained a measure of humanity, or

remembered the friendly relations of the old days. The news must have created a stir in Gentile's mind, if after learning of the event, he asked more precise information from Fausto Nicolini, with whom he remained in fraternal relations even after the break with Croce. Gentile must have been deeply shocked, if writing immediately to Giovanni Laterza, he mentioned again "the very disturbing facts". It must have been a sad moment for Gentile, even if a momentary one. In the old days, he would have been the first to be informed, and the first to show support in person or by letter. Now political disagreement compelled him to ask a third party about his old friend, once regarded almost as a brother. (35)

Political events had separated Croce from Gentile, and the gulf increased between them, no personal feeling would be able to reduce the political distance between them. It was different with other people. Resistance to fascism was able to cement new solidarity, to overcome old rivalries, even among those who in the past had fought bitter battles. On this occasion Croce received many expressions of support; none was as significant as the letter he received from the historian and socialist, Guglielmo Ferrero. It revealed the feelings now, uniting all those who opposed the policies of Mussolini, and it showed the communality of ideals which was created by the anti-fascist struggle. (36)

If the aim of the Neapolitan fascists was to destroy the courage of those four gentlemen, and to put a stop to their activities, they failed; all of them continued in their opposition to fascism with undiminished courage. Croce went back to his now proverbial routine and iron discipline, and resumed his research for History of Italy. The afternoon of the invasion of the house, while demonstrations were still taking place in the streets of Naples, Croce went for a long walk, and visited an old friend, asking to go alone to show his "undisturbed tranquility". Some of his younger friends did not share such tranquility, and, worried about possible incidents, followed him at a distance, armed with walking sticks! When later in the day Giovanni Amendola's son, Giorgio, went to see the house and to visit the family, the time was not spent in lamentation, but in discussing the future of Amendola and the plan for his studies at university. Amendola was encouraged to visit Croce's house every day and make use of the library to acquaint himself with the writings of his father, and the works of Marx, as he wished. (37)

When, three weeks later, the Senate debated the Law for the protection of the State, Croce went to Rome, sat beside Ruffini, applauded his speech in defence of the old Statuto, and then together they voted against the government bill. The vote of the Senate provided the

occasion for another protest. When the official record of that sitting was published, by mistake Croce's name did not appear under the list of those who had voted, and voted against the bill. Immediately Croce sent a letter to the president of the Senate, pointing out the mistake, asking for rectification, and demanding a written reply. (38)

In his memoirs of 1944, Croce even recognized that the invasion of his house, in keeping with the cunning of history, produced an unintended result: "That deed was beneficial to me, because foreign newspapers discussed it, and even exaggerated it; from abroad I received telegrams, letters and even visitors". Croce had known that Mussolini was advised by his political informers in foreign countries that similar acts were not helpful to the propaganda of the regime and to his personal reputation, and urged him not "to repeat the scandal of the Rheims Cathedral". As a result, during the fascist regime, Croce was expelled from cultural institutions or deprived of membership in other Academies, but he "was no longer threatened physically". Though that same month, in 1926, he was threatened with another incursion into his house, which compelled him to move some papers to a safer place, for the time being. (39)

Under Police Surveillance.

But Croce's social life changed a great deal after that event. From then on, two policemen were put near his house,

to protect his safety, in the official jargon, in reality, "to monitor visitors to his house and to follow him when he went out". It did not take long for Croce to recognize the presence of the two policemen. After a while he approached them, told them his usual itinerary and even advised them about following him, or how to find him again should they happen to lose sight of him, as happened every time he took a taxi. But, as a result of the police presence, from then on the cheerful group that accompanied Croce in his walks in the old city streets, began to dwindle, until only a few very close friends remained, to keep him company. (40)

Another sign of the changed times was the end of the social gatherings that took place every Sunday, like a cultural institution, in Croce's house. In the old days these informal meetings were open to all; it was an opportunity for young writers to meet famous scholars and to exchange views with them. Foreign visitors had a chance to establish connections with Italian colleagues. For Croce these gatherings were a part of his extended intellectual family, an occasion perhaps to spread his influence and to keep in touch with literary novelties. After the invasion of his house and the presence of the policemen, visitors began to avoid Croce's building and to desert the Sunday gatherings. The Sunday meetings lost vivacity and after a while were abolished. At the same time Croce acquired new

friends, and his house saw different visitors during the week days. The old erudite scholars slowly disappeared and were replaced by the intellectuals of the new generation, critical of fascism, and not afraid of persecution. Croce's young daughter noted the changes and observed the arrivals of these different and younger people. "Often there arrived mysterious visitors, who gathered in father's study for talks that we imagined dramatic and passionate". (41)

Since then not only in Naples but also in other cities in Italy, many who had been in cordial relations with Croce, and before would have regarded as a signal honour to be seen and to speak with him, began to avoid him, showing "fear to be seen in my company", at the same time were ready to offer him "friendly and warm greetings in deserted streets and in solitary corridors". These changes in the personal behaviour of people would be described by Croce in his History of Europe, when narrating the triumph of Napoleon III and the establishment of the Second Empire. In the description of that ruere in servitium of people and institutions, the personal experience and the direct observations are evident. (42)

Changes in Croce's Life.

The invasion of his house and the consolidation of Mussolini's power also affected Croce's personal feelings. Croce's reputation among the general public, created by his

philosophy, is that of an Olympian serenity. The diaries and the personal correspondence have revealed a man of deep passion, subject to periods of anguish, able certainly to reach serenity and to achieve tranquility, but these were not gifts of nature but the result of struggle, and even torment. The political memoirs of 1944, and also the Autobiographical Notes of 1934, reveal this aspect of Croce's personality, and show the personal torment felt after the triumph of fascism. "During fascism my life was full of anguish, a feeling of insecurity, an incubus of destruction and ruin, and I lost since then that trust in awakening in the morning, that turning of the eyes towards the world and seeking the things beloved, that re-entering among them with joy". Expression of similar feelings can be found in his private correspondence and in his diaries.

(43)

Fascism also affected Croce's intellectual development and political evolution. On the same page of the Notes we found also this other statement: "But, despite all this, my mental vivacity was rather increased than diminished". Fascism gave Croce almost a second youth. The necessity of opposition spurred him with new vigour; the sense of duty increased his determination. As he confessed to Luigi Russo in those years: "You see: I had reached an age in which a man can grow childish from too much applause. Providence

now has brought us this fascism, that opposes me, that torments me, and persecutes me; but at the same time it rejuvenates me, and gives me a renewed vigour to fight". Eugenio Garin made the same observation and noted the outstanding results: "In the fire of the struggle against fascism Croce found himself again"; "to fascism Croce owed a second youth, but also a splendid maturity of thought". (44)

Close to the end of his life, speaking to the students of his Historical Institute, Croce recognized the changes brought by fascism to his life and to his activity. "Even I owe some gratitude to fascism because it infused me with a new youth, filling me with increased activity and with fighting spirit; it compelled me to reconsider political problems, which otherwise I would not have studied with a similar anxiety and so in depth; it made me feel that the work of the thinker and of the writer ought to be one with that of the citizen and of the man". (45)

Indeed, for a minority of Italians this heightened sense of personal responsibility was one of the unintended results of fascism. It was this new found moral energy that compelled the best of that unfortunate generation to refute dictatorship and sustained their resistance, inspiring their philosophical meditations and guiding their practical actions, in Italy or in exile, in jail or in their homes.

Chapter 7: The Defence of Liberal Italy, 1927

By the end of 1926 liberal Italy had died. Mussolini had consolidated his power, and created the legal instruments for the continuation of his dictatorship. Political parties had been outlawed, and freedom of the press had been destroyed. The opposition had been disarmed and Parliament reduced to impotence. In 1927 it became almost impossible to undertake any open political action; it was also dangerous to express critical opinions in personal letters, and it was considered anti-social to be associated with known opponents of the regime. Public employees could lose their jobs if they expressed views contrary to government policy. Besides a powerful political police division in the Ministry of the Interior, under the direct responsibility of the chief of police a new and efficient secret police organization, ominously and mysteriously called OVRA, was created with the aim of repressing any anti-fascist manifestation and controlling any expression of dissent. In a short while it collected files on more than one hundred thousand people and built an impressive web of special agents, spies and informers, extending its reach throughout the country and even abroad.

But despite the difficulties and dangers, opposition to the fascist regime never stopped completely in Italy, assuming instead new forms and using different means. When

the normal avenues and activities became impossible, the communists tried to build an underground organization and some socialist and democratic groups did the same. For the other movements of the opposition, one can say what Croce claimed after the war about the Liberal Party. "The Party, that did not have legal existence any longer, and for that reason had neither an office nor the possibility of holding meetings, nevertheless continued to live from one end of Italy to the other in the personal relations, in the reciprocal visits, in the hospitality of friendly houses, in the agreements that we reached and in the comfort that we gained from those young men, that remained immune from fascist seductions and did not care about intimidation".

(1)

Increased Police Surveillance.

In the new political situation, even a peaceful man like Croce was under police surveillance. Two agents were stationed in front of his house, followed his movements, and took note of his visitors. Police began to control Croce's private correspondence after 1926, creating files on him and his correspondents. To better monitor his activity, spies were recruited among his acquaintances and those who frequented his library. In similar conditions other people felt intimidated and became frightened. Croce instead chose a different route to protest; he went to the

Prefect, to show that he was aware of the government's special attention, was not afraid of it, and had no intention of changing his traditional way of life. "I went to the High Commissioner, Castelli, to discuss various things, and in particular to tell him that it is ridiculous that the authorities trouble to monitor my house and my person for fear that I may escape abroad." (2)

Mr. Castelli was also a senator, and had been and still was in cordial relations with Croce. By a simple visit Croce shifted the burden, and put Mr. Castelli in an awkward personal and social position; it turned the prefect from a representative of the State into a symbol of persecution. Mr. Castelli's position was more awkward than Croce suspected at the time of his visit. The authorities' fear was real and originated in higher places. The chief of police had been misinformed by spies that Croce was planning "a clandestine expatriation" and "participation in an anti-fascist meeting to be held in Paris in January 1927". To avoid that occurrence, Bocchini himself, the Chief of Police, on behalf of the Minister of the Interior, in this case, Mussolini, recommended "utmost sagacious vigilance" of Croce's movements to all prefects, including all border police stations, on land and sea. He also sent a special telegram to the prefect of Naples, ordering him "to arrange immediate measures of vigilance to avoid absolutely

that [Croce's] planned trip could take place". (3)

Despite the new difficulties, Croce refused to be silenced. He did not take refuge in an ivory tower, nor was he unwilling to take personal risks. The publication of his books and the regular edition of his periodical are the proof that he was determined to continue his cultural programme despite government harassment. He kept in touch with kindred people through the hospitality of his house, his personal correspondence and his frequent trips. Writing about his anti-fascist experience in Naples, from 1926 to 1930, Eugenio Reale, a prominent communist after the war but then still a democrat, has revealed that during those years he and his university friends, Marxist or liberal, regarded Croce as a teacher, looked at him "with respect and admiration, and visited his house often with one excuse or another", finding Croce "always liberal with encouragement and help". Giorgio Amendola too has confirmed that Croce in that period "was always willing and pleased to receive his anti-fascist friends", whether from Naples or out of town, like Nello Rosselli, Eugenio Colorni and Aldo Garosci, then still students but who later played prominent roles in the Resistance. (4)

New Means of Opposition.

In the changed political conditions, Croce's increased number of trips in Italy and his forays abroad acquired a

new meaning. The frequency of his trips has to be regarded as a new form of political activity, a new way to show the presence of the opposition. In the past these trips always had their immediate justification in historical research, but the monthly occurrence now showed a new restlessness in the spirit of Croce, and a new concern driving his activities. In the absence of a free press, the visits to his friends in other cities were above all a means to keep in touch, to share news, and to offer support, hoping to destroy the sense of solitude, created around the opposition by the triumphant and arrogant regime. Month by month Croce's diaries register his trips to Rome, Florence, Milan and Turin to meet kindred people. Unfortunately but understandably, few names are mentioned, and often details are not given, but the presence of words like "long walks", "lively conversations", "large gathering of friends", are enough to reveal the nature of the discussions and the purpose of the meetings. Police records show now that Croce's movements were closely monitored and noted from one prefect to the next one, from one city to another. (5)

The potential value of Croce's presence in these cities was enhanced by his social activities during his visit. He did not go incognito, and he certainly did not remain closed in his room once there. People knew he was in town and came to see him even from the surrounding areas. His

guests organized social gatherings for him, turning lunch and dinner into political discussion. A great walker by nature, he took long passeggiate, went to libraries, visited bookstores, always in the company of old friends or university students. His presence was noticed by the authorities, and probably become a topic of conversation in news rooms, and in academic halls, and in private houses. The opponents of the regime who saw him or heard him, may have taken heart from his presence and his confidence; others may have been encouraged to read his books and to discuss his ideas.

Support to Fortunato and to Ada Gobetti.

In the absence of political parties and in the presence of an oppressive police apparatus, even personal relations could become an expression of anti-fascism. In helping friends in need for political reasons, Croce was at his best when solidarity could be direct and immediate, requiring only personal intervention. This presence at a critical moment, was best illustrated, in 1927, in his relations with Giustino Fortunato and with Ada Gobetti.

Not cowed by the returned "Bourbonic times", Giustino Fortunato continued to write letters to Nello Rosselli and to Giovanni Ansaldo even after these two young scholars and publicists were arrested and sent to jail. Despite having "the honour of some police surveillance" he kept in touch

with his political friends, freely expressing his opinions, to old and young alike, always lamenting "the new follies of those in power". When Nello Rosselli was arrested, Fortunato thought that he had been the cause of this misfortune, having sent him a parcel with the new introduction to his old book, Pagine e Ricordi, whose publication had been censored by police authorities. Full of apprehension and remorse for the anguish caused to the Rosselli family, Fortunato asked Croce for advice. Croce was prompt to help the old man, he visited his house frequently, reassured and calmed him, and finally advised him to write to the prefect explaining the innocence of Rosselli and assuming full responsibility in the case.

When it became evident that Rosselli had been arrested for other reasons, which had nothing to do with Fortunato, but were rather a reprisal for the activities of his brother, Carlo, who had organized the escape of Turati to France, the year before. Fortunato, in several letters, expressed gratitude to Croce for the "fraternal advice received and for the support", "You have saved me literally from folly, and worse from ridicule". Fortunato also mentioned the case, and the help from Croce, in his correspondence with other people, which must have increased Croce's reputation. In a letter to Giovanni Ansaldo, a newspaperman with a wide circle of friends, the praise for

Croce was explicit: "He was my special benefactor in the first two weeks of June, among the most terrible of my life". (6)

If Fortunato called Croce a benefactor, for Ada Gobetti, the young widow of Piero, Croce became "the only steady and reliable point", in those uncertain and tormented times. Croce had met the Gobettis before, but only in 1927, and after the death of her husband in France, did they begin that delightful friendship, which also involved all the members of their families. Beside the championing of a political cause, their correspondence reveals a domestic Croce, always solicitous and deeply concerned, in small and large matters, with the health and welfare of those he loved and respected. After the death of her husband in 1926 and the birth of their son, Ada Gobetti lived like "a wounded beast"; she closed herself "in a painful seclusion"; and felt "without support and without a guide". At that moment Croce offered Ada his support and the friendship of his family. (7)

That friendship played no small part, from her own admission, in giving her new strength and making it possible to overcome her pain. The constant affection of Croce and his family helped Ada Gobetti to return to cultural and political activities, to a new marriage and to a happy family life. During that time Croce gave Gobetti

practical advice; he encouraged her to write and to translate; he read her manuscripts, and found publishers for her books; he "followed her work with paternal satisfaction", not only during the fascist regime but even after the war. It was Croce who persuaded Gobetti to publish her diary, one of the best of such works written during the partisan war.

In translating books from English into Italian, Gobetti tended to follow her literary inclinations, but those suggested by Croce were directed to a political purpose, and were published by Laterza. Under Croce's supervision, Gobetti translated in the middle thirties, the History of Europe by H. Fisher, published in three volumes with some difficulty with the censorship authorities, who found "the work conceived with a spirit and an intonation which are contrary to the principles of the regime...". (8)

The censors of Bari were not the only ones who kept a close eye on the cultural activities of Croce and Gobetti. The publication of their correspondence has revealed that all the letters of Ada, and probably those of Croce, were opened and copied by the police in Turin, thus, unintentionally, assuring their survival, and giving us the possibility of enjoying and admiring one of the most beautiful episodes of anti-fascism. Despite police surveillance, the residences of Croce and Gobetti in Turin

and especially in the Piedmont countryside became a favourite meeting place of anti-fascist intellectuals, who went there as a sort of political pilgrimage, attracted not only by the restoring beauty of the mountains.

Break with the King.

Fascism had the power to cement new friendships, but also to interrupt old social relations. In 1927 Croce broke off his relations with the King. As a senator and especially as a minister Croce had met Victor Emanuel in Rome and in Naples during official visits and public ceremonies. On these occasions the King liked to talk about historical events, revealing that his knowledge of the past was impressive, if rather anecdotal. But during these conversations Croce also noted some unpleasant aspects of the King's personality, the presence of a satirical spirit, a prosaic bent and lack of enthusiasm for anything. Croce stopped his presence at royal ceremonies in 1927, after the King went to Naples, was received with great enthusiasm by the people, but showed a great deal of deference toward the fascist authorities, as if he were seeking their approbation. In his last meeting Croce found the Monarch "older and ill at ease". He avoided serious conversation, preferring to indulge in innocuous pleasantries, at the same time giving the impression that he was almost in fear of the Minister of Education, Pietro Fedele, a man for whom

Croce had no respect. The year 1927 was also the last time that Croce joined the other Neapolitan senators at the Royal Palace, "for their usual visit to the Crown Prince, Umberto". During the many years of the Prince's residence in Naples, Croce's absence from official ceremonies was noted, and the prince made known his regrets. He even expressed his desire to see Croce, wanting to ask him for "some historical information". But an invitation never came, nor was ever sought. (9)

Croce's writings reveal that the attitude of the King towards Mussolini and his acquiescence to the fascist regime created dismay and resentment among the old liberal leaders. The same impression is found in the memoirs of Marcello Soleri, Giolitti's lieutenant. At critical moments in fact attempts were made, in private meetings, to impress upon the old Monarch the need to take a royal initiative and to defend the Statuto, not only to protect Italy but also the destiny of his House. All attempts were in vain. Croce too, at various times, was urged to use his authority and to meet the King, but he always refused, regarding these meetings as useless and even dangerous. The King made it known that it was his duty, as a constitutional King, to refer to the Prime Minister any political conversation, even a private one. Perhaps there was no need for Croce to have a special meeting in the Quirinale Palace to make his

political views known to the monarch. From the report of a political informer to his masters in Rome in 1930, we learn that Croce with his friends and even with his acquaintances, openly and without restraints criticized the conduct of the King, accusing him of having betrayed his oath and of having allowed the destruction of the Statuto.

(10)

Relations with the Underground.

If political reality put an end to old relations, it also created the occasion for new ones. Armando Gavagnin, one of the most active young men in the democratic underground organizations, has given, in his memoirs, an account of such a meeting in Croce's house, without providing, unfortunately, many details. In 1927 a new secret movement was organized in Northern Italy, repeating the name and the ideals of Mazzini's Young Italy. The new organization gathered elements from the various democratic parties. Its aims were to publish a weekly bulletin, to maintain ties among opposition groups in Italy and France. The organization was active mostly in Turin, Milan, and Bologna. When it was decided to expand it in other parts of Italy an ambassador was sent to Croce. Mario Neri, a magistrate from Turin went to Naples, carrying a letter of introduction from Senator Ruffini, met with Croce, and his mission was successful, more than was originally expected.

As Gavagnin put it: "There were some doubts, and perhaps they remained, about Croce's disposition to action; but the fact is that he gave his adherence without reservation".

(11)

Gavagnin's assertions are now confirmed by police reports, which in several places, directly or indirectly, associate Croce's name with Young Italy. In 1927, with a short telegram, Mussolini ordered the prefect of Naples to stop police surveillance around Croce's house. Soon after, as a justification for past and present actions, making clever distinctions between "surveillance", "vigilance" and "information", a note from the political police branch informed the Minister of the Interior that information on Croce was collected and his movements followed: "since Senator Benedetto Croce has not appeared completely unrelated to the anti-fascist movement called Young Italy". The files in the National Archives are now there to prove that surveillance, vigilance and information never stopped but continued till the end, in one form or another. (12)

Cultural Activity as Political Opposition.

Even in this period Croce's writings are the best guide to understanding his political position, and to gauging the cultural plans he followed in the changed conditions created by the consolidation of the fascist regime. In his Autobiographical Notes of 1934 and 1941 Croce confessed

that he did not have the personal ability nor the moral inclination to undertake conspiratorial actions, and he also said that he did not have much faith in the efficacy of those actions. On the other hand, not wanting to increase the general depression and timidity, he did not discourage those, in Italy and among the exiles, who planned and dreamed "more promptly resolute actions and conspired". For his part, Croce decided to devote his best energy to cultural activities, and to promote the philosophical ideas that underlay a liberal society, because, this was "my best opposition, the one more suitable to my nature and in which I could produce the best results". Croce thought that this theoretical activity had become more necessary, and acquired a new urgency, because during the liberal age freedom had not received an adequate philosophical justification, and the "concept of freedom, so to say, had been disarmed". With his cultural activity then Croce wanted to offer to political action the support of philosophical theory, inviting, at the same time, the politicians involved in the struggles against dictatorship and especially the new generations "to re-think the problems of freedom". He also hoped to "light anew in their minds and in their souls the central fire of the Risorgimento". (13)

In 1946, speaking as president of the Liberal Party to

its first national congress after the war, Croce expressed with more precision the purpose of his resistance to the fascist regime and the aims he had hoped to achieve with his cultural activities. First of all, with his historical essays he tried to defend the liberal ideals of the Risorgimento and "to keep immaculate for the future the most precious heritage of our fathers ...". With his philosophical and political writings, Croce endeavoured to give a new and better expression to the concept of political freedom, because this concept "had not received an adequate elaboration in the thought of the nineteenth century", "had been treated empirically by the English theorists", "had been sacrificed to the State by the Germans", and had not received the spiritual relations, necessary to its life by positivism and naturalism. As a result of this new elaboration the concept of political freedom was : "...fully identified with conscience and with moral life in all its comprehension and extension". One of the consequences of this conclusion led to the separation of political freedom from economic organization, and made it possible to break the ties that had been established in the nineteenth century between political liberalism and economic liberalism or laissez-faire. (14)

Cultural Organization.

This was not a programme for a political party,

concerned with problems of organizations, practical actions and membership needs. In choosing such a programme one has to recognize that Croce put to efficient use his natural talents, and achieved his intended aims. But even in Croce's cultural programme there was more than he was willing to admit or his critics have been ready to concede. To achieve his purposes, Croce too needed an organization, and people willing to be in that organization. To be effective Croce's programme required first of all the writing of books, expressing ideas relevant to the times and appealing to old and new generations. But before they reached the hands of readers, those books had to be printed, distributed and sold. Croce was lucky to have in Giovanni Laterza a faithful and courageous publisher, not afraid of political and economic harassment. In Guido De Ruggiero and Adolfo Omodeo, Croce acquired congenial collaborators, who gave to his periodical a wider appeal and an extra zest. In the universities and high schools, in the libraries and book stores, there were teachers and librarians willing to use, to discuss, to select, to display and to recommend Croce's books. In every Italian city there was a network of friends, young and old, men and women, ready to help, to protect, to support and also willing to take a risk, that constituted what Croce liked to call "the Italian family". At the risk of sounding

crass, one has to admit that in this period Croce's intellectual output was impressive both for quantity and quality; but one has also to recognize that in cultural activity, in the practical production and distribution of goods, Croce created an efficient organization and showed outstanding managerial qualities. He was a great impresario.

New Editions of Old Books.

Not only the publication of new writings but also the republication of Croce's old books has to be regarded as part of his new cultural programme and his opposition to the fascist regime. The new editions fulfilled another important function; they offered a link between generations, made possible a continuation of old debates and kept the present aware of the past; ideas, now ostracized by the regime, but which had inspired other parties, were put back into circulation; new readers were exposed to them, and placed in a position to accept or to reject them. The link with the political situation was assured by a new introduction, which often was an occasion to rectify a misconception or an invitation to read the book from a different perspective.

In 1927 Croce published a new edition of his essays on Marxism. In the previous edition, he had used rather heavy and inappropriate sarcasm against the ideals preached by

the humanitarian socialists and by the democrats. The new introduction rectified the bad impression created by that sarcasm, and offered Croce the occasion to clarify his political ideas. In 1917, in the middle of the war, Croce had expressed his admiration of Marx for the realism of his doctrine and for the emphasis given to force, which had helped the young Croce, as he claimed, to resist and to reject the charms and the "seductions of the Goddess Humanity and the Goddess Justice". Those words, after the war, had been interpreted by some commentators as an indication of Croce's "adhesion to the party or to one of the parties that are called authoritarian...", "which is contrary to my feeling and to my thought". Now, 1927, Croce clarified that force is a neutral element in politics, to be used when the situation requires it by all politicians, with the difference that the liberals employ force to promote a liberal society, while the reactionaries use force to impose their authoritarian solutions or to defend their own interests. (15)

The same ideas are expressed in the new edition of his book, Italy from 1914 to 1918. Once again the new introduction was used by Croce to criticize the ideas of the fascist regime and to condemn the writers serving the regime. Croce reminded his contemporaries that his intention in 1927, and during the war, was to defend the

common European heritage against all the various nationalisms. But the introduction contains also a self criticism. The essays of the book continually stressed the concept of politics as power and force. Now Croce recognizes that force cannot be materialistically understood, and that politics cannot be separated from ethics. In the name of this new conception, he rejected "the idolatry of the State", and, with direct reference to Gentile, refused with scorn the idea "that the State is Duty and it is God". At the same time he invited Italians to return to Christian precepts, giving to Caesar what only belongs to Caesar, and to follow "the moral and religious conscience" in the determination of practical action, without waiting for the orders of the State or the approval of government. (16)

Philosophical Evolution.

The new introductions and the other historical essays written in 1927 were signs of Croce's political and philosophical evolution. Already he had abandoned the strident polemic against the democrats, now his liberalism lost its conservative edge and became more progressive. From now on Croce's liberalism acquired a democratic nature and accepted democratic ideas in politics and Croce can be regarded as a liberal democrat. Under the impact of fascism, Croce was now offering a new view of politics,

more respondent to his inner feelings, better attuned to the needs of the time, and in fuller harmony with his philosophical system. Facing a new adversary, Croce moved away from his old stance; force lost the previous emphasis, and the accent was put on freedom and morality. In politics the dialectic between force and consensus remained, but freedom had to be the result of the struggle, giving value to political action.

Croce's evolution was evident in three essays, that were first published in La Critica, in 1927 and were included later in the book, Etica e Politica. In the first essay, The Liberal Conception as a Conception of Life, Croce made an effort to redefine the nature of his liberalism, giving it new attributes and a different connotation than in the past. The fact that Croce was and remained a member of the Italian Liberal Party, and always retained an emotional attachment for that party has created some confusion about his liberalism and generated some equivocation about his use of the word, with unfortunate consequences, much of his own making. But the essay made clear that for Croce liberalism was not so much a political party among other political parties with its own programmes and leaders. Sub specie aeternitatis, liberalism for Croce has religious connotation, is a meta-political vision "and coincides with a total conception of life and reality". It reflects an

immanent philosophy, and "it is centred on the idea of dialectic and becoming, that, through diversity and opposition of spiritual forces, increases and continually ennoble life, and gives to it its full and true meaning".

(17)

This conception is against dogmatism and definitive solutions; it favours diversity and requires opposition, and regards them as beneficial to society and necessary to life; it also asks participation and demands active and responsible citizens. This conception is refused by philosophies based on transcendence and authority, that condemn struggle, refuse diversity and fear contrasts; it is contrasted by institutions and regimes that prefer to impose solutions from above, and accept only passivity from its citizens, and demand continual obedience. The struggle between these two conceptions has a religious character, because it is a fight not so much about practical solutions as about ultimate ends and supreme ideals. In its perfect form, liberalism finds its antithesis in the Catholic Church. But the liberal ideal has an adversary also in communism because this doctrine too has eschatological elements, presents a total conception of life, based on authority, and believes in a final and perfect society, where conflict disappears and history comes to an end. (18)

For most of his life, Croce, in the name of liberty,

opposed both fascism and communism as expressions of the authoritarian tendencies in modern society. During the fascist regime Croce in reality fought a continuous battle on two fronts, against fascism and against communism. This was done to counteract the appeal of Marxism and the allure of the Russian revolution, but also to refute fascist propoganda, which always presented fascism to the fearful middle class as the only alternative to communism and the only bulwark against the triumph of bolshevism: Rome or Moscow was a popular fascist slogan in those days. With their theory of social-fascism, the communists played into the hands of fascism, and increased the fears of the moderate elements. (19)

While Croce criticized the theoretical aspects of Socialism, in its Leninist interpretation, he recognized the positive historical role played by the socialist parties, and the beneficial results produced by their organizations, for the working classes but also for society as a whole. He recognized that socialism was a component of the modern age and a product of immanent philosophy. Croce made a clear invitation to modern socialists to develop their ideals further along a dialectical conception of reality, accepting freedom as essential to life, and avoiding dictatorial solutions as contrary to their own origins. No such sympathy was shown toward the opposite

movements. Croce's criticism against the reactionary elements was always harsh, and he rejected with sarcasm their continual harping back to a feudal past and their longing for a theocratic and authoritarian future. (20)

Distinction between Liberalism and Capitalism.

Croce not only gave a dialectical foundation to his liberalism, but he also introduced new elements in the traditional doctrine of liberalism, and these increased his influence among the new generations active in democratic and socialist movements. For Croce liberalism does not coincide with capitalism or with the market economy or "liberismo" as he calls it. Capitalism is only an economic organization born to satisfy certain economic needs of society, and can be changed, modified or replaced as the needs change, or when different solutions are found to produce more wealth and which are better able to solve economic problems. Finally, now Croce admitted that Liberalism and Democracy are based on the same ideals and can be regarded as similar, under certain conditions. Liberalism and Democracy are similar when they oppose authority, when they favour moral equality, when they try to ameliorate the conditions of the working classes, assuring them economic and moral progress. (21)

Croce's separation of liberalism from capitalism and his distinction between philosophical liberalism and economic

laissez-faire gave rise to a long polemic with Luigi Einaudi, who defended a more traditional view of liberalism, inspired by the ideas of classical political economy. But in the political situation of the time, Croce's distinction made it possible to bridge the distance between old opponents, and to influence the young leaders of the democratic and socialist movements. As the historian Nicola Tranfaglia has recognized: "In this essay Rosselli found the theoretical arguments ... for his formulation of liberal socialism". (22)

In the second essay, Croce elaborated further on the distinction between liberalism and laissez-faire. For Croce liberalism is an ethical and political principle and has "the value of a supreme rule and law of social life", and it coincides with a total vision of life, and has its foundation in an immanent philosophy. Liberalism dislikes the regulations that limit the freedom of individuals, but it also recognizes the need to impose limitations on economic activities in order to achieve a greater good for the community. Laissez-faire, on the other hand, is only an economic rule, concerned with the production of material goods, produced in an efficient manner as a result of private initiative. Liberalism cannot be concerned only with the economic results of production, but has to be preoccupied with its total effect on society. And it does

not accept as "goods" only those produced to satisfy the economic necessities of man, but regards as goods all the creations of the human spirit. If one is concerned with the production of economic wealth, the other is guided "by the promotion of spiritual life in its totality". (23)

In the practical field, according to reasons of opportunity, liberalism approves many measures proposed by laissez-faire, but can also reject them, when they do not promote but instead impede freedom. At the same time, and for the same reasons, liberalism can even welcome socialistic proposals, when these improve the protection and promotion of the freedom. The difference and the opposition between liberalism and socialism rests not so much on a different economic organization as on an ethical and political ideal, one based on individual freedom the other on authority. (24)

The political consequences of Croce's distinction between Liberalism and Laissez-faire were far reaching. The distinction made possible, in the present and in the future, an alliance or a cooperation between liberals and democrats and social democrats; it allowed the new generation of socialists, like Carlo Rosselli and Giuseppe Saragat, to introduce elements of liberalism into their revisions of socialism. Croce's essay was also directed at those liberals of his time, who identified liberalism with

the capitalistic economy, and applauded the free market policies of fascism. Croce reminded them that the litmus test for true liberals was always political freedom not economic policy, and one cannot be bartered for the other.

In the last essay of the year, The Bourgeoisie, Croce rejected the concept of bourgeoisie to indicate the modern age, as generating political equivocations and historical confusion. For Croce bourgeois and bourgeoisie were only empirical social distinctions, useful sometimes to indicate economic subjects or juridical institutions, but unsuited to describe a spiritual or historical personality. To indicate the ideals of the modern age, Croce preferred the concept of liberalism, as a better and more precise definition to qualify the struggles to achieve political freedom and the advance of a rational and immanent philosophy. (25)

The essay analyzed and debated the theories and books of Sombart and Groethuisen, but the political necessities of the times were quite evident, if not exclusive. The authoritarian movements of the right and of the left often proclaimed that they were not fighting against true freedom, but were only opposed to bourgeois ideals and to capitalist society, and wanted to replace them with a new order, inspired by true liberal ideals or a more progressive program. Against the sophistry of these

arguments Croce argued that at stake in the struggles of our times were not bourgeois ideals but the dignity of man as a free agent. Many progressive intellectuals criticized and even rejected the liberal ideals of the modern age because they did not like elements of capitalist society or found questionable the morals of the bourgeois class. Also, often fascist politicians contrasted the materialism and the egoism of the bourgeoisie with the spiritualism and the heroism of fascism. Croce made the argument that there are no bourgeois or proletarian ideals but only human ideals, produced by the human spirit in its struggle against adverse forces. In the age of dictators, Croce tried to bring the concept of freedom to its pristine purity, devoid of contaminations. It was a reminder to all that the fight in modern times was between freedom and authority, between political systems that promote liberty, and those that dictate solutions by force, imposed on all by a single party, or, more often, by a single man. (26)

The History of Italy.

These essays are also essential to fully appreciate Croce's ideas when he wrote the history of liberal Italy, which was a capital moment in his struggle against fascism and Mussolini's dictatorship. Besides all the other activities and writings, from the middle of 1926 to the end of 1927, Croce was occupied in writing History of Italy

from 1871 to 1915. The research began in June 1926, by July 1927 the readings were done and the writing began; in the last days of December Croce went to Bari and gave the manuscript personally to Laterza; in January 1928 the first edition was published, and the book immediately became a best seller. The book was an extraordinary event then and has remained at the centre of historical debate ever since, praised and blamed with equal force, always with political motivation clearly evident. Croce had reason to be pleased with the result of his work. History of Italy fully achieved its aim, which was the defence of liberal Italy from the denigrations of fascism. (27)

But despite the linearity of the argument and the clarity of the prose, this work remains a difficult and complex book. History of Italy is not only a book of history, it is also a work of philosophy; its pages are full of philosophical statements, reflecting Croce's vision of life. The historical judgments presuppose a dialectical conception of reality, and Croce's particular insistence on the unity and distinctions of the categories. One also has to keep in mind the changing nature of that troubled and troubling category of vitality, and its evolving relation with the categories of utility and morality, and the different functions assigned to them now. (28)

As a work of history, History of Italy offered a

positive evaluation of the liberal period from 1870 to 1915. But the book never became a hagiography. Croce was aware of the shortcomings of the political and cultural elites; he did not hide the mistakes made in foreign policy. He recognized that agriculture was sacrificed to industrial development, and that the few southern industries disappeared under the sudden competition of northern companies, and the disparity between north and south remained and was not even reduced. He did not ignore the social and public backwardness of Italian society, when compared with the more progressive nations of Europe. But despite these reservations, Croce praised the ruling classes for the great progress achieved, and for the effort made to overcome geographical and historical difficulties, constantly increasing the standard of living.

The positive judgment given to this historical period reflected Croce's political evolution after the war, and revealed the influence exercised on his ideas by his friendship with Giolitti. Now his liberalism had acquired a democratic nature, and he had come to accept democratic ideas in politics. The new ideas made possible a better understanding of Giolitti's policies, and a new appreciation of his personality. At the same time the new position allowed Croce to give a more equitable evaluation of Depetris and the victory of the Historical Left in 1876,

different from the corrosive judgments he had heard and shared in the house of Silvio Spaventa.

The events that followed the Great War in Italy and in Europe compelled Croce to revise his philosophical concepts and political ideas. As he has written in his Autobiographical Notes of 1934: "Since then my philosophical and historical works, without ceasing to be severely scientific, and without acquiring political contamination, expressed with greater and quicker correspondence than before the new demands that the moral conscience posed, and provided the light that it demanded". This new attitude can be seen in all his writings, "but especially in the political essays and in the historical books which I have been writing, that, devised before the war, by the new events acquired an accent that they would not have had before, and also an awareness of certain processes, that before would not have been as clear". (29)

This intellectual evolution also reveals a changed personal attitude to politics. Until the First World War Croce had devoted his life mainly to cultural activities, and had left political affairs to professional politicians. After the advent of fascism Croce became personally involved in politics, and was deeply concerned with political events. From then on with his cultural activities Croce responded to political urging and tried to influence

political events in a more direct way. (30)

For all these reasons History of Italy, besides its philosophical and historical value, has also to be regarded as a political statement. Given the times in which it was written, and the ideas animating the narration, the book acquired the meaning of a political protest against the ruling party. Mussolini and Rocco, with the support of Gentile and the acquiescence of Victor Emanuel, had destroyed the liberal State and were building the authoritarian regime, and were compelled to make recourse to persecutions and exiles. Against the oppression of this dictatorship, Croce showed the fruits of liberty, and the creative spirit of a liberal society. He defended the reasons for freedom and the need of political parties to assure social progress and to avoid political disasters. He praised the functions of Parliament, the contribution of a free press, and the role of the opposition as a vital necessity to maintain the authority of the State and to create the moral unity of the nation. (31)

The fascist intellectuals were creating the myth of the Duce, the chief who is always right, the leader who dares where others vacillate, and looked to Crispi as an earlier example of bold initiatives and great energy against a reluctant Parliament and the indifference of the population. Croce gave a critical judgment of Crispi, and

condemned his methods and policies, showing his shortcomings, his constant vacillations and tendency to blame Parliament for his own personal failures. He stressed the dangers of that leadership's style, reminding that many of Crispi's mistakes had their origin in his disregard of Parliament, and that the foreign policy of Crispi, unrestrained by Parliament, ended in national disaster. The reference to Mussolini's policies and personal style were clear, and were noted by contemporaries. (32)

Against the failures of Crispi, Croce contrasted the success of Giolitti, who throughout his career remained faithful to the Statuto, respectful of Parliament and always willing to accept the cooperation of the opposition. The result of that method and that policy was a period of peace, economic development and social progress. Without ignoring the difficulties of this period, Croce praised in Giolitti the working and the achievement of the liberal method: a method able to maintain law and order and to assure freedom of individual initiatives; to achieve a synthesis of progress and conservation, avoiding the pitfalls of reaction and revolution. (33)

The age of Giolitti is also the time of King Victor Emanuel, and one is surprised to find very few praises for that King, amid much indirect criticism. Throughout the book there is an evident contrast between the cordiality

and humanity of King Umberto and the known aridity and skepticism of King Victor Emanuel: between the ability of the first to share the joys and sorrows of the Italian people and the cold indifference of the second. In the narration of the events of 1898 Croce makes evident the similarities with the happenings of 1922. There we find a reminder to the present King, using the words of his own message for the accession to the throne, that oaths have to be kept, and that "the protection of freedom" and "the defence of the Monarchy" go together, and "both are tied to the supreme destinies of the Fatherland in bonds indissoluble". (34)

Besides Giolitti and his liberalism, there is another man and another movement that receives high praise in Croce's book. When Croce was writing History of Italy the organizations created by Socialism had already been destroyed, and the leaders were persecuted. Turati, despite old age and illness, had been compelled to escape to France, to avoid the continuous harassment of the government. In his book Croce recognized the historical role played by the Socialist Party and its necessary presence in the political life of a nation; he praised the achievements of its organizations and the positive contribution given to the social progress of Italian society. At the same time, Croce paid a tribute to the

personal honesty, the natural moderation, the democratic faith, the patriotic spirit and the common sense of Turati. In 1926 the courage of Parri and Rosselli had brought Turati back to freedom and given a new life to his broken heart, the book of Croce restored the old socialist leader to his deserved place in the history of modern Italy and assured his reputation among younger generations. Giolitti first of all but also Turati are the real heroes of Croce's History, and he seems to indicate their leadership and policy as examples worthy to be followed, by liberals and socialists . (35)

The Origins of Fascism.

But Croce not only wanted to compare and contrast the fruits of the liberal State with the oppression of the fascist regime, he also wanted to understand the reasons for the collapse of the liberal forces and the victory of Mussolini and fascism. This is in accordance with his theory of the contemporaneity of history: historical questions arise from practical needs, and demand clarification to understand the present and to prepare for future action. In the historical debate about liberal Italy and the nature of fascism, many critics have complained that History of Italy does not explain the origins of fascism, and leaves a chasm between what preceded and what followed 1915. But a candid reader of Croce's book,

reflecting especially on the narrative of chapter ten, can agree with the stringent arguments of Sasso, and can recognize without difficulty that the nature of fascism was always present in the mind of Croce, and the origins of fascism are clearly indicated and forcefully expressed.

(36)

Unlike other historians, then or later, Croce saw the origins of fascism in intellectual ideas and moral attitudes, that began to change the political and cultural atmosphere of Europe after the defeat of France and the triumph of Bismarck in 1870, and that came to maturity in the years before the war. (37) During the Giolittian era amid the bloom of cultural and economic progress, there was also "something unsafe and a little unhealthy". In those unhealthy elements have to be found the germs that after the war, increased by the war, produced fascism. Before the war the moral and political enthusiasm of the younger generation was attracted by new theories, all expressing "a rapacious spirit of conquest and adventure, attitudes of cynicism and violence". The new forms of belief weakened the sense of distinction "between morality and utility", "duty and pleasure", "truth and falsehood". The traditional ideal of patriotism was replaced by the passions of nationalism and imperialism, often accompanied by "a religion of the race" and by "a cupidity of conquest", that

placed the State above morality. While the new theories made progress and increased their appeal, the old ideals went into decadence and the liberal ideals became no longer fashionable: "Liberalism was then a practice and not a living faith". (38)

These elements of irrationalism and the general anti-liberal reaction generated by them, found new nourishment in the Libyan War, but were increased and became fully developed by the Great War. Croce characterized that conflict as "the war of historical materialism", and "the war of philosophical irrationalism", "devoid of ideal motivations", but "full of commercial and industrial considerations", "nourished by immoderate desires and morbid fantasies". If those elements characterized the war in its European dimension, the Italians contributed something of their own. Many Italians participated in war moved by irrational feelings and for dubious reasons. The nationalists wanted to destroy the Giolittian system and to replace it with an authoritarian government; D'Annunzio preached the war for sensual desires, seeking exotic adventures and violent experiences to satisfy his libidinous cravings. In favour of the war even the democratic interventionists accepted the violence, made appeals to the piazza, inflicted a vulnus to Parliament, thus violating the rights of the majority, and

establishing a dangerous precedent. (39)

Once we remember that for Croce fascism had its origins in the irrationalism and activism of the Giolittian era, then we are able to appreciate his characterization of Mussolini, made in chapter eleven. There Croce stressed Mussolini's intellectual modernity. Unlike the old leaders of Socialism, still following the ideas of positivism, Mussolini tried to rejuvenate the socialist ideology by "using Sorel's theory of violence, Bergson's intuitionism, the pragmatism, the mysticism of action, all the voluntarism that was in the air, and that seemed idealism to many...". Mixing all those elements together, Mussolini was able to give a new vigour to the Socialist Party and a new importance to its newspaper. Preaching "utopias and miracolism", he became popular not only among socialists but also among the Italian cultural elite. (40) For Croce, Mussolini, before the war, had been the best political expression of all the irrational forces that were undermining liberal and democratic ideals, and, by implication, after the war, he became the leader, who was able to organize and to lead those same forces to the destruction of the liberal State and to the suppression of democracy.

In History of Italy there was a good dose of self-criticism; Croce recognized the importance of his own

work and his contribution to Italian culture. But he admitted that the new idealism also had elements of irrationalism in its own luggage, especially in the position of Gentile. For this reason the new philosophy had not been able to contrast the victory of irrationalism and decadentism, had not been able to influence the praxis, and to acquire hegemony. There was also the admission that he was not involved in politics and was not unduly worried about political problems. Above all one learns that during the Giolittian years, Croce did not possess yet a full theory of liberalism, which could give support and justification to the methods of Giolitti. (41)

The Defense of Liberal Italy.

The practical origin of the book and its political function were recognized by Croce himself. Since 1902 he had decided to write "the moral and political history of Italy in the last two centuries" alone or as part of a history of modern Europe. (42) But in writing his book in 1927, Croce was moved by several novel considerations, and all of them had origins in the political conditions of the time and in the triumph of fascism. As he said in his Autobiographical Notes of 1934. These reasons are to be found in the cataclysm created by the war; in the historical ignorance of new generations; and finally, in the derision of fascism towards liberal Italy. "The break

with tradition, caused by the World War and by the moral and political perturbations that followed; the ignorance of the new generations about what had been the life of Italy after the achievement of unification; the shame, the contempt, the derision, that for a calculated partisan action were thrown against the honest, modest and solid work of our fathers, through which Italy had taken her place in modern culture and in international politics; inflamed my spirit to narrate History of Italy from 1871 to 1915". (43)

In 1946, Croce explained with more precision the passionate origin of his work. The aim had been to write a political and moral protest against those fascist intellectuals who "... for partisan reasons considered it useful to promote calumny and scorn towards the previous generations of Italy", and began "to ridicule and to make a mockery of what they called the Little Italy or the Umbertine Italy". In writing his book Croce had in mind particularly the younger generations, and his intent was to offer them a book, "that told them briefly and honestly what had been, with its lights and its shadows, the modest and laborious country of their fathers and grandfathers". (44)

Because that was the time in which he "had been educated and could give witness", Croce approached the history of

that period with a feeling of pietas, love and reverence. Not the great accomplishments moved his mind and his heart, but the moral qualities animating, "the feelings and the thoughts of those three industrious generations". "I have loved and love the air of the Risorgimento, that respect for recognized truths, that coherence and honesty, that feeling of humanity, that gentility of customs, that rebellion ... against lies". (45) This feeling of nostalgia gives a particular pathos to many pages of the book. In the narration there is a constant contrast between "the memory of the happy time", and the view of "the sad present"; between "the comfort and the pride" in the contemplation of "the free fatherland among free nations" and "the shame and the reproach" for the old "ideals and customs now lost, despised and derided". (46)

These feelings of sadness are also expressed in the Taccuini. At the beginning of July 1927 Croce entered a revealing note in his diaries: "I have finished reading the notes ... and thought a great deal about the order of the work. But the ties of this history with the present situation have led me to meditate with anguish on the present and on the future. It cost me a painful effort to devote myself to this history, that I have undertaken to write it as a duty towards my fellow citizens. Old wounds are opened again, which would not happen if I could occupy

my mind in other studies, not so close to the present political life". (47)

Croce's feelings of sadness were expressed in his private correspondence of this time, especially in his letters to Karl Vossler. (48) The political aspect of the book and the intellectual evolution it represents in the life of Croce found significant expression in the correspondence between Croce and Fortunato. Fortunato read several chapters in manuscript "with a mountain of emotion" and "with joy, wonder and gratitude", "in this hour so dark for Italy, of such obscurity, and such offense to truth". He confessed that he "was grateful" and his mind "was fired ... for the justification of Italian resurrection ... achieved under the aegis of freedom", and "... for the exaltation of the fifty years of our Italian national life, so much ridiculed and scorned in the present hour". (49)

The Political Function of the Book.

By following closely Croce's correspondence with his friends during the preparation of History of Italy and after its publication we can understand the political nature of this book and the particular role it played in the fight against the fascist regime. (50) From the Taccuini we also learn that Croce discussed the critical problems of that history with Adolfo Omodeo. (51) Croce wrote to other friends about his readings for History of

Italy. He even mentioned the preparation of such a book in an interview, given to the London Observer. (52) He also asked some of his closest friends to read chapters, still in manuscript, to share with him their comments and their views before the actual publication. These friends must have mentioned the upcoming book in their correspondence, and also in their meetings with other friends. In 1927 Gioacchino Volpe published his book, L'Italia in Cammino, which covers roughly the same period, but seen with the eyes of a moderate nationalist. Since then many have assumed that Croce's book in 1928 was the liberal answer to Volpe's history. In reality the two books are the fruit of different inspirations and have no close relation. (53) But the event increased expectation for Croce's book, as we learn from a letter of Guido De Ruggiero, who had been asked to read the first chapters of the book still in manuscript. His letter shows that the cultural elite had become aware of the work in preparation and was waiting for it, eager to compare and to contrast the two books. From Bologna, in October 1927, De Ruggiero wrote to Croce: "Here the presentiment of your book is in the air; I did not mention it to anybody, but fame flies. I have learned that G. Volpe has received the news with disappointment, because he is afraid to be pushed from his nest". (54)

In the political situation of the time, the research,

the preparation and the writing of History of Italy by Croce, the readings of chapters still in manuscript by his friends in various Italian cities, the correspondence and the discussions it generated acquired a special significance: a choral expression of anti-fascism.

Chapter 8: Publication of History of Italy, 1928

The publication of the History of Italy was unusual and different from Croce's other books. In the past Croce published chapters of his books first in his periodical. This time a different procedure was followed, made advisable by the changed political conditions of Italy; the book was published at once, without any single chapter appearing elsewhere. (1) Croce had decided on this strategy, following the advice of his closest friends, all of them afraid that the book could have been seized by the police before publication. To avoid that unpleasant possibility, precautions were taken. A copy of the manuscript was sent to London, and the possibility of an English edition was put discreetly afloat, so the message could reach the right ears. Instead of using the normal service of the Post Office, Croce took the manuscript personally to Laterza, and went to Bari, "accompanying Laterza's young daughter", which was intended to disguise the true nature of the trip. (2)

History of Italy was finally published in January 1928, and immediately became a best seller, despite the high price of twenty five lire. The first edition of five thousand copies was sold out within days, a second edition of five thousand copies was printed in March, followed within the same month by a third. The book was reprinted in

1929, and it appeared four more times during the fascist regime, the last reprint in 1943 just before the fall of Mussolini. A comparison with the book of Gioacchino Volpe highlights Croce's commercial success. For the first edition of Volpe's book in 1927, two thousand copies were printed, followed by a second edition of one thousand in 1928, and a third of two thousand again in 1928. A fourth edition of two thousand copies appeared in 1932, and this was followed by a fifth of similar numbers, some time later. (3)

Croce's book was then printed more times and sold more copies than Volpe's book despite the boycott of the cultural establishment and the hostility of the government. Given the size of the literary market and the conditions of the publishing industry in those times, even Volpe's book has to be considered a commercial success, but Croce's achievement is more significant when we consider that Volpe's work had the support of official propaganda, and the financial resources of the Treves publishing house, then the leading publisher in Italy, with a commercial and marketing organization far superior to Laterza. If Croce's book had success despite the official boycott, then the explanation has to be found in its political importance, in the nature of the work, and in the authority of Croce among the Italian people. This success also shows that during the

regime, when it was necessary, news and information traveled outside of the normal channels of communication, using old avenues or new trails.

Reactions to the History.

Once the book was published, the success of the sale caught the attention of police authorities. In March 1928 Arturo Bocchini, the able and efficient chief of police, asked the prefect of Bari "discreetly to ascertain how many copies have been sold of the last book by Benedetto Croce". With promptness the prefect replied that: "The publishing house Laterza has until now printed and sold five thousand copies of B. Croce's last book, History of Italy". Then the prefect added, "another five thousand are in the process of being printed". The success was recognized by the fascist press itself. In April Rome's newspaper, Il Tevere, lamented that "the book, it needs to be said, ... has enjoyed a colossal success. In a few days two editions of five thousand copies each have been sold out. And it cost the good sum of twenty five lire". (4)

After the publication Mussolini was asked to ban and to seize the book. But he refused, and instead, expert as he was, ordered the press to ignore it. When the book became a bestseller, despite the boycott, and could no longer be ignored, the orders were changed and the press was asked to scorn the book and to ridicule the author. The most bitter

criticism of Croce's book came from the radical fascists, joined on this occasion by the Catholics, the nationalists, and by Gentile, who bitterly resented Croce's criticism of his philosophy and politics. (5) Farinacci's friend, Giovanni Preziosi called Croce "the stubborn senator" and denounced the book "as an evident libel against fascism". A few titles of articles, dedicated to the book, reflect the atmosphere of the time: "The history without history"; "An obscene thing"; "A mystification of history"; "A bad and bitter book"; "A poor thing and a poor man"; "A case of spiritual exile". The last title suggests that for many fascists Croce had become, like the political exiles, a foreigner in his own country. (6)

Naturally these personal insults and the bad reviews increased interest for the book, but also generated reactions, not really intended by their authors, who hoped only to destroy Croce's influence and reputation, or to discourage and to intimidate the readers of his book. Many Italians not only bought the book but many debated the issues raised by the book. If it was not possible to discuss the book publicly in scholarly reviews it was still possible, despite censorship, to discuss it in private letters. In the political situation of fascism, private correspondence, in this case at least, replaced discussion in periodicals. And beyond letters one has to imagine, to

fully appreciate the book's influence, the news exchanged among friends, the debates carried on in the privacy of homes, and even the discussions in clubs and restaurants.

Old friends and political leaders of liberal Italy received the book from Croce or from Laterza, and all of them wrote back to Croce, expressing their admiration, offering comments and sometimes reservations. Among the most interesting are the letters of Giolitti, Salandra, Fortunato, Albertini, Guido Alessio, and Nello Toscanelli, all of whom recognized the political value of the book, regarding it as "a true hymn to freedom", as Giolitti put it. (7)

Croce also received letters from younger people, university students and teachers. Some of these letters are quite valuable as historical or theoretical documents. Particularly important are the letters written by Giovanni Ansaldo, Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, Guido De Ruggiero, and Carlo Rosselli, who wrote from jail. All of them read the book "with great interest", and "with feelings of gratitude". All appreciated "the defence of liberty", and recognized the intrinsic polemics against "the novus ordo". For his part Salvemini read the book in London, and wrote, with his usual polemical verve, a favourable review for Time and Tide. (8)

Volpe's Reactions.

Croce's polemic against the fascist regime was noted by fascist intellectuals; they had no trouble in establishing a relation between the defence of liberal Italy and the implicit condemnation of the fascist regime. When Croce's book was published, Gioacchino Volpe wrote a review in Corriere della Sera, in which he rejected the general thesis of the book, but was in general respectful of Croce and not without some praise for the work itself. (9)

Besides the reservations expected from a nationalist historian Volpe's review of 1928 contains a great truth. Volpe recognized that in writing his book, Croce's intention had been twofold: to write a positive history of liberal Italy but also to achieve a political purpose. "Croce not only wanted to vindicate to the Italians of yesterday their just part, but he also intended to fight a battle: for liberalism and for the liberal method, and for the so called liberal government, and even more for Giolitti, and his so called liberalism". (10)

Despite the general reservation and the sarcasm of the last sentence the review did not meet with the approval of the fascist authorities. Augusto Turati, the national secretary of the Fascist Party, penned a letter to Volpe, complaining against the "weak tones" used in his review. In that letter Turati even threatened Volpe with the denial of

party membership that Volpe had asked for during those months. "I have read and read again your article on the History of Italy by Benedetto Croce", Turati wrote, "should I decide your admission to the Party on the basis of that article, I can not hide that I would have to give a contrary opinion". For Turati, rather than using the respectful tone as Volpe had done, it was necessary, even more "it was dutiful to fight resolutely Croce's premises and conclusions", for the simple reason, that "the book is the exaltation of all that we have fought against and transformed: it is the affirmation of a spirit and a conception antithetical to ours". (11)

Turati's letter to Volpe reveals that Croce's book was discussed at the highest level, and had become a matter of delicate politics, demanding an official response. Under political pressure Volpe in 1931 wrote a lengthy introduction to a new edition of his book, L'Italia in Cammino. This time the animus was different; the introduction was very critical of Croce and of his book; the substance was not much different from the previous review, but the tone was acerbic, the animosity evident, and the reverence had disappeared. The difference did not escape Fortunato's attention. He called the new introduction "an aggression against Croce". (12) Above all Volpe disliked Croce's open polemic against the policies of

the fascist regime. "This book, by agreement of all, those who like it, and those who do not like it, is wholly polemical, implicitly or explicitly, by rapid allusions or by demonstrations, in the text and even more in the notes". In agreement with Augusto Turati, Volpe expressed a truth that often has been forgotten. "The truth is that Croce is fighting desperately against the Italy of today; and every judgment of his on the past, from 1871 to 1915, assumes the colours of this fight". For this reason, Volpe recognized that the book was a moment in the anti-fascist struggle ! "This History of Italy ... will remain more as an historical document of the years in which it appeared than as an historical reconstruction, with objective value, of the times to which it refers". (13)

Political Actions Inspired by the History.

Not only the History of Italy was read and discussed among the cultural elite of Italy, in Pisa and in Milan, among young students and other intellectuals, Croce's book provided the stimulus to undertake also something more concrete, and lead to a politico-cultural initiative. After the publication of Croce's book, V.E. Alfieri bought and donated to his friends twelve extra copies, and then this group decided to initiate the publication of a new cultural periodical: "The idea was to publish a small historical revue of the Risorgimento: this idea was the fruit of the

enthusiasm generated then in young people by Croce's History of Italy". According to Alfieri, the aim of the periodical was not only to study the history of the Risorgimento but also "to raise political issues", and to defend liberal ideas. Unable, for financial reasons, to found a new revue the group tried to utilize the small periodical, Pietre, published in Genoa. But the attempt had a short life, and soon afterwards the periodical was suppressed and the young promoters were arrested.

In April of 1928, while the King was going to open the Milan Fair, a bomb exploded along the Royal route. The King was not hurt, but twenty men died and forty were seriously wounded. Soon after under various pretexts, the police arrested many anti-fascists, especially students and teachers. Among the arrested were Alfieri, the writers of the periodical and other friends. In Milan 200 intellectuals, among students and professors were arrested and sent to jail; in Naples thirty friends of Croce were questioned by the police and two of them were detained. In both cities the young intellectuals were apprehended by the police "under the accusation of conspiracy and participation in the founding of a new Young Italy". On that occasion many of those arrested did not stay long in jail. Their residence in jail was shortened by the support many students received from their professors, and by the

intervention of Croce himself. Through the good offices of a common relative Croce was able to employ the assistance of Filippo Marinetti in favour of those students. The futurist leader, and others, persuaded Mussolini that those young people were not dangerous, and could be set free without repercussions. (14)

The attempt against the King had been just an excuse to crack down on the opposition. In the case of Pietre, however, the accusation of conspiracy was correct, at least for some. Pietre was a small monthly literary magazine, founded in 1926 by students of the University of Genoa, influenced by the example of Gobetti and by the ideas of Rosselli, who had been a teacher there in those years. Later the periodical moved to Milan under the editorship of Lelio Basso, the future socialist leader who turned it into a bi-monthly publication, gave to its content a more political orientation, and tried to make the paper an instrument of connection among the various groups of the opposition. In 1928 Basso was arrested after a trip to Rome and to Naples, where he had gone to establish contacts and to solicit material for Pietre, and where he had met, among others, Croce and Mario Vinciguerra. (15)

Vinciguerra was an old friend of Croce; he was already involved in anti-fascist activities, was a member of Young Italy, had had troubles with the police before, and in 1928

wrote for the periodical one of the few reviews favourable to Croce's book. It seems certain that this book review was one of the reasons for the suppression of Pietre and the arrest of its writers, especially after the police found in the house of one of them an article criticizing the reactions of the fascist intellectuals to Croce's book, and a private letter addressed to Alfieri which detailed Gentile's anger against Croce and his book. In his report, the prefect of Milan wrote that Basso and Vinciguerra wanted to increase the circulation of the periodical and had agreed to turn Pietre into "the organ of spiritual connection among those affiliated with Young Italy". On the same occasion the police of Naples informed that no evidence was found against Vinciguerra "except his frequent visits to the notorious Senatore Benedetto Croce", and the only accusation against Alfieri was: "He is a friend of Croce". (16) These accusations would be repeated several times against others during the fascist regime.

The Political Value of the History.

Published in 1928, History of Italy immediately enjoyed a great success; altogether forty thousand copies were published during the regime; from 1928 to 1940 there were more than thirty thousand copies available for reading and studying in private hands and in public institutions. The book was read by all those who counted in the republic of

letters; it was passed from hand to hand among friends and relatives, as was the custom. It could be found in public and school libraries; it was discussed at the universities or in high schools; it became a part of the culture of the time. For its commercial success, for the discussions it generated, for the reactions it created among the Italian cultural elite, in the government and in the opposition, Croce's History of Italy has to be regarded as the most important act of resistance to fascism and the most successful and efficient.

This fact was recognized at the time by friends and foes alike. One of Croce's correspondents compared The History with Silvio Pellico's book, My Prisons. Two police informers reported to their master the unusual success of the book, adding also that in Rome "diplomatic and cultural circles say that this success has a much greater value than a political demonstration, nay that it is the biggest and most recent silent demonstration in Italy". (17) At the same time, the commercial success of Croce's book and the correspondence it generated among his friends revealed also that Croce was at the centre of a vast but loose network, without rules but kept together by moral ties.

Croce's Political Activities.

History of Italy did not exhaust the entire political activity of Croce. In 1928 he continued to participate in

the sittings of the Senate; he did not take part in the debates, but sat beside Albertini and Ruffini during their opposition speeches, and voted against the bills that further destroyed the old Statuto. In May, Croce cast his vote against the law that abolished free elections in Italy, and compelled the electors to vote for a single list, whose candidates had been suggested by the fascist organizations, approved by the Grand Council of Fascism, and in many cases chosen by Mussolini alone. "I took part in the sitting and the vote, casting my ballot against the so-called electoral reform, that is the abolition of the representative regime in Italy". (18) In November, Croce voted against the law that gave legality to the existence of the Grand Council of Fascism, and turned that party organization into an organ of the constitution, infringing on royal prerogatives. Not even the generals came to the defence of the King's old rights, seemingly unaware of the danger. No wonder on that occasion the Tacchini have a sad note: "We were only nineteen to say no". (19)

This note of sadness is always present in reference to the Senate. It pained Croce to witness so many sudden conversions, and to see "old liberals and once fierce democrats turned fascist", showing now "a false... cordiality", or displaying "the badges of the new faith", but avoiding political questions, "fearful ... and

suspicious of any free discussion". (20) During his visits to Rome, Croce never failed to visit Giolitti, admiring his tenacious liberal faith and his constant presence in Parliament, despite his venerable age. In July 1928, Giolitti died, and even the funeral held in Piedmont, acquired a political significance. Mussolini did not go, and neither did the King nor the Crown Prince, as protocol required. Croce participated at the funeral with a few friends, "those faithful", he noted, with evident reproach to those absent. (21)

Help to Anti-fascists.

Besides pious acts, even in 1928 there were many occasions to support morally or to help financially old friends and new followers. For lack of published evidence, and because of Croce's natural discretion in these matters, it is hard to establish where one ends and the other begins. During 1928 and in the following year, Croce helped Bonomi and Meuccio Ruini with the publication of their books, using his close relations with the publishing house of Ricciardi in Naples and Laterza in Bari. Deprived of political activity, some of the former leaders became historians, or returned to legal practices and private activities. The new professions provided them with financial help, but also allowed them to continue their political battles with different means. Bonomi published

biographies of Mazzini and Bissolati; Ruini wrote a history of Switzerland and an essay on Madame de Stael, and these books were valuable in keeping alive liberal and democratic ideals. (22)

Croce was also quite solicitous about the needs of young people, especially when he met promising scholars, whose future was clouded by political difficulties. During the year, at various intervals, he received in his houses in Naples and in Turin, some of the students who had been arrested and then released in April, no doubt to offer them reassurance or assistance. In one of these cases he offered more than the usual moral support. With gratitude and evident pride, almost as badges of honour, V.E. Alfieri has revealed several loans that Croce advanced to him every time he found himself in dire straits for political reasons, which was quite often in those years, and every time he was made to understand, with discrete excuses, that he need not worry about the repayments. (23)

It was already known that during the fascist regime, for political reasons and as a part of the opposition strategy, Croce advised Laterza to publish works by anti-fascist writers or to translate books useful to the struggle against fascism. From Alfieri we also have learnt that during those times Croce asked Laterza to pay more than the standard rate to needy anti-fascist writers and

translators, and to charge the difference to his own account. This practice remained a secret; it was known only to a select few, and was kept hidden from those directly affected. But it was well known to the police authorities, including Mussolini and Bocchini, as the records in the personal file of Laterza at the National Archives show. The police read and copied the letters sent by Laterza to Croce, in which were indicated the agreement reached and the payments made. (24)

Not only did Croce help individual writers in economic difficulty, he also directly or indirectly supported the editorial activities of the few who tried to remain independent from fascist influence. Domenico Petrini was one of these: a young man of liberal ideas, and a promising scholar, he lived in Rieti, a provincial city of Latium, where he had a small publishing house. Croce allowed him to publish some of his political essays, and when it was time to be paid, he simply refused, and advised the publisher "to employ the money for the continuation of the collection". After the young man died Croce continued to advise his young widow, and offered support so she could continue her husband's activities. (25)

Trips at Home and Abroad.

During the year, as usual now, Croce undertook his various trips to northern Italian cities. But in 1928 his

historical research took him also to Southern Italy, in the province of Basilicata, the land of Nitti and Fortunato. -he immediate scope was to do research in loco for the biography of Isabella Morra, a poet of the Renaissance, involved in a tragic love story. The political importance of the trip rests with the warm reception that the local people offered Croce wherever he went. He visited various towns, connected with his research, and everywhere he was received with respect and cordiality. When he stopped at the town where the Morra castle was located, he was "greeted by many gentle people of the place", and these were joined by others who had "arrived from the surrounding area". After the visit to the castle, Croce and his friends spent the evening in the house of the local doctor, among "many guests and in lively and varied conversation". Many of these guests had been friends and political supporters of Nitti and Fortunato, we can speculate that the lively conversations included more than poetry of the Renaissance and tragedies of love. (26)

But the most important foray in 1928, was the trip that Croce, in September, made to Paris in the company of his daughter and with Laterza. That trip took place despite some unpleasant incidents that were connected with his passport. In April, two young men, with an excuse, entered the house of Croce's brother-in-law in Turin and tried to

ascertain the date of Croce's arrival, and the names of those who usually visited him in that city. In July, while the family was enjoying their vacation in Piedmont, a police officer arrived and asked for Croce's passport, which he had obtained in Naples apparently without difficulty. The event prompted Croce to send a letter to the prefect of Turin, demanding "to know the reason for this trick". Two days later a captain of the Royal Carabinieri appeared, assuring Croce "that the withdrawal of the passport was the result of a misunderstanding (?) on the part of Turin's police officials", and promising quick restitution. Despite the evident provocation and intimidation to him and to his family, the trip took place as planned. In reality, as we now know from police reports, the renewal of Croce's passport had been granted not as a matter of course, but only after the prefect of Naples asked and received authorization from the chief of police. As a result, Croce's departure from Naples and his arrivals in Milan, Turin and Paris were noted by police, following Bocchini's instructions that Croce "be followed with discretion". (27)

Once in Paris, Croce did historical research at the National Library, saw French scholars, went to the bookstores, and then he and his daughter visited all the places, usually included in a well planned tourist trip.

But they also did something unusual for tourists; the first day of their arrival, they went "to Pere Lachaise, to visit the tomb of poor Gobetti", as a sign of respect for a fallen comrade but also as an expression of friendship for his wife, Ada, now one of their most intimate friends. The day after, they made another visit of political significance: "With Elena I went to see the Nitti family". After a first stay in Switzerland, Nitti had moved definitely to Paris, where he spent most of the exile years. Croce had visited Nitti the year before in Switzerland on his way to Germany, and continued to see him every time he went to Paris. During the conversations, with his usual certainty, Nitti showed Croce financial statistics and economic calculations that proved "that fascism could not last, and would be soon buried under a financial crush". (28)

That evening, in his hotel, Croce received a visit from another political friend: "Sforza came from Brussels, and I spent the evening with him". Croce and Sforza had been colleagues in the last cabinet of Giolitti, and would be together again in the government of Badoglio. Besides old friends and colleagues, Croce received a visit from Luigi Sturzo. The notation in the Taccuini is brief and terse, but one of the most eloquent, revealing great feeling: "I received Don Sturzo, who spoke with great nobility".

Croce's admiration for that little Sicilian priest, for whom Giolitti had no sympathy, is now quite evident, and shows the new solidarity created by fascism and the changes in his political outlook. (29)

Those are the only names mentioned on that occasion in the rather concise prose of the Taccuini. But we can be sure that Croce met other people, as we can judge from a tantalizing entry: "In the morning I received many visits". From other sources we know that he also met the socialist leaders Turati and Treves, and Lionello Venturi and his family. (30) In those Parisian meetings, besides the usual cultural discussions, various accounts show that the main topic of interest was the political situation in Italy, and the personal condition of the exiles.

Chapter 9: Against the Lateran Pacts, 1929

With the publication of History of Italy and after the death of Giolitti, Croce became the symbol of liberal Italy. It was natural then that when the Senate was called to approve the Lateran Pacts and the reconciliation between the Vatican and Italy, the role of the leader of the opposition should fall upon Croce, rather than to a more experienced parliamentarian. Parliament had become a rubber stamp of the government's decisions. Speeches of the opposition were ignored, or more often shouted down by jeers and noises from the floor and from the public galleries. The only task left to the opposition inside parliament was to stand for a tradition and to give witness to its ideals. Giolitti had done that in the House until the approval of the new electoral law, just a few months before his death. In 1929 Croce performed the same function when he spoke for the last time in the Senate against the new Concordat and the repeal of the Law of Guarantees, which had unilaterally regulated the relations between Church and State in liberal Italy. Long before the Lateran Pacts were presented to Parliament for ratification, Croce had made his opposition to the reconciliation between Church and State known. While some of his closest friends were willing to vote in favour, or suggested abstention in the Senate, Croce decided immediately to oppose the Lateran

Pacts, and this decision was reached "out of great moral rebellion", as Adolfo Omodeo put it. (1)

This feeling of outrage was directed as much against Mussolini as against the Pope, and was created by their alliance against liberal ideals. The heir of the Destra Storica could not stomach the abrogation of the Law of the Guarantees, which he had praised in History of Italy as a "monument of wisdom and moderation"; nor could he approve the abandonment of one of liberalism's fundamental tenets, the separation of Church and State. Not surprising notes of sadness appear frequently in the Taccuini during the first months of 1929. The day the reconciliation between the Catholic Church and the Kingdom of Italy was announced to the Italian people, and received with general jubilation, the nephew of Silvio Spaventa expressed different feelings in his diaries: "Great sadness for the announced Conciliation and the Concordat with the Pope, and similar delights". (2)

On February 11, 1929, the Lateran Pacts were signed between Mussolini and Cardinal Gasbarri, after long and tortuous negotiations. The Pacts brought to an end the Roman Question, and achieved a reconciliation between Italy and the Vatican, closing the enmity between the Pope and the King, which had lasted since 1870. The solution of a problem that had eluded liberal leaders was a personal

triumph for Mussolini: his prestige increased at home and abroad. The reconciliation gave fascism a truly national character; the regime acquired the support of the rural masses, and the benevolence of the Catholic hierarchy. The government of Mussolini now enjoyed the support of all the traditional sectors of the Italian nation. For all the members of the Italian establishment, Mussolini had become, indeed, "the Man of Providence". In the country public opinion was largely favourable to the reconciliation. Among fascists only Gentile and a few radicals, for a short while, dared to express publicly their reservations about the Concordat. After the reconciliation all realized that the fascist regime would last for many years; hopes for the fall of Mussolini or for the disintegration of his government disappeared. The testimony of Giorgio Amendola is rather eloquent on this aspect: "Fascism became stronger than ever. The reconciliation, and then the Plebiscite, showed that year that there was a great deal of consent around the fascist regime, more or less conscious". (3)

The Lateran Pacts.

The official negotiations between Italy and the Vatican began in secret in 1926, after both sides had made suggestions and presented proposals for a possible agreement the year before. The final accord, signed on February 11, 1929, was divided in three parts: a Treaty, a

Financial Convention, and a Concordat. The Treaty ended the Roman Question; it abrogated the Law of Guarantees, and it created the State of the Vatican City; the Catholic Church recognized the Kingdom of Italy under the House of Savoy, and Italy recognized Vatican City, as a sovereign state, under the Pope. The Treaty was approved by all: liberals, fascists, and Catholics were in agreement on this point. A painful vulnus in the Italian nation was finally healed. For the first time since the unification Catholic citizens felt completely at home in Italy. It is true that this positive achievement had been made possible by the moderation of the liberal governments, but only Mussolini had shown any urgency to achieve a solution, and to bring the old quarrel to an end.

With the Financial Convention Italy agreed to pay to the Vatican 750 million lire, and one billion in Italian savings bonds at 5 percent annually. Liberal Italy had promised to give to the Vatican three million two hundred and fifty-five thousand lire annually from 1871, which was the amount spent by the Church for the administration of her former territory. The sum of money paid by Italy was great and improved the finances of the Vatican, but it was much inferior to the three billion and 160 million lire calculated on the basis of interests and capital promised by Italy and never accepted by the Vatican. In this case

also Mussolini had to be admired for his effective bargaining.

It was different with the Concordat, the true bone of contention. The Concordat changed in some important aspects the lay character of the State, introducing elements of clericalism in its administration, and limiting its jurisdiction in some fields. The Catholic religion was recognized, as in the Statuto, as the official religion of the State. Religious weddings acquired legal validity, and canon law invaded marriage legislation, making a civil divorce impossible. Catholic doctrine was recognized "as the foundation and the completion of public education", in elementary and secondary schools. Defrocked priests could not teach or be employed in positions that placed them in contact with the public. Rome acquired "a sacred character", and the Italian government was obliged to adopt policies in the administration of the city accordingly. Bishops had to swear allegiance to the King, but the State renounced some old controls, "placet" and "exequatur" on ecclesiastical benefits. Religious orders were legally recognized, and priests and other religious personnel acquired some special privileges and benefits, similar to those of civil servants. The organizations of Catholic Action were recognized by the State, were put under the direct jurisdiction of ecclesiastic supervision, and

obliged to avoid any political activities, and to devote their time "only for the realization and diffusion of Catholic principles". In conclusion the Concordat has to be judged more favourable to the Church than to the State. The Church increased its influence on civil society. The State renounced some powers and controls, and allowed the Church to influence public education and marriage legislation. (4)

But besides the legal and traditional aspects of the Lateran Pacts, what was important was the political nature of the agreement. Instead of a unilateral solution, there was a bilateral accord; the separation between State and Church ended, and it was replaced by a regime of mutual concessions. Among Italian politicians Mussolini was the only one willing to seek a solution to the Roman Question outside of the Law of the Guarantees. He did not have the "preconceptions of the liberal school", nor was he hampered by what Pope Pius XI liked to call "liberal fetishes". He viewed religion as an *instrumentum regni*. Since his first speech in Parliament he had sought an alliance with the Catholic Church for political reasons, his own interests and the prestige of Italy. The reconciliation was the culmination of this policy and these preoccupations. For Croce and his liberal friends, instead the reconciliation was an alliance between fascism and the Catholic Church against the principles of a free society and a betrayal of

the Risorgimento. The Church hoped to establish a Catholic State, in the short or the long run, with the help of fascism. For Mussolini it was the last achievement of his long march to garner the support of the strong and traditional forces of Italian society. Besides the support of the Monarchy and the army, the industrial classes and the bureaucracy, now he gained the adherence of the Church to his cause and with that the consensus of the rural masses to his policy.

The Plebiscite of 1929.

With the reconciliation Mussolini obtained great personal success: the approval was genuine and general. To exploit the enthusiasm among the Italian people he called a general election for March 29th. From the elections he wanted popular approval of his personal rule and a consecration of the fascist revolution; more important, from a plebiscite he hoped to put an end, once and for all, to the "moral question" and the Aventine Secession. He was successful and obtained all his aims. The elections took place under the new electoral law, against which Giolitti made his last speech in Parliament, and which really marks the end of the Albertine Statute. Four hundred candidates ran for Parliament; all had been previously approved and selected by the Grand Council of Fascism from lists proposed by various national associations controlled by the

Fascist Party. No opposition candidates were allowed. The electors had to vote for the entire list, by marking yes or no on the ballot. The enumerated electors were nine million nine hundred and eighty-two thousand; in 1924 they had been twelve million and sixty-nine thousand; political emigration and partisan enumeration accounted for the difference. Eight million six hundred and sixty-one thousand, or 89 percent of the enumerated electors voted; the government list obtained eight million five hundred and twenty-six thousand votes or 98.4 percent. More than one million abstained from voting, a little more than 10 percent. One hundred and thirty-five thousand or 1.6 percent had the courage to vote against by marking no on the ballots.

The elections not only were not free, they also were not secret. Electors were handed two ballots, one for yes and another for no; the ballots were folded in different ways. With these subterfuges, those who abstained and those who voted against the list could be easily identified, and in fact the police reports not only indicated the number of those not voting yes but also their names. With these reservations, despite the moral pressures and the open persecutions, the elections of 1929 were a plebiscite for Mussolini, if not complete approval of fascism. The reasons for the success are not hard to find. For the first time in

Italian history the Catholic organizations were instructed to vote for the party in power. The clergy encouraged the faithful to do their religious duty and show their appreciation for the man and the party that had brought them the reconciliation between State and Church, or as the official propaganda put it, with a clever slogan, had given Italy back to the Church and the Church back to Italy. (5)

Before the elections took place the democrats and the socialists advised their followers to abstain, while the communists ordered their adherents to vote against the national list. Despite increased police controls before and during the electoral campaign, in Naples and in Turin, and probably in other Italian cities, flyers were posted and distributed in the streets, inviting people to abstain from voting. There is good reason to believe that Croce and his wife abstained from voting in the elections of 1929. In the Taccuini the act of voting in national or municipal elections is always mentioned and acknowledged until 1924. There is no mention of ever going to vote during the fascist regime. During the electoral period of 1929, the Taccuini register the arrival of senator Casati in Naples on March 21st, and then a trip to Bari by Croce and his wife from the 25th to the 26th of March, the voting period. In Italy national elections used to last three days, from Saturday to Monday, when the final count was completed. The

evidence suggests that the trip to Bari and the visit to Laterza was just an excuse devised by Croce to avoid voting. The votes of Croce and his wife have to be counted among those who abstained. (6)

The elections of 1929 and their plebisciterian character encouraged strange initiatives and pious expectations. Many believed, or dreamed, that fascism would evolve towards a moderate regime. Mussolini had several meetings with Emilio Caldara, the former socialist mayor of Milan, and with other old socialist friends. The occurrence of these meetings created the impression of something new in the air, and rumours of a national reconciliation. Some even hoped for a political amnesty, and the abolition of the exceptional laws. For his part, Mussolini never entertained the idea of any substantial political changes. Among the few initiatives undertaken, Bruno Buozzi, the former trade union leader, was asked to return to Italy from France and to assume some responsibility in the labour movement; Croce and Bracco were invited, again, to become members of the Royal Academy of Italy. All refused the advances made by the naive emissaries. (7)

Ratification of the Lateran Pacts.

The new parliament was called to ratify the Lateran Pacts soon after the elections in May 1929. The Chamber approved the Pacts without any voice of opposition, 357

members voted in favour and only two against. Nobody spoke in defence of the Law of the Guarantees. But during the discussion Mussolini's old anti-clericalism came to the surface. In his speech to the Chamber he reserved some surprises; he was less accommodating than anticipated. Some fascists, Gentile included, were not too happy about the reconciliation and the concessions made to the Church. Mussolini tried to reassure them and also to dampen the enthusiasm of the Catholic hierarchies. Some of his assertions were rather strong, indeed, and could be shared by old anti-clericals: "In the State the Church is not sovereign, and it is not even free". No liberal leader had ever dared to say that. Mussolini bluntly stated also that the fascist State had "a moral character" of its own, independent of any religion: "The fascist State proclaims in full its ethical character; it is Catholic, but it is fascist, it is above all, exclusively, essentially fascist". Mussolini also limited the importance of religion in the education of Italian youth. In the fascist regime, he said, the teachers and the schools had to give to the pupils "the sense of virility, of power, of conquest". Catholicism could be only an integration of these aims. The Pope was not pleased by Mussolini's speech, he was amused neither by the tone nor by some historical judgments of Mussolini, and made known his displeasure. Before the

parliamentary discussions were over, Mussolini was compelled to offer reassurances, and in his speech before the Senate, he toned down or corrected some of the most contentious affirmations, and vented his resentments against Croce, instead. (8)

When the Lateran Pacts reached the Senate, on May 24th, 1929, among the fascist senators only Vittorio Scialoja, whose father had been a colleague of Cavour and a member of the Destra Storica, defended with eloquence the Liberal tradition, reminding the assembly that "the political spirit of those who proposed and voted the Law of Guarantees was admirable". But only Croce spoke for the opposition and only six voted against the Lateran Pacts, while 316 voted in favour. The strategy for the occasion, the decision to oppose the Lateran Pacts and to speak against the Concordat had been agreed before among Croce and his friends. On this occasion Casati maintained a different position than Croce. He was for the acceptance of the Concordat, but he was also unwilling to make a political break with Croce and the few others. For this reason he did not take part in the sittings of the Senate. But Albertini, Bergamini, Ruffini and Croce had meetings in Naples and in Rome during the months of April and May. During those discussions it was agreed to designate Croce as the speaker of the opposition. When the debate began in

the Senate, Croce went to Rome, met his friends, read to them his speech, and all gave "their full adherence". But also all expressed fear and concern, and worried that during the speech Croce would be interrupted and shouted down, making it impossible for him to deliver the full text of the speech. (9)

During Croce's speech a few senators, in fact, helped by members of the Press Gallery, tried to shout him down, but did not succeed, Croce proved more tenacious than expected, and he was able to deliver the full speech, even through continuous noises and among heckles from some honourable members. In the Taccuini, Croce wrote a small account of that session in the Senate, and the reactions his speech generated among fascist senators. In that account a little sense of satisfaction for that personal victory, on May 24th, 1929 is revealed. "I took part in the meeting of the Senate and spoke against the bill. Noises were made and an attempt was undertaken to interrupt the speech from a group of senators ... and from the press gallery. But I repeated the words, which had been covered by the heckles, raised my voice, till I could read my speech fully, and in an audible way to the end". (10) Unwittingly, the hecklers created more sympathy around Croce, and gave to his speech greater impact. That evening in Rome and two days later when he returned to Naples, many friends went to see Croce and

remained for long conversations. Evidently the speech had a big effect, had become known, despite the press black out, and many people agreed with Croce's position, and came to congratulate him, or to express their support.

Croce's Speech.

Croce began his speech telling the Senate that he spoke for himself but also for a small group of friends, sitting around him. Since 1925, this small group of faithful liberals had agreed to designate one of them to express their views, while the others sat beside the orator to show solidarity, or simply to avoid the sense of solitude. On this occasion the natural speaker should have been Senator Ruffini. As a professor of canon law, he had the legal training and historical background to analyze with competence the nature and the implications of the new Concordat. But the occasion required the political defence of an historical tradition more than a legal analysis. For that task Croce was better qualified; History of Italy had given him special authority. He rose to defend the heritage of liberal Italy, and the ideals of the Risorgimento against the policies of the fascist regime. Croce declared that he and his friends had nothing against the Treaty and the Financial Convention, nor were they against "the idea of a reconciliation between the Italian State and the Holy See". He reminded the Assembly that the Law of the

Guarantees would have achieved such an aim, if only it had been accepted by the Church. "The repeated attempts, made in the course of many decades, from either side, prove the desire to put an end to a disagreement that created damage and inconvenience to both sides". (11)

Croce defended the ideals of the Risorgimento and the inspiration of the men who had proposed the Law of the Guarantees, as the heritage of modern thought and as the struggle against the anachronistic pretenses of the Catholic Church, that had become a burden for the Church itself. In fact the result of that ideal movement had been "the mitigation and the almost disappearance of jusnaturalism, and the freedom recognized to the Church inside the Italian State". The separation between Church and State, and the spirit of those ideas had been beneficial not only to the Italian State but also to the Catholic Church. "It is certain that the Church, thanks to the new order, not only was able to carry out its work and its propaganda, but gained a consideration of respect, and even of reverence, which she had lost for centuries in Italy among the best". The reason for which Croce and his friends opposed the Lateran Pacts was not the idea of a reconciliation between Church and State, "but solely for the way it has been gained, and for the particular conventions that accompany it". The Concordat was a painful

break with a great tradition; the abandonment of the separation between State and Church was a negation of the fruitful policy followed by united Italy for 60 years. For those reasons "conscious of the past, solicitous of the future, we contemplate with pain the break in the equilibrium that had been realized". (12)

Croce was not afraid "of the resurrection of a confessional State in Italy", but he predicted, and was soon proved right, that the new Concordat would create disagreements and different interpretations. "For certain, again will start painful and sterile struggles on irrevocable facts, and pressures and menaces and fears, and the poisons poured on the souls by the pressures, the menaces and the fears". For Croce the discussion between the two parties, and the disagreement in interpretation while the treaties were still being debated in Parliament was the indication and the proof that the "equilibrium had been broken", and that soon those conflicts that "the so called Concordats always produce, and against which the old Neapolitan jurists of the eighteenth century deprecated the negotiations and the conclusions would start again". (13)

In his speech Croce gave an answer to the many, inside and outside the Senate, that regarded the reconciliation between Italy and the Vatican as a political masterpiece and a brilliant achievement, and as such worthy to be

accepted despite the shortcomings and the reservations of the Concordat, forgetting "naive ethical ideals", but repeating the old dictum that, after all, "Paris is worthy a mass". Croce reminded the senators, and also the Pope, who had made disparaging remarks about liberals and liberalism recently, that "beside and against the men, who regard Paris worthy of a mass, there are others for whom to listen or not to listen to a mass is a fact infinitely more important than Paris, because it is an affair of conscience. Woe to society ! to human history ! if men that feel so differently had not been there or were not here now"! (14) Those sentences became very popular, and were then and later repeated throughout Italy; and came to symbolize the creed of the opposition to fascism, and to the opportunism of the Catholic Church.

But those words were yet another sign of Croce's political and philosophical evolution from his position taken during the war, revealing his passage from the "hard realism" of Machiavelli to the "naive idealism" of the democrats. The abandonment of a Machiavellian conception of politics is also evident in the speech's conclusion. Croce had also a word for those who had reservations about the Concordat, but nevertheless were going to vote in favour of the pacts "because they regard them as fruitful of unexpected good effects in the future, according to the

other trite saying that from bad is born good, and from mistake truth". Croce invited these people to leave aside hypothetical speculation on the future, and "to seek and simply do one's duty, in the present". It was quite evident that the allusion was to Gentile, who disliked the Concordat but had decided to vote in favour of the treaties, putting all his faith in Mussolini. Croce ended his speech, touching again a raw nerve in his old friend and others in the same predicament, when he reminded them that his vote and that of his friends was "... dictated by our conscience, to which we cannot refuse the obedience that is commanded from us". (15) In the struggle against fascism and the dictatorship of Mussolini, the voice of conscience, for Croce and some others, had definitely replaced the realism of Machiavelli and Marx.

Reaction to Croce's Speech.

Mussolini did not like Croce's speech, and during the debate showed signs of resentment. At the end of the discussion, in his final remarks to the Senate, he hurled an insult against Croce, and called him "a shirker of history". The newspapers were instructed to downplay Croce's intervention, and to give a short summary of his speech followed by derogatory remarks. From their account it was not possible to learn Croce's arguments against the Concordat and the reasons for his opposition to the Lateran

Facts. But despite the boycott of the mass media and the incomplete account provided by a few newspapers, Croce's speech enjoyed great success, it quickly became known throughout Italy, generating discussion and approval among liberals and democrats. Croce was also instrumental in creating this success. He sent copies of his speech to all his friends and to those who made a request for a copy. Many of these copies reached their destinations despite the fact that Croce's correspondence with his friends was often opened by the police, causing difficulties and inconveniences. (16)

A week after the speech, evidently to satisfy the increasing request for copies, craftily taking advantages still open to members of the opposition, Croce asked, as was his right, the printing office of the Senate for 300 extra copies of his speech, which was then produced in a booklet format. In Naples, either under his direction or certainly with his knowledge, 400 more copies were printed in the same format and some more copies were typed in loose sheets, to the concern and annoyance of the police, unable to discover the printing press and to locate the typewriter, that had done the clandestine job. Croce mailed the speech to his acquaintances, in many cases personally writing the address on the envelopes, and using not only the senate booklet but also the clandestine materials of

Naples. Often he sent more than one copy with the evident intention of encouraging further diffusion or to satisfy a previous request. For that purpose, the speech was later also published in his periodical. (17)

As a result of Croce's speech in the Senate and the interest it generated in the country, police surveillance of his movements and control of his mail were increased, officially reversing an order of Mussolini in 1927, which had never been fully observed. The chief of police, Bocchini, was soon informed of Croce's request to the Senate's printing office, and immediately ordered the prefect of Naples to adopt against Croce "careful and direct measures of surveillance;" to make "reserved and accurate inquiries" about Croce's correspondents, to find out their names and their addresses, and finally to seize all the speeches sent out by mail. The prefect of Naples took the order seriously and began to stop and control all Croce's mail, informing Rome every time a politically sensitive letter was found, and forwarding the compromising piece to Croce only after the approval of Bocchini had been received, but not before it had been copied and filed. Moreover, at regular intervals, the prefect sent reports to the Minister of the Interior, that is to Mussolini, making a faithful summary of letters seized: "in which are written phrases of support for the speech recently spoken in the

Senate by Senator Croce, and also expressions less than respectful to the head of government". (18)

The archives now contain, thanks to the zeal of the prefect, many of those letters, which record the anti-fascist faith of Croce's correspondents and sometimes even the honesty of police reports. The letters came from all over Italy, but also from Europe and even from the United States. Sforza, from Paris, sent international press clippings, mostly in English. The writers included men and women, not only former members of Parliament and university teachers but also common people, liberal or socialist. Even a Roman poet sent six sonnets praising Croce but commenting on the Lateran Pacts, as the police noted, "with ironical and anti-national feeling". All the letters seized by the police expressed support for Croce's opposition, and showed admiration for his courage. All shared his criticism of the Lateran Pacts, some blamed Mussolini for the accord, others condemned the Pope, while Bonomi questioned the King's conduct. Many of those who wrote to Croce claimed to express not only their personal views but also the feelings of others, "and there are many, more than we sometimes think", as one of them said. When people asked for a copy of his speech, Croce was assured that the reading of the full text would please not only them but also other friends. The number of letters in the police file alone and

the expressions they contain prove that Croce's speech had touched a popular chord and was widely discussed among people, showing at the same time that despite the press boycott and police harassment, groups of opposition were still alive in the country. (19)

News of Croce's stand and copies of his speech also reached the various places, where anti-fascist militants were jailed or confined. As Leo Valiani later wrote: "When, on the 24th of May, 1929, Croce spoke against the Lateran Pacts, negotiated by an enslaved Italy ... we felt that he was also speaking for us, who were crowding the fascist jails and the islands of deportation". (20)

Political Initiatives.

Apart from individual reactions, the debates in the Senate also generated two collective actions of political significance. Not only did Croce's speech have repercussions in his own city among his traditional friends, but also among the students of the University of Naples. Despite police controls, as Giorgio Amendola has recalled in his memoirs and as Eugenio Reale confirmed in his: "By now the Sunday afternoons in Croce's house had become the only existing meeting place among anti-fascists". (21) In the Taccuini, Croce noted that two days after his speech in the Senate: "many people came in the house for the usual Sunday conversations". It is easy

to imagine that the conversation that Sunday was mainly about the Lateran Pacts and the stand taken by Croce. But the university students did not limit their interest only to discussions and philosophical comments, they did something more concrete and more alarming for the police.

In their regular quarterly relations to the Minister of the Interior and to the chief of police on the political situation and public order, several prefects in 1929 commented on the Lateran Pacts and the interest the events had generated in the country during and after the parliamentary debates. The majority of the prefects assured Rome that the reconciliation had been well received throughout Italy by the general public and especially by the Catholic clergy. But the prefect of Naples also had to report "an attempt at anti-fascist propaganda", telling Bocchini and Mussolini that students of the university tried to distribute on the streets of Naples: "copies of the speech made by Croce in the Senate on the Concordat between the State and the Church". The police had also found that the students had mailed Croce's speech to other universities and to friends in other cities. The prefect hastened to add that he had no worries about the activities of these young elements. On the other hand he also wrote that their actions were closely followed by the police and the police informers. The prefect's report confirms in a

direct way what Amendola and Reale have said in their memoirs that beside Croce and inspired by Croce, in Naples there was a group of liberal and democratic young men, willing to take risks and able to make their presence felt. In fact, at that time they also published at regular intervals a clandestine periodical, called L'Anti-fascista, which often printed or reprinted articles by Croce, Salvemini and others. (22)

The most interesting and certainly the best known reaction to Croce's speech and to debates on the reconciliation happened in Turin. During the discussion in the Senate, Mussolini replied directly to Croce's criticism, showing anger and vexation, and called him "imboscato della storia", a shirker of history, the real meaning of which left Croce and others bewildered. Later, to make amends or to correct the bad impression, Mussolini explained that, more than to the speech he was referring to Croce's decision to end History of Italy to 1915, without including and discussing the war and the advent of fascism. If the literal meaning of the expression, when it was uttered, was not clear, the moral slur was rather plain, considering the political importance of the bitter polemic about the "imboscati", during and after the war.

The moral and political implication of that expression aroused the indignation of a group of university students

in Turin. On their own initiative they wrote, and circulated on the campus a letter of solidarity with Croce. The letter was signed by some students, who later during the resistance and after the war, became famous in Italian cultural and political life, in the Action Party but also in the communist movement. "Unable to protest in public and through the press, we want to express, in private and among ourselves, our affection and our devotion". Offended by Mussolini's accusation, they now wished to protest "against the injury hurled at you by the Prime Minister", and also they rejected the accusation of shirker "because all your work as an historian is inspired by an intense love of Italy". The students expressed their faith in Croce's moral leadership, and their gratitude for his political stand, "as the only one who has raised his voice in the name of moral conscience, which now continues to demand its own freedom". Having written the letter, the students asked their professor to sign it. Umberto Cosmo, the man Croce had defended during the war, not only signed willingly, he also added a note of his own: "to express to the illustrious friend his admiration and his devotion", concluding that "... a higher honour could not have come to the work of the free philosopher and proud character than from the insult of the powerful against him". (23)

Tipped by spies, the police intercepted the letter and

Croce naturally never received the students' message. However, he was immediately informed about those events by Augusto Monti, another anti-fascist teacher, politically closer to Salvemini, but always respectful of Croce. Monti had in mind two reasons for writing to Croce. One was to inform Croce that his speech had become known in Italy despite the official boycott: "...Anyway I wanted to inform you soon, so you could see what kind of an echo has had in Italy a speech not reported by the papers". The other reason was even more political. "I believe that it would be useful and also of comfort to know that some university students on their own initiative were writing to you a letter of thanks and approbation before they were arrested by the police". (24)

Those students and their teacher were immediately arrested and put in jail, receiving on the whole mild sentences and were able to regain freedom in a few weeks. But even after their release Bocchini ordered further inquiries into the case and the students' background in order to ascertain their political connections. In fact the police authorities always regarded them with suspicion, and kept a watchful eye on their activities. But despite the police surveillance, Croce met those students soon after their release from jail, and later every time he went to Turin, or during his summer vacation in the Piedmont

countryside. In some cases he read their university dissertations, and found publishers for their books. In Turin he had long walks with Umberto Segre, who had taken the initiative for writing the letter and then for collecting the signatures from the other students. From the letter of Monti and from the entries in the diaries, there is good reason to believe that Croce, as he had done the previous year, intervened in favour of those students, using his personal connections. Others in positions of influence did the same with good results. (25)

During the fascist regime old friendships, family relations and business connections often were used to lighten the burden of oppression or the asperity of the law. These interventions were possible and sometimes successful when members of the middle classes were involved, not only because they had the necessary connections with the party in power and the old establishment still influential in the civil service, but more important because of the coincidence with government policy. For ideological and political reasons the regime preferred to be tough with the communists and to be lenient with the sons of the middle classes. This allowed the government to point to the communists as the only enemies of fascist Italy, and to present fascism as the true defender of Italian civilization. The requests and the

granting of clemency were afterwards used by official propaganda to foster the image of Mussolini as a generous and benevolent dictator.

Paolo Treves.

All the students from Turin were released from jail after a while and were able then to resume their studies at the university and to return to normal life with their families. But one of them was not so fortunate: Paolo Treves, contrary to regulations, was separated from his friends, kept in isolation, and detained for a few months longer. Paolo was the second son of Claudio Treves, the former socialist leader, now living in exile, who had always been despised by Mussolini, since his socialist days. Always under close police surveillance, for these political and family reasons, Paolo Treves had met Croce for the first time in 1928, while he was attending university in Turin. In the typical fashion of the time, the liberal senator and the son of a socialist leader met "in the back room of a Turin bookstore", since "it was not advisable to be seen together in the streets". (26)

After that first meeting, Croce took an interest in Treves' studies, wrote letters to him, encouraged him to turn his thesis into a book, and then persuaded Laterza to publish the volume. After Treves was released from jail and graduated from university in 1929, his family moved to

Rome, where they had great difficulty in finding jobs and apartments. But at the first opportunity, Treves took a trip to Naples, where he was received by Croce and his family with great cordiality and was engaged in a conversation that "lasted the whole afternoon". After that year Croce and Paolo Treves, and his brother Pietro, met again on various occasions and in other cities; they discussed political questions but also private matters, and finally the opportunity of an escape to France because of the racial laws of 1938. But no other occasion matched the refreshing sensation of that first meeting in Naples at the end of 1929, when he was only twenty-one years old. (27)

The memoirs of Treves, published in England in 1939 by Victor Gollancz, are still able to communicate the sense of gratitude and the feeling of elation, that he experienced on that special day of his life. "I deem Croce's benevolence and affection an honour, and that day at Naples I spoke to him of history and politics and it was a consolation to find him sharing many of the ideas that I had so much loved during those years of loneliness. I had been alone so long that it seemed a miracle to be able to walk the streets of Naples by Benedetto Croce's side, although there were two guards following us. The philosopher's vital words were bringing me back into contact with life, with that life which I had almost

forgotten, lost sight of for three years, ever since father had had to leave the country". (28) After the war Paolo and Pietro Treves played an important role in Italian socialist parties, and were elected to Parliament.

Mario Vinciguerra and the National Alliance.

During those years, Treves was not the only man who went to see Croce, and found words of encouragement or received more concrete help. In 1929, Mario Vinciguerra, Lauro De Bosis and others tried to organize a new underground movement, which they called the National Alliance, making direct reference to the moderate tradition of the Risorgimento. The new group directed their propaganda appeals to the traditional forces of Italian society. The ultimate aim of the National Alliance was to convince the King to employ the Army and to oust Mussolini from power. Croce encouraged Vinciguerra and gave his support to the new organization, looking "with sympathy at the attempt of the National Alliance", as Salvemini wrote in 1954. In Croce's diaries, during 1929 and 1930, there are reported visits to Naples, and meetings in Rome with Vinciguerra and Irene di Robiland, who was one of the most active members of that small group. (29)

Now the memoirs of Eugenio Reale in the National Archives provide more details to show Croce's concrete support. When in 1930 Vinciguerra was arrested under the accusation "of

having organized an anti-fascist movement and wanting to procure the fall of the Regime", Croce tried to help his unfortunate friend, devising a little subterfuge. In a hurry, he wrote and had printed another flyer in the name of the National Alliance. He then asked Reale and his young anti-fascist friends to mail and distribute the piece of paper in a clandestine manner, to lead the police into believing that Vinciguerra had no connection with the operation of the organization. Needless to say the stratagem did not work and the police were not fooled. Vinciguerra was sentenced to fifteen years in jail. (30)

After the failure of the National Alliance and his imprisonment, Croce's support and friendship for Vinciguerra and his little daughter increased. Croce's personal involvement in the political troubles and family difficulties of Vinciguerra was reported to the police, but it also became known in Paris among the anti-fascist exiles. In 1931 the organ of the democratic anti-fascist groups in France, La Liberta`, carried a news item on the front page under the title "The most beautiful work of Benedetto Croce". The piece was probably written by Claudio Treves or by Carlo Rosselli. "Mario Vinciguerra, sentenced to fifteen years in jail by the Special Tribunal, has left behind two things: a great book on Romanticism and a little girl of seven. ... But we have just received the beautiful

news that a man has taken care of the two things left behind by Vinciguerra. This is Benedetto Croce.... In fact under Croce's sponsorship, Vinciguerra's book on the romantics has just been published. Moreover Benedetto Croce has taken under his charge Vinciguerra's daughter, and has placed her in a private school, providing for her future needs even in case of his death. The mind of Croce is great but his heart is even greater". (31) Remembering these troubling events in 1973, Livia Tilgher, Vinciguerra's sister-in-law, reported that after his arrest many friends abandoned Vinciguerra, but she found Croce "moving in his support and generosity toward his unfortunate friend and toward his daughter". (32)

Help for Luigi Russo.

In 1929 Croce used his economic wealth for another political purpose: he and Luigi Russo made an agreement that bore fruit a year later. That year, Gentile ousted Russo from the editorship of the periodical, Leonardo, displeased with the political contents of the paper and also with its irreverent polemical style. Immediately Croce, in agreement with Albertini, Casati and Fortunato, decided to help Russo, and provided the funds necessary to start a new periodical, which appeared in 1930 with the name La Nuova Italia, and lasted for a few years. With his intervention Croce kept alive in Florence a centre of

cultural independence. Russo was not only an old friend, he was also a good polemicist and an independent spirit, faithful to the ideals of the Risorgimento. In Croce's and Russo's intention La Nuova Italia could supplement the work of La Critica, devoting less space to high culture, but paying more attention to current literary events. In its short existence the new periodical fulfilled these expectations, defending the liberal tradition against radical fascists, and, with no less pugnacity, against the new spirit of clericalism created by the reconciliation.

(33)

Croce was closely involved with the publication of this periodical; he gave advice; made suggestions; sent newspaper clippings; and finally, invited by Russo, wrote short and biting notes, that appeared under the name of Russo, who changed or deleted and then added a few words, here and there, to reflect his personal style, and to make the camouflage more believable. Or so Russo and Croce liked to believe: the stratagem did not fool Gramsci in jail and neither, with all probability, the police. Croce's collaboration in La Nuova Italia, like the collaboration of Omodeo and Ruggiero in La Critica shows that there was unity among Croce and his friends, and makes evident that they did not fight their battles alone but acted with "a spirit of religious communion". (34)

Police Surveillance.

After the reconciliation, the police increased the surveillance of Croce's movements and tampered with his correspondence. Croce noticed the increased attention and did not take the occurrence too kindly or too seriously. He complained to the Prefect, more to embarrass the gentleman, than to seek an end to the harassment. In June 1929, Croce wrote, "I went to speak with the High Commissioner, Castelli, for the renewal of my passport, and I showed him that I have become aware of the special attention that the police are giving to my person, and to my correspondence, that is all opened and then glued again, and often delivered incomplete. But I only made the statement, and told him that I will not write a complaint, as something useless". (35)

Croce noticed and recognized the agents following him or watching his house. He spoke to them, gave them greetings of the day, and even told them when he was leaving town. This kind of unexpected friendliness created some embarrassment, and prompted the usual excuses. But despite the smiles and the salutations, every time that Croce left Naples, the agents did their duty, and the police in Rome or in Turin were notified, as recorded in the archives. (36)

Police surveillance continued even when political

reasons were absent. In June 1929, the authorities saw fit to send special agents and spies to a small town near Naples, when Croce and his wife were invited to attend a baptismal ceremony by the family of an old friend. The prefect was even required to file a report to Rome for that occasion. From the police report it is possible to understand the social isolation that the regime was able to create around a known anti-fascist personality. In the best Southern Italian tradition the Fusco family, Croce's host, had made preparation for a great feast, and as the prefect wrote, "had invited the best people of the place, but all these, knowing the political views of Croce, refused the invitation. Only relatives and the closest friends took part in the festivities". (37)

Incidents like this one, and the political atmosphere that they reveal, explain the moments of sadness experienced by Croce during the fascist regime, especially in 1929, when often, in the diaries, we find revealing notes: "suddenly the usual crisis of sadness came over me". (38) But despite police control and harassment Croce continued his usual way of life. He continued to receive the usual stream of visits in Naples or Turin. Almost every month in 1929 he made trips to other cities. He used his letters and his trips to keep in touch with his friends, or to encourage and to console when necessary. Subject to

bouts of anguish himself, but able to overcome their power, he often was able to find the right words for his friends in difficulty. More often than not, he told them, or repeated to himself, that whether sailing with favourable winds or rowing against the currents, man has always to do his duty, because the fulfilling of duty is the only hope of a better future. In a letter, written after the reconciliation, to his old friend Lombardo Radice, suffering the pain of disillusion and pessimism, Croce wrote: "The world unfolds as it should; we can not make it go according to our desire. What is important is that ... we behave well, trying to serve God with joy". (39) The same phrases, more or less, appear in the diaries, at various times, or are repeated in other letters to other friends.

Chapter 10: Croce's Resistance, 1930-1940

The elections of 1929 and the Lateran Pacts marked the end of one era and the beginning of another in the history of fascism and in the fortunes of Mussolini. The elections were a vote of confidence for the government, and turned into a plebiscite for Mussolini, showing that the regime was secure now and rested on solid foundations. For fascism those were years of consensus, but for the opposition, or what remained of the opposition movements, the years following the reconciliation between Church and State were times of despair and isolation. It was then that in Italy many lost hope for a different future, became disillusioned, and abandoned the struggle as a useless and quixotic undertaking. Yet, amid the general consensus enjoyed by the regime, political opposition to fascism never disappeared completely in Italy, but continued in different and precarious ways, and was carried out, more or less, by all parties, according to their own traditions and expectations. More importantly, in all walks of life, there were men and women who refused to join the conformity of the times and remained faithful to liberal ideas. With their example they were able to preserve the memory of the past and present a set of values for the younger generation, different from the one preached by the regime.

(1)

After the war the Liberal Party had tried to organize itself into a modern mass party, but failed in the attempt, and remained a party of elites, dominated by strong personalities. When the party was no longer legal, meetings of a political nature among the old and new leaders continued to take place, despite moral intimidation, economic pressures, and harassment by the police apparatus. As Croce himself recognized after the Second World War, during the fascist regime the Liberal Party did not disappear "but lived from one end to the other of Italy through personal relations and reciprocal visitations"; in the impossibility of public meetings "agreements were undertaken in the hospitality of friendly residences". In these conditions a political continuity was assured and a new generation of leaders was created. (2)

The liberal opposition was centred around old political leaders, university teachers, lawyers and intellectuals. Most of them were well connected with the old establishment and the civil service, and they could count often on their national and international relations. Some did more than others, and assumed functions of leadership. Luigi Albertini, who had organized a special fund for the education of the sons of Giovanni Amendola, during the fascist regime continued to send money to anti-fascist leaders in exile, and to help promising young people in

Italy. Luigi Einaudi, as responsible for the Rockefeller Foundation, offered scholarships to needy anti-fascist students, so they could continue their education abroad. Mario Ferrara, a criminal lawyer, gave free legal assistance to young men in political trouble, and even defended communists before the Special Tribunal. Raffaele Mattioli, as general manager of Milan's Banca Commerciale sheltered in the research department of that bank many who later played leading roles in the Party of Action. Alessandro Casati was an indefatigable traveling salesman for the liberal cause, in the process making a police informer "greatly suspicious of his frequent visits to Naples". Another great traveler who also visited Naples quite often was Umberto Zanotti Bianco. Living in Rome, he had access to the capital's influential circles, and according to police, he had "relations with a great number of persons, contrary to the regime" and carried out "a great deal of activity against the regime, but in a quiet way". But Croce was the most influential leader of the new liberal forces and was at the centre of the new opposition, and already had become the symbol of liberal and democratic anti-fascism. (3)

Croce's Life under Fascism.

This position of moral leadership was recognized by the fascist authorities. The police reports and the comments of

the prefects make it possible to understand the peculiar conditions under which Croce exercised that position and carried out his new political functions. During the fascist regime Croce was never openly persecuted, but he was constantly harassed. The government regarded him as an adversary of the regime, and in all police reports he is always defined as "noto oppositore", in full agreement, this time, with the international press, which during the same period, referred to Croce as "the well known anti-fascist". As a senator Croce could neither be arrested nor jailed without the consent and advice of the Senate, but the political authority tried to isolate Croce from his friends and to create a desert around him by keeping his life and his activity under close police scrutiny. During the period, Croce's house in Naples and his summer residence in Piedmont were under police surveillance. Visits to his homes became a political liability, and a matter for police suspicion. The policemen on duty made lists of Croce's visitors, and then the prefects ordered inquiries into their affairs, and often "frequent visits to Benedetto Croce" is the only imputation found in the police reports. (4)

Croce was allowed to travel in Italy and in Europe, and no restrictions were ever put on his movements. But his departures from Naples and his arrivals in other cities

were communicated by the police authorities or by the prefects from one place to the next. The passport was not renewed as a matter of course and certainly not as a citizen's basic right, but always after some delay and never before the prefect of Naples had asked and received the approval from the chief of police in Rome. Croce's trips abroad were always followed by special agents, acting "with judicious discretion", and in accordance with Bocchini's favourite advice, "con sagacia e riservatezza".

(5)

Not only were Croce's movements followed and his residences monitored by regular police agents, but the political branch of the police, as was customary at the time, also employed intellectual informers to better understand Croce's inner motivations and aspirations. These were highly cultured people, recruited in the entourage of Croce, able to gain his confidence and that of his collaborators, but above all capable of discussing cultural arguments and even of initiating political conversation. Their reports now show astute observations, and prove that the confidence of the police in their work was well placed. The reports were read by the chief of police and then passed to Mussolini himself, who signed his famous "M", in red or blue pencil, and sometimes made appropriate or annoyed comments, as when one informer tried to report

something out of nothing on second and third hand hearsay.

(6)

During the fascist regime Croce continued to write and to publish his books and his periodical, La Critica. But at regular intervals his editor, Laterza, was confronted with unexpected difficulties and unforeseen delays, causing moral distress and financial loss. Under the censorship law of the time, the censors in Bari had to read Croce's books before they could be printed and published. From their delicate and powerful position, the censors made known their dislike and contempt for the contents of Croce's works, and often delayed or denied their approval and the printing permit with one excuse or another, depending on their mood or their superior's orders. Sometimes the sale of a book was banned after permission for its printing had been granted. Once the books were finally published and sent to the book stores, often the police took note of those who were seen buying the books or reading the periodical in the libraries. (7)

Moreover, the newspapers were not allowed to review Croce's books, but were ordered to ignore the works or to ridicule the man. In 1933, Mussolini himself complained that Croce's name had been mentioned too many times in a periodical and his importance greatly exaggerated. In 1935, with a short note to the Minister of Education, he

expressed surprise, "as something incredible", that many public and school libraries still had a subscription to Croce's periodical, La Critica. The minister acted with speed, and ordered the libraries to cancel the subscription, and then also ordered the high schools to remove one of Croce's books from the list of adopted textbooks. In 1937, the catalogue of the Laterza publishing house, which had been reprinted for more than twenty years without changes in its format, was seized by police and ordered out of circulation, because it had been published without prior authorization, and above all "because it contains an apology of Croce's thought". Finally in 1940, with a rather chilling expression, revealing the mentality and atmosphere of the times, the Minister of Propaganda informed Laterza that La Critica could continue its publication "because Mussolini does not want to give any hemlock cup to the philosopher". (8)

The longa manus of censorship reached also into Croce's private correspondence, especially from 1929 on. In Naples all incoming letters to Croce were stopped, read, copied, and filed, including letters from his wife or from his daughters. In other cities letters sent by Croce to his friends were also opened and forwarded with delays. Many of his letters were sent to the chief of police and even to Mussolini, and forwarded after approval had been received.

In some cases letters considered politically sensitive never reached their destination. Thanks to the work and the zeal of the police and the censors, a great amount of material has been collected in the National Archives of Rome.

Materials in the National Archives.

In the Archivio Centrale dello Stato, in the collection of personal files, the file of Croce contains twenty boxes, or buste; in these boxes there are 1368 folders, one for each of Croce's correspondents. In the collection of the Prime Minister's office, or Segreteria Particolare del Duce, there are two heavy folders, containing documents collected from 1926 to 1943 for the special attention of Mussolini. There are also other files on Croce in other sections and collections of the archives. Letters of Croce to his friends or reference to his name can also be found in the Central Political Files, or Casellario Politico Centrale, where the police authorities kept the files of all those jailed during the fascist regime. A close but far from complete study of these documents has revealed that the police authorities were in possession of the full subscription list of the periodical, La Critica. The informers had supplied the names of Croce's most trusted friends in major Italian cities. Censorship had controlled and kept under scrutiny most of the correspondence

addressed to Croce. Between the work of the regular agents and the reports of the informers the prefect of Naples, the Chief of Police, and Mussolini knew the most important aspects of Croce's life and activity, public and private, at all times. (9)

The information in their possession left them without any doubt about Croce's political position and the personal opinions of "the notorious adversary", "il noto oppositore, senatore Benedetto Croce". Because they knew Croce's tenacious liberal faith, his unchanging opposition to fascism and his critical opinion of Mussolini, the regime never entertained the hope of one day winning Croce to its causes and never seriously tried to lure him into the fold of fascism as the authorities had tried and succeeded with many others. When an informer suggested a sort of peace treaty between Croce and fascism, with concessions coming only from the regime, the chief of police with his sharp senses rejected the proposal "as too complicated", knowing from other sources that it was a waste of time for both parties. (10)

Croce's New Youth.

Despite police surveillance, the reading of his mail, and subtle harassments, Croce continued his usual way of life, receiving and visiting friends, writing and publishing books. While fascism celebrated its triumphs and

the new leaders strutted about in special uniforms, flaunting their power, Croce increased his efforts against the authoritarian regime, defending with new energy and almost youthful vigour the ideals of liberalism, and "the traditions of studies, customs and moral concepts, that belonged to the men to whom we owe the resurrection of Italy." (11)

In a time when the new regime was destroying venerable institutions and creating new myths, he remained faithful to the ideals of the Risorgimento, inspiring others to share his faith and to join the anti-fascist resistance. In 1932, writing from jail to his sister-in-law, Gramsci expressed well, and better than anybody else, Croce's magisterial function during those years: "While many people lose their heads, and grope among apocalyptic feelings of intellectual panic, Croce becomes a point of reference and is able to give inner strength by his unshakeable faith that evil cannot metaphysically prevail and that history is rationality." (12)

La Famiglia Italiana.

Because of his intellectual prestige and his political coherence, Croce became, in Italy and abroad, the moral leader of the anti-fascist opposition and the symbol of Italian resistance to Mussolini's dictatorship. He found himself at the centre of a loose political movement, kept

together without strict rules, but united by moral commitment, and animated by common aspirations, pre-eminent among them love of freedom and desire for the return of political liberty. This "Famiglia Italiana", as Croce called it, was made up of members of the cultural elite, who in the past had been liberals, democrats or moderate socialists. In the past these men had been engaged in bitter debates, had even disagreed on fundamental issues, but now they had been brought together by the loss of freedom and reunited by the need to regain it. Even more important for the future, the needs of the struggle and the nature of the adversary compelled all of them to reassess their differences, urging them to rethink old conclusions, to seek new solutions, and to reflect on the reasons for their common defeat. Groups of this ideal family were present in major urban centres, and were able to maintain regular contacts among themselves, not without some degree of danger. (13)

In this unstructured movement an important role was played by women, exceptional for their courage and nobility of character, as wives, sisters, friends or militants. Under the guise of innocent gatherings, the residences of Barbara Allason, Giuliana Benzoni, Bianca Ceva, Maria Cittadella, Irene Di Robiland, Ada Gobetti, Nina Ruffini, and Elena Croce became discreet centres of the opposition.

Especially in Capri, Rome, Turin, Milan and Veneto, these women provided the occasion and the opportunity for cultural and political meetings, away from police interference. In their elegant living rooms, kindred people met with some security, exchanged news and discussed political events, keeping alive the flame of freedom and the hope for a better future. In this long chain of concentric circles, Croce was the strong link, providing ideal aspirations with his writings and assuring practical continuity with his frequent trips and with his constant correspondence. (14)

Even the police informers and the political authority recognized, at various times, the existence of this unorthodox political movement and the role played by Croce. In 1934, a promising young historian, turned police informer, provided the prefect of Naples with a list of Croce's friends, who went to his house with a certain frequency, making comments on their personal value and political ideas. The same year, prodded by his masters, he sent to the prefect "a partial list, which could be useful for further investigation". In this second list were written "the names of persons in various Italian cities who have relations of a political nature with Benedetto Croce". The cities mentioned were Genoa, Turin, Milan, Florence, Rome, and Messina in Sicily. Among the names listed were

old politicians, university teachers, and young people just out of university. "Almost all of them", to use the informer's own words, "are university teachers and personalities of great influence in the fields of politics and culture, and they have a great many connections".

Because of the moral significance of their names and also the political role that they were already playing then in the underground, it is worth mentioning that in the list were also included the names of Leone Ginzburg and Nello Rosselli, besides the older and more famous Adolfo Omodeo, Guido De Ruggiero, Gaetano De Sanctis, Luigi Russo, Piero Calamandrei, and Luigi Einaudi. (15)

In 1935, even the chief of police, Bocchini, in a departmental note, recognized the political implications of Croce's cultural activities and personal relations. He had to admit that a group of university teachers, living in different cities, "under literary and philosophical appearances are increasing their mail correspondence and personal relations, which have the centre in Benedetto Croce, whose unchanged feelings of hostility against the regime are well known". Finally, in a report to the prefect of Naples, the learned Neapolitan informer, using some vivid expressions, concluded that Croce did not belong to "a proper structured organization", but he "is the head of a business centre", adding that this "centro d'affari" was

"a small coterie of university teachers and dreamers, made up of friends with great social connections, scattered in various Italian cities". (16) Because Bocchini was aware of the many relations of that small group of friends, and as a learned man himself knew the power of culture, and appreciated the influence that those dreamers enjoyed inside and outside of the universities, he never eased police surveillance of their activity and their movements.

Croce's Houses as Centres of Opposition.

Aware of these special police attentions, Croce ignored the harassment and continued his activities with increased determination. In the struggle against fascism Croce's functions and contributions were manifold. His opposition was carried out first of all by his intellectual activities, writing books and publishing his periodical. Also his regular trips in Italy and his forays in Europe have to be considered part of Croce's political activity, and have to be regarded as an important contribution to the anti-fascist resistance. The same function was fulfilled by his correspondence with old and new friends. In actual fact, political activity and opposition to fascism for Croce really began at home. During the entire fascist regime Croce's house remained open to all those who wanted to see him for personal or cultural reasons. In particular the opponents of fascism knew that they would always be

welcomed inside the house and received by Croce and his wife "with a friendly smile", according to Vinciguerra.

(17)

In his house Croce received not only the liberals and the democrats but also the young members of the Communist Party until they were arrested or went into exile. At one time or another all the most important leaders of the anti-fascist movement made trips to Naples, seeking Croce's support or his advice. Inside his library Croce and Omodeo wrote some of their major essays and prepared the publication of La Critica. Senator Casati made frequent visits to Naples, not only to keep company with an old friend but also to bring news from Northern Italy and sometimes from Europe, and then to carry back information to common friends in other parts of Italy. When Croce's eldest daughter married, she and her husband, Raimondo Craveri, became sort of roving ambassadors, and kept even closer relations between Croce and his friends in Rome, Milan and Turin. (18)

During the regime, visits to Croce's house always attracted the watchful attention of the police. Despite his air of innocence, Casati's presence in Naples aroused the suspicion of a police informer. From the reports he wrote to the prefect and the list of names he provided, it is clear that an influential group of anti-fascist

intellectuals and personalities of Naples remained faithful to Croce and often met in his house for political and cultural discussions. Besides this group of old friends, there were also frequent visits to Croce's house by members of the younger generation, not only from Naples but also from other Italian cities. In the early thirties, the usual informer in his reports noted that "every evening there are meetings of young students in Croce's house". In 1937 other young scholars from Bologna in central Italy went to Naples to seek Croce's inspiration and support. After they returned home, one of them, Carlo Ragghianti, wrote his appreciation to Croce: "My friends and I wish to thank you for your cordial hospitality given to us on our visit to Naples". (19)

With all these friends coming and going, Croce's residence in Naples became one of the best places to gather free information about Italy and Europe. Croce was in correspondence with literary personalities of Italy and Europe. Some of his acquaintances were newspapermen of the leading French, British, and German papers. Presidents of European and American universities made a point of visiting Naples when they went on holiday to Italy, or were going to Greece or Egypt. Walter Lippman always made a stop in Naples on his European tours to gather fresh information about the continent's political situation. Often

ambassadors of European nations paid a visit to Croce with one excuse or another. Finally the British Council rented two rooms on the second floor of Croce's building, providing no doubt the occasion for discreet visits. When national or international conferences of a cultural nature took place in Naples some delegates made a point of visiting Croce, or he invited to his place those congenial to his ideas.

The same frequency of visits occurred in Croce's summer residence in Piedmont, which was conveniently located near the vacation residences of Albertini, Antonicelli, Gobetti and Ruffini. During the summer months friends from the city of Turin and other parts of Northern Italy went there as pilgrims to a sanctuary. During his vacations Croce not only saw university professors, but also other senators and former ministers of the Giolitti cabinets; a few times he had meetings with Enrico Caviglia, among the few generals critical of fascism. Because of its location, sometimes friends going to France or returning from there stopped at Croce's house for a day or two. These too were opportunities to keep in touch with European events, to discuss French political evolution; and in general to send and to receive information, exchanging views with other friends, at home and abroad. Besides these old friends Croce also received visits from young men still attending

university or recently graduated, but already active in the underground, and in contact with the exiles in Paris and other groups in various Italian cities. The political importance of Croce's summer residence, and his connection with members of the underground movement of "Giustizia e Liberta`", was recognized by a police informer in 1934. It really seemed to him that Croce carried out most of the political activity during the summer months and in Piedmont. With the same astute perception he was among the first to note the importance of Leone Ginzburg in Croce's entourage. "Until last summer the Russian was one of the most frequent visitors in Croce's summer residence, together with Signora Ada Gobetti, widow of the notorious Piero". The informer also reported that among Croce's frequent guests there were also Barbara Allason and Umberto Cosmo "and all the others that the recent police arrests and investigation have shown were involved in criminal activities against the regime". The informer here was referring to the arrest of a group of young people belonging to the underground movement of "Giustizia e Liberta`", the brain child of Carlo Rosselli in Paris. Their arrest and their sentences did not stop other people from joining the movement or from continuing their visits to Croce's house. In 1937, Croce's daughter, writing from Turin, told her mother in Naples that there were "many

friends who wanted to see father". (20)

Mussolini and fascism tried in subtle ways to keep Croce in isolation, but the world kept in touch with him, and he himself kept closer to the outside world. Just after a recent return from Russia, and a meeting with Maxim Gorky in Capri, in one of his last visits to Italy, Stefan Zweig went to Naples and paid tribute to Croce's anti-fascism. "I could not but admire the freshness and the mental elasticity which the old man preserved in the daily struggle". He also noted the strange isolation of Croce and its true meaning: "This hermetic isolation of a single man in a city of millions, in a nation of millions was at once weird and magnificent". (21)

Trips to Italian Cities.

In the changed political situation, the increased number of Croce's trips in Italy and his frequent forays abroad acquired a new meaning. The frequency of trips to various Italian cities has to be regarded as a form of political activity and as a new manifestation of anti-fascist opposition. They were dictated by their recognition of the insecurity of the mail and the need to regain freedom of expression among trusted friends, carrying information or bringing comfort away from police interferences, or so it was hoped. These trips have a striking similarity to the underground activities of the communists and of "Giustizia

e Liberta`"; the only difference was that they were carried out in the open and accomplished their aim without breaking existing laws. From 1930 to 1940, month by month the diaries of Croce register the trips to Bari, Rome, Florence, Milan, and Turin to meet kindred people. For security reasons few names are mentioned and few details are given, but the presence of expressions like "large gatherings of friends", or "long discussions lasting into the night" are enough to reveal the nature and the purpose of those meetings. In these and other cities Croce met not only old friends but also members of the new generations, who were involved in opposition activities or were in relations with others already active in the underground organizations. (22)

Police records and the reports of the prefects now provide a great deal of information, making clear that at one time or another, directly or indirectly, Croce became acquainted with people who played a leading role in the Resistance or assumed positions of command in the Liberation struggle after 1943. In Rome Croce maintained close relations with Guido De Ruggiero and Gaetano De Sanctis, leading university teachers and well known then for their opposition to fascism. In the capital Croce also had meetings and conversations with old politicians and former newspaper editors, like Bonomi and Ruini, Albertini

and Bergamini. He also met future political or cultural leaders like Carlo Antoni, Leone Cattani, and Niccolò Carandini. But also in Rome Croce had relations with Umberto Zanotti Bianco, "a dangerous person", according to police reports, who maintained relations with many people in high places, "notoriously contrary to the regime". When in Florence Croce was usually the guest of Luigi Russo, who gathered in his house students and teachers from the universities of Florence and Pisa and even Perugia, like Guido Calogero, Aldo Capitini, Piero Calamandrei and Pietro Pancrazi, assuring lively conversations lasting late into the night. In Florence Croce was often invited to the house of Nello Rosselli, the younger brother of Carlo, and to that of Alessandro Levi, the brother-in-law of Claudio Treves, the old socialist reformist leader, friend of Turati. Also in Florence, Croce often met Bernard Berenson, the famous art historian, who maintained close ties with Harvard University. (23)

In the hospitable house of Casati in Lombardy Croce was warmly greeted not only by his traditional friends, Alfieri, Flora, and the Treves brothers, but also by other young and old socialists, and by a group of influential liberal Catholics, and similar "elements of the Masonic Order", as the police informer qualified them. The informer was astute enough to add that Tommaso Gallarati Scotti and

Stefano Jacini, like Casati, had strong ties with the industrial world and connections with the great publishing houses of the city, Rizzoli and Mondadori, "still full of the wreckage of anti-fascism". In reality these firms often provided jobs to anti-fascist scholars in trouble. More important for the future, when in Milan Croce also met those people like Adolfo Tino and Ugo La Malfa, who later were instrumental in the creation of the Party of Action and were then working in the Banca Commerciale, under the tutelage of Raffaele Mattioli, a steadfast friend of Croce at all times, but whose "feeling of loyalty toward fascism" left something to be desired, according to police reports. Sometimes Croce was the guest speaker at a meeting of a "philosophical society", that Casati had organized in his house, to avoid police suspicion. But the political nature and the moral function of those meetings did not fool police authorities. In 1934 an informer reported to the chief of police that Croce had had a large meeting with anti-fascists personalities and in the course of the conversations he had urged his friends "not to lose faith in their ideals", and to remain optimistic "about the fall of fascism in the near future". Perhaps those were not Croce's precise words, but the faith in the future or in the "intreccio storico" is consistent with Croce's thought, and can be found in many of his historical and political

essays. (24)

When Croce went to Bari to discuss editorial matters, Laterza gathered in his villa or in his bookstore a group of bright intellectuals, including Tommaso Fiore and the much younger Michele Cifarelli, later active in the Socialist and Action Parties, where they brought a new awareness of the problems connected with the Southern Question. During his frequent visits to Turin, in the house of his brother-in-law or in other friendly places, Croce met not only university teachers, like Giole Solari and Luigi Einaudi, and old and younger leaders of the Liberal Party, like Marcello Soleri, Franco Antonicelli and Manlio Brosio, but also members of the younger generation, critical of fascism, and not afraid of persecution, associated with "Giustizia e Liberta`" and grouped around Leone Ginsburg and Carlo Levi and their many friends, working in Giulio Einaudi's fledgling publishing house, and writing in the periodical, La Cultura. (25)

Among the Italian cities, Turin had a special place in the mind and heart of Croce, attracting him for elective affinities, historical memories, and family ties. Since his marriage, Croce's presence in the streets and porticoes of the city became a rather familiar sight; his intellectual influence at the university had been constant for years, and deeply touched generations of students, who later

became liberals or socialists, communists and members of the Actionist diaspora. Rather than "the city of Gramsci and Gobetti", as the city is often described, without detracting anything from the historical merit of those two exemplary figures, more properly Turin deserves to be called the city of Croce. Certainly his intellectual influence among teachers and students was far greater there than in his own city of Naples; in Turin between the wars Croce's political influence was more evident and more fruitful. In 1934, the usual well informed historian-spy came to the same conclusion. He recognized that Turin was the city where Croce "does most of his political activity" and "where are living many who belong to Crocean anti-fascism". (26)

The political value of Croce's trips to Italian cities was enhanced by the public nature of his visit. He did not remain closed inside an hotel or a house, but went about town in the company of his friends, becoming a topic of conversation. The presence of Croce in any town was an event, and often created a stir, putting in motion unexpected reactions. Luigi Russo has recounted one such occasion, when he and Croce went to the University of Florence to pay a courtesy visit on Ernesto Codignola, a professor of pedagogy there. While waiting outside in the hall, the students recognized Croce, pressed around him,

and spontaneously burst into great applause, which moved Croce and Russo to tears, and then the philosopher had to improvise a little speech. (27)

Croce himself has given a charming account of a trip to the city of Campobasso, in the province of Molise, that showed Croce's moral influence remained unchanged among the cultural elites of Italian provincial towns. For a few days Croce's visit generated interest and kept civic life buzzing. He was received with cordiality by the mayor and then with local notables invited for lunch at the hotel. In his research Croce was helped with enthusiasm by local experts, and accompanied by them from place to place. When he went to the bishop's palace to consult old parchments, the bishop came out of his living quarters and cordially greeted Croce, proudly showing his last book, History of Europe, recently published and quickly placed by the Church in the Index Librorum Prohibitorum. (28)

Croce's Correspondence.

Croce's cultural influence and political presence in the provincial life of Italy is attested not only by his research trips, but also by his correspondence. A few years ago, Professor Toni Iermano of the University of Naples brought to light "a small but intense correspondence" between Croce and Gaetano Perugini, a doctor who lived in Avellino, a city not far from Naples. Those letters show

the ability of Croce and Dr. Perugini to establish a deep relation, reaching moments of great humanity, based only on common ideals and historical memories. True to their education, the two friends did not talk much about private matters, but, in a relaxed fashion, discussed literary currents, debated historical facts and lamented the general condition of Italian society. Not only did Croce write letters to Perugini, but, on his own initiative or at the discreet request of the doctor, he sent to Avellino some of his books and political essays.

This correspondence opens a window on the cultural and political life of an Italian provincial town during the fascist regime. As a doctor, Perugini was in touch with the bourgeois elite of the city, as a man critical of the regime, he was in close relations with Guido Dorso and other anti-fascist intellectuals. These congenial friends often met in their favourite cafe', facing the public square, and there they discussed political events and shared cultural news. The letters they wrote to Croce, the replies they received from him, given their general nature, must have been part of the discussions, and made Croce's ideas almost a familiar presence among them. When one of them bought a book by Croce, or received by mail his periodical, the book and La Critica surely were shared and then discussed and commented on with excitement in their

meetings at the cafe' or in the more secure privacy of their homes. When Perugini suddenly died, it was Dorso who informed Croce of the sad news, and the notes of condolence of Dorso and Croce, besides the grief for the sudden loss of a friend, attest to a strong intellectual intimacy among them all. (29)

When the full correspondence of Croce is published the presence of similar cultural circles will be shown in other provincial cities, attesting to his deep influence among small but influential groups. The letters already published have revealed that throughout his life private correspondence was one of the most powerful means used by Croce for his political and cultural activities. Also in the National Archives it is possible to find, in unexpected places, revealing letters, showing the magisterial use of Croce's correspondence. In 1933 from Florence Nello Rosselli informed Croce of his desire to publish a new historical review, and Croce must have replied, offering encouragements and also advice, which then were discussed with the other scholars involved in the plan. Writing from Rome in 1937, Antonio Amendola, the younger brother of the communist leader, Giorgio, expressed to Croce his gratitude "for past benevolence", but he also reported "the deep admiration" of his university friends "for everything you do and say", and this, Croce was assured, despite his

anti-communism and their Marxist inclinations. On the eve of the war, Carlo Ragghianti, from Bologna, assured Croce that his work and his thought supported "me and many others in daily life", encouraging them "to seek and do better things". (30)

Trips Abroad.

When political parties were banned in Italy, Croce rejected the idea of emigration, but many political leaders went into exile in European countries. From there they continued political activities, trying to maintain contact with Italian comrades and to influence European public opinion about the nature of fascism. From the beginning to the end, the exiles remained a thorn in Mussolini's side, and the regime subjected them to a relentless campaign of moral denigration, or even worse in the case of Carlo Rosselli. "Fuoruscito", in the propaganda of the regime became a term of political opprobrium and a symbol of anti-patriotism. Undeterred by the official propaganda and by personal dangers, in private conversations, as reported by police informers, Croce praised the exiles for their personal courage, stressed their international reputation, at the same time blamed Mussolini for turning political adversaries into personal enemies. He also remained in correspondence with his exiled friends and maintained personal relations with liberal and democratic leaders in

exile, visiting them in London and Paris, Geneva and Grenoble, Berlin and Brussels, and probably also in Budapest and Vienna. In the Archives there is some evidence to suggest that Croce and Sforza at least used members of their families to send and receive personal letters and political news in the form of newspaper clippings and articles. (31)

The experience of the exile and the hard choices that they had to make, in order to remain faithful to their ideas, deeply affected Croce. Those feelings found expression in one of his best historical writings: the short biography of Galeazzo Caracciolo, whom the emperor Charles V had made Marquis of Vico, as a reward for his services. After his conversion to Calvinism, Vico decided to emigrate to Geneva and to abandon his family, preferring to renounce all his Italian possessions in order to live in conformity with his new faith. When Croce describes Vico's bitter refusals, "le amarissime rinuncie", one feels that he is talking about the exiles of his times, and the pains suffered in that experience by his friends. (32)

For their part the exiles understood Croce's feelings and were aware of his sympathy toward them. In 1936 the periodical of "Giustizia e Liberta`" in Paris lamented the official silence maintained by the Italian authorities on the occasion of Croce's 70th birthday. Rosselli's paper

went on to stress Croce's contribution to European culture and his influence on the education of several generations of young Italians. The paper also praised Croce's past deeds against fascism, concluding with a revealing observation: "Today he understands and shares our passions". (33)

This community of feelings was the result also of private conversations held in foreign lands. From 1930 to 1938, Croce made several trips to France and England, Belgium and Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Switzerland. The main reason, or excuse, was to do historical research, or to offer his young daughters occasions to broaden their education. In these trips not only was he always accompanied by one of them, but was also followed by agents of the Italian police, acting under Bocchini's usual instructions. But despite the presence of police escort, Croce never failed to meet the exiles and to be a guest in their houses. In 1930 and again in 1933, first in Paris and then in London, Croce had meetings and long conversations with Don Luigi Sturzo, the former head of the Popolari. Beside politics, Croce and Don Sturzo also discussed, with the usual gusto, their literary and philosophical works, already published or still in progress. In those meetings an old friendship found new bonds, that lasted for many years and continued after the war, with increased

reciprocal admiration. (34)

Whenever in Paris, Croce never failed to visit his old friend, Francesco Saverio Nitti, the former Italian premier. In their meetings the two friends not only discussed "the present political situation"; they also talked, with poignant nostalgia, about common acquaintances, lamenting or praising, "the tenacity of some and the changes of others". In Nitti's house, which was a meeting place of Italian anti-fascists, Croce also met the old socialist leaders, Filippo Turati and Claudio Treves. The relations between Croce and Turati had always been rather cordial, but in the past he had sharp polemics with Treves; but now those quarrels were almost forgotten and were superseded by a new respect and a new solidarity, in the name of which Croce was helping Treves' two sons, still living in Italy with their mother. Among the exiles, Croce had the longest conversations with Carlo Sforza, the minister of foreign affairs under Giolitti. As a former ambassador, Sforza had close ties with the diplomatic circles of European capitals, and probably was able to apprise Croce of the latest developments in those quarters. Croce and Sforza met in Paris or in Brussels, where he lived. Sforza traveled to Paris to meet Croce, and on those occasions they remained together for long hours. It was in those conversations and in their private correspondence

that their friendship was strengthened and their political ideas sharpened. They came to agree on many points, and that agreement reappeared after the war, when both of them served under Badoglio. (35)

Meetings with Carlo Rosselli.

The most important political meetings of Croce in Paris were held with Carlo Rosselli and took place in the house of Lionello Venturi, a famous art historian and father of Franco Venturi, the historian of Italian Illuminism and Russian populism. There Croce met all the leaders of "Giustizia e Liberta`" including Alberto Cianca, Emilio Lussu and Alberto Tarchiani, and other "dangerous subversives", as the police reports defined them. Among these there was also the much younger Aldo Garosci. Over the years, Garosci has retained a special inclination toward Croce for moral and intellectual reasons, and always remained respectful, even when questioning Croce's political choices, able as he had been to observe at close range the humanity of the old philosopher. Croce played the role of emissary between Garosci and his mother in Turin, and carried their letters back and forth. Once he even stopped for half a day in Grenoble, so that a son could send by personal courier reassuring news to a worried mother. (36)

The conversations between Croce and Rosselli verged on

political questions, both practical and theoretical. Those discussions were always cordial, according to Gaetano Salvemini, who was present at most of the meetings. A report written in 1934 by the usual police informer confirmed that "Croce has a great consideration for Carlo Rosselli". From Croce's memoirs written in 1944 and from his book review of Garosci's biography of Rosselli we can gather both Croce's admiration for Rosselli and their political disagreement. In his memoirs and the book review Croce paid tribute to the personal generosity, political courage and determination of Rosselli in the struggle against fascism and Mussolini. At the same time, he expressed reservations about Rosselli's philosophical ideas and political programme. For Croce Rosselli's attempt to conciliate liberalism and socialism remained unsuccessful, marred by eclecticism, contradictions and lack of coherence; more important his social programme was devoid of realism and showed dangerous signs of authoritarian tendencies, with traits common to communism. In all his references to the death of Carlo and Nello Rosselli, Croce remained certain that the order for their assassination originated with Mussolini himself, and with his desire to get rid of an indomitable adversary. After the two brothers were killed in France by hired ruffians of Italian fascism, Croce wrote a letter to Nello's wife in Florence, which can

be found now in the Archives. On his last trip to France in 1937, Croce paid a visit of respect to the mother and the wife of Carlo, then still living in Paris. (37)

In his trips abroad, Croce also met, besides Italians, prominent European intellectuals, and was cordially welcomed in their circles. He established lasting relationships in Germany especially with Thomas Mann, Friedrich Meinecke, and Albert Einstein, in France with Daniel Halevy, and in England with Robert Collingwood. In 1933 during his trip to Paris and London, he used his international reputation and tried to organize the writing of a letter, signed by prominent personalities, to be sent in the form of a message to Mussolini, asking the dictator to release from jail Mario Vinciguerra, who had been sentenced to a harsh penalty three years before for his anti-fascist activity. The letter did not materialize then, because George Bernard Shaw, the author chosen for the job, wanted to include in the letter ideas that Croce and others judged as demeaning of Vinciguerra's dignity. Later, another letter was written by Aldous Huxley, signed by Sidney Webb and Paul Valery and sent to Mussolini without producing any concrete result. (38)

During this period Croce participated in two international cultural and philosophical congresses. Reluctant to embark on a long sea journey, it is to be

regretted that in 1933 Croce did not accept a cordial invitation by Charles Beard to the annual meetings of the American Historical Association. At Oxford's Congress in 1930, he read one of his most important essays which was soon published by the German Historische Zeitschrift. On that occasion Croce compared the authoritarian forces of modern times to the barbaric invasions that had destroyed the Roman Empire; and he invited intellectuals and men of culture to perform in the present conditions of Europe the same functions and to assume the same role that had allowed the Popes and the Catholic Church to preserve classical civilization. Those present and those who read the acts of the congress realized the meaning of the speech and Croce's position in the fight against the new barbarians.

In 1931 the Italian government invested great effort to avoid Croce's election to the presidency of an innocent cultural congress in Budapest. The annoyance of the participants at the political interferences was shown at the end, and assumed a show of solidarity towards Croce. At the final session, the official head of the Italian delegation, the historian Gioacchino Volpe, received the polite applause that usually concludes these occasions. When Croce rose and made an unscheduled small speech, he received a standing ovation. The occasion became even more significant because Croce had mentioned the close ties

between the Hungarian and Italian patriots during the Risorgimento and the references to the present conditions of the two countries were self-evident. (39)

The last trip abroad was made by Croce in 1938. That year he and Casati went to Geneva and met with Joyce Salvadori, the sister of the historian Max, then both living in exile for their anti-fascist feelings. The official excuse was to receive a book of poetry and to agree on its publication. But the new poet was also the wife of Emilio Lussu, one of the leaders of "Giustizia e Liberta`", and in that movement because of her facility with European languages, she was a sort of roving ambassador. Besides the book, probably the young lady brought other news, and the trio must have shared other information and discussed other items besides literary matters. The book was finally published, but not without some bureaucratic snags. Evidently even the fascist authorities realized that the distance between literature and politics can be rather short sometimes. (40)

Croce and the Underground.

In the fight against fascism, Croce did not join any underground movement, recognizing that he did not possess the intellectual and personal qualities required for such an undertaking. At the same time, it is also true that he did not have much faith in the efficacy of the methods of

conspiracy, nor did he have great hope in the lasting result of activities based on such method. Always reluctant to give personal advice, when young anti-fascists asked him what to do, Croce always replied that they had to find their own way, follow the dictates of conscience, do what they thought was right, and be prepared to face the consequences. For his part he recommended that young people devote time and energy to study and to acquiring a solid intellectual preparation for the future. In these cases, Croce also advised that young people have faith in Providence, and hope in the "intreccio storico", trusting the historical development, that continually creates new realities, always presenting unforeseen conditions and unexpected opportunities that one has to be ready to exploit. In the end, Mussolini's fall by foreign arms and political intrigue and not by a popular insurrection or by the contradictions of the capitalist system proved that Croce had been more realistic than the democrats and the communists. (41)

But if Croce did not encourage people to go underground, at the same time he never discouraged those who "dreamed more resolute action" and undertook conspiratorial activity to express their anti-fascism. Once they had made that dangerous choice, he always respected their decision, continued to befriend them, and even tried to help them,

when they inevitably were caught by the police and ended in the fascist jails, or were sent to confinement. From 1926 to 1943, by design or by accident, always by ties of friendship or political affinities, Croce had personal contacts with all the underground movements, and helped some of their most important leaders. He was in contact with the members of Young Italy and helped them when they were arrested. When Giorgio Amendola abandoned the liberalism of his father and joined the Communist Party, Croce remained in friendly relations with him. After his arrest, he sent books and periodicals to his jail and continued to receive his brothers in Naples. He maintained relations with them and their friends at the University of Rome before and even after they had joined the clandestine communist organization and their activities were known to the police. After the failure of the "National Alliance", Croce followed with paternal care the peregrinations of Mario Vinciguerra in the Italian jails. With the help of Casati, he tried to improve the condition of his friend, and to have him transferred to a jail with a less authoritarian director, where he would be allowed at least to read and write. (42)

In the early thirties a group of young socialists in Milan tried to give a new impulse to the clandestine organization of the old party and to establish closer

contacts with the exiles in Paris. Croce had many socialist friends in Milan, especially among the old associates of Turati. He also had contacts with the leaders of the new group. He helped Eugenio Colorni and Rodolfo Morandi to publish their books, and for this reason had several meetings with them in Milan and in Naples. It is rather significant that Morandi's book was published by Laterza and in the collection that was under Croce's direct responsibility. Morandi's history of Italian industry offers a Marxist analysis of the Risorgimento in many ways in contrast with Croce's interpretation. (43)

Above all, from 1930 to 1936, Croce was in close relations with Rosselli's movement, "Giustizia e Liberta`". In 1934 the well known informer was convinced that Croce was aware of Rosselli's activity in Italy, he also suspected that Croce was somehow deeply involved in the movement, and might have had "a part in the events that, directed by Rosselli in Paris, have taken place in Italy". If there were doubts about the material participation, certainly the close personal ties between Croce and the leaders of the movement in Paris and in Italy were self evident to all concerned, including the informer, the prefect of Naples and the chief of police. Many members of this movement were Croce's close personal friends and were greatly influenced by his philosophy. Every time Croce was

in Florence he had meetings and conversations with Carlo's younger brother, Nello and with his friends, and often Croce was a guest in his house. When, in May 1930, the Milan group was discovered and its members sent to jail, Croce remained in correspondence with Riccardo Bauer, through the good offices of Bianca Ceva, a common friend. When, Umberto Ceva, brother of Bianca and a member of the same group committed suicide in jail to reaffirm his faith and to point out the spy who had betrayed him, Croce paid a special visit to the widow, and, with Arturo Toscanini, was among the very few to whom the family showed the last letter that poor Ceva had written to them as a last testament. Moved by this experience, in a letter to Salvemini, Croce called Ceva "the best hero of Italian anti-fascism". (44)

In Turin the most important members of the movement were all Croce's friends; they frequented his house and were regular guests of his family, or met him in the houses of Ada Gobetti and Barbara Allason. On two occasions, Leone Ginzburg, the head of the group, took verbatim notes of Croce's opinions and passed them to the periodical of "Giustizia e Liberta`" in Paris; to his chagrin, one of the pieces was thrown into the wastebasket by "the Parisians", judging the tone too moderate. When in 1934, Ginzburg was arrested and then confined to a village in Abruzzi, Croce

took the initiative to find his new address so he could send him books, periodicals, and translation work. It is also probable that later Croce and Laterza provided the unfortunate man and his young wife with more concrete help, in forms often unknown to them. (45)

One of the primary aims of the underground organization was to collect money and to help the victims of persecution and their families. Unlike other movements, the democratic underground groups did not receive any help from foreign nations or from private Italian corporations. Instead they had to rely on the private wealth of Carlo Rosselli and the individual contributions of wealthy sympathizers:

Albertini, Casati, Croce, Fortunato and Nitti were among these. Moreover, often, some of them on their own offered help to a particular friend in difficulty, with whom they happened to have close ties of affection. It has been revealed recently by close friends that Croce sent his Senate salary of two thousand lire to the exiles in Paris, probably to Alberto Tarchiani, the right hand man of Rosselli. (46)

After the Ethiopian war and the changed diplomatic situation, the contacts of the Italian democratic underground movement and its centres in Paris practically disappeared. The assassination of Rosselli was a great blow for Italian democratic anti-fascism and the organization

suffered a mortal wound and never recovered. From 1937 to 1939, however, especially in the universities of Pisa, Florence, and Rome, a new movement, called Liberal-socialism, had a discreet success among students and intellectuals. The new movement was the child of Aldo Capitini and Guido Calogero. Croce read their clandestine publications, was critical of their ideas, rejected their political conclusions, but remained in cordial relations with Calogero and published a book of Capitini in the collections of Laterza, that was influential in breaking the conformity of the time. (47)

Despite political difficulties and the scarcity of economic resources, beside the communists and in competition with them, a loose democratic underground movement continued to exist throughout Italy from 1936 to 1943. This movement was not formally affiliated with any party, nor had a recognized leader, but included liberals, democrats and socialists. They were united by the desire to regain lost freedom and all of them had been, more or less, greatly influenced by Croce's ideas. Later, in the great majority of cases, the members of this organization went on to organize the Party of Action, and played important roles in the military organizations of the Resistance. One of the most active organizers of this movement, continually in and out of jail for his efforts, was Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti,

an art historian by profession, Croce's close friend since 1933, and after 1943 head of Tuscany's Committee of National Liberation. From this man, who was deeply immersed in the underground organization, and who had frequent contact with Croce, the final conclusion about the relation between Croce and the anti-fascist underground can be taken. "After 1933, when my relations with him became regular, and until the first months of 1943, Croce was always informed about the underground movement and the conspiracy, and often he participated with his advice and criticism in the clandestine political writings...". "It needs to be made known that ... Croce did not confine himself to advice and observation, remaining 'au dessus de la mele'e...', but he also took an active part in the conspiracy, despite his friends' invitations to prudence".

(48)

Croce's Writings.

But in the struggle against fascism Croce's most important contribution was his intellectual activity. In this respect he assumed a position of leadership, and his influence was unmatched, affecting all the cultural and political movements of the time. The books were Croce's way of defending liberal and democratic ideals, and the success of his works gave him the moral leadership of the anti-fascist resistance, assuring him also personal

security against the dictatorship. It is now evident that, in the conditions of Italian society, and given the nature of fascism, Croce's refusal to go into exile or to join the underground was an inspired and fruitful choice. He chose the field and assumed the position in which he could be more effective and where his contribution could be more productive and influential. That choice allowed him to continue his mission in Italy and to remain part of the cultural discourse. It compelled the political powers to tolerate his activity and to accept the presence of his books and the influence of his ideas in the middle of the regime and in the middle of the educational system. (49)

From 1925 to 1943, under the pressure of political events, Croce shifted his cultural interests, and devoted much of his intellectual energy to works of an historical and political nature. The critical aim was always the same, to defend the concept of freedom and to show the fruits of a democratic society, animated by liberal ideals. At the end Croce's works constitute a block of ideas opposed and contrary to fascism and have to be regarded as one of the most important contributions to the Italian anti-fascist resistance. Those books usually had a wide readership, often were discussed at university classes, and sometimes were even used as a course manual. The readers debated their contents, and were compelled to compare and to

contrast different positions, assuring circulation of Croce's ideas. Croce's writings were popular also in the jails among democratic and communist militants, greatly influencing their future intellectual development. A few of the books generated political enthusiasm, and assumed the function of political actions against the tyranny, creating, or reviving opposition against the regime. The historical essays of Croce were an effective tools in preserving the heritage of the Risorgimento and in undermining the moral authority and the national claims of the fascist regime. His philosophical and political writings offered to young people the essential elements for a critical education and provided them with an alternative to fascist ideology, offering the tools with which to challenge the official conformism, thus breaking the corrupting influence of the rhetoric and the propaganda imposed by the party. (50)

Even Salvemini, with his usual generosity, had to recognize that from 1925 to 1943 "the teaching and the example of Croce" "had a powerful effect", created "invincible opposition", and "encouraged ... many young people to believe in freedom" and to join the resistance to fascism. More recently, in a stringent analysis, Renzo De Felice has come to the conclusion that, among the opposition movements, Croce's resistance was "the most

important and the most fruitful". With his personal example and his cultural activities, according to De Felice, Croce achieved two fundamental aims: he protected the cultural and moral life of Italy from the mortal danger of "paralysis and corruption", which by necessity would follow "the isolation, the conformity and the politicizing imposed by fascism". Second, it offered to Italian culture and especially to the young generation, "a critical alternative to the official position", providing "the essential elements for an autonomous education to moral and intellectual freedom and to the spiritual values of a true culture". (51)

Great as that achievement was, it pales before another merit. If Italian fascism did not reach the abyss of Nazi Germany, if the Italian people retained a degree of sanity in the tragedy that engulfed Europe, and refrained from the atrocities demanded by the infernal gods, the merit belongs to the Italian millennial civilization, first of all, but also to Benedetto Croce and to men like him, who, during the fascist regime, in the schools or outside the schools, defended and maintained the values and the ideals of a liberal education and a humanistic tradition.

Croce's writings, even those of a more literary nature, have a constant aim, direct or indirect, against the ideas and the practice of the fascist regime. But the arrows of

Croce were not aimed only against fascism. The ideas of freedom and individual responsibility were also defended against the other totalitarian movements of the modern age. In this period Croce waged a constant battle not only against fascism but also against the clericalism of the Catholic Church, and especially against Marxism and communism, in their new Leninist and Stalinist incarnation. Unlike many European intellectuals, Croce never succumbed to the allure of Russian communism, and never suffered any illusions about the authoritarian and dictatorial nature of the new soviet society. While his early anti-democratic polemic softened and almost disappeared, Croce's hostility to soviet communism never relented; for him the political movement created by Lenin and led by Stalin remained an aspect of modern activism and showed strong affinities with fascism.

Some critics have regarded the anti-Marxism of Croce as a sign of his conservative philosophy, or, more damnable, as a political expression of his agrarian interests. In the historical context of the times, Croce's anti-communist polemics, instead, has to be seen as a necessary moment of the struggle against fascism; it was a clarifying aspect to blunt the propaganda of the regime. During this period the communists and the fascists liked to present their own movement as the only true alternative to the other. In the

confusion of the time, often, well meaning people, or plain opportunists jumped from one movement to the other, hoping that the new chosen party would realize the real revolution that, according to them, the other had betrayed. The communists rejoiced, before the popular fronts, in calling every movement to their right, including the socialist parties, social-fascism. Exploiting the old fear of communism, the regime propaganda presented fascism as the only bulwark of Western civilization against the new Mongolian orders. "Rome or Moscow" was a popular and effective slogan of the time, and was the choice that Mussolini preferred to impose, and that, strangely enough, the communists seemed to share. Croce rejected that claim and offered arguments for a liberal alternative to both movements, showing that the real struggle was between freedom and oppression. Croce's message was clear and so was understood in those times: those who loved freedom had to fight fascism in the present and had to remain wary of communism in the future. (52)

The History of Europe.

Among Croce's books, History of Europe in the XIX Century has a special place and fulfilled an important function in the struggle against fascism. It helped to give a new appeal to the ideal of freedom and it gave a new vigour to opposition against the totalitarian regimes. The

book describes the rise and fall of European liberalism after the Napoleonic wars; it narrates the victories and the defeats of the national movements, contrasting the different aspirations of the Italian Risorgimento and German unification; and finally stresses the great changes brought in European society by the Prussian wars and especially by the First World War. More than in any other previous book, even more than in his History of Italy, in the new book Croce tried to explain the conditions of present times, offering a cogent analysis of cultural trends, social forces and political movements that had weakened and undermined the democratic institutions and shaken the liberal foundations of European civilization, preparing the ground for the advent of totalitarian regimes.

The political inspiration of the historical narration is quite apparent and became evident then to all readers. The contemplation of the past is animated by feelings of the present. The "ruere in servitium" of the French nation during the Second Empire assumes resemblances with Mussolini's Italy. The generosity of the Italian Risorgimento evokes condemnation against the violence of fascism. The beneficial influence of liberal ideals is continually contrasted with the depressing and corrupting effects of authoritarian interventions. Croce showed that

political freedom is the necessary condition to assure economic progress and to satisfy the social needs of man. The concept of freedom was presented as a tool to interpret the past, but also as an ideal aspiration for the present, worth the sacrifice of one's own life. Facing totalitarian ideologies, freedom acquired the connotations of a modern religion.

In that book, the narration of historical events has an eloquent pathos, almost a hieratic tone; some of the periods became famous and were repeated in conversation among kindred people. The conclusion of the book, pointing to the future success of freedom against present adversaries, had a poignant appeal to those who were engaged in the struggle or were suffering in fascist jails. Often in those places, under a candle's flickering light someone read aloud to a group of friends chapters of the book. Away from their families, without hope of a different future, one can imagine the emotions and the feelings of these men, when they heard Croce's words, exhorting the faithful not to despair of the present because even in defeat freedom knows but victory, and not only the future but eternity belongs to liberty. In 1932, Mussolini and the fascist regime celebrated the decennial anniversary of the March on Rome with triumphal speeches, large exhibitions and with oceanic meetings, 'adunate oceaniche'. The

opposition, in jail or at home, had only Croce's book for comfort and for fortification. (53)

The book was written in 1931, published in 1932, and immediately became a best-seller, enjoying a commercial success almost equal to that of the History of Italy. The European nature of the book was enhanced by an eloquent dedication to Thomas Mann, quoting an appropriate triplet of Dante. The first edition of three thousand copies, costing twenty-five lire, was sold out within a week. A second edition of the same size was printed the same month. Four more editions appeared during the fascist regime. The success of the book was the subject of police reports, but the informers in Italy and in Switzerland, chose an easy and traditional explanation, they blamed the commercial success on the support of "Masonic organizations". As was traditional for Croce, several chapters were first published in his periodical, La Critica, stirring extra interest, stimulating expectations and whetting appetites for the rest. By deliberate choice, parts of the book were known and discussed in large circles long before they were actually published.

This time too several precautions were taken to thwart the longa manus of censorship, and to avoid the danger of confiscation. As soon as chapters were ready, copies were sent to friends and trusted scholars, soliciting their

views and comments. The full manuscript was brought to Nitti in Paris and to Gaetano De Sanctis in Rome, where it was seen and read by visiting friends, as happened to Paolo Treves. At the right moment news was leaked to appropriate ears, and Laterza and others spread the word that the book was already in the hands of foreign publishing houses, and was ready to be translated in all major European languages. Probably there was some truth in the rumours, for the English and German translations appeared soon after the Italian publication. Above all, during 1931, in the presence of no more than five trusted friends, Croce himself read all the chapters of the book in weekly gatherings of the Royal Society of Naples, whose proceedings were protected by law, and had to be published in the acts of the Academy of Arts and Sciences of Naples, and could not be seized by the police under any circumstances. Perhaps Croce's resistance to fascism was a passive one, as his critics have claimed, but he certainly knew how to protect his rights, nor was he afraid to exploit to his advantage the existing laws. Not all the traditions of liberal Italy, and certainly not all the old academic freedoms, disappeared under the fascist regime; often what was lacking was the moral courage to use the protection and the opportunity that they offered. (54)

Other Books.

Besides History of Europe, other books of Croce enjoyed a similar success and fulfilled the same political function, though in a different and smaller way. In 1938, History as Thought and as Action despite the rather high price of thirty-five lire, had a second edition of fifteen hundred copies within a short time of the first. No Italian paper mentioned the book, but Croce's new work, for the ideas it discussed and the intellectual power it showed, generated a great deal of interest, as is attested by the personal letters and also by the reports of police informers. Bracco from Naples and Russo from Florence assured Croce that his book was selling quite well, and regarded the second edition as a minor miracle under the prevailing circumstances. At the University of Pisa, Guido Calogero used the book, or chapters of the book, in one of his philosophy seminars, to the great annoyance of Gentile. From Turin both his wife and daughter informed Croce that people had been waiting with impatience for his new publication, and then had received or bought the book with joy. Writing from France to his parents in Turin, Garosci also expressed a similar feeling, marveling at Croce's vitality in his old age. The letter of Elena Croce provides us with another example, to appreciate the devices employed by Croce to assure the circulation of his ideas and the

success of his books. She told her father that in her house their friends had snatched the chapters of the manuscript sent to her for typing, as soon as they were ready. As for the informer, known to police as Cesare, he had the honesty and the intelligence to report both the commercial success and the political value of the book, recognizing that Croce, "with great ability and erudition", had written a book of "exceptional theoretical importance", and, "as usual in his recent writings, not free from clever and critical references to the present regime". (55)

Published in 1940, the immediate success of the book, Il Carattere della Filosofia Moderna, must have caught the attention of Mussolini himself, if the Minister of Popular Culture was required to send a written note to his office on that very subject. Alessandro Pavolini, the author of those Appunti per il Duce, readily acknowledged "the commercial success of the book, as shown by two printings in short succession", but he chose to dwell longer on the political aspect of the matter, stressing that Croce's new work had a clear political thesis, and in the book the author "defended the principle of freedom and condemned authoritarian politics". In particular the minister called Mussolini's attention to chapter six of the book, titled: "On the philosophical theory of freedom", which was a new edition of one essay, previously published by an American

periodical in English. Pavolini found it rather worrisome that there on every page Croce made "the exaltation of freedom", and tried to prove "its identification with modern thought and its superiority over authoritarian principle". (56)

There is another book that needs to be mentioned and that instead usually is forgotten, perhaps because it was not published by Laterza. In 1934 at the request of his anti-fascist young friends from Milan, Croce published a small collection of short political essays: Orientamenti: Piccoli Saggi di Filosofia Politica. The essays are in the form of answers to particular questions, and deal with aspects of political philosophy, and especially with the changing idea of the State. The criticism of fascism and the refusal of authoritarian ideas is present in every essay and is made evident by reference to similar historical periods and to the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. The essays make an eloquent defence of freedom, presented as an essential element to assure the vitality of the State itself. Throughout the book there is an invitation to writers and to intellectuals to avoid political servility and to reject materialistic ideals, instead to celebrate human values and to cultivate the love of freedom. One also notes a constant appeal to kindred people of the opposition to keep faith and to maintain hope

in the liberal spirit and not to be discouraged by the present success of authoritarian ideals. This little jewel was published in Milan by a small publishing house. The size and the modest price allowed the small book to reach a different and larger audience than the massive tomes published by Laterza. The first edition, probably of five thousand copies, was sold out in a few days. Miffed and incensed by that success, the fascist authorities denied permission for a second printing. But Croce and the publishers protested and within the same year two more editions of the book were issued, which sold "very well, like the first one", according to Laterza. (57)

La Critica.

Perhaps even more important than the historical books, in Croce's arsenal, the most efficient tool was the influence of his periodical, La Critica. During the fascist regime the circulation of the paper increased from seventeen hundred to three thousand copies. To Mussolini's annoyance, all universities and many high schools maintained their subscriptions to the periodical. The paper could be found in the majority of public and school libraries, and was available easily to the general public, students and teachers in the reference rooms. La Critica appeared regularly every two months, could be bought at major book stores, and then loaned from friend to friend,

as was then the fashion with periodicals of that nature. From the beginning, La Critica had concentrated efforts on history, literature and philosophy, hoping to achieve a renovation of Italian culture. During the First World War and especially during the fascist regime the political presence in its pages increased, but never reached a predominant position, and the paper never lost its fundamental cultural nature. But in the condition of the times, La Critica became almost the organ of democratic opposition, providing a secret tie among anti-fascist exponents, who often used it as an identification card. In the absence of freedom of the press, the periodical filled a vacuum and fulfilled a great political function. With its regular appearances, the paper kept its readers in regular touch, it offered a constant point of reference, and provided critical information on intellectual production in Italy and in Europe. (58)

Opposition to the fascist regime and criticism of authoritarian ideals appeared indirectly in all the major historical and even literary essays, and in a more direct way in the book reviews, and especially in a popular section, called "Postille e Varieta'", or roughly views and news. In the long critical essays, Croce and Omodeo celebrated the beneficial power of freedom, or lamented the deleterious effects of "activism" and nationalism, that had

replaced the patriotism and the ideals of the Risorgimento. Omodeo offered a Mazzinian interpretation of the First World War to contrast the imperialistic views of the nationalistic historians. The book reviews were used adroitly to score political points. The notorious speech of Heidegger and his sympathy for Hitler were the occasion to criticize once again Gentile and to point out the practical effects of his philosophy. A book by Karl Barth was used to defend the separation of Church and State and to praise personal responsibility and religious freedom against dictatorial authority. On other occasions, the democratic dreams of Marx were compared with the authoritarian practice of Stalin; or the young Marx inflamed by the ideals of 1848, and willing to unite socialism and democracy, was contrasted with the absolutist tradition of Russia and the autocratic mentality of Lenin. In his special column, with short notes and biting words, Croce denounced the servility and the peccadilloes of Italian writers, who in many cases abandoned old ideals and praised the new masters, often to obtain personal favours. (59)

The authorities realized the impact of the periodical and at regular intervals created difficulties for its circulation or continuance, but never dared to stop it. The periodical remained available in reading rooms to students and teachers, who wanted to read it or were not afraid to

be seen reading it. In the National Archives there is ample evidence that the periodical was read and its fortunes followed closely by government leaders and by Mussolini himself. In 1933 the chief of police asked and obtained from the prefect of Bari the full subscription list, which contained the names and addresses of twelve hundred and ninety-four people and institutions, located in Italy or in other countries. Mussolini immediately complained to the Minister of Education about the schools and public libraries found in that list as subscribers. During the following years, the reports of the informers, in Bari or in Naples, kept Bocchini abreast of the affairs of La Critica; he was made aware of Croce's special device "to talk of Germany", when he really intended "to speak of Italy"; the informers never failed to underline Croce's frequent polemics against those intellectuals, "who belong to fascism" and his "rather transparent allusions to the regime". Mussolini too found the time to read La Critica with attention, finding of special interest its most polemical sections. When necessary he also brought to the attention of the appropriate minister the news and views found there, expecting a reply. In 1940, Bottai had to write a defence for an anthology of modern poetry, whose adoption by high school collegiates he had recommended and Croce instead had condemned in La Critica. And this took

place while Europe was already engulfed in war. (60)

Laterza's Publishing House.

In the publication of La Critica, Croce was helped by the contributions of his friends, Adolfo Omodeo and Guido De Ruggiero, but also by the steady solidarity of the publisher, Giovanni Laterza. Without the support of Laterza Croce's opposition would have been more difficult and probably of a different nature. Laterza not only published all his books, it also published books recommended by Croce. In the collection for which Croce was personally responsible, The Library of Modern Culture, appeared the classics of European liberalism, but also books written by Italian and European democratic writers. Whenever possible the translation of foreign books was entrusted to anti-fascist intellectuals. In that collection were also included works of young Italian scholars at the beginning of their academic careers, or just out of university but already in trouble with official authorities for their unorthodox views. Often these young writers had a different point of view than Croce's, but offered a valid contribution to the critical debates. Not only was Croce liberal in his cultural choices, he proved to be rather generous in his editorial remunerations. When the personal circumstances so required, some writers or translators were paid a higher fee than normal, and the difference, without

their knowledge, but not without that of the prefect and the chief of police, was put on Croce's account, and sometimes probably absorbed by Laterza himself. For his friendship with Croce, Laterza paid a price and lost economic opportunities. He remained faithful to Croce and true to his liberal ideals even when the authorities of the regime started to harass his firm and to create obstacles to his activities. When that happened, especially from 1938 to 1943, with pluck and a sense of humour, with a certain zest and even exploiting the rivalry among the local ras, both Croce and Laterza were able to neutralize the government's intervention and the hostility of the regime, and the firm continued its activity along traditional lines. (61)

Reasons for Croce's Relative Freedom.

The freedom of expression that Croce enjoyed during the fascist regime, has raised some questions and aroused speculations. Those questions have often been malicious. After the war, Togliatti first and some communist historians later, even claimed that Croce had been guilty of a secret agreement and a hidden connivance with fascism. But a candid look at Croce's condition under fascism may provide a better understanding both of Mussolini's dictatorship and Croce's personality. The reason why Mussolini allowed Croce to publish his books and his

periodical generated some "wonder" even during the regime, as we learn from Croce himself in his Autobiographical Notes. In 1934 Croce confessed that he was not in a position to explain "the reasons for this sort of immunity", nor could he foresee the duration of this attitude. He listed four reasons that seemed plausible to explain the policy of the authorities: first of all, his literary fame abroad, and the scandal that had been caused by the invasion of his house in 1926, with damage to the prestige of Mussolini in Europe, always sensitive to this issue; the desire of fascism to show that freedom of expression was alive and well in Italy, and to use Croce's situation to prove the point; the traditional respect and social prestige, usually transcending partisan politics, accorded in Italy to great men of letters; finally, Croce pointed to his own age, that probably counseled the authorities to rely with more faith on the work of nature rather than on a messy political decision. In June 1940, when the Minister of Education suppressed La Critica, with a hypocritical excuse: "To limit in the present circumstances the number of periodicals". Croce used another argument, that must have carried some weight, since he won the case and the decision was rescinded. In the protest that he wrote, Croce reminded the minister that his periodical belonged to "a man who had remained faithful to

the ideals of his youth, and which are not those that are prominent in the new times of Italian history", but he also claimed that La Critica was not a political publication, and dealt only with theoretical ideas. On other occasions, from 1930 to 1940, when he had to protest against the suspension of his books, Croce also stated that his books had not violated existing laws and he was not guilty of any "common crime". (62)

Both claims were certainly true. Even the political and historical essays of Croce never did criticize the policies of the government directly, and hardly mention the name of fascism. When fascism had to be mentioned, it was indicated with synonyms like "authoritarian movements", "anti-historicism", and more often "activism", or "irrationalism". In his writings Croce expressed ideas contrary to the ideology of fascism, which undermined the position of the regime, but those ideas were not penally liable, and could not be regarded as an attempt against the security of the State. The government could harass Croce, could even remove him from official positions, and it did with impunity, but could not mount a legal case against his activities. The normal courts retained a certain degree of independence, as the trial of Parri and Rosselli showed in 1927. The special laws of Rocco protected the security of the State rather than the ideology of fascism; and did not

contemplate a crime of opinion. As a senator Croce could neither be arrested nor jailed, but had to be tried first by the Senate, and inside the Senate, acting as the High Court of Justice. In such a trial only those senators, who had been present at all the sittings from the first to the last, could vote on the final verdict. A persecution of Croce had to be based on a political decision, and to employ measures outside of the existing legal system, and this the authorities never decided to do, unwilling to have on their hands a messy situation with unforeseen reactions even among fascist supporters. Mussolini himself seemed to realize this reality in his conversation with Ivon De Begnac during the thirties.

In reality, the reason for the relative freedom of Croce has to be found in the nature of fascism and in the personality of Mussolini. Croce was not the only one to publish a periodical outside the control of the regime, and challenging cultural orthodoxy. Apart from the Catholic press, there were other liberal personalities, and even socialists, who enjoyed that same precarious privilege, and who were relatively immune from censorship. Luigi Einaudi, Cesare De Lollis, Ernesto Codignola, Piero Martinetti, Luigi Russo published periodicals in their field of interest, for short or long periods, free from political control. Laterza was not the only publishing house faithful

to liberal ideals. Fascism created an authoritarian regime, but did not have the time, perhaps did not even possess the strength, to build a totalitarian society. The movement was not based on a single philosophy, and did not have a well defined theoretical system, guiding all its actions in a coherent programme. Within the movement philosophical and artistic currents coexisted in changing alliances, and people were free to embrace different beliefs and even different religions. Until the racial laws, the government and the party never tried to impose an official line on literary and scientific matters. When those laws were introduced, and a new policy began, the harassment of Croce and others in fact increased. Before that time, the press could debate cultural events and could promote intellectual theories, old and new, without too much fear. The rivalries among fascist leaders increased this relative freedom, and sometimes, under the protection of powerful ras, ambitious people could sponsor unorthodox ideas and even criticize single ministers and their policies, though never question the leadership of Mussolini. In this situation the position of Mussolini acquired paramount importance, and his personality, and the contradictions of that personality, assumed a central role in explaining the policies of the regime.

One of the reasons for Croce's relative freedom can be

found in Mussolini's attitude toward culture and cultural leaders. Mussolini had an instrumental approach to culture; for him cultural activities and cultural organizations were instruments to be used to increase the prestige of the regime at home and especially abroad, and also to assure the fascist education of new generations. A blatant persecution of top cultural leaders would be an impediment to achieving those aims. For this reason, at least until 1938, he was rather indifferent to higher education and concentrated his effort to control the mass media, creating the organizations able to influence the opinions of the masses. Cultural activities that involved small elites could be left undisturbed.

Mussolini also had a contradictory attitude towards cultural leaders. He could be brutal as in the case of Gobetti; he could be tolerant with others, even accommodating when it fitted his political needs; but he was authoritarian when the education of young people was involved or his authority was challenged. The long conversations with De Bagnac reveal that Mussolini regarded the collaboration of cultural leaders as necessary to achieve national consensus and essential to ensure success to the initiative of the regime among the people. He also seemed to realize that great writers enjoy a sort of natural immunity, that provides them with a shield against

the pressure of political powers. There are revealing statements in those conversations, showing that Mussolini was aware of those limits and was willing to respect them. He wanted co-operation without seeking recourse to terror, and was not ready to use extreme measures because "revolutions that send poets to their deaths are destined to fall". (63)

During the course of those conversations, Mussolini talked a great deal about Croce: he expressed gratitude for Croce's early support; he regretted his subsequent opposition; lamented his refusal to join the Academy of Italy; but he never uttered threats against Croce, nor did he use angry words, but always maintained a rather respectful tone. In the past Mussolini had accepted Croce's advice in two critical moments and even offered him a place in his government. When for his own political reasons, Mussolini hurled against Croce insulting expressions, he made sure that later an emissary brought to Croce, if not excuses, at least reasonable explanations. There is reason to believe that Mussolini read Croce's most important books, and he liked to show, on some occasions, on his desk, to surprised Italian and foreign visitors Croce's last book or the last issue of La Critica, praising the author to add to their amazement. In his memoirs Bottai has revealed that even during the war, Mussolini liked to

engage in a discussion about Croce and to debate some of his controversial essays. It is then not farfetched to say that Mussolini had a great deal of respect and admiration for Croce's intellectual achievements, and regarded his prestige as a national asset, not to be tampered with lightly, especially after the negative experience of 1926.

One can also speculate that Mussolini had his own peculiar reasons to like and to appreciate what Croce wrote. In private conversations and in his books Croce always had harsh words for nationalism and the nationalist leaders, and Mussolini, with few exceptions, had not too much sympathy for them either, regarding them always with suspicion. After the Reconciliation in 1929, Croce increased his criticism of the Catholic Church, giving an anti-clerical tone to his attacks, and that must have been sweet music to an old anti-clerical and notorious blasphemer from Romagna, besides providing ammunition against the ever increasing demands of the Pope in the field of education. Croce's constant criticism of Gentile could be used by Mussolini to curtail the dynamism of that strong personality, or to undermine the influence of other intellectuals, or even to push forward his own solutions for cultural activities. While these are simply reasonable speculations, the conversations with De Begnac and other documents show that Mussolini strongly believed that the

future belonged to Fascism, and the regime was creating a new culture, giving the new generations a fascist education, and relegating Croce and his elitist culture to the past, soon to be forgotten. At the end, it is fair to conclude, Mussolini did not engage in direct persecution of Croce, making recourse to extreme measures, first of all, for political considerations, and, perhaps, for a certain respect and personal benevolence toward a great man.

Whatever the reasons for the attitude of Mussolini and fascism towards Croce, one has to accept the conclusion of Ernesto Ragionieri, a Marxist historian, often not benevolent to Croce, that during the fascist regime:

"Benedetto Croce was able to utilize with extraordinary ability the margins of freedom that fascism had to concede to him", because of his fame and his reputation at home and abroad. But as a final conclusion it is still better to leave the last words to Croce himself: "Whatever one wants to think about all this, I have used this personal and relative freedom not as a concession and as a donation, for which I owed gratitude to somebody, but as one of my rights, using, though, moderation and observing the austerity that good taste advises in such conditions, so grave and at the same time so delicate". (64)

To the ever returning question of why Croce was allowed to publish his books and his periodical during the

dictatorship of Mussolini, the answer now has become rather simple. Croce enjoyed relative freedom under the axe of Mussolini because he felt free, had the courage to act as a free man, and expressed his ideas with sobriety but without fear. The prestige thus gained further increased his safety, and fascism was compelled to tolerate his activity, unable or unwilling to challenge public opinion and to risk moral and political discredit.

Oath of Loyalty.

Besides his cultural activities, in order to have a complete view of Croce's position under the fascist regime, it is necessary to pay attention to his reaction to some important events of that period. In 1931, in order to increase political control in higher education, Mussolini forced university teachers to take a loyalty oath to the fascist regime. Until that year the oath of office required the teachers to observe loyally the Statuto, now they had to swear "to be faithful to the King and his successors and to the Fascist Regime". It was no longer enough to turn students into good citizens, now the aim of university education was to produce graduates "devoted to the Country and to the Fascist Regime". This humiliating law had been first suggested and inspired by Gentile, who was moved by different concerns, but deep down by a desire of vendetta against those intellectuals, who had signed Croce's

anti-fascist manifesto in 1925. Mussolini accepted Gentile's request for his own political reasons; the new law offered him an easy opportunity to give small satisfaction to the radical wing of the party and at the same time to reaffirm the authority of the State against the increasing demands of the Catholic Church in matters of education. Out of about twelve hundred university teachers, only nineteen did not take the loyalty oath. Some just refused, others resigned or took early retirement before the law came into effect. None of them turned the occasion into a public protest, and no attempt was made to mount a political response. As a police informer remarked with astute observation, the decisions remained individual, did not turn into a united movement and did not find a leadership, as had happened in 1925, at the time of Croce's anti-fascist manifesto. But such a response, to be successful, requires freedom of the press, which was still available in 1925 and had disappeared in 1931. Only Gentile, strangely enough, the very inspirer of the law, during a meeting of his faculty at the University of Rome, expressed publicly and with eloquence his admiration, and his regrets !, for the three professors who had refused to take the oath, preferring to resign their positions, in order to remain coherent with their ideals. (65)

The entire affair was a victory for fascism and in

particular for Mussolini, who at first had been reluctant to introduce the new law, fearing the reaction and the protests of the professors. In reality the overall reaction of the academic body was rather dismal and left much to be desired: the number of resignations was too small, even if one has to admit that in the economic conditions of the thirties few teachers were in a position to take a different road or could afford the loss of employment. Still one should not be too harsh in his judgment, but should avoid a blanket condemnation without making distinctions. Many professors took the oath willingly for the conformity and servility traditional in Italian academic life. But the anti-fascist teachers, who had to swallow their pride and take the bitter pill, were moved first of all by economic necessity, but also by political considerations; they wanted to remain in touch with the new generations and did not wish to surrender the universities to the complete control of fascism. This solution, in good Italian fashion, was facilitated by the peculiar procedure which was followed for taking the oath. During the official ceremony, the chancellor of the university read the formula of loyalty, and afterwards the professors signed a piece of paper without having to say a word. After the oath and the ceremony, life in the universities returned to the normal routine. The professors were able to resume their lessons

as before, free to teach what they wanted, how they liked. Outside the classroom there remained occasions to express personal ideas and to manifest some political opposition. At the universities' official ceremonies academic authorities and fascist professors started to wear party uniforms, while the anti-fascist teachers continued to appear in civilian clothes and business suits.

Croce was not a university professor, so he was not personally affected by the new law. But the law affected some of his best friends, and he became deeply concerned with their difficult position, compelled to make a dramatic choice, that would either affect their economic welfare or their moral status. In the last months of 1931 Croce was writing the History of Europe; the prose of that book has a pathos not present in other books; no doubt the hortatory tone reflects the feelings generated by the policies of the government, and the pains he was sharing with his friends. Entries in the diaries for 1931 reveal Croce's concerns for the predicaments of his friends and their families, and show the resentment and indignation against the law and those who had sponsored it, especially against Gentile. As an immediate consequence, Croce's antipathy to his old friend increased, and he refused to allow his name to stand beside that of Gentile in a miscellaneous book, that was being prepared at the time in honour of Ernst Cassirer.

(66)

When the law was announced, the police soon noted an increase of mail and personal visits to Croce's house; the informers too noticed several meetings in Rome and in Naples between Croce and other leading intellectuals. Many wrote or went to Naples to seek Croce's advice, or to find comfort in his understanding. For a few months he played the role of father confessor. Friends asked for guidance, to be strengthened in their resolve or to be absolved for their acceptance. At the end, three of Croce's best friends refused to take the oath, Francesco Ruffini, a liberal; Lionello Venturi, a democrat; and Gaetano De Sanctis, a Catholic; another friend, Luigi Einaudi, and three of Croce's closest collaborators, Adolfo Omodeo, Guido De Ruggiero, and Luigi Russo complied with the government's request. As in other similar situations, Croce did not try to impose his personal views, but accepted and respected individual decisions. (67)

On this particular occasion, Croce, like many others, did not advise an absolute intransigence, and did not regard the oath as one of those insurmountable cases of conscience, demanding a flat refusal. The university teachers faced an evident case of necessity, which for some could justify a political choice. A personal sacrifice could be made in the name of a higher responsibility, in

this case to protect the welfare of the universities. With other anti-fascists, Croce shared the view that university education should not be abandoned to the complete control of fascist teachers. For the sake of a different future, the hateful measure could be accepted, in order to remain inside the classrooms to preserve a tradition and to offer to new generations ideas different from those preached by the regime. It was one of those Machiavellian decisions, demanded by the harsh and inescapable realities of the time. (68)

In the name of political realism, the Communist Party advised its members or sympathizers to obey the law, and Concetto Marchesi at the University of Padua took the oath, and continued to teach classical literature, creating future scholars and partisans. Even Ernesto Rossi, a pupil of Salvemini, and an indomitable anti-fascist, member of "Giustizia e Liberta'", who was in jail at the time, shared the view. In a letter to his mother, he praised the economist Antonio De Viti De Marco for his resignation, and expressed solidarity with Luigi Einaudi, who had chosen a different road, and remained in deferential correspondence with him. More than the formal ceremonies of the oath, for Rossi the fate of university education remained of paramount importance. Inside the universities, the students themselves appreciated and respected the personal sacrifice

made by their anti-fascist teachers. When Leone Ginzburg's father-in-law, Giuseppe Levi, an old socialist friend of Turati, entered the classroom for the first time after taking the oath, shaken and with a sad face, the class gave him a standing ovation, anti-fascist and fascist students joined together. Years later, in their memoirs, three Nobel prize winners have expressed gratitude for all his teaching abilities and for his personal qualities. Had professor Levi made a different choice, than the one he reluctantly made, Italy would now number another hero, but perhaps fewer Nobel prizes in the field of chemistry and medicine.

(69)

Party Membership.

University teachers were not the only ones in those years subjected to political pressure and compelled to accept official rules, imposed by a dictatorial government. During Mussolini's regime membership in the Fascist Party always increased career opportunities, and in the late thirties became a condition of employment in the civil service. But even before that date, at regular intervals, to increase moral pressure and to create personal anxieties, rumours were spread that soon a new law would make it mandatory for all public employees to join the party. When that happened civil servants were put under pressure by friends, families and superiors, all urging

conformity and acceptance of the inevitable. In 1933 a friend frightened by these converging solicitations or impositions, wrote to Croce asking for his advice. This time Croce's advice was more explicit, but also consistent with his previous position: one should avoid acts of insincere spontaneity; but "if something is imposed by law or by violence, and in the present they are synonymous", then one had to decide whether to "submit to the absolute necessity", or to face the consequences of the refusal. In either cases a personal decision was required, one had to draw his own conclusion, and accept the responsibility for the choice. (70)

During the same period, and for the same reasons, Adolfo Omodeo too faced a similar experience, and was urged to ask for Fascist Party membership. Strangely enough the strongest pressure came from well-meaning friends, afraid that he was in danger of losing his university position for his political views and friendship with Croce. Omodeo had a large family, and teaching was his only source of income. In this period of trial, Croce stood by his friend, giving good advice, suggesting calm and the avoidance of a rushed decision. He tried to calm the overwrought man, pointing out that this time "the evident necessity" did not exist, and that rumours of pending legislation are not yet the law itself. When Omodeo took courage and refused to join the

Fascist Party, Croce immediately wrote him a letter of praise, lauding his choice and his determination. On reading this letter one can almost feel Croce's sense of relief for the decision made by his friend. (71)

In these two episodes one notes a sense of sadness for the solitude that began to surround the lives of those who refused to join official organizations. The closeness experienced in those years and the difficulties faced together probably explain the strong value that Croce always attached to his friendship with Omodeo. It also explains the paternal benevolence that Croce felt for Leone Ginzburg, who, during those same years, unlike many older people, refused to take the loyalty oath and lost his teaching positions in high school and university, not frightened by the economic consequences of his deeds.

Expulsion from Academies.

In 1933 the government compelled the members of the old learned societies and the national academies to take a loyalty oath, similar to the one imposed on university teachers. This time Croce was asked directly by official letters, and invited by the president of the institution to take the oath at a public ceremony. He did not need to consult with other friends, but refused the invitation without hesitation, and in a public way. To the presidents of the Royal Society of Naples and the Lyncean Academy of

Rome Croce wrote that an oath of loyalty to a political party was "in contrast with the nature and dignity of the academic office", whose only function was "the free search for truth". (72)

After Croce refused to take the oath, he was no longer invited to the meetings and functions of the Royal Society of Naples. Again he protested against the illegality of that procedure. He sent a letter to the president, reminding the gentleman that he had been made a member of that society by a Royal decree, "and until a new decree, from the same source", revoked his nomination, he had to be regarded as a member in good standing, and entitled to receive all the communications and invitations sent to the membership. The letter, needlessly to say, never received a reply, nor did Croce expect one. (73)

After the introduction of the oath of loyalty, and later as a result of the racial laws, all the Italian academies lost members and reputation. During the regime they suffered a steady erosion of independence and were continually subject to political interference. While Croce was an effective member of those academies and in a position of influence, especially in those of Naples, he tried, not without some success, to protect the integrity of those venerable institutions. In 1930, Croce opposed the nomination of the Minister of Education as a member of the

old Pontanian Academy. During the general meeting, he reminded the audience that in its long history under the Bourbon Kings, in order to preserve political independence, the Academy had never elected as one of its members a Minister of Education while he was still in office. Among the general silence and embarrassment, Croce invited the Assembly, to reject the nomination not only because it was politically incorrect, but also for the simpler fact that the present Minister of Education did not possess the required scientific qualifications. (74)

In 1931, the Minister of Education nullified the election of the vice-president and secretary of the Royal Society of Naples because of their political ideas and friendship with Croce. It was another attempt to isolate Croce from his friends. Croce went to the next meeting of the Society to express public solidarity with his younger friends and to protest the minister's illegal intervention. On other occasions, Croce did all that was possible to safeguard the cultural independence of those academies, or to protest against ministerial interferences. When political control became complete, he no longer took part in the activity of those societies, of which for many years he had been the most active member. (75)

The Ethiopian War.

In October 1935 Italy invaded Ethiopia, and in May 1936

Badoglio brought the war to a victorious conclusion. The same month, speaking in Rome to an oceanic crowd, Mussolini proclaimed the new Roman Empire amid thundering applause. The Ethiopian war was very popular among the Italian people, and the proclamation of the Empire marked the zenith of Mussolini's prestige and popularity. The regime was able to mobilize public opinion against the League of Nations, appealing to old aspirations and to ancient resentments against the western powers. The victory over Ethiopia and the fall of Addis Ababa seemed finally to have vindicated Adowa, and to have given to Italy the status of a great power, that France and England had denied to her for a long time.

Unlike other liberal leaders and even anti-fascist exiles, Croce did not share the general enthusiasm for the new colonial adventure, and this new incarnation of Crispi's old imperial aspiration. His private correspondence of the time did not contain any praise or approval for the event, and the diaries instead reveal the usual notes of sadness, when Croce was faced with troubling and unpleasant political news. During those months, when it was fashionable to blame "perfidious Albion", Croce had several meetings with British newspapermen, especially with his old friend Cecil Sprigge of the Manchester Guardian, and expressed disappointment over the vacillations and the

appeasement of British foreign policy. Finally, in private conversations with a reliable police informer, Croce expressed worries about the consequences of "a nefarious policy". (76)

A few months after the beginning of the war, the Italian government, to mobilize public opinion but also to boost the gold reserve bled dry by the African campaign, asked the Italian married women "to donate" their wedding rings to the cause of the fascist revolution. As part of this well orchestrated publicity campaign the president of the Senate invited the senators to do the same, and to give back to the State the gold medal, that they had received, when appointed to the Assembly. At first Croce had decided to ignore the request. But in a series of meetings in Naples and in Rome, the other few remaining anti-fascist senators, including Albertini, Bergamini and Casati, argued for a different course and pressed for the acceptance of the invitation. All of them wanted to avoid the accusation of anti-patriotism; they were also concerned that a gesture of defiance could provoke a political backlash, involving more harassment, and perhaps even new forms of persecution of a more personal nature. With some reluctance, against the strong advice of his wife, Croce accepted their arguments. At the end he "returned" to the secretary of the Senate his medal, but accompanied by a brief letter,

written with a cold and rather bureaucratic tone. In that letter Croce clearly reaffirmed his political opposition to fascism, and stated the reason for his gesture.

"Excellency, though I do not approve the policy of the government, I have accepted, in the name of the fatherland, the invitation of Your Excellency, and I have returned to the offices of the Senate my medal, that has the date of 1910". (77)

The gesture of Croce and the other senators has to be seen both as an act of political expediency and as an act of traditional patriotism, still strong in men of that generation, all of them with personal and emotional ties to the Risorgimento. But that gesture left the door wide open to political speculation; that very speculation that it was meant to avoid, and that instead occurred right then and has continued ever since. The government, or at least the chief of police, was aware of Croce's negative feeling about the war and the government's foreign policy, but the mass media, controlled by the regime, reported the event in a light favourable to the official propaganda, as a sign to show the wide support enjoyed by the government's policy; no mention was made of the letter, as was to be expected; and "the return of my medal" was doctored and became "the donation of the gold medal" made by senator Benedetto Croce.

Future historians and newspapermen, even recently, have preferred to ignore the documents and instead accepted and repeated the propaganda of the fascist regime. More important, in the conditions of 1935, Croce's gesture created confusion among his friends and provoked deep consternation among anti-fascists in jail or in exile, who, ignoring the letter and reading the papers, felt abandoned by Croce, and came to believe that he now was approving the policy of Mussolini. Croce was made aware of their reaction in a dramatic meeting with Bianca Ceva, who has left a touching account of their discussion, in which Croce explained his reasons and asked her to convey his unchanged feelings to their friends in jail, and in particular to Riccardo Bauer. (78) In retrospect, it would have been much better and politically more opportune, if Croce had followed his first instincts and had chosen the advice of his wife, instead of accepting Casati's arguments.

More documents that improve understanding of Croce's position during the African adventure, besides the report of the police informer are now available as they were not to those who were suffering in jail at the time. During 1935, in the Senate, a motion of approval for the Ethiopian war, praising the leadership of Mussolini was proposed, four hundred senators endorsed it, only Croce and his few remaining friends, less than a dozen, refused to sign that

motion, thus denying it the unanimous consent of the assembly. In May 1936, when the Senate voted the proclamation of the new Italian empire, Croce made a point of being absent from the Senate. (79) Since his last speech in 1929, and the heckling he had received then, Croce rarely participated in the sittings of the Senate, and then only briefly and for curiosity, but he no longer took part in the voting. From 1929 on, Croce's absences from special occasions, assumed the function of a vote of nonconfidence, and were duly reported to the proper authorities by those senators, who were in the employ of the secret police, and whose names were not unknown to Croce. Finally in 1936, after Badoglio conquered Addis Adaba, Croce broke his relations and correspondence with his old friend, Giovanni Castellano. Inebriated by imperial enthusiasm, Castellano had invited Croce to renounce his anti-fascism and "to make public amends" of his political mistake. (80) Not only did Croce not follow the clumsy advice of Castellano, but in the very middle of the martial sounds and imperial euphoria that prevailed in the Italian press, at the end of 1936, he published the little book of Aldo Capitini, Elementi di una Esperienza Religiosa, that was inspired by the ideas of Gandhi and his commitment to non-violence, and also preached brotherhood among nations, according to Mazzini's teachings. (81)

In the international scene Croce's views were coherent with his unchanged anti-fascism and anti-imperialism. In December 1935, while the Italian mass media were foolishly increasing the praises of Nazi Germany, Croce joined Thomas Mann, and at the request of German political refugees, urged the Nobel Peace Committee to assign the Nobel prize to Carl von Ossietzky, the German journalist who had campaigned for peace among nations, opposed German rearmament, and had been jailed for the last three years for his political ideas. In private correspondence and in personal conversations, Croce expressed sympathy for the Spanish republic. Also in 1936, when the traditional Italian alliance with the western powers was in pieces, and the fascist propaganda stressed the differences between Italy and the western "plutocratic powers", Croce wrote a political essay for the American periodical, The New Republic, which was then republished in La Critica. In that essay, Croce reaffirmed his faith in the future triumph of freedom and condemned all forms of authoritarian regimes, then rather fashionable among many European intellectuals. He also urged "all men of good will to work every day, in every condition, with all means available, using appropriate ways ... to protect and to promote the liberal spirit ...". (82)

The Racial Laws.

The Ethiopian adventure had great consequences in Italian society; it changed the ideology of fascism and affected the personality of Mussolini, pushing the government towards more authoritarian policies. The traditional friendship with Great Britain came to an end, and was replaced by a more cordial collaboration with Germany. Foreign relations with the Western Powers acquired a strong ideological connotation, and the ties between fascism and Nazism assumed a novel intimacy. Slowly the regime acquired a more totalitarian character; the presence of the State in the economy increased; fascist doctrine became prevalent in the schools; the government increased control over social and personal morals, affecting the civil society as a whole. Mussolini and the party organizations embarked on ideological propaganda against "the bourgeois spirit" and began a relentless campaign against the traditional "pietism" of the Italian people, preaching instead martial virtues. The aim of Mussolini was to create a new sense of "heroism", and to transform the Italians into "a race of warriors", worthy of the new empire and able to imitate the Roman legionnaires. At the end, all these changes affected the nature of Italian society and, unfortunately, dramatically altered the legal status of the Jewish community inside the Italian nation.

Until 1938 there had not been a Jewish question in Italy, apart from the rather innocuous and annoying prejudices of old. The Jewish community was small and well integrated in Italian social life, participating fully in national affairs and sharing the same aspirations as other Italians. Over the years, the Jewish people had been liberals and conservatives, nationalists and socialists, neutralists and interventionists, fascists and anti-fascists. Even under the fascist regime, Jews held positions of great responsibility in the schools, in the civil service, in the army, and in the government itself. A few were even spies of OVRA. Until then, the Jewish people had enjoyed the same freedom, or the lack of freedom, as the rest of the Italian population.

This natural harmony was abruptly shattered by the introduction of the racial laws. With those laws a definition of Jew came into existence in Italian legislation, and Italian citizens were divided into two categories and put into two different races, one of them subject to discrimination. As a result, Jews were forbidden to marry outside of their religion, were not allowed to attend public schools, and could not hold public office. They were immediately expelled from the civil service, the armed forces, and professional organizations. They were subject to restrictions on their economic activities and in

their personal possessions. Foreign Jews, even those with Italian citizenship, were ordered deported from Italy. Finally, showing the hypocrisy and the tragedy of the event, the Jews were no longer allowed to be members of the Fascist Party, and those who already were members were expelled or compelled to resign. (83)

From the beginning, the vast majority of the Italian people regarded the racial laws as ill-considered and unjustified. Even within the Grand Council of Fascism there were strong disagreements; Italo Balbo spoke and voted against the laws, and then carried on his opposition in public, in Italy and in Libya. For the first time official propaganda failed to create enthusiasm, but increased skepticism instead. As never before the Catholic Church voiced grave concerns against a law of the government, and that voice echoed throughout all the Catholic organizations, and was repeated in the parishes of the country. To their shame, many Italian writers supported the racial laws and participated in the anti-semitic campaign with articles, essays and books. Among the well known fascist intellectuals only Giovanni Gentile and Filippo Marinetti on occasion expressed their disagreement, and then tried to help some of their friends, victims of the new persecution. But most of the ninety-five university positions that the Jewish professors had held until then

with great prestige and were compelled to vacate, were eagerly grabbed with shameful haste by Italian scholars, often possessing academic credentials greatly inferior to those of the former occupants.

Croce's position on racial theories and against the persecution of Jews was well known long before the German and Italian racial legislations came into effect. Already in 1928, in his book, History of Italy, he had praised the liberal policies of Italian governments, stressing at the same time the contribution of the Jewish community to the Risorgimento and to Italian public life in general. Before that book, on many occasions, with sarcasm or irony, he had rejected or ridiculed the extravagant claims, that nationalist historians employ to extol the primacy of certain races or the mythological accomplishments of their people. When the new racial persecution began first in Germany and later in Italy Croce remained a courageous defender of the Jews and a tenacious opponent of racism, and expressed his solidarity to the Jewish people in the name of a common humanity, that through them and their persecution was offended and humiliated in all men.

From 1933, in his periodical, Croce engaged a frequent battle against racial ideas. Almost in each issue of La Critica there were small notes written with a trenchant style against that argument, when news items or more often

the publication of a book provided the occasion. In those notes and in other essays, Croce lamented the decline of German culture, the loss of universal inspiration and the steady march from the idealism of Kant to the materialism of Rosenberg. With sardonic irony, he pointed out that the Nazis were destroying German science, and at the same time, without their intent, had succeeded in showing to the world how great had been the contribution of the Jews to German cultural and social life. When Mussolini saw fit to imitate Germany, and Italian writers borrowed freely from German racial theories, Croce pointed out how those arguments were offensive to Italy and to Italians. He reminded those naive writers that often German scholars blamed the corrupting influence of Latin heritage on the German spirit, downgraded Roman civilization, and praised the achievements of classical Greece instead, stressing at the same time the inferiority of the Latin race and the affinity of the Germans to old Greeks. (84)

Before the Italian laws came into existence, not only had Croce written against racism, he had also made public statements against the persecution of the Jews, and tried to help some of his friends, victims of German anti-Semitism. In 1933, a protest against the new German racial theories was contained in a letter that Croce sent to Charles Beard, as president of the American Historical

Association. The letter made observations about the nature of historiography, but it also contained preoccupations on the political problems of the times. Croce urged the American historians to reject racial and ethnic principles, that reduce history almost to a fight of cats and dogs, of beasts hunting beasts. He warned that those principles, by reducing man to a prowling animal, with their emphasis on the satisfaction of biological needs, and materialistic aspirations, not only make impossible a proper interpretation of human history, but they also weaken the moral forces of society and increase prejudices among people and rivalries among nations. (85)

In 1934 Croce wrote an article for The American Hebrew and Jewish Tribune, in which he reaffirmed his old refusal of "the stupid concept of race", and "the various forms of oppression against minority groups". The article was later republished in his own periodical, and so the Italians, like the Americans, could read that "the persecutions against the Jews have never brought benefits to any nation", and could also see the prediction that the new persecution would give "no benefit to the life and culture of Germany", but would hasten instead her moral and political decadence. With a clear reference to the Italian experience under the fascist regime, the American and Italian readers were told that in Germany "the men of

science and culture, who were serving the oppressors and persecutors of freedom had renounced their mission and were betraying their office". (86)

In 1936, Croce sent a long essay to the Swiss paper, Die Nation, with the expressive title: "The Germany that we have loved". In that essay he lamented that the Germany of the great historical culture that he and the men of his generation had loved was no longer, destroyed by the racial policy of the Nazi regime. With sadness he also observed that German universities and scholars had abandoned the great philosophical principles of the past, and had replaced them with zoological concepts of race, and their cultural life had become arid and materialistic, and were no longer able even to understand the great German authors of the past. Croce pointed out that, quite appropriately, the University of Heidelberg had recently changed its motto from "To the Spirit of the World", to "To the German Spirit", pleasing Rosenberg if not Hegel. (87)

In August 1938, while in Germany the persecutions against the Jews and in Italy anti-semitic propaganda was increasing, Croce wrote a letter to the president of Stockholm's University, and joined an international appeal launched by the Swedish press in favour of German Jews. In his letter, "as a man and as a liberal", he expressed his "horror at today's dreadful persecutions against the Jews

in Germany and Austria". Sadly he also had to confess that what was happening in many parts of the world "before our astonished eyes", was outside of all the feelings, sentiments, and customs of the old generations and was contrary to their principles and their education. He also made a keen observation, when he noted that the increasing mass accumulation of crime, and the impossibility of opposing them in any adequate manner was generating among the people a sort of dull indifference and moral torpor. Unfortunately, Croce proved right on another point: in the letter he lamented the increased agitations against Italian Jews, and expressed fears for their future safety. The letter was published by the Swedish papers and soon became known in Italy and brought the usual outburst of insults and threats against the author; Croce was accused of anti-patriotic activity, soiling abroad the good name of Italy. (88)

For his part Croce not only continued to write polemical notes and historical essays against racial discrimination, but he also tried to help his Jewish friends, who were deprived of their academic positions, and were compelled first to emigrate from Germany and later from Italy. In 1933, he wrote to Nicholas M. Butler, president of Columbia University, urging him to find a position for Leo Spitzer, professor of Romance Literatures, recently expelled from

the University of Koln. Croce hardly needed to explain that the employment of Prof. Spitzer would be a scientific gain for American universities, and at the same time "an act of human brotherhood". At the same time, Croce approached Bernard Berenson, the famous art historian, living in Florence, but with strong ties to Harvard University, to interest him in the case. Croce urged Berenson to use his American connections to help the victims of "what was happening in Germany against humanity and science". By giving employment to people like Spitzer and others like him the American institutions would gain scholars and at the same time would give "a lesson in humanity to Germany, now no longer the fatherland of Lessing". (89)

When the racial laws were introduced in Italy not even the members of Parliament were in a position to voice their concern, let alone their opposition. Italy had become a one party State, dominated by a vast and efficient police apparatus; freedom of the press had disappeared and no political criticism could be published against government policy. Parliament had changed its nature, lost its traditional powers, and turned into a rubber stamp, approving all government bills without discussion. The majority of laws were passed by the government as orders in council; from an exception this practice had become a very convenient normal rule. Only the twenty five members of the

Grand Council of Fascism were in a position to debate and to challenge with some freedom government initiatives. But even this new organism did not meet very often, and its convocation was at the discretion of Mussolini.

The Senate too had changed in a fundamental way after 1936, when Giacomo Suarso replaced Luigi Federzoni as president. The sittings of the Senate lost the old dignity, the atmosphere became more partisan than in the past, the great majority of senators wore the black shirt, or appeared in party uniform. More often than not, the president began and closed the sessions with party slogans and with the Roman salute. Not only were the anti-fascist senators made uncomfortable inside the assembly by the behaviour of the government bench, they were also plainly discriminated against, and frequently did not receive the reports of the commissions or even the agenda. Above all, the Senate changed its method of work, and as a result, to all practical purposes, the senators lost their legislative functions and were deprived of their power to influence national policy. With the exception of the budget, international treaties, and the judiciary system, legislative powers were transferred from the assembly to standing committees, "comitati legislativi", where no political opposition was allowed but only technical suggestions were accepted, when dealing with new bills.

Once government proposals were approved by a committee, the chairman reported the result to the Senate, and the Assembly accepted it without further debate.

To avoid any surprises, the selection of the committee was also altered. Unlike the old commissions, chosen at random and renewed every year, the members of the new committees and their chairmen were appointed by the president of the Senate, and served at his pleasure. In the new organization of the Senate, Croce, Albertini, Casati, Einaudi and their few remaining liberal friends were left out with cold deliberation. From then on no anti-fascist senator became a member of a commission or participated in its work even as a technical expert. In this way they were deprived of their legislative rights and remained senators in name only. (90)

In 1938 the racial laws were debated and approved by the Grand Council of Fascism, and afterwards were dealt with in a cursory way in the standing committees, and finally acclaimed by parliament without further debate. When the racial laws reached the floor of the Senate Croce and his liberal friends did not take part in the sitting, as the only way left to them to express their opposition and to make a protest. In 1938 Benedetto Croce did not have the material possibility of repeating what he had done in 1929 against the Lateran Pacts, standing before the Senate and

defending the traditions of liberal Italy. For the same reason, the few Jewish senators, still present in the Senate, were compelled to remain silent in the face of persecution against their community.

In these conditions, deprived of their rights, without the possibility of a public tribune, the only thing left for anti-fascist senators was to act alone, to show personal solidarity, offering help and moral support to their friends, according to their possibilities. When racial laws became a reality in Italy and Jewish scholars were deprived of their university positions and in many instances compelled to seek new opportunities abroad, Croce wrote letters of reference for several friends, and, as he had done for the German scholars before, used his international reputation in their favour. Today in the National Archives under the personal files collected by the zeal of fascist censorship, it is possible to read their letters, sent to Croce from various places, all of them expressing their gratitude for the help they had received and the hospitality they had also enjoyed in his house.

(91)

After the war Croce himself, as part of a larger essay, published the letter that he had sent in 1938 to the British philosopher, Robert Collingwood, asking him to help Arnaldo Momigliano, who wanted to return to Oxford, where

he had studied before. The censors of Naples, however, were the first to read the rather sad reply that Momigliano wrote to Croce on that occasion: "I thank you for your certificate, that you kindly sent to me. I regard it as an inspiration and an encouragement. It should have some effect on others, but unfortunately the world is tired". Despite his pessimism and that of Collingwood, after some difficulties, Momigliano found a university position at Oxford, where he became a renowned scholar in classical historiography, writing his many books no longer in Italian but in English. (92)

From England in 1939, Enzo Tagliacozzo expressed his appreciation for the letter of reference that Croce had sent to an American college, and "for your cordial and warm hospitality during these last years". The same year from Florence, even a well established scholar and no longer in the prime of his life, Alessandro Levi had to ask Croce for a letter of reference "just in case I should decide to emigrate". Once the Jewish friends had emigrated abroad, Croce tried to maintain relations with them until the war made it impossible. The same year, from London, Paolo Treves sent a typed letter, "to facilitate the job of the censors in Naples", giving his news, but also asking Croce's help for the publication in Italy of a book, written by one of his new English colleagues. (93)

Separated suddenly from their university friends, living and teaching in a new environment, often in a precarious condition, letters from Italy acquired a poignant significance for these Jewish scholars. Renato Treves probably spoke for many of them, expressing feelings common to all emigrants, when he wrote to Croce from Montevideo, after receiving one of his notes: "Every sign that reassures me that my teachers have not forgotten me is of great comfort to me". From the letters of these people we also learn that the arrival of La Critica created a moment of excitement, maintaining an intellectual link with Italy. Some of them shared the periodical with other friends, as was the case between Treves and Rodolfo Mondolfo in Argentina. It is quite evident that the presence of the Italian Jewish diaspora in England, The United States, and in South America increased the popularity of Croce's philosophy and his political reputation. In 1939, writing from Argentina, Rodolfo Mondolfo informed Croce that a group of students and university teachers wanted to translate some of his books, and had asked for his help.

(94)

Besides his international reputation, Croce employed his Italian connections to help those Jewish scholars who could not emigrate or had decided to remain in Italy. In this case he made appeals to friendly publishing houses, and as

a result the historians Giorgio Falco and Paolo Alatri and some others could publish their books or do translations, after they had assumed an innocent Aryan name. As Falco wrote after the war in a new introduction to his book, La Santa Romana Repubblica: "This book was published in 1942, under a false name in difficult times, through the kind interest of Benedetto Croce and the thaumaturgic virtues of Raffaele Mattioli". (95)

Not only did Croce help living scholars in their hour of need, he also protested against the confiscation of old and new books written by Jewish authors, pointing out the illegality of the measure and also the damage done to Italian studies, once those books were no longer available. The letters that Croce wrote, and Laterza used, for the retrieval of the confiscated books are admirable for the arguments employed and not the least for the zestful ironies. Once Croce asked the censors why they were still allowing the sale and the republications of the Bible, certainly the most Jewish book ever written by authors with Jewish blood. (96)

The most admirable quality of those letters was the plain courage they showed, in a time when this was becoming a rather scarce commodity, not only in scientific matters but also in social relations. In a period when relations with Jewish families were avoided, when old acquaintances

were shunned and sometimes even taken advantage of, Croce maintained steadfast relations with all his Jewish friends, receiving them with his usual liberality in his house, where they continued to go, seeking support or consolation. Of particular significance was Croce's constant paternal benevolence towards Leone Ginzburg and his young family, and towards the Treves brothers and their mother, who probably consulted him before they decided to escape from Italy, and to seek refuge first in France and then in England. In Turin, Croce paid several visits to Mrs Giua, whose husband was in jail for anti-fascist activity, and whose young son had been killed in the Spanish civil war, fighting with the volunteers of Rosselli. (97)

After the war, remembering these tragic events and the persecution suffered by the Jews, Arnaldo Momigliano paid a tribute to Croce: "Few eminent men have been like Croce so closely sympathetic to the Jews, Italians or Germans, victims of racial persecutions". (98)

Momigliano spoke from personal experience; he had witnessed Croce's kindness in good and in bad times, when he was still a student and when he had been discriminated against as a Jew. Now Croce's diaries of 1938 and 1939 reveal his emotional participation in the tragedy of the Jewish people. In those pages we come across the names of the Italian Jews that Croce saw, or visited and tried to

help, while Italian society was almost submerged by "lies, wickedness and stupidity". In the diaries the persecution is described for what it really was: "a cruel crime ... and a cold spoliation" against "our fellow-citizens ... and our friends, ... that loved Italy no more and no less than we did". There we also learn the emotions that the political events and the persecutions were stirring in Croce's mind, and then found expression, in three of his best books: The History, The Poetry and Il Carattere della Filosofia Moderna. We also come to know the books and the authors that Croce read to overcome the pains of the times and to restore his faith in the human spirit; the Bible, Goethe, Don Quixote helped him to maintain a balance and to keep in check the desire for death, and even suicide. In the diary of 1939 are some of the saddest pages and one of the greatest lamentations ever written by Croce, worthy really of a Jewish prophet in captivity, contemplating all around the ruin of his people. But at the end of that touching and painful page we also find, once again, the resolution to continue the fight, "because there is always something good to be done", "for our family, friends and country". (99)

The news and the anguish, that we read in Croce's diaries, reveal that the racial laws not only created havoc in the Jewish community, they also inflicted a moral wound in the whole society, compelling many Italians to question

anew the nature of fascism and the leadership of Mussolini. It was then that new elements joined the ranks of the opposition and the first cracks began to appear in the structures of the regime. The racial laws and the imitation of German policies weakened the popularity and the authority of Mussolini. Two years later the fortunes of the war completed the rout.

The Second World War.

Mussolini's declaration of war against France and England in June 1940 put Croce and other Italians who shared democratic ideals in an awkward position, compelling them to make a dramatic choice. Men of Croce's generation had been shaped by the heritage of the Risorgimento, and regarded the fatherland and the unity of the nation as one of the supreme political ideals. In time of war, that tradition demanded that partisan contrasts come to an end, all the forces bent to achieve victory and to avoid defeat, as Giolitti had done in 1915. But the war of fascism against the Western democracies created a contrast between fatherland and freedom, and Croce and men like him were torn by contrasting ideals, patriotism and liberty stirring different claims. But slowly and painfully, Croce came to the conclusion that true patriots and those who loved freedom had to wish the defeat of Italy and Germany and the victory of the Western democracies to avoid the enslavement

of Europe to Nazism, and to make possible the return of freedom in Italy. To reach that painful conclusion, Croce was helped by the contacts and the discussions that in those months he had with friends of the younger generation, men that had achieved maturity under a different environment, and had been shaped by the aftermath of the First World War. For these younger men the new conflict was not a traditional war, it was instead a clash of ideas, a contrast of different civilizations. At the end, and in accordance with the inner logic and moral dictates of his philosophy, Croce came to regard the war as a war of religion, and for the new religion of freedom a true patriot had to accept the defeat of his own country, and welcome the Allies as the liberators. (100)

It is not without some irony that in 1940 Croce came to accept the conclusion reached by the "naive democrats" in 1915: modern wars are conflicts of different ideals, and international alliances are a choice of civilization. Unlike his younger friends, who could not remember Adowa, Croce however foresaw the political and moral damage that a military defeat, even a welcome one, would inflict on the Italian nation, weakening pride and reputation, and making foreign relations and even her economic reconstruction more difficult in the future. For that reason, patriotism remained a strong ideal for Croce, necessary for the

political cohesion of a people, and for the moral authority of national institutions; and after the war, even when he became an advocate of European unity, he lamented the disappearance of the old Risorgimental patriotism among the new generations and especially among the new mass parties.

Chapter 11: From Monarchy to Republic, 1940-1952.

Surprised by the sudden collapse of the western front in 1940, Mussolini had entered the war sure of a quick victory, hoping to enjoy the spoils of the defeat of France and England, and probably to moderate the appetite of Hitler. But his hopes soon turned into ashes in the snow of the Alps, the steppes of Russia and the sands of Africa. In 1942 the Germans were halted before Stalingrad, the Italians and the Afrika Korps were defeated at El Alamein, and the Americans landed in North Africa. Then, many Italians realized that the nature of the war had changed, and the fortune of fascism had come to an end. By the end of that year political parties had been reorganized and were active again, publishing clandestine papers and pamphlets. At the beginning of 1943, the regime began to crumble and entered its final agony, Mussolini no longer trusted.

When the invasion of Italy turned into a possibility, the overthrow of fascism and the replacement of Mussolini became a necessity to avoid further destruction, and to assure the very survival of the Italian nation. It was then that the most informed and responsible elements of Italian society began a desperate search for a way out of the tragedy. At the end, despite the strikes and the economic difficulties, Mussolini and the fascist regime were brought

down not by a popular insurrection but by an old-fashioned Royal intervention, precipitated by military defeats and moral collapse. (1)

The Role of Liberal Leaders.

In Mussolini's fall in July 1943, the role of Badoglio and Grandi is well known, but the participation in that event of the old liberal leaders has remained less known and is little mentioned in the historical accounts. This group, for the authority of its members, played a decisive role in persuading the King to act, allaying his fears and reassuring him that his action would have the support of democratic forces. The liberal leaders also had meetings with Badoglio, and these contacts and the agreements reached allowed the old Marshall in his dealings with the King, the generals and the British agents, to speak on behalf of a qualified body of public opinion, and not only to express his personal views.

The leader of that group was Ivanoe Bonomi. During the regime the old premier had lived in genteel poverty, but had retained the benevolence and the trust of the King. In 1942 and 1943, he helped to revive the opposition and to create a loose organization, made up of old politicians and young recruits, belonging to the liberal and democratic traditions. The centre of action was for obvious reasons Rome, but the diaries of Croce and the memoirs of Bonomi

and Soleri make it evident that the liberal and democratic opposition was active also in other Italian cities. (2)

Croce played an important role in this movement; he participated in its major decisions or was kept informed by Casati about new initiatives or new developments. In all the future governments envisaged, or dreamed, after Mussolini's fall, Croce's name was always mentioned. No one had comparable prestige in Italy or was more respected abroad. All agreed that he would have to play a relevant role in the immediate future. Even the fascists recognized Croce's moral authority and tried to use it for their own ends, without success. In the Spring of 1943, the new leaders of the Fascist Party organized a propaganda campaign to boost the morale of the nation. Hoping to regain the political initiative, they invited personalities of Italian culture to make public speeches in favour of the war effort. Gentile accepted; Croce refused. The new secretary of the party, Carlo Scorza, through an intermediary, approached Croce and asked him "to make a patriotic speech, inviting the Italians to resistance against the Anglo-Americans". Needless to say, Croce rejected the insolent invitation, and rebuked the messenger for his impertinence. (3)

This episode is a significant demonstration that the times had changed and the nature of wars had acquired a new

dimension since the last one. Then, during the days of Caporetto, in Parliament Turati spoke like a patriot of the Risorgimento and Croce on his own initiative wrote a stirring appeal against the invading enemy. Now for the majority of the Italian people Mussolini was the enemy and the Anglo-Americans had become the liberators. Such were the fruits of fascism!

Croce's Involvement.

During the war Croce continued to travel to central and northern Italy, visiting Rome, Florence, Milan and Turin. In each city he had meetings with friends, that lasted well into the night, no doubt discussing military developments and making plans for the future. Besides the familiar names of university teachers and academic scholars, one notes the more marked presence of old politicians and younger conspirators in those meetings. The contacts with Bonomi and other politicians in Rome became more frequent than before. In Turin Croce had long discussions with Marcello Soleri, the old lieutenant of Giolitti, who was in touch with Piedmont's anti-fascists, but also had maintained cordial relations with the King and was able to approach him.

In 1942 and 1943, Croce had several meetings in Milan, Turin and Naples with Raffaele Mattioli and Ugo La Malfa, who went together to see him probably to disguise the

political nature of those encounters. Mattioli, as president of the Banca Commerciale, was at the centre of the Italian economic system, and in a privileged position to know the precarious conditions of Italian industry and the fears of the businessmen. La Malfa too was an employee of the bank, but above all he was one of the most energetic and most intelligent young leaders of anti-fascism, in close touch with the underground organizations of Northern Italy and with Ferruccio Parri. In those meetings Croce received fresh news of national and international developments, but during the long conversations, that lasted hours, he was also urged to use his prestige to put pressure on the King, even to take the leadership of the initiative, and to be prepared to assume himself the succession of Mussolini. (4)

From the second half of 1942 to the first months of 1943 as is attested by his diaries, Croce was actively involved in political activities, and most of these meetings were of a conspiratorial nature. In Naples he helped to reorganize the Liberal Party and encouraged other friends to join the more progressive Party of Action, heir of Rosselli's movement. He wrote political tracts dealing with the present situation or with hopes of the future, that were published by the clandestine papers, and were circulated among friends in order to initiate a political debate and

to clarify personal positions. In the Fall of 1942, Croce was advised, for reasons of personal safety, to move from Naples to Sorrento, on the Amalfi coast. There, living in the villa of the Albertinis, he continued to receive a steady stream of visitors from all over Italy, that kept him abreast of the situation and then carried his opinions to friends in other cities.

The most important meetings of the liberal and democratic conspiracy took place in Rome. In the capital during those critical months Croce had several meetings with Bonomi, Casati, De Gasperi, Ruini and other politicians. The anti-fascist senators of this group also made an attempt to call the Senate into a special session to debate the gravity of the situation, and to offer the constitutional excuse for the King's intervention. Without success, they also tried to organize a meeting with the King of all the members of Italy's highest royal order (Collare dell'Annunziata), hoping that a collegial gathering of such distinguished personalities could encourage the King to take a political initiative. Both times the meetings did not materialize for old grudges and ancient animosities, especially, it seems, for the rivalry between Badoglio and Caviglia.

During the trips to Rome, before and after the meetings with the politicians, Croce had discussions with members of

the young generation, active in the underground. A group of these energetic young men, under the leadership of Leone Cattani and Niccolo` Carandini, in September 1942 reorganized the Liberal Party, and began the publication of a clandestine paper. In this paper in the Spring of 1943 appeared Bonomi's editorial calling all the other anti-fascist parties to form a Freedom United Front, and urging the King to fire Mussolini, and to put an end to the war and the fascist regime. During March 1943, Croce traveled several times from Sorrento to Rome for political consultations with Bonomi and Casati. On one of those visits to the capital, more than a hundred people gathered in the house of his daughter, where he was staying, and the visitors included not only liberals but also members of the Party of Action, to which his daughter and her husband also belonged.

At the end of March 1943 the liberal conspirators decided to request a meeting with the King without further delay. Bonomi was given the task of presenting the requests of the group, urging the King to replace Mussolini and to form a new government, supported by all the anti-fascist parties, and with the clear mandate to negotiate a separate peace with the Allies. Others, according to their personal connections, tried to enlist the help of key members of the royal entourage, to increase pressure on the King. The same

day of the last meeting Croce and his friend, Umberto Zanotti Bianco, went, in secret, to see Maria Jose`, the wife of the Crown Prince, Umberto. In the presence of her mother, the Queen of Belgium, Croce urged the Princess that the time had come "to compel the King to fire Mussolini, to put an end to the fascist regime, and to liquidate the alliance with Germany". (5)

Underground activity and political meetings continued in the following months. In April, in the apartment of Croce's daughter, an eye witness counted thirty people in the room, talking politics and literature, but also discussing anti-fascist flyers and their clandestine distribution. But despite the many efforts and the hopes of the old liberals, Bonomi and Soleri unfortunately were able to obtain an appointment with the King only in June, when the economic and military situation had further deteriorated. Had Victor Emanuel followed the advice of Bonomi and Soleri even in June, and acted immediately with speed and determination, the destiny of Italy would have been different and much ruin and humiliation would have been avoided. Reluctant by nature to take the initiative, always afraid to make a fatal mistake for the dynasty, the King continued to vacillate, wasting precious time. (6)

The liberal leaders were not without faults of their own: even when they were aware of the gravity of the

situation and recognized that time was of the essence, hindered by age and education, they acted according to old rules and showed undue reverence to the monarch, in the slow negotiations wasting time or missing opportunities. In those fateful months, among uncertain proposals and personal hesitations, Italy lacked a tragic hero, a leader with energy and vision, able to appeal to the nation, calling the people to action, and sending forth the snow-ball that creates the avalanche.

The Fall of Mussolini.

When the King finally did act the political and military situation had further deteriorated; the Germans had strengthened their forces in Italy and the Allies had landed in Sicily. Instead of forming a government made of politicians and supported by the democratic parties, as even Badoglio suggested, the King imposed a cabinet made of uninspiring bureaucrats, unwilling to make a clear break with the past. The government then continued many policies of the old regime. Even worse, the government entered the peace negotiations without clear ideas, and then delayed the conclusion with useless vacillations, dreaming of better terms, that were no longer in the cards. When the armistice with the Allies was signed and was announced to the nation, the King and the government, with haste and without dignity, abandoned the capital, seeking safety in

Southern Italy. Left without leadership at the top, the authority of the State collapsed, and Italy returned to the condition of the past, invaded by foreign armies, devastated by civil wars, divided into factions, the achievement of the Risorgimento almost destroyed. (7)

In the Fall of 1943, Italy plunged into general chaos, and only the organization of the Catholic Church remained intact. With bold resolution the Germans invaded Italy and returned a dejected Mussolini to nominal power in Northern Italy. But in the North, despite harsh military actions and police repression from the Germans and from the fascists, almost spontaneously arose an active resistance, later organized by the anti-fascist parties, but also, and in not small measure, by army officers, who had remained faithful to the King, and had refused to join Mussolini's new republic. Rome was declared an open city, dominated by the authority of the Pope, but ruled by the German police. Despite the danger and the repression, the anti-fascist parties expanded their organizations and formed a Committee of National Liberation under the chairmanship of Bonomi. This Committee tried to maintain a sort of unity between the Resistance in the North and the Badoglio government in the South.

In Southern Italy, the Allies continued their slow advance, and allowed the King and Badoglio to set up a

rather weak government, first in Brindisi and later in Salerno. Despite Italy's declaration of war against Germany and her status as "co-belligerent", the Allies retained full control over Italian affairs by the terms of the armistice, and acted accordingly. In Southern Italy the British and to a less extent the Americans repeated the mistakes they had made with the French in North Africa. Instead of appealing to the democratic forces and the anti-fascist leaders, the British preferred to protect the conservative elements who had been compromised with fascism, and to shun the democratic groups. (8)

Leader of the Opposition.

In 1942 to avoid the dangers of the Allies' bombs, Croce had moved from Naples to Sorrento; in the Fall of 1943, to avoid the danger of being kidnaped by the Germans, he was taken by British and Italian soldiers to Capri, better protected by the Allied Navy. Croce's villa in Capri became in that period a centre of political activity, almost a seat of a virtual government and there Croce assumed the role of leader of the anti-fascist opposition against the King. He was in constant touch with political developments in Rome and in Southern Italy, through the frequent travels of his son-in-law or other friends, active in the role of messengers between the various seats of power. Government ministers, political leaders from Rome and from Southern

Italy went to Capri to seek his advice, to show their support, or to suggest a different political course. Allied generals and agents of British and American secret services came to hear his views, to pay respect or simply out of curiosity. But Croce had also political discussions with the Allied political ministers, and in particular with Harold MacMillan, Robert Murphy and Rene' Massigli. Often among the British and American visiting officers he had the pleasure of meeting sons of old friends, students of his philosophy, readers of his works or, in MacMillan's case, publisher of his books.

From the Fall of 1943 to the Summer of 1944, Croce participated directly and in a position of leadership in political events. For his international prestige, his authority was almost a counterpart to the King's. He worked very closely and was in constant agreement with Carlo Sforza, the former and future minister of foreign affairs, who had just returned from his exile, and with Enrico De Nicola, the former speaker of the House and future head of State. During these months, at different times, all three of them were invited to join the Badoglio cabinet as individuals, and all three refused. Instead together they worked with a certain determination to remove the King from power, and to create a new government, made of democratic politicians and supported by all the anti-fascist parties.

They also agreed that the priority of the new government had to be a quick return to full freedom and an increased war effort, in order to hasten the liberation of Italy from the Germans and to improve relations with the Allies. (9)

During those months Croce showed unusual diplomatic tact together with a great deal of political realism. Unlike other leaders and other parties, Croce realized very soon the strict limitations that the nature of the war, the military occupation and the clauses of the armistice imposed on Italy, greatly curtailing the government's freedom of action. To remove those limitations and to regain some degree of national autonomy, he worked on several fronts. To achieve his political aims, but mainly to improve the diplomatic conditions of Italy, Croce used his international prestige and his personal relations. He wrote letters to Walter Lippmann, reminding him of their old friendship, and asking now for his support for a more benevolent attitude towards Italy from the Allied Powers. To create a better understanding of Italian problems and stronger sympathy among international public opinion towards Italy, he gave press interviews and private talks to his old or new friends working as war correspondents. In this context he met often with Cecil Sprigge of the Manchester Guardian and Reuters, with Herbert Matthews of The New York Times, and also with the Canadian James

Minifie, writing for American and Canadian papers. To create good feelings, in October 1943, Omodeo, as the new president of the University of Naples, with Croce's advice, conferred a degree Honoris Causa on General Mark Clark, the commander of the American Fifth Army.

But for Croce, to regain support and sympathy among the Allies, a bigger war effort remained of paramount importance, and not only did he urge the government to increase Italy's military contribution beside the Allies, but in October 1943, Croce and his friends, on their own, proposed the formation of a military legion made of volunteers, able to fight beside the Allies but under the Italian flag. For the occasion, in Capri, Croce, Alberto Tarchiani, and Raimondo Craveri constituted themselves into a Committee of National Liberation, to give their action more authority. Croce wrote the manifesto, inviting Italian soldiers and civilian young men to join such a legion in the old Risorgimental spirit of Garibaldi. The flyers were printed and posted. A general was found, who seemed to have the ability and the reputation to organize and to lead such a unit. Croce discussed the initiative with General William Donovan, the head of the OSS, who approved the idea and then urged his superiors to support the plan. Tarchiani and Craveri made a special trip to Brindisi and informed Badoglio of their new initiative. He praised the idea and

made some promises, spoke well of Croce and at the end did nothing concrete.

The initiative of an independent Italian legion remained at that time stillborn, opposed and sabotaged by Italian and British generals, unwilling to support a military unit inspired by anti-fascist parties and organized outside of the influence of the regular army. Despite that failure, the initiative was repeated again months later by others, until finally a volunteer corps was created (CVL) that fought with distinction beside the Allies, as Croce had hoped. Already in December of 1944 the corps numbered sixty thousand soldiers under its colours, and received high praise for its combat actions from General Clark. By the end of the war the corps had suffered eighteen thousand casualties. (10)

During this period Croce was also busy in party politics and maintained close relations with his Neapolitan friends. With his encouragement, in the Fall of 1943 the Naples Committee of National Liberation was created, made up of the representatives of all the anti-fascist parties, led by Vincenzo Arangio Ruiz, a liberal and Croce's close friend; this was one of the first of such organisms to emerge in Italy. At the same time Croce helped the reorganization of the Liberal Party in Naples and in Southern Italy with a modern programme and without the degeneration of the past.

He became president of the party, but continually urged De Nicola to play a more active role in politics and to assume the leadership of liberal forces, as heir to Giolitti's tradition. He also encouraged his friend, Adolfo Omodeo, to join and to be active in the Party of Action. Despite old age and the difficulties of traveling, Croce participated in the first congress of all anti-fascist parties in Bari, in January 1944. It was the first free political assembly after 1926. He was able to impose his views on that assembly, and to moderate the demands of the radical elements. The left wing parties wanted the immediate abrogation of the monarchy, Croce advised them to defer the institutional question to a referendum to be held after the end of the war. The Assembly elected an executive committee, and Croce and Sforza became the spokesmen of this committee. In their meetings with Badoglio and the Allied military authorities they could claim, and with reason, that they spoke not only for themselves but for all the other democratic parties.

Croce Against the King.

Following the Bari meeting, the most difficult question for Croce and Sforza was their relations with the King and his stubborn refusal to abdicate. For Croce, the King, during the regime had betrayed the Statuto, and had become co-responsible for fascism. After Mussolini's fall, Croce

regarded the abdication of the King as a necessary step to achieve a clear break with the past and to give a strong signal of a new beginning. During this time many people wanted Croce to become Prime Minister and to replace Badoglio. The initiative came from Ugo La Malfa of the Party of Action and was also encouraged by De Nicola, among others. There is reason to believe that even the King was ready to accept this solution. But Croce refused without hesitation. In that period, he wanted Sforza to become Prime Minister, and campaigned hard for his old friend. Croce accepted a different course only when the British government vetoed the substitution of Badoglio, and Churchill made clear his personal dislike of Sforza. Confronted by British opposition, to break a dangerous impasse, Croce and Sforza finally agreed to serve under Badoglio in a new government, made by anti-fascist politicians and supported by the democratic parties. Despite his questionable past, they came to accept Badoglio because they had no choice and the Marshall, as signatory to the armistice, had the confidence of the Allies. But Croce and Sforza remained adamant in asking for the abdication of the King, prior to the formation of the new government. (11)

Besides the British hindrances and the stubborn refusal of the King, Croce had to deal with the radical demands of

Rome's Committee of National Liberation. While he and Sforza were involved in painful and so far fruitless negotiations in the South, the Committee of National Liberation (CLN), on March 18th, 1944, under the initiative of the Party of Action, supported by the socialists and the communists, demanded the immediate abolition of the monarchy, the proclamation of the republic, and the assumption of full powers by the Committee itself. Those demands found resonance in large sectors of the population in Northern and also in Southern Italy, stirring enthusiasm and fear at the same time. Croce regarded those requests as not only illegal but also extremely dangerous. The creation of a third government in Rome would only add confusion to an already chaotic situation. Unlike other politicians, under those national and international circumstances, Croce realized the importance of the monarchy as a symbol of legality and legitimacy, and as the guarantor of the armistice with the Allies. He was also deeply concerned that, carried away by popular enthusiasm, Italy could slide toward a Spanish situation, with catastrophic consequences for freedom, and even for national unity.

Faced with a difficult situation and with contrasting demands, in those days Croce showed political realism, conciliation and diplomacy, and also determination. For obvious but profound reasons, in the present or in the

future, Croce was against the proclamation of the republic. He wanted instead the institutional question to be postponed until the end of the war, and be resolved by a popular referendum, when the Italian people could freely choose between republic and monarchy. At the same time, Croce and Sforza demanded now the abdication of the King and the Crown Prince, and the creation of a regency council, as a clear sign of a break with the past. Together with the abdication of the King, they proposed the formation of a democratic government, strong enough to re-establish law and order, but also able to deal with the most pressing problems, among which the liberation of Italy and an increased military effort were of the greatest importance. At the end, faced with the unreasonable and unpatriotic refusal of the King to abdicate and with the opposition of the British government to any institutional change, a typical Italian solution was found to break the impasse and move forward.

During the first two weeks of March, in secret meetings with the King and with Croce, De Nicola worked out an unusual constitutional compromise, devised by his fertile legal mind and by his insight into the murky psychology of the King. Victor Emanuel would remain King until the liberation of Rome, then he would retreat to private life, and name his son as Lieutenant General of the Kingdom,

exercising royal prerogatives until the Italian people made a final choice through a popular referendum at the end of the war. This plan was communicated to the government by the King on March 16th. With some reluctance, a few days later, Croce finally accepted the legal arguments of De Nicola, and then on his part had the task of convincing an even more skeptical Sforza to accept that solution. With the acceptance of that compromise, by the end of March 1944 the doors were open for Croce and Sforza to participate in Badoglio's third cabinet, and to form the first democratic government of the new Italy supported by all the anti-fascist parties. (12)

The Svolta of Salerno.

The impasse between the King and Croce had already been overcome and the accord had been reached, but not yet made public, when Togliatti, the leader of the Italian Communist Party, on March 27th, 1944 returned to Italy from Russia and four days later imposed on his surprised comrades a different policy, a new turn, which has passed into the history books as the "svolta of Salerno". Togliatti's offer to serve under the King and to support a Badoglio government without fussy reservations hastened the publication, at the beginning of April, of the accord reached between the King and De Nicola, but did not influence the outcome. But with that Machiavellian act,

Togliatti changed the terms of Italian politics, and undermined the radical enthusiasm of the left wing parties, including his own. In the best tradition of Italian transformism, he brought nevertheless a sense of realism into the political discourse, that Croce was compelled to appreciate, and others to resent.

The intervention of Togliatti also underscored the difference between the new mass parties and the liberal forces, and showed their handicaps. The most important liberal leaders were old men; they acted in slow motion, took their time and moved according to old traditions, and relied on their personal prestige. Togliatti instead was much younger and had been shaped by different experiences; he could act with speed and energy, knowing that his policies were supported by a great power and by a monolithic party. It took more than a month for De Nicola, Croce and Sforza on one side and the King and Badoglio on the other to reach an agreement. In less than a week Togliatti announced a new policy, called a meeting of the party's national council, and imposed his new programme, which then was accepted and defended and spread throughout Italy by Communist militants. (13)

Despite the presence of Togliatti, Croce was the driving force behind the formation and the short life of the new Badoglio government. The cabinet was formed and often met

in his villa, out of respect for the age and the physical condition of Croce. The programme itself was written by Croce and accepted with marginal modifications by all the other members, Togliatti included. Badoglio chose his ministers in consultations with Croce, and was always deferential to Croce's authority. It was Croce who imposed Omodeo, as Minister of Education, against the reservations of the Catholics and the indifference of the other parties. Badoglio made Croce privy to State secrets, that he could not share with other leaders for reasons of security, but mainly in compliance with the clauses of the armistice. Croce was among the very few that knew the full text of the long armistice, when it was still secret. Finally, the programme of the government reflected the ideas and priorities of Croce and Sforza.

Once the new government assumed its functions, Croce was the chief advisor to Badoglio, who consulted him on all important issues. Often Croce's wisdom and common sense were employed to smooth relations among different personalities, or to achieve a compromise acceptable to all parties. Inside the cabinet, Croce supported law and order, complaining that in some cases the parties supporting the government were also encouraging public discord and social agitation, thus undermining its authority and programme. In order to reintroduce without delay forms of the democratic

tradition, and with them to begin the return to public political debates, Croce also prepared the bill for the creation of a Consultative Assembly, made of outstanding personalities, chosen by all the parties, to act as a sort of temporary parliament. After the democratic lapse, and years of authoritarian decisions imposed from above, Croce wanted to recreate an institution where the public and the politicians could regain parliamentary experience, and where the actions of the government had to be publicly defended, the laws debated openly and the financial bills explained and then approved.

Croce was less successful on the question of the so-called "epurazione", or purge of the administration: the controversial policy to remove from public office those civil servants that had been compromised with the fascist regime. For Croce the purge was a political act, and had to be guided by political considerations rather than by legal formalities. He wanted to avoid a blanket law, preferring a law capable of punishing well known personalities who had been guilty of great fascist crimes, perpetrated before or after 1943. He also wanted to remove from the administration of the State those people in positions of responsibility, who had followed Mussolini to the North, or had remained unrepentant fascists, and could be regarded as dangerous to the democratic life of the new Italy. (14)

Croce's proposals on the purge were modest but sensible; above all they could be achieved in a short time and without creating a general panic in all ranks of the administration. But that solution was regarded as too moderate; other schemes were elaborated, with high sounding words; after much talk and waste of time, at the end not very much was accomplished. Two years later, as Minister of Justice, Togliatti, by design or by necessity, provided a general amnesty, that was too large and too lenient, "shameful" Croce called it. The result was that unrepentant fascist elements, sometimes shadowy figures, remained in the civil service, polluting and deviating sensitive organs of the State.

In later years, both Croce and Togliatti praised the ability and the dignity, even the loyalty of Badoglio, the old fox, servant of many masters. Both agreed that Badoglio, with his canny military bearing, had improved relations with the Allies; both also recognized that under his leadership the Cabinet worked well, and made important decisions. In reality the last Badoglio government achieved a great deal in its short life, and greatly influenced future events. It was the first democratic government of the new Italy, included all the anti-fascist parties, and was supported in Rome by the Committee of National Liberation and in Milan by the forces of the Resistance.

Among the chaos and the divisions of the time, Badoglio and Croce, with the help of De Nicola and Togliatti, had been able to form a truly national government, "strong and authoritative" in Togliatti's words. With its concrete actions, the government healed the split between North and South, recreated national unity, and prepared the ground for peaceful institutional change: above all it avoided in Italy a repetition of the Spanish or Greek tragedies. (15)

The Elder Statesman.

Croce's participation in Badoglio's Cabinet represents his most direct influence in the political affairs of Italy. Once Rome was liberated from the Germans and was returned to Italy, the King retired to private life and his son, as it was agreed, assumed the royal prerogatives, for the time being. At the same time, Badoglio resigned and without much ceremony was replaced by Bonomi in June 1944. With the formation of the Bonomi Cabinet political power shifted to the Committee of National Liberation, and more precisely to the national mass parties. The influence of strong but independent personalities declined and the big political parties reasserted their preeminence in national affairs and in the decisions of the government. Croce remained in the Bonomi Cabinet without much enthusiasm for a few more months, then he resigned, unwilling to travel often from Naples to Rome. But old age was only one of the

reasons for Croce's resignation. He often lamented Bonomi's weakness in dealing with the requests of the parties, and he did not approve the constant meekness of the government in its relations with the Allies.

Despite his resignation from the government, Croce continued to have great influence in political affairs, as president of the Liberal Party. He was consulted by liberal leaders on all major issues and played a direct part in the negotiations for the formation of a new Cabinet or for the solution of the government's frequent crises. In this period Croce's constant aim and that of the Liberal Party was a quick return to legality and normality, both in domestic and foreign affairs, as the necessary condition for economic reconstruction and international cooperation. This sense of moderation was bound to clash with the policies and the agitations encouraged by the left wing parties, and with some aspects of the military administration imposed by the Allies on Italy, and especially with the attitude of British politicians towards the Italian people, and with their shortsighted policy toward the new Italy. (16)

Inside or outside the government, Croce used his personal prestige to improve the international position of Italy, constantly urging the Western powers to recognize Italy as an ally, and reminding them that generous

treatment of Italy was in the interests of democratic nations and European reconstruction. In September 1944, during a public gathering in Rome, at which were present all the major political leaders, he made requests to the Anglo-Americans that the government was too timid or too impotent to formulate. In particular, Croce asked for the abolition of the clauses of the armistice that greatly reduced the sovereignty of Italy, and allowed the military administrators to interfere in internal affairs, complicating the political process, increasing the financial burdens, and practically reducing Italy to a colony. (17)

A few months later Croce sent a letter to the British papers, in which he lamented the exclusion of Italy from the San Francisco Conference, that had been called for the organization of the United Nations. Finally, in September 1945, during the London conference that discussed the peace negotiations with Germany's allies, Croce wrote to the Manchester Guardian, and expressed the hope that the five powers would propose "a constructive peace" to Italy and would not impose instead punitive terms, so that Italy would not be "mutilated, humiliated and made impotent". On various occasions Croce made known his fears and anxiety about the fate and the future of Trieste, and he hoped that the city would remain in Italy. He was among the very few

Italian politicians that dared publicly to protest against the ambitions of Tito and to lament the forced expulsion of Italians from Istria.

While Croce protested against the impositions and the harshness of the Allies against Italy, he advised Italians to defend the national interest with determination, but to avoid nationalistic posturing, cultivating instead "the sentiment of temperance and humanity" of the Italian Risorgimento. Faithful to the ideas expressed earlier in his History of Europe, Croce was among the first to accept the idea of European unification, as it had been dreamed in fascist jails by Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi, and written in their Ventotene Manifesto. He also supported Churchill's rather unexpected appeal for the creation of the United States of Europe, that unfortunately remained stillborn and without consequences. (18)

In internal affairs Croce's political moderation clashed with the wishes and the aspirations of the more radical forces of the anti-fascist movement. One of the major contrasts between the liberals and the left wing parties concerned the nature and functions of the various Committees of National Liberation. Less for the socialists or the communists, and more for the Party of Action the provincial and urban committees of the CLN, together with the factories' councils, had to represent the first nuclei

of a new democracy and the popular instruments through which to achieve a general political renovation, able to infuse a new spirit into the social life of Italy. The liberals and Croce instead regarded those committees as necessary but temporary bodies for organizing the fight against the Germans, and had to be replaced by the traditional organs of the State as soon as the necessities and the requirements of the armed struggle had disappeared.

Relations with the Party of Action.

The refusal of radical solutions, and the preference for traditional institutions put Croce and the liberals in contrast with the communists and the socialists, but also in constant disagreement with the Party of Action, the only new political party born out of the struggle against fascism, heir of Rosselli's "Giustizia e Liberta`" and Calogero's Liberal-socialist movement. The polemic between Croce and the actionists acquired a personal tone and a special bitterness, not unusual among those who happen to share ideological affinities and then take separate roads. Many leaders of the new party had been greatly influenced by Croce's writings, and quite a few were personal friends of long standing, including his two major collaborators during the regime, Adolfo Omodeo and Guido De Ruggiero, not to mention his own daughter and her husband. (19)

Yet despite the friendship and the cultural affinities

political collaboration proved impossible and personal relations became strained. The reasons were manifold and rather complicated, reflecting different political experiences and personal background. There were philosophical differences, that went back to the contrast between Croce and Gentile. The political disagreements recreated the old conflicts between the moderate and the Jacobin traditions, and between the heritage of Cavour and the legacy of Mazzini. The majority of actionists were much younger than Croce; many of them had been in jail or in exile during the regime, and now were impatient with the moderation of the old elites, preferred more radical solutions and were ready to experiment with new ways. For his part Croce was suspicious of Jacobin enthusiasm, displayed by actionists on many occasions, and accused them of authoritarian tendencies. Some of them, in reality, were rather prone "to dictate" their solutions or their arguments, showing an attitude typical of enlightened intellectual elites. As was to be expected there were also different interpretations of Italian history, out of which flowed a different assessment of fascism and divergent solutions to the problems of Italian society. Many members of the Party of Action regarded the Risorgimento as a failed revolution, and did not share Croce's admiration for Giolitti.

Typical of these diverging views was a polemic in June 1945 between Croce and Ferruccio Parri, the leader of the Party of Action and the new prime minister. Not content to have presented a reasonable political and economic programme, following his moralistic inclination and Mazzinian heritage, in the first speech to the Consultative Assembly, Parri felt compelled to venture a judgment on Italian history, claiming that liberal Italy had never known a true democratic government. Immediately Croce came to the defence of liberal Italy, compelled to rebut Parri's judgment for the same reasons that he had rejected the fascist accusations against the "Italietta" of Giolitti. In fact, on this occasion he repeated the arguments that he had used with great force in his History of Italy. In the tragic conditions of the time, both Parri's statement and Croce's rebuttal were not politically opportune, adding unnecessary divisions. Both, however, felt strongly about their points. But the authority of the government was certainly not increased by the polemic, even if Croce had no intention of creating difficulty for Parri. In the campaign against the Parri government, the opposition used Croce's speech in a rather selective way. To embarrass Parri, the papers emphasized the historical arguments of Croce's rebuttal. Nobody noted then or remembered later, "the admiration" and "the gratitude", that Croce expressed

to Parri for his contribution and for his role in the struggle against fascism and in the war against the Germans. At the same time few seemed to note that Croce expressed agreement with the political and economic programme of the government. (20)

Croce and De Gasperi.

Unable to find common ground with the Party of Action, the policy of moderation compelled the liberals to join forces with the Christian Democrats, to offer greater resistance to the radicalism of the left wing parties, and to oppose a moderate bloc to the common front of the socialists and the communists, united, then, in a troubling and troublesome alliance. In fact during and after the brief government of Parri, the liberals and the Christian Democrats marched together and De Gasperi became the leader of the moderate forces. Croce had met De Gasperi several times during the fascist regime in Rome, in the houses of common friends or in the Vatican library, where he was employed as a librarian earning a meager salary. During the war Croce and the liberals came to admire De Gasperi's democratic faith, his personal moderation and political determination. In those confusing times, during the meetings with other parties, the leadership qualities of De Gasperi became evident to all, and his sense of the State, together with his political independence from the Vatican,

struck a rather sympathetic chord in the liberals and among other democrats. For his part, in reaching out to non-Catholics, De Gasperi proved to have learned the lessons of history; in dealings with other parties he avoided the intransigence of the old Popolari, and resisted the ever returning temptation of clericalism. The struggle for freedom against fascism put an end to old divisions and prepared the ground for a new alliance against the challenge of communism. The meeting between the liberal forces and the Catholics, in the name of freedom, was indeed a "providential" event in the history of Italy, and proved beneficial to Italian society, then and later. (21)

After the end of the war, as Croce had done during the fascist regime, he continued to fight with coherence the old enemies, Jacobinism, clericalism and communism: the political forces and the philosophical ideas that he regarded as inimical to a liberal society. Despite the new political alliance and the respect for De Gasperi, even now Croce waged a constant polemic against old and new forms of clericalism, always unwilling to accept the interferences of the ecclesiastical authorities in national politics and in the formation of a national government. Twice in this period he rejected the request of the Christian Democrats to assign to a Catholic the Ministry of Education, fearing, with justification, that in the administration of Italian

schools a Catholic would favour the private against the public schools, showing "excesses and abuse of power". (22)
Croce and Communism.

But after the war the criticism of clericalism remained of secondary importance, the greatest efforts were directed against the theory and praxis of the Communist Party, especially after the Party of Action disappeared from the scene. Having rejected the ethical State, Croce had no use for the ethical party or for a political organization that resembled a church, possessing sacred texts, initiation and excommunication rites. Unlike many Italian intellectuals of the time, even some of his old friends, Croce never succumbed to the charms of Togliatti, nor did he have any doubt about the character of Russian society. For Croce communism had strong affinities with fascism, and a society inspired by Leninism was bound to be more totalitarian than the one created by fascism, and be characterized by more repressive features.

After the war the Italian communists presented Russia as a socialist and classless society; long before Milovan Djilas, Croce argued that the soviet society was divided by classes and was governed by privileged elites, belonging to the party apparatus and to the technical professions. He also liked to remind the Italian communists that in foreign affairs, Russia defended national interests and was not

guided by the ideals of the international proletariat. In those years the Communist Party began the translation and the publication of all the works of Lenin and Stalin, and these were constantly presented and quoted as great philosophers, as if they were new Platos or Hegels. Croce conceded that the two soviet leaders were great politicians, but denied that they were also philosophers, and then delighted in showing "the lamentable nonsenses" of their theories. (23)

In view of the later evolution of Italian communism, it is interesting to note that at this early stage Croce urged the communist leaders to avoid a pedantic repetition and imitation of Russian ideas, and to make a special effort to give an Italian contribution to international communism. When the letters of Gramsci were published to great acclaim, Croce praised the nobility of the man and the acumen of the intellectual. But when the other writings of Gramsci appeared, many critics inside and outside the Communist Party regarded Gramsci's notes and aphorisms as the genial creation of a new philosophical system, Croce on his part rejected that conclusion and expressed reservations, showing that Gramsci's ideas lacked originality, and above all pointing out that all his efforts had been directed not to the creation of a philosophical system but to the foundation of a political

party. (24)

Croce's constant polemic against the Communist Party and his criticism of Marxism did not remain without answer. First Togliatti and later other communist intellectuals began a relentless criticism of Croce's philosophy using political accusations and personal innuendoes. While Togliatti welcomed with open arms old followers of Gentile and close collaborators of Bottai, that had seen the light only in July 1943, the Communist Party, in the name of Gramsci, subjected the reputation and the philosophy of Croce to a brutal and irreverent attack. That policy caused great damage to Italian culture, and was also a disservice to Gramsci himself. It chose to ignore Gramsci's respect and sometimes his admiration for Croce, and it also failed to explain the constant dialogue of Gramsci with Croce, as appears in his letters and in his notes. (25)

The Constituent Assembly.

On June 1946, Italy had the first really free elections after those held in 1921. The Italian people were called to choose between Monarchy and Republic, and to elect a Constituent Assembly, whose main task was to draft a new constitution, replacing the old and now discredited Statuto Albertino. In the elections the Monarchy lost, and the House of Savoy came to an inglorious end. Croce obtained a personal success in Naples, and was elected to the

assembly. Thanks to his efforts, for the first time the various currents of Italian liberalism came together, a little too late; Bonomi, Croce, De Nicola, Nitti and Orlando ran under the same banner, the National Democratic Union (U.D.N.). The Union achieved a good electoral result, but it was greatly inferior to the success of the Christian Democrats, the socialists and the communists. Liberalism was no longer the dominant force in Italian politics, and the time of the great notables finally passed away. From then on Italian politics would be dominated by the big mass parties with their capillary organizations. But despite the lack of political power, liberal personalities retained a great moral and intellectual influence on society, especially in the schools, the mass media and the financial institutions.

During the life of the Constituent Assembly, Croce was present at the most important sessions, but his participation in the debates was minimal and without much importance. By 1946 he was 80 years old, and old age began to exact its toll. In the Assembly he made only two important speeches, that resonated outside the walls of parliament, especially the second one in which Croce called into question the legitimacy of the Nuremberg Trials. In the first one, in March 1947, he gave an overview of the new republican constitution, and lamented the way it had

been put together. Croce was among the first to see the danger of "partitocracy" and to protest against the practice of the big parties to reach compromises among themselves and then to impose their conclusions on government, greatly reducing its authority. He argued that those compromises had produced a document without conceptual coherence, juxtaposing rather than uniting the rights of the individual and the authority of the State, legal protections and social aspirations. Faithful to a unitarian conception of the State, Croce disliked the creation of provinces, and the transfer to provincial jurisdiction of functions that logically belonged to the national government. Above all he opposed the inclusion of the Lateran Pacts into the new constitution, calling the inclusion of a bilateral treaty between two States into the fundamental law of the nation "a juridical monstrosity" and "a logical error and a legal scandal". (26)

Croce's other great speech was against the Peace Treaty, during its ratification debates in July 1947. Speaking this time like an old Jacobin, he asked the Constituent Assembly to reject the Treaty and to refuse its ratification for a question of national dignity and as a protest against the unjust policy of the Allies, who not only were imposing heavy burdens on Italy, but also pretended to pass a moral judgment on the Italian people and their history. Croce

expressed the feelings of many Italians, inside and outside the Assembly; his speech had been read and approved by De Nicola, the new head of State, and had been discussed with other political leaders. Many had hoped for a more lenient Treaty, and were surprised when presented with a punitive peace. Many speakers accepted the treaty as an inescapable political necessity, and urged its ratification, using arguments that Croce would have appreciated in the past, at the time of his Marxist essays or during the other war. But Croce's old concept of "political realism" had acquired a richer connotation and moral considerations had become paramount now. In fact Croce's speech, like many of his best political essays, was a mixture of practical considerations and philosophical arguments, that involved the relation between morality and war, national self interest and international cooperation, and above all the rights and the duties that war imposes on individuals and on nations, that cannot be avoided by simply invoking the condition of necessity. (27)

Refusal to Stand for President of the Republic.

Once the Constituent Assembly was called into session, in June 1946, and organized its internal affairs, it had to deal, among its first priorities, with the election of the new head of State, replacing the last King of Savoy, whom the electorate had dispatched into exile. The executive of

the Socialist Party officially proposed Croce as the next president of the Republic. To assure the acceptance of his nomination, Nenni, the leader of the Socialists, appealed to Croce with a personal letter, and then sent the writer Ignazio Silone to Naples, where he pleaded the case for a full day. To the appeals of the Socialists, De Nicola himself added his own arguments, urging Croce "not to refuse his historical duty". But the appeals were of no avail; Croce refused to be drafted, and made it clear that if drafted, he was not willing to stand. (28)

It would have been of lasting historical significance to have Croce's name as the first president of the republic. His refusal has to be regarded as a lesson in humility and also as an act beneficial to the fledgling republic. In 1944, Croce could have been Prime Minister, had he wanted that office. And it has to be regretted that he refused the opportunity. Then his name and reputation would have been an asset for Italy, increasing the authority of the government, and making easier the collaboration of the democratic forces in the South and the North and between the government and the resistance. In 1946, after the general elections, the situation had changed, the Christian Democrats had emerged as the dominant force in Italian politics, and they and the Catholics in general were hostile to the candidacy of Croce, whose books the Vatican

had placed on the Index. In these conditions Croce's name threatened to reopen the split between Church and State that had weakened liberal Italy. Even if he had allowed his name to stand for the election, it is doubtful that all the other parties would have been willing to engage the Christian Democrats in a frontal battle. That unity did not happen a year later, when the Lateran Pacts were included in the new constitution against the opposition of Nenni and Croce, but with the votes of Togliatti and his party, then and later more concerned with the creation of "a progressive democracy" than with the defence of the lay character of the State. (29)

Croce's refusal, as he knew and hoped, opened the door for the election of Enrico De Nicola, who proved to be an ideal president, always scrupulous and impartial in the exercise of his office. He created the legal framework and the political precedents that were later followed by his successors, or ignored at their peril. The universal respect that he enjoyed, his proverbial impartiality reassured the Republicans and did much to reconcile the loyalty of the old Monarchists to the new and unproven institution. From 1943 on, Croce had constantly prodded De Nicola to play a more active role in politics and to assume a position of leadership. During those years the two old friends had collaborated very closely on all major issues,

and had reached the same conclusions. In political matters Croce sought the advice of De Nicola whenever possible. His political speeches in this period were always read by De Nicola before they became public, and Croce even accepted suggested changes, never an easy thing for him. In many instances De Nicola's political antennae were more alert and more sensitive than those of Croce. When the reorganization of the Liberal Party was undertaken in 1944 and 1945 De Nicola, more attuned to popular feelings, suggested that the word democratic should be put beside liberal, to indicate a clear break with the past and to attract a wider range of support. Croce instead showed a rather passionate attachment to the words liberal and liberalism, because they reflected and expressed his entire philosophy, and to him came to mean more than their common meaning, assuming a pleasing and almost magic sound. (30)

The Liberal Party's President.

On the institutional question, in 1946 Croce voted for the Monarchy, as did most men of his generation, who felt emotional ties to the events of the Risorgimento and to the institutions that had shaped the life of united Italy. Croce's monarchical choice was part of his natural moderation, and shows his attachment to historical traditions. Often, in fact, during the last part of his life, he advocated a return to the ways of liberal Italy.

No doubt this nostalgic feeling influenced political choices, and explained his personal sympathy for old liberal leaders like De Nicola, Orlando and Nitti. But this love of things past, did not preclude him from accepting the new times, and the solutions demanded by the changed conditions of society. He did not preach an impossible return to the conditions of the past, but rather lamented the disappearance of the spirit that had animated the Italy of his youth, when political adversaries were not regarded as enemies, and politics did not interfere with personal relations. (31)

Despite these nostalgic feelings, during this period, Croce cannot be considered a conservative, let alone a reactionary. His so-called political involution is denied by the facts and by the documents. When Croce reorganized the liberal forces in Southern Italy, he made it clear that the conservatives, who had been fascist were not welcome in the Liberal Party. At that time Croce had hoped that not only liberals but also democrats and even reformist socialists would join the new Liberal Party. In this period he made constant reference to the progressive heritage of Cavour's liberalism, and rejected the conservative tradition of Salandra. Later in his correspondence with Professor Calogero, the theoretician of liberal-socialism, Croce declared his preference for a liberalism that was

democratic and on the other side for a socialism, that was liberal, and hoped for an alliance between the two movements against clericalism and communism. (32) Before the liberals chose De Gasperi and the Christian Democrats as their political allies against the challenge of communism, Croce had shown a certain preference for Nenni and the Socialists. Whenever he mentioned socialist leaders, unlike the communist ones, Croce always showed signs of personal sympathy, and even in disagreement praised their generosity, as appears in his meetings with Nenni and Saragat and references to them in the diaries. (33)

In 1946, speaking to the first national conference of the Liberal Party, Croce stressed that for him the Liberal Party was naturally a party of the centre, at the same time ready to accept new solutions to old problems, and willing to support even radical reforms, as long as these increased the freedom of the citizens, and were not undertaken to increase the presence of the State in the national economy only for aprioristic reasons, or for ideological opposition to a market economy. Unlike Einaudi, who had a stronger preference for the market economy, both for economic and moral reasons, Croce was comfortable with a mixed economy. (34) Finally in 1951, in his last message to a congress of the party, Croce urged the liberals to follow the example

of Great Britain, and praised the programme of the Labour Party then in power, recognizing that in her present conditions Italy needed reforms rather than more conservatism. It seems quite evident that in his old age, Croce had returned to the aspirations of his youth: democratic liberalism and sympathy for socialism, at least a socialism with a human face. (35)

Croce's strategic choices of general policy were wise and proved beneficial to the Italian democratic progress, but as president of the Liberal Party from 1944 to 1947, he was much less successful and not enough attuned to the needs of modern parties and the requirements of mass politics. He was too much the philosopher and not enough the party politician. As a party president he stressed always first principles and neglected the nitty gritty of party politics, for which he did not have the natural inclination or the personal motivation. With his faith in freedom, as the necessary condition of social progress, Croce refused to give the Liberal Party a well defined economic programme with the honest excuse that governments never implement party programmes, by choice or by necessity. Without economic proposals, appealing to particular interests, the liberals lost potential supporters, and the middle classes deserted them for other parties, where they felt more protected and better

defended. The liberals then remained a small party of elites, which suited Croce just fine. Croce's choice, however, had a certain coherence, it reflected both his personal inclination and his general vision of life. He rejected a demiurgic conception of politics and disliked big parties with a tight organization, suffocating individual initiatives and personal responsibilities. A political party was for Croce a union of kindred people to achieve certain goals, and could not become the end itself. Party politics, and politics in general, were only a part of human life, and could not claim the whole of existence, and should not exhaust the entire human experience. Having rejected the ethical State of Hegel and Gentile, Croce could not accept the ethical party, based on a single ideology and a rigid discipline: a party that has a project and a mission, that resembles a church and becomes a State within the State, with its own laws and enforcement mechanism. (36)

In reality, not only Croce and the Liberals, but also the Democrats and even the Socialists remained parties of elites, rich in strong personalities but split by internal dissensions, continually quarreling among themselves. After the experience of fascism, they were not prepared to accept the personal and political discipline that the new times and the challenge of communism demanded. Despite their

handicaps, however, the democratic forces, more as individuals than as parties, played a pivotal role in Italian society. They were the ones that blazed new trails and gave vigour to political debates, compelling, in due time, the mass parties to accept their ideas. Fifty years later, the Italian mass parties have disappeared, splintered into smaller groups, based now on cultural affinities and kept together more by common aspirations, broadly defined, than by rigid ideology. The old ideologies and their demanding creed have become a relic of the past, and not many mourners stand before their altar.

Italian Institute for Historical Studies.

In 1947 Croce resigned from the presidency of the Liberal Party, assuming the position of president emeritus, as such he still had some political influence. Political friends continued to see him, seeking advice or discussing public events. In 1948, under a special constitutional dispensation Croce, like other former parliamentarians, became a member of the new Republican Senate. But Croce did not make public speeches anymore; once in a while he sent short messages to public gatherings or wrote small polemical articles for newspapers. He rarely left Naples but made an exception in 1949; he went to the Senate and voted for Italy's participation in NATO. Much of Croce's practical energies in those years were given to the affairs

of the Italian Institute for Historical Studies, a post-graduate school that he had founded in 1947, and to which he donated his library and a wing of his house. Directed by Federico Chabod, the Institute soon acquired an international reputation, attracting some of the most promising historians of Italy like Rosario Romeo, Renzo De Felice, and Denis Mack Smith.

In the Institute for the first time in his life, Croce became a teacher, giving ten lectures, from 1948 to 1950, on historiographical questions. During those crisp lectures Croce often touched on the nature of fascism and on the reasons that had favoured its victories. For Croce fascism even now remained a moral crisis of European civilization and a weakening of liberal values, brought about by "the entire historical course of the last forty years". In "the process of facts and events", among "the accidents and incidents", and "historical necessities" that had undermined the spirit of the liberal faith, he indicates "as mostly relevant" the militarism of German society, the violent nature of the Russian revolution and the passions and turmoils generated by the First World War. (37)

In the last of these lectures, Croce offered advice to future historians on how to deal with the history of the fascist regime. He had strong words against fascism, and lamented the damage done to Italian society and the ruin

brought to the nation by Mussolini's dictatorship. He left no doubt on his negative judgment on the whole period and on the leaders of that time. But, in accordance with his historical theories, Croce also urged historians to refrain from giving a completely negative judgment, when dealing with fascism, painting "a canvas all black", or making a catalogue "full of crimes and shame". Instead, historians should make efforts to find the positive beside the negative, pointing out the good things that were also done in that time; moreover they should also recognize that some fascists joined the movement not for base passion but moved by generous aspirations, "though they were not sustained by critical reason, as happens to immature and youthful spirits". (38)

But for Croce the true positive aspect and the lasting heritage of that tragic period, however, was the struggle for freedom, and the example of men who opposed the dictatorship and fought against fascism, and suffered and died for their ideals. "If for nothing else, fascism will remain for this: for the adversaries that it generated and encountered; for the many who suffered inside the jails, in the places of confinement and exile; for those who died of privations and did not surrender; for those who died fighting against the fascists and the invading Germans". Among the most important results of fascism Croce counted

the tremendous shock that compelled the Italians to rediscover and "to love with more passion" the value of freedom and the ideals of democracy. On a personal level. Croce also confessed that the struggle against the dictatorship gave him a new vigour and almost a second youth, "filling me with increased activity and with fighting spirits"; it also compelled him to rethink political ideas and philosophical concepts, and above all "made me realize that the work of the thinker and the writer has to be in harmony with the duties of the man and the citizen". (39)

The Last Years.

But his teaching activity did not last long. In 1950 he suffered a stroke that immobilized his right side for a few days. After that incident Croce's physical activity and writing ability were greatly reduced. Despite his weakened body, he was able to continue his intellectual work until the last days of his life, helped by the devotion of his daughters, who read books to him and wrote from his dictation. From 1940, despite his active participation in political affairs, Croce's literary production was never broken, and remained remarkable as before. Even in this last part of his life, Croce's intellectual interests continued to be wide ranging. Some of his best philosophical essays and some of his most moving

soliloquies were written in this period. The philosophical questions dealt especially with the origin of the dialectic and with the troubling category of vitality and its dialectical relation with morality, trying to reconcile the voracious appetites of the individual with the ethical demands of the universal.

The tragic events of recent European history, the wanton destruction caused by the war, the sufferings imposed on innocent peoples, affected Croce's vision of history and found reflections in his philosophy. Optimism was toned down, the presence of pessimism became stronger. The dialectical conception of life remained, but acquired a more dramatic sequence, no longer guaranteeing the triumph of the good. The destruction of war introduced the doubt that the rhythm of life can be broken, that barbarism can destroy civilization, and finally that the mission of Europe has come to an end. The old certainties disappeared, leaving man to contemplate a tottering world, continually menaced by the violence of elemental forces. Still something remained as tenacious as before in Croce's life and thought: the power of reason, the creating freedom of the human spirit, the ability of man to choose good. Croce's last philosophy became a religion of work, stressing the primacy of doing and urging the responsibility of the individual. In this tottering world

of ours, we have to do as best as we can, "fulfilling with zeal all our duties as human beings and as good citizens", and have to continue to perform our work, "because death cannot find us in stupid idleness". (40)

Death found the philosopher in November 1952. The family refused a State funeral, but the nation naturally turned the event into a memorial day. The government proclaimed a day of mourning and the schools remained closed. From all over Italy, public authorities, political leaders and simple friends went to Naples, as in a pilgrimage. The city of Naples came to a standstill and the streets were lined with thousands of people. No official speeches were made the day of the funeral, and there was no religious ceremony, but Croce's wife made known that she and two of her daughters had remained at home to pray. The most appropriate eulogy was delivered on February 25, 1966, by an old friend and comrade of Gobetti and Rosselli, Matteotti and Turati, as part of the official ceremonies to mark the centennial year of Croce's birth. That day in Naples, Giuseppe Saragat, speaking as President of the Republic, reminded the old and the new generations what the books and the example of Croce had meant to those who suffered persecution, jail and exile in the struggle against fascism. (41)

Conclusion

The new documents have clarified Croce's political actions and revealed new aspects of his personality. After reading his diaries, it is no longer possible to view Croce as an Olympian philosopher, serenely contemplating the unfolding of the universe, indifferent to political events. The diaries have revealed a rather complex man, subject to bouts of depression, but tenacious in his determination, constant in his beliefs, full of fighting spirit, and deeply involved with the general welfare of the country and the personal condition of his friends.

The letters, so far published, show that Croce was a man of many relations, frequently writing to his friends to give or to ask for information, but also to console or to encourage, often urging them to continue the good fight. This presence of Croce at critical moments, in personal affairs or political events, is now attested by the accounts written by those who had close relations with him, and at one time or another experienced directly his assistance or generosity.

The police files in the National Archives leave no doubt that during the fascist regime Croce was willing to take risks and was not afraid to face dangers. He received in his residences or visited in other cities notorious anti-fascists, was involved with members of the

underground, and even maintained relations with the exiles in France. The fascist authorities regarded Croce as an adversary of the regime, and kept his house, his movements and mail under close and constant police scrutiny. To pry into Croce's inner feelings, the authorities recruited special informers, able to gain his confidence and to discuss political affairs without arousing his suspicion. The reports of these learned informers were read with attention by the chief of police and often by Mussolini himself.

Despite police and political harassment, during the fascist regime Croce continued to live a normal life, observing only some elementary precautions, without departing much from the rigid and fruitful routine of the previous years. But the mood and feelings changed completely, the usual joyful disposition toward life and work disappeared and was replaced by a gloom and doom outlook. Cultural activities remained of paramount importance, but under the impact of political events, Croce's interests moved from literary matters to historical and political questions, bearing close relation with the surrounding reality. Philosophical essays and historical books were the occasions for political interventions and were employed as tools to celebrate freedom, to defend the ideals of the Risorgimento and to condemn authoritarian

rule. These books found faithful readers throughout the country, inspiring young people to join the opposition or strengthening the old politicians to continue the resistance, creating a sort of ideal "Italian Family", dispersed in various Italian cities.

Croce's opposition to fascism was not immediate, it was slow to materialize and took some time before acquiring public manifestations. During the turmoil that followed the end of the First World War, he shared the anxieties of other Italians, was annoyed by the frequent strikes, and by the chaos they created in the public services, but, unlike many others, he never feared the imminence of a Russian revolution in Italy. As a member of the Giolitti government Croce approved moderation during the occupation of the factories, and then supported the use of force to end the Dalmatian adventure of D'Annunzio. Before the March on Rome, in his writings or public statements there is no praise or approval for fascist violence.

When Mussolini conquered power in 1922, Croce shared the illusion, common to all other liberal leaders, that after the March on Rome Italy would soon return to normalcy, enjoying a period of social peace. In this period Croce followed the indications of Giolitti, and like the old premier he hoped that the new government would restore law and order, and give a new vigour to the liberal state,

bringing into the main stream the young generations that had fought in the war. He never feared that the government would change the fundamental nature of the constitution, and destroy the heritage of the Risorgimento. The support given to the coalition government by all the liberal and democratic parties, the presence of trusted generals in key positions offered the assurance that the institutions were in no danger, and that in the final analysis the King had the situation under control.

In these conditions, from the fall of 1922 to the summer of 1924, Croce showed benevolence toward the government and leadership of Mussolini. In the Senate he voted for the government after the March on Rome, and supported a motion of confidence in July 1924, after the murder of Matteotti. In the press, he defended the reform of education sponsored by Gentile; praised the policies of the government; and during the elections of 1924 wished the victory of the government list and probably voted for the "Listone" himself. But even in this period Croce never joined the cheering crowds, maintaining instead an open mind and showing independence of judgment. He praised the policies of government, but never applauded the violence of fascism, and never shared the ideology of the movement. He publicly defended Nitti and his reputation, when the old premier had become the bete noire of fascism and was bitterly attacked

by the fascist press. Croce came to the rescue of Gobetti, offering his help when the young publicist was left alone, facing a barrage of accusations from a wild pack, clamouring for his blood. He expressed solidarity to Amendola, the leader of the opposition when he was the victim of fascist violence.

Above all, Croce, unlike many others, never denied his liberal ideas, and never confused liberalism with fascism. Instead, in private letters and public discussion, he rejected the claims, put forth by Gentile and nationalist historians, that fascism was the offspring of the idealistic philosophy and the heir of the Italian Risorgimento. Croce's support for the Mussolini government came to an end in the aftermath of the Matteotti Affair, after some hesitation and persisting illusions. In that time of confusion and uncertain perspectives, Croce's desire to put an end to Mussolini's experiment and to replace him with another leader, at the appropriate moment, must have been strong if political difference were able to break his long and fraternal friendship with Gentile. It was then that Croce and Gentile took two diverging political roads, one supporting the construction of the fascist regime, the other defending the liberal ideals of the Risorgimento.

When in 1925 Mussolini began the destruction of the

liberal state, and Rocco started to lay the foundations of the authoritarian regime, Croce went into opposition immediately and without hesitation. He came forward and assumed a position of intransigent opposition, at the time when other liberals and democrats became frightened, abandoned the struggle or jumped into the triumphant faction. In this period of general disarray, Croce joined the Liberal Party, participated in its national meetings, made public speeches, in a last attempt to strengthen its organization, to enlarge its following or to galvanize its membership. Never a great parliamentarian, in the Senate Croce seldom spoke but voted against all the new laws that destroyed personal freedoms, and changed the nature of the constitution.

At the invitation of Giovanni Amendola, he wrote the Anti-fascist Manifesto, and then helped to turn the collection of signatures into a resounding success. While freedom of the press remained in place, Croce did not hesitate to poke fun at Mussolini, showing his cultural shortcomings. Coherent in his political position, from then on he refused any collaboration with the new cultural institutions that the regime was creating to enlarge its appeal and its outreach among intellectuals.

In a short while, Croce became one of the leaders of the anti-fascist opposition, and was regarded as an enemy of

the regime. As a result, during the violence that followed the Zamponi attempt against the life of Mussolini in the fall of 1926, his house was invaded and damaged by fascist thugs. It is rather significant that during that night of violence the residences of a liberal senator, a communist leader, and democrat and socialist members of parliament were assaulted at the same time. The regime tried to intimidate all its opponents, hoping to cow each of them into submission. It failed with Croce.

When political parties were banned and freedom of the press came to an end, Croce continued his struggle with different means. He used his periodical, the republication of old books, and finally the writing of new works to promote liberal ideals, at the same time condemning the new authoritarian practices. In 1927, La Critica published three political essays to better define the nature of liberalism, that influenced the ideas of young generations then and have remained relevant even in our times. In 1928 appeared History of Italy, which immediately became a best seller and fulfilled also the function of a political manifesto. The book offered a defence of liberal Italy and showed the beneficial effects produced by free institutions. But the book was also an open polemic against the policies of the government, and offered a not too veiled criticism of Mussolini's leadership.

In the Senate, Croce made a point of being present when Albertini and Ruffini spoke against government proposals. During their speeches he sat beside them to show solidarity, openly applauded their arguments and at the end cast his vote among the few remaining members of the opposition. Finally in 1929, Croce himself was chosen to be the spokesman of the opposition, and he was the only member of parliament who dared to speak against the Lateran Pacts, defending the separation of Church and State, and condemning the new alliance between the throne and the altar against liberal principles.

The Concordat and the elections of 1929 consolidated the power of Mussolini, his prestige increased at home and abroad; Il Duce and his regime could look with confidence to years of consensus. It was different for the opposition. The years that followed the Lateran Pacts were gloomy years for anti-fascism. Those who still dared to oppose the regime and carried on the good fight had to be willing to face persecution and to confront harassment, living the life of social outcasts. Croce was expelled or was compelled to resign from the learned societies of which he had been a member for a long time. From 1930 until 1943, the government regarded Croce as a political adversary, and considered his actions and movements with concern and suspicion, warranting close scrutiny. Policemen monitored

his house, stopped his mail and reported his movements. Sometimes spies were able to inform on private conversations and meetings with friends.

Despite police harassment, and the evident attempt to create isolation and to spread fear, Croce refused to be intimidated, and continued instead to live his normal life, carrying out his work and publishing his periodical with the usual zeal. Croce kept in touch with his political and academic friends by a constant stream of mail, and by undertaking, at regular intervals, frequent trips to Italian cities. The house in Naples and the summer residence in Piedmont became sort of pilgrimage places, where visitors went to give and to receive information, to exchange news, and to find words of advice and encouragement.

Croce also maintained contacts with the young people who were involved in underground activities, and did not abandon them when they were caught by the police, and ended up in jail or in places of confinement. He also made several trips abroad, and there had meetings and long conversations with anti-fascist exiles, including Sturzo and Sforza, Nitti and Carlo Rosselli. During this period Croce also helped some of his anti-fascist friends in more concrete ways. He made financial loans to promising young men in difficulty and made it understood that they need not

worry about repayment in the near future. Croce often helped young scholars to publish their books, or to find translation work. He asked Laterza to pay some anti-fascist writers more than the current commercial rate and to charge the difference to his account. Finally Croce helped Laterza to keep the activity of his publishing house in the liberal cultural tradition.

The willingness of Croce to challenge official policies and his readiness to help friends in political difficulty became evident after the adoption of racial laws in Italy. He had already written essays against racial theories and ethnic discrimination, when they first appeared in Germany, and continued to show this dislike when Italy tried to imitate Nazi policy. As he had done with German scholars, Croce provided letters of reference for Italian Jews who decided to emigrate, and helped in various ways those who remained in Italy. At the same time, he joined Laterza to fight the banishment of old or new books written or translated by Jewish authors, writing letters to the authorities praising the books and their authors.

During these years Croce experienced almost a second intellectual youth, and he wrote some of his best political essays and historical books. All these writings were inspired by liberal ideas and motivated by a rejection of authoritarian rule. A few of these books became best

sellers, all of them generated a great deal of interest and discussion. They were read in schools, at home, in jail, or in exile, and helped to undermine the authority of the regime. These books sustained the members of the resistance, or inspired many young people to join the ranks of the opposition or to question anew the policies and the ideas of fascism. At the end, Croce's writings of this period constitute a body of ideas and ideals contrary to the ideology of fascism, and the other authoritarian or totalitarian regimes of the times, and have to be regarded as one of the more significant contributions to the struggle against Mussolini and resistance to fascism.

For his moral authority and intellectual prestige, Croce became the head of an ideal "Italian Family" with connections in various Italian cities, and found himself at the centre of a widespread anti-fascist network, kept together by moral ties but without any formal structure, made of liberals, democrats and socialists, all united against the fascist regime and hoping for a different future.

When the fortune of the war changed and the invasion of national territory became imminent, Croce played an active part in the civilian conspiracy, made of old liberal politicians, that urged the King to fire Mussolini, put an end to fascism, negotiate a peace, and name a new

democratic government, supported by anti-fascist parties. After the fall of Mussolini and the division of Italy into two warring camps, Croce's villas in Capri and in Sorrento became centres of political activity and assumed almost the functions of a virtual government in waiting, able to maintain relations with Brindisi and Rome, with the Allies in the South and the partisans in the North. Croce played a national function, people and parties rallied around him spontaneously, listened to his advice and naturally accepted his leadership

Among the first to realize the limitations imposed by war on Italy's freedom of action, Croce used his international reputation and his personal prestige to improve relations with the Allies and collaboration among Italian politicians. From the fall of 1943 till the spring of 1944, Croce played a pivotal role in the so-called Kingdom of the South. In his participation in political activities, he showed a great deal of realism and the ability to set and to choose priorities; he also displayed unsuspected diplomatic skills in dealing with other politicians and Allied personalities.

Despite old age, Croce participated in a position of leadership in the Bari congress, the first democratic gathering of all the new Italian political parties, and there was able to moderate the more radical aspirations of

his own friends and to cool the enthusiasm and the illusions of the left wing parties. He helped to organize one of the first Committees of National Liberation in Naples. To improve Italy's military standing, Croce urged the creation of a volunteer corps, able to fight beside the Allies in a condition of parity, and to rekindle the spirit of Garibaldi.

With De Nicola, Croce was instrumental in devising a temporary compromise that broke a dangerous impasse with the King and made possible the formation of the third Badoglio government. Supported by all the anti-fascist parties, it became a truly national government, and was the first democratic experiment of the new Italy. Croce wrote the program of the government and remained its driving force, always consulted by Badoglio even when others, for reasons of secrecy and the requirements of the armistice clauses, had to be excluded from those consultations. In its short life that cabinet re-established national unity between North and South, assured a peaceful resolution of the institutional question, and laid the foundation for a democratic evolution of Italian politics.

During the chaos that followed the fall of Mussolini, the reputation of Croce was one of the few remaining assets left to the Italian people, and he used that prestige wisely and in the national interest. From then till his

death, respect for Croce remained universal, and without distinction of political parties, despite momentary partisan disagreements. Every time a position of national importance had to be filled the name of Croce was put forth immediately. Had he been a man of political ambition he could have been Prime Minister in 1944, and would have had a good fighting chance to become the first president of the Republic in 1946. When Croce died in 1952, the mourning was general and heartfelt, and publicly expressed by all parties, in Parliament, in the mass media and in the streets of Naples.

After so many years we are probably now in a good position to better understand the political admiration felt by so many people for that exceptional man. The fascist regime has been studied from different angles, and the damage done to the Italian nation has become apparent. The ideologies opposed to liberal democracy have collapsed, and their solutions have been found wanting, leaving a tragic and dismal heritage of ruin. After the disintegration of the old party system in Italy, old animosities are fast disappearing, and liberal ideas are enjoying great favour again. To better view the events of Croce's life, historians now can read old and new documents, and can consult the memoirs written by friends and foes alike. For a closer study of Croce's personality and his political

activity, we also have at our disposition his own diaries and a good part of his correspondence. Finally we can consult the records of the police, we can read the reports of the prefects and even the opinions of the chief of police.

Yet to appreciate the unique role that Benedetto Croce played under the fascist regime and the contribution that he made to the anti-fascist resistance, nothing is more revealing than his own books and nothing has a higher value than the admiration and the gratitude that Croce enjoyed then from Amendola and Gobetti, Rosselli and Ginzburg, Gramsci and Don Sturzo, and from those who suffered persecution, jail and exile for their struggle against fascist dictatorship. "Tanto nomine nulla gloria par est."

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