

Giorgio Levi Della Vida: *Remembered Ghosts* (Extracts)

Introduction by Luca Maria Scarantino

Giorgio Levi Della Vida (1886–1967) was not only an eminent Islamologist, belonging to that tradition of Italian Oriental studies that stretches from Ignazio Guidi to Leone Caetani, Carlo Alfonso Nallino and Francesco Gabrieli – he was also a man with solid roots in his own time. He taught in Naples and Rome, then for the ten years 1939–1948 at the University of Pennsylvania. He was one of the few university teachers who, when the oath of loyalty to the Italian fascist regime was introduced, in October 1931, opted not to accept that act of submission.

The story is worth re-telling. The oath, which Mussolini introduced in order to sweep up the academics who were still resistant to the regime, imposed loyalty ‘to the King, his Successors and the Fascist Regime’ and required that ‘the teaching function should be performed and all academic duties carried out with the aim of producing hard-working, honest citizens loyal to the Fatherland and the Fascist Regime’. As a result of this imposition the academics affected (i.e. all except those teaching at the Catholic University) were faced with an agonizing alternative: conforming professionally to a political demand, or paying personally for the consequences of refusing.

*On 19 December 1931 the education minister announced that there were only twelve refusals. This total was far from complete: apart from Giorgio Levi Della Vida there were mathematician Vito Volterra, philosophers Ernesto Buonaiuti and Piero Martinetti, economists Antonio De Viti De Marco and Piero Sraffa, historians Gaetano De Sanctis, Lionello Venturi and Agostino Rossi, jurists Fabio Luzzatto, Francesco and Edoardo Ruffini (father and son) and Francesco Atzeri Vacca, anthropologist Mario Carrara, chemist Giorgio Errera, physicist Giuseppe Vicentini, as well as doctor Bartolo Nigrisoli. Others, such as the former prime minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando and the jurist Mario Rotondi, cleverly contrived to avoid the issue. In addition Norberto Bobbio, in his book *Trent’anni di storia della cultura a Torino* (Thirty years of cultural history in Turin), mentions Leone Ginzburg’s refusal in 1934, when the oath was extended to *liberi docenti*. Although some recent books on this episode have appeared, it still remains to be explored further.*

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Giorgio Levi Della Vida, together with Edoardo Ruffini, was one of the youngest of the rebels, and he suffered serious consequences. Working at the Vatican Library as a result of long-standing connections with church circles (he was a Jew who had taken part in the debate on modernism), he applied for a teaching post at Pennsylvania University and was appointed in 1939, just when the introduction of racial laws was making the situation in Italy increasingly difficult. He stayed in the USA till 1945, then again from 1946 to 1948.

In 1965, back in Italy, where he returned to Rome University, he was 'the only one of the writers approached' to accept a proposal from the Venetian publisher Neri Pozza inviting him to write a volume of memoirs. It appeared in 1966 under the title *Fantasma ritrovati* (Remembered Ghosts); the book, now out of print, conjures up a tableau vivant of half a century of intellectual encounters in Italy and Europe between the wars. Among the portraits he paints there is the astounding story of those crucial days in June 1924 when the fascist government became a full-blown regime. Here we present extended extracts from that story.

At the moment when Levi Della Vida's narrative begins the political situation in Italy was extremely tense. The socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti, who had exposed the May 1924 electoral fraud in parliament, had been kidnapped on 10 June on the Tiber embankment and found dead in the countryside a few days later. Shaken by the rumours that were beginning to go the rounds fingering him as having instigated the assassination, Mussolini saw his political and popular support failing – there was even a whisper going around that the king might be on the point of ditching him. Then something new occurred in Parliament. On 27 June in the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house) most of the opposition decided to refrain from parliamentary business as long as Mussolini remained in power. Like the Roman plebs they said they were retiring 'to the Aventine Hill of their conscience'. And there they stayed till 1926, when the main opposition leaders were relieved of their posts and arrested or forced to flee abroad. At the same time the opposition groups in the Senate, who were mostly liberals, took up a legalistic stance whose penetrating spirit was illustrated by Benedetto Croce's words, which Levi Della Vida quotes.

These choices led the old socialist and liberal political class to suicide. The government felt free to adopt a dictatorial manner: in July 1924 laws restricting the freedom of the press were enacted, then, after a final gesture of revolt from the opposition in December, the process was completed in a few months; when parliament reassembled in 1925 laws, which were labelled 'fascistissime' (fascist in the extreme), removed all freedom to associate and publish, forced political obedience on public servants, abolished local elections and set up a special court for crimes against the state.

The four personalities Levi Della Vida shows us were not all in the same position. The first two – liberal Giovanni Amendola (1886–1926) and socialist Claudio Treves (1869–1933) – were at that time ready to join the Aventine secession. Amendola was one of its main instigators, and the portrait Levi Della Vida paints of him helps to explain the cultural roots of an attitude that turned out to be profoundly apolitical. He became a deputy in 1919, sitting on the liberal benches, then a minister; his even-handed stance with regard to Yugoslav nationalist claims soon made him one of Mussolini's chief opponents. He was twice the object of fascist attacks, the second of which eventually killed him in April 1926, shortly after he had fled to France. In the years after the war his son Giorgio became one of the leading figures in the Italian Communist Party.

A different course was taken by the career of the socialist Claudio Treves, one of the leaders of reformist Italian socialism, alongside Filippo Turati and Anna Koulichova. A former direc-

tor of *Avanti!*, from which he was ousted in 1912 by the Mussolini faction in the Socialist Party, he had been a supporter of complete neutrality during the First World War. In 1926 he went into exile in France, whence he contributed actively to organizing the anti-fascist opposition centred on the brothers Carlo and Nello Rosselli's Justice & Liberty movement. The story of the events that followed that exile has been told by Treves's son Paolo in a book published in London in 1940 with the eloquent title: *What Mussolini Did to Us*.

The series of interviews closes with two senators. Advocating a philosophical and political liberalism that did not prevent him seeing the rise of fascism as the hoped-for remedy to the labour disturbances rife in Italy just after the Great War, the philosopher Benedetto Croce (1866–1952) became in April 1925 the promoter of a 'Response from Italian writers, teachers and publicists' to the fascist intellectuals' Manifesto disseminated by Giovanni Gentile. And so he became the regime's leading public opponent. Protected by his international reputation, which kept him safe from a regime that was anxious to show a certain cultural generosity, Croce, together with Luigi Einaudi, became the champion of freedom for a whole generation of young anti-fascists. But his attitude to the 1931 oath, when he is said to have advised people to submit to the regime in order to safeguard Italian culture, makes him a more complex figure than he seemed for a long period.¹

The case of Carlo Sforza from Milan (1872–1952) is quite different. He was a diplomat and experienced politician whose lucid, disenchanted realism sets him apart from Levi Della Vida's other interviewees. His friendship with the king did not prevent him leaving Italy in 1926 for a lengthy exile in Belgium and France. In 1940, given the German army's progress, he crossed to England, then the USA. Throughout his exile he was extremely active as an essayist and polemicist whose objective was to discredit fascism and Mussolini and promote a firmly European policy for the future of the continent. Returning to Italy in October 1943, he was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1947 and retained the post until his death.

Giorgio Levi Della Vida's book reminds us of that whole cultural, political and intellectual movement.

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One morning around the middle of June 1924 (I cannot remember which day precisely, nor can I find it among my documents) I was walking down from home towards the university – which was at that time still in the 17th-century Palazzo della Sapienza and the 19th-century Palazzo di Carpegna, since demolished – along Via Boncompagni and Via Ludovisi among others. Scarcely two months had gone by since the general election, the first one since the fascists had come in, and the campaign posters had not yet been removed from the walls – posters that were all fascist of course, since the ones for the opposition parties had either never existed or else been ripped down even before the election was held. The only ones it was still possible to see clearly along the main roads were a few huge posters at least three or four metres high showing an enormous profile of Mussolini against a black background, a profile so starkly white that it put you in mind of chalk rather than marble, and with 'Roman' features made to look like Julius Caesar. As is well known, Mussolini liked to be compared to him, until he remembered, or was reminded of, the Ides of March, after which Caesar was replaced by Augustus, who died in his bed

aged 76. During the previous night someone, or maybe a group of people dispatched to different parts of town, had splattered the posters, probably using a little pump spray, with a kind of orangey-red porridge, which was still sticking to the much-repeated portrait and sullyng its pure whiteness with runnels of bloody spittle, making it look like a horrid murderous spectre smeared with its victims' blood. As I emerged from Via Ludovisi and continued along Via Francesco Crispi into Via della Mercede, Piazza San Silvestro and Piazza Colonna, the horrifying vision was repeated, the same thing time and time again. It was early and the streets were not yet very busy, but knots of people were already starting to gather under each poster and passing comments on this particularly explicit symbolic act. A few days earlier, on the 10th, the socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti, who had used one of the first sessions of the new parliament to deliver an implacable, irrefutable denunciation of the illegalities, the acts of violence, the abuses that were being tolerated or frankly encouraged by the government, had been snatched in broad daylight right off the street, and no one was under any illusion about the fate that awaited him. From the very outset public opinion, followed by the opposition press, which had suddenly found its freedom of expression again, at first *sotto voce* then out loud, pointed the finger at people very close to the government, or actually within it, as the ones who had issued the order, and suspicions, or rather accusations, rose higher and higher up the hierarchy till they eventually came to rest on the head of the government himself.

Regretfully aware of the fact that intellectuals are incapable of being receptive to their surroundings except through the filter of a literary memory, I immediately called to mind the spectacle that had appeared to the Athenians one fine morning in the spring of 415 BC – the statues that had been mutilated during the night. Except that in the Rome of 1924 AD it was something even more significant than the Sicilian expedition and the political fate of Alcibiades: the destiny of a whole nation was at stake, but it was also, of course, a matter of saving the skins of a number of prominent people. The crowds were getting ever larger and starting to move towards the centre without any instruction encouraging them to do so or any leader initiating the march – as if an instinctive force alone had got them going; one felt that decisive events were about to take place. It could be said that if at that moment one of the opposition leaders – an Amendola, a Turati, a Modigliani – had urged 50 or so excited followers to mount the steps of Palazzo Chigi (which had not yet been replaced by Palazzo Venezia as the prime minister's residence), and if, after overcoming the handful of national security militiamen (another Gallic invention that was due to the regime's 'Italian-ness'), he had defenestrated Mussolini and from the balcony harangued the crowd massed in the square, fascism would have been eradicated on the spot and would have disappeared without trace – the signs could already be seen in the provinces.

Maybe and maybe not. However that may be, nothing of the kind happened, as we know. In any case at that particular time I had a personal problem to solve and I was very afraid I would not be able to. Luigi Salvatorelli, then political director of Turin's *La Stampa*, had written to say that, as he could not leave his job at such a delicate moment, he wanted me to do a report for him on the view of the situation taken by some eminent politicians of my choice and their forecast for the immediate

future. It was clear that this dear friend of mine greatly overestimated my experience as well as my perspicacity. Granted, I too had dabbled in political journalism between 1919 and 1922 and had written a number of articles for *Il Paese*, a Rome daily paper with a strong anti-fascist line that had been started by Francesco Saverio Nitti and was managed by Francesco Ciccotti Scozzese; it was sacked and forced to cease publication on the very same day as the March on Rome. I had also done two or three articles for *La Stampa*. But I must admit, at the risk of seeming naïve (a word that is often synonymous with stupid), that I had not done it out of a sense of any kind of vocation for politics, but merely because of a conviction that it was the duty of all citizens, and therefore my duty too, to take an unequivocal stance and accept specific responsibilities in circumstances as grave for the health of the nation (as well as the whole world, given the muddled, tense international situation) as were those of the early years of a peace that was not a genuine peace. Some of the most important issues that had brought about the First World War had not been resolved and others, which were just as important and equally dangerous, had arisen since then. So, even though I still expressed my thinking frankly in the columns that the papers' editors freely put at my disposal, I did not seek out any sort of continuity of contact either with political figures (I never met Nitti, among others) or with journalists. Even with the *Il Paese* manager or editors I only had the contacts I needed in order to make my regular contribution. I cannot say whether, apart from my instinctive and maybe not fully conscious aversion to politics, it was reticence, or pride, or laziness, or all three together that helped keep me at a distance. This may indeed be so, but if I had really had an enthusiasm for politics, there is not the slightest doubt that I would have managed to overcome all that.

And so Salvatorelli's request put me in a spot. I had no wish to disappoint the trust shown by my old fellow-student, who many years earlier had, so to speak, initiated me into thinking about events in contemporary politics. First of all I thought of consulting Giovanni Amendola and Benedetto Croce; one was a member of the chamber of deputies, the other a senator, both had been ministers and I had known them for a long while, even though, as I shall relate at the appropriate point, we met each other at occasions that had nothing to do with politics. It was also essential to listen to a socialist deputy's views; my thoughts naturally alighted first on Turati, but I discovered he was not in Rome then and so I turned to his 'brilliant second-in-command' Claudio Treves, though I had never met him and had no letter of recommendation to offer him. Then, how the idea emerged of interviewing Carlo Sforza I could not really say. Perhaps because I was familiar with the name of his father Giovanni, an eminent researcher in the archives who cleverly turned up old documents and demonstrated great erudition in editing them? Or else (and this is more likely) because of the admiration I had felt almost two years earlier for his brave gesture, when he was ambassador to Paris, in adamantly rejecting the 'revolution by royal decree' that had brought Mussolini to power?

I should like to report quite simply yet precisely the interviews I conducted with these politicians and relate what impression I had then of each of them. Here once more I think I must warn readers, as I have done elsewhere, not to expect general, categorical judgements from me; that is not my intention, nor, in all likelihood, am I capable of providing them. I will merely note down memories without attempting to

develop them into some sort of critical essay. And in addition I must warn them that I have not kept any written notes of these interviews; of course I reported them immediately and at length to Salvatorelli, but I know he destroyed those reports at a time when the Turin police had got into the habit of going and searching among his papers. So I am forced to rely exclusively on my memory, a rather difficult task when it comes to events that took place more than 40 years back, even if they have of course remained deeply etched on my mind because of their uniqueness. There are many things I am afraid I have forgotten; however I am sure that what I do remember I recall accurately, and that I do not need to apologize, like many writers of memoirs, for forgetting what happened and remembering what did not.

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I had no difficulty in getting Amendola to see me at *Il Mondo*, a daily paper he had started in 1921, and which survived him by a few months – it did not close till November 1926 following the complete ban on the opposition press. From start to finish its chief editor was Alberto Cianca who, after going into exile in France, had the courage to brave the danger and become one of the most active and influential leaders of the anti-fascist movement abroad. At the Liberation he was appointed minister without portfolio, a post he held for a short time. Indeed until his recent death he still played a part in politics, but much further to the left, closer perhaps to the young Amendola than his father. The paper's head office was in Via della Mercede, and Amendola had an office there that was acceptable but utterly plain, a faithful reflection in its simple, austere furnishings of his personality, which was indifferent to the allure of wealth.

I have said I knew him. But I hasten to add that, since we were not extremely close, we spoke fairly formally² but called each other by first names without standing on ceremony and using titles. In the course of our meetings, which were neither long nor frequent, we never discussed political or indeed other topics in great depth, and we never found ourselves working together on projects (except after the period we are concerned with here). The thing we nevertheless had in common, other than anti-fascism, was the strange fact that, among all his friends and acquaintances around that time, I was probably the oldest since our first contact, which was the longest lasting and the closest, dated back to the winter of 1903–4, when he was just 21 and I was not quite 17. I cannot recall those distant memories without feeling a certain tenderness, as if they did not involve myself but a younger brother who never reached adulthood and whom I was looking at with slightly protective and maybe also rather mocking warmth. I had already got through the religious crisis I have previously recounted at the risk of boring my readers (and I apologize once more if I am doing so again) and was interested in the history and phenomenology of religions from a purely academic standpoint. For this reason I had started to attend the Theosophical Society, which taught a kind of mixture of speculative philosophy and Indian yoga for westerners and was then fairly thriving. It was very comfortably housed in a building on the Corso, between Via Pietra and Piazza Colonna, if my memory serves me correctly. I would read books, of which there was no shortage

there, and attend lectures, and I became friendly with some of the most fervent and – shall we say – assiduous members, who used to invite me to their homes for smaller meetings, where people engaged in discussions and related their personal experiences. I would just listen attentively and seldom speak; I did not show any sign of agreement (which would have been hypocritical) or disagreement (which would have been rude as well as pointless).

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The reality of the suprasensory world and the autonomy of religious feeling were always very firm convictions in Amendola's thinking, and he never wished to abandon them. His confidence in the answer given by theosophy to these two fundamental problems had come to him from that youthful ingenuousness (this dates back to 1900 when he was hardly more than a teenager) which the influence of Eva Kühn, an open opponent of the occult, doubtless helped to cure him of. However, even though his philosophical thinking later matured through Croce and Gentile's neo-Hegelianism – which he never fully accepted – he could not take the step of agreeing that the concept of religion could be reduced to an imperfect philosophy, just as he bravely contested the negation of feeling as a mental category, which Croce had theorized in his *Logic*.

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I have often wondered, and occasionally still do, how it is possible that, with such a mental disposition and temperament, Amendola could enter political life and have the long career he did. I would say he took that turning accidentally. In life it sometimes transpires that a chance circumstance points us in a direction that is not the one in which we would prefer to or could progress, and that, once we have taken that path, it is too late to turn back; so we end up going right on and possibly get a taste for it, eventually convincing ourselves that in fact it was made for us. However, we have hardly gone halfway when we nearly always come across an obstacle, a pitfall, a trap that lets us know, to our cost of course, that this was not the right path. The man who diverted Amendola from the royal road of philosophy was Mario Missiroli (in fact the man who has for 60 years harboured in his heart an unsatisfied love of philosophy!). At that time he was not yet 25 and already a top journalist who took pleasure in discovering journalistic talents in people who were unaware they had them (eight years later he discovered Buonaiuti).

Amendola was invited to send some articles from Rome to the Bologna paper *Il Resto del Carlino* and was a hit: he was incisive and subtle and he could write. Practice made his style more lively and moderated his seriousness somewhat. He was so successful that in under three years the most reputable Italian daily with the highest sales, *Il Corriere della Sera*, stole him from the *Carlino* and made him the true head of the Rome bureau of that Milan paper – virtually on the same level as the titular head, the deputy Andrea Torre. His passion for politics emerged after his success as a journalist – and not the reverse – thus proving he was not a born journalist since, contrary to what the French aphorism says (or confirming it?) 'journalism leads to anything provided you get out of it' – the born journalist will never get out.

At the beginning of the war, during the dramatic months of Italian neutrality, Amendola was interventionist, not only because his paper was, but also because at that time his political stance was not very far from the nationalists', even though he

had never been a member of the Nationalist Association and his ethical view of the world was irreconcilable with the amorality of *Realpolitik*. All the same many of his ideas changed during the war, in which he played an active part, serving in the artillery as an officer of the reserve; the uniform (and I saw him in it when I chanced to meet him) set off his virile beauty. Though he merely obeyed orders, he nevertheless followed operations and analysed them with a critic's eye; and as he kept in contact with *Il Corriere*, he did not lose sight of the overall situation. In this regard his correspondence with Ugo Ojetti is instructive. Ojetti, who also worked for *Il Corriere*, was stylistically superior to Amendola, but not as a politician or as a human being. In full agreement with Ojetti and following, but partly providing the inspiration for, the paper's line, Amendola eschewed vague imperialist ambitions and preferred to support the Yugoslavs' national aspirations. It is true that he so preferred, but (since for him politics ought not to be an activity aimed solely at utilitarian objectives) he also thought it was right, recognizing as he did that those aspirations had legitimate grounds. This open, resolute stance decided, both in his favour and to his disadvantage, the subsequent course of his political fortunes: during the lengthy preparations for the peace treaties he was treated as one of the quitters by the nationalist mob; but the fleeting repentance and temporary return to good sense which prevailed with the country's public opinion also opened the way for him to be elected to the deputation: in the last government in free Italy he was minister for the colonies.

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On the eve of the March on Rome, Amendola had the honour of being chosen by Mussolini as one of the few *anime nere*³ in the pallid *Facta* cabinet. There is no doubt that he resolutely opposed the various capitulations in the face of intimidation, the gradual crumbling of the authority of the state, the shameful surrender without conditions that resulted from the king giving in to blackmail. But he managed to lose with dignity without giving way to recriminations; neither did the electors from his home region abandon him in the fraudulent elections of 6 April 1924, voting him back in to the chamber of deputies. He was the first among the members of a minority that made up for their sparse numbers by their leader's prestige

I think he had no illusions that fascism would somehow quickly become unpopular and suddenly collapse. It was perhaps the conviction that the eclipse of freedom in Italy would be lengthy that brought his thinking back to considering problems on which he had spent his youth. Maybe deep within himself he had become convinced (and this is mere conjecture, I could be mistaken but I fancy it is justified) that politics had been only a temporary, secondary episode in his life, that the mission fate had allocated to him was different, a mission very like a religious apostolate. He was in politics and was unable not to remain there. But day by day it was losing a little of its character as an empirical, changing daily occupation and sliding from the personal into the national domain, those moral principles, that messianic expectation of renewal, that aspiration to go beyond the limits of mere reason by using intuition. The wave of popular indignation aroused by Matteotti's assassination had brought him back into active politics. But after only a few days he was forced to admit that indignation that was not organized or channelled towards a well-defined goal was insufficient to reverse the situation. There has been much discussion, which is still going on and will continue to do so, about the appropriate-

ness of the parliamentary opposition's withdrawal, which was dignified with the happy title of 'Aventine' (the required classical reference), and which Amendola was one of the foremost people to promote and defend. I think it was a mistake, but I do not claim that what is only an impression should stand as well-founded historical judgement. What is certain is that, beneath that wordless protest, made solemn by silence, beneath that refusal to have any connection, even that of opposition, with an adversary who was judged unworthy of being fought openly, beneath that implicit appeal to the judgement of history, there can be discerned the religious (and also, it should be said, somewhat abstract) spirit of the early Amendola before he entered politics.

During the succeeding months he did not abdicate his position as a political animal. His constant, coherent polemical opposition in *Il Mondo*; founding and organizing in autumn 1924 the National Union that was the supreme and supremely noble manifestation of his determined legal resistance to dictatorship; his detailed report to the king on the reality of the political situation and the dangers it entailed for the continuation of the monarchy (the details of the long audience and the king's impenetrable silence were recounted to me by Amendola himself) are proof of the scrupulous commitment with which he carried out the mandate he had been given as the leader of the liberal opposition. But it has to be said that he did all that more out of a sense of duty than on impulse; it has to be said that he was utterly convinced he was the victim designated to expiate the errors of a whole generation (and he was indeed a victim, since his premature death on foreign soil was unequivocally recognized as due to the beating, in true fascist style, that he suffered for the second time on St Stephen's day 1925); it has to be said that what he really cared about was not victory in the present but rather redemption, made possible through his suffering and that of so many others, in a future he would not see with his mortal eyes.

I have no precise memory of the few words we exchanged initially or of the discussion that undeniably took place about the concrete situation at that time. But the words with which he concluded the interview are engraved upon my memory just as they were spoken, word for word, in the same way as I retain in my mind the expression he wore then, which seemed, in the darkening of a gaze that was already naturally sombre, to seek confirmation and comfort in something far off: 'A lot of blood has been shed,' he said, solemn as a prophet, 'and still more will have to be. We cannot prevent it. The only thing we can and will do is bear witness to our faith.'

At that moment I understood why, a few days earlier, Amendola had not mounted the steps of Palazzo Chigi to throw Mussolini from the balcony.

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I had never had any kind of personal contact with Claudio Treves. Of course I was familiar with his political activism, which had made him Italian socialism's second-in-command, directly below the undisputed leader Filippo Turati. An eminent barrister at the Milan bar, a journalist with a brilliant and lively style, he had been at Turati's side during the attempt to get the socialist party to give up the subversive-

ness of its early days. Both of them had been thoroughly perplexed, just two years before the outbreak of the Great War, by the revolutionary intransigence of Mussolini, who was as yet very far away from his abrupt U-turn of September 1914, which had succeeded in wresting from Treves the management of the paper *Avanti!*. That resulted in the two men, who were already deeply divided ideologically, conceiving a mutual antipathy and personal dislike that were insurmountable, and that division and aversion was subsequently strengthened because of the opposing stances they took up when Italy entered the war. The famous challenge to the chamber of deputies thrown down by Treves: 'Not another winter in the trenches!' had been interpreted by many as a call to desert; and an attempt was made to see desertion pure and simple as the main cause of the Caporetto defeat (which was not correct). No socialist leader was more detested than Treves by those who rejected any possibility of a negotiated peace and wanted the fighting to go on until complete victory had been won. And when this came about, when victory was crushing as no one had dared to hope, Treves's sustained criticism of the way the war had been fought, his reference to the extremely serious damage that had been suffered by the victors no less than the vanquished, the support for the demands of the 'working masses' and the determined opposition to budding fascism had further exacerbated that hatred. Even after the break in the unity of the socialists, which had prepared the ground for the rise of fascism, and even after fascism's crushing victory, Treves remained one of the most eminent opposition figures; indeed his long experience in parliament conferred a special value on his opinion of the situation that had come about following Matteotti's assassination and the Aventine dispute.

He accepted at once my request for an interview and arranged to meet me at the Genio hotel on Via Zanardelli, where he used to stay when he was in Rome; a hotel that was not in the top flight but was an indication of the simplicity whose eclipse might be deplored by some *laudator temporis acti*⁴ among our contemporary politicians. He welcomed me to his room without ceremony and proved quite ready to listen to me and reply with spontaneous friendliness . . . His entire person breathed forth a charm that was hard to define but could immediately be sensed, a kind of – what should I say? – magnetism that captivated the person he was talking to and might perhaps explain his success as an orator. It may be too that, since he was totally lacking in self-satisfaction or condescension, he attracted sympathy from the first moments and had the art of seizing one's attention; his manner of speaking was clear and precise but utterly without rhetoric. He demonstrated this to me as he answered my questions. I told him I found the situation confused and full of unknowns. The initial reaction of fear following the sudden news of the horrible crime, which exceeded everything the fascists had dared to do so far, had now passed off. But, while the opposition still appeared undecided on what line to follow, fascism was starting to recover from the early defeat. Mussolini, who at first had panicked and would easily have given in if faced with a determined attack (apparently dictators' strong characters are prone to sudden discouragement: Napoleon often suffered from this too – and we are recalling it here not to elevate Mussolini but rather to cut Bonaparte down to the level of mere mortals), had come to his senses somewhat; and his determination not to plunge blindly into the 'moral question' had been strengthened by the support of some of his old and most adventurous

companions-in-arms, who were prepared to risk everything for the great prize. In the chamber of deputies he had a safe majority; it seemed difficult for the senate, which could, by voting against him, have handed the king the constitutional excuse his narrow formalism required in order to intervene, ever to pluck up the courage or even the will to get rid of a regime that guaranteed the comfortably-off would be able to enjoy their wealth in complete safety. In addition the tension was now running too high for a resolution not to be impending, whether by letting go or a clean break. What did he think were the most probable developments?

I was astonished by the abruptness and conviction of his response, as if he already had it fully prepared in his mind and now only had to read it off. 'Mark my words. We are just moving into the summer and in Italy in summer nothing happens in politics. Of course things mature. When parliament reopens in the autumn both the liberal groups in the chamber, Salandra's, which is more to the right, and Giolitti's, which is more left-leaning, these two groups, which have till now supported the government without proclaiming openly they are fascist, will join the opposition. Even if the self-proclaimed fascists are themselves sufficiently numerous to form a majority, the composition of that majority will change and the king will be forced to consult the various parties. Mussolini will go without the *squadristi*⁵ wreaking havoc throughout the land, and we shall have a transitional government to get ready for elections.'

It is true that these predictions were perfectly logical and unarguably coherent, two qualities that could be said to typify Treves. All the same I was not convinced, and I tried to raise some feeble objections. Would Mussolini allow himself to be sacked so calmly? For him that would mean the end not only of his position but of his whole career, or at least his freedom. And would the *squadristi* remain unmoved, having shown in recent days that they could seize the initiative without even waiting for a formal order from their leader? They too, or many of them at least, risked being called to account for common-law crimes. And in view of the likelihood of bloody excesses, would the king, who was known to have a pathological fear of armed repression, not prefer to let sleeping dogs lie? Indeed, but at the end of the day I had not come to argue but to listen. And Treves, who had a long succession of political experiences behind him, and whose realism and moderation were well known, seemed so sure of what he was suggesting! Nevertheless I went away with a feeling of discouragement and vague apprehension: was that what they were made of, these men who were the ones, the only ones, to whom we entrusted our hopes that the situation would shortly be brought under control?

Events more than proved how grossly mistaken he was. Mussolini's dismissal, which he judged to be certain within four months, did indeed occur, it is true, but 19 years later and in circumstances that could not have been more different! And Treves himself was not very far away from the day when, having been illegally stripped of his parliamentary prerogatives and made a target for insults and threats, close to arrest and with a certain guilty verdict hanging over his head, he chose the route of exile and, having spent seven years as de facto leader – if not in name – of the anti-fascist struggle abroad, lived out his life in Paris tirelessly fighting for an ideal. How can we explain such blindness in a man of such profound intelligence, with such an accomplished political career, such an experienced, critical mind? We shall shortly

find the same lack of farsightedness, albeit in a slightly different form, in Croce. He was not a technical politician, and such an erroneous assessment of the reality of the time can be explained far more easily in him than in Treves. And it seems still odder and more instructive to find such blindness even in Giolitti. On this matter, as historical research has now clearly shown, he underestimated the destructive nature of the liberal state (that is, the state that the *Risorgimento* had painfully brought into the world and which had lasted for 60 years, even though it swung between right and left) in fascist hands and wrongly thought that fascism would adapt relatively easily to the normal practices of parliamentary politics, just as the socialists had moved, already in part and later still further, from the subversive stage to becoming supporters of legality. If we wish to avoid appealing to the intervention of supernatural powers (*quos Deus vult perdere dementat prius*),⁶ we can only surmise that a long period as a deputy had so habituated Treves to 'role playing' politics that it had made him incapable of conceiving of a different kind, had prevented him from understanding the fundamental change that fascism seizing power had wrought in political norms. The 'Fascist Revolution', that pompous phrase on which the Duce, the regime's dignitaries and the press prided themselves for more than 20 years, is simply hype if it claims to be understood as the violent destruction by armed uprising of a consolidated state of affairs, but it defines precisely a historical reality if it denotes a gradual obliteration of the principles and institutions of *Risorgimento* Italy and their replacement with principles and institutions that were not just different but antagonistic: obliteration and replacement that first affected the content, leaving the form unchanged, rather as a piece of furniture being eaten by termites appears intact even as it is about to crumble into dust, and then they affected the form . . . perhaps with the sole exception of the institution of the monarchy, though we do not know whether the man who personified it was aware that he was now reduced to being just an empty name.

Most politicians, who had pursued their career in a completely different environment, did not notice in the slightest this radical change in the basic elements of life and the political struggle in Italy (which is only one aspect of the rupture caused by the 1914–18 war in the continuity of the historical process, with the result that it is from 2 August 1914, rather than 20 September 1792, that we can say 'a new history begins'). Giolitti eventually realized his mistake and publicly acknowledged it. I imagine the same thing must have happened to Treves, whose subtle, lucid intelligence could not have continued to misread reality. But I have to confess regretfully that, although my admiration for his great spirit, firm faith in the future, and coherent action never wavered, I did not ever have the opportunity to follow at close quarters the activities he went on to pursue, in Italy till late October 1926 then in Paris up to his death on 11 June 1933. And so my contacts with him were limited to an hour's conversation. But the memory has remained alive and I am delighted I was able to meet, even for a brief time, a man who deserves to be remembered.

For me going to see Croce and conversing with him was a treat, and I savoured the pleasure in advance. I almost forgot the particular, clearly defined mission I had been given as I made my way towards the senate, where he had agreed to meet me on the morning of the very day the vote was due to be cast in the afternoon on Mussolini's declarations: it was 25 or 26 June (my uncertainty about the date is due to laziness, which stops me going to look up the senate records in order to make sure that the discussion that started on the 24th really did go on beyond the following day). The government's fate depended on that vote, but as an unavoidable and fatal consequence, so did the fate of Italy. I still cherished the hope that the senate would vote against, especially if the undecided group (who were even more numerous than they usually were in similar circumstances insofar as the senate, because of its composition and the origin of many of its members, was a typically moderate body where both resolute supporters and determined opponents of fascism were few and far between) had allowed themselves to be swayed by the group of which Croce in fact was one of the most eminent members, a group that stood out from the pallid flock because of a certain tendency to reason with their heads. Granted, I knew that Croce had not been opposed to the fascist movement when it started out, and that he had agreed both with inviting Mussolini to form a government and with that government's initial measures. Indeed we do well to remember that it was not composed solely of fascists and nationalists, but looked vaguely like a coalition even if it was, in the majority and above all in spirit, *inequivocabilmente* fascist (I really do have to use that pompous adverb for the first time in my life, the adverb that was so often at that period thrown in the faces of sceptics, as was the adjective it is derived from, whose invention Panzini-Schiaffini-Migliorini attributes, rightly or wrongly, to Mussolini himself). It seemed quite likely that this, shall we say, benevolent expectation had been somewhat ruffled by Matteotti's assassination, even though Croce himself had made no public statement about the murder (nor indeed did he mention it, even later, as one of his reasons for going over to the opposition). In short my curiosity – I should rather say my thirst to learn his view – was extreme.

...

Although three years had now passed since our last encounter, Croce apparently still had the same warm feelings towards me, for he welcomed me with an affability that was full of consideration. Sitting on the edge of a divan in one of the little reception rooms in the Palazzo Madama, with one of his excessively short, slim legs stretched out and the other bent under it so as to support his somewhat protruding belly (this was Cavour's habitual posture, but I am sure that Croce had no thought of imitating him . . .), he readied himself to listen to what I had to say to him. But from the very first words his reply sounded bitterly disappointed. 'We had a lengthy discussion in our group as to the attitude we should adopt to Mussolini's declarations,' he said, 'and we decided to give him our vote of confidence. But we are talking about conditional confidence. In the agenda we have drawn up it is explicitly stated that the senate expects the government to restore legality and justice, as indeed Mussolini promised in his speech. In this way we hold him captive, since we are ready to withdraw our confidence if he does not keep his word. You see, fascism

was a good thing at first, now it has turned into a bad thing and it has to go. But it needs to go without upheavals, at the right moment; and we can choose that moment insofar as Mussolini's hold on power depends on our goodwill.'

I could scarcely believe my ears. My indignation was such that I forgot all the restraint I owed to respect and my admiration. Pointing accusingly at him and in a voice distorted by emotion, I allowed myself to launch into a lengthy diatribe: 'How is it possible for you not to realize that your behaviour is simply sophistry and naivety? Fascism a good thing? Are violence, purges, beatings, fires, murders a good thing? Is it a good thing that protected illegality should continue after Mussolini's gaining power handed him not only the opportunity but the duty to get rid of it? And if it was a good thing, why should it now be bad? Because of Matteotti's murder? But that act is no different from the previous murders, except that the victim was a deputy and that he was kidnapped in broad daylight: no different from Don Minzoni's, for instance. The truth is quite different. The truth is that you, Croce, and many others with you, enthusiastically applauded the coming of fascism while glossing over the moral lapses, under cover of a rather hastily adopted "historicism", because you saw him as an antidote to the victory of communism that you so feared, because, given the failure of the state which you vainly called on to intervene, he defended the interests of the *"benpensanti"*, that is to say the well-off. When the history of the years 1919–21 comes to be written, it will be realized that in Italy a truly revolutionary period never existed; it will be realized that, apart from the explicable infatuation of a few enthusiasts and the violent episodes that were equally explicable though unjustifiable, and were simply a spontaneous reaction after a long period when the "labouring masses" were deprived of their rights and subject to hard military discipline that was often irrational and arbitrary; apart from that, the strikes and disturbances had economic causes, and the demand for increased wages was equivalent to – or rather much lower than – the normal rise in employer profit; without mentioning the fact that the strikes and disturbances were already dying down and on the point of completely stopping when the fascist violence erupted and was able to boast quite freely of its own victory over a non-existent enemy. I did not experience that blind panic that tried to make us believe Italy was soon likely to become a strictly conforming bolshevik state, but I saw it spreading around me, even into my own family. Even my father, who is a stranger to politics and keeps it at arm's length, and had in fact gone over from favouring the liberal right to a socialist-leaning left, did not fight against fascism; he was very sad to see me writing for a frankly anti-fascist paper and was deeply affected when I told him, just before the Rome local elections in the autumn of 1921, that I intended not to vote for the so-called Union, a coalition of all the bourgeois parties from moderate clericals to radicals of masonic hue.

...

'And you, Croce, a big landowner, a critic of marxism and supporter of economic liberalism, a theoretician of liberty who's not concerned about how those who should enjoy it manage to survive, the defender of a city council in Naples composed of a right-wing coalition that prophetically called itself "*Fascio dell'Ordine*",⁷ you were afraid as well, and fear made you abandon your normal critical sharpness and give credence to the myth of an impending bolshevik revolution. You jumped on the

bandwagon of the nationalists' open pro-fascism, and flirted with them more than once. You didn't think about the fact that, once it was open, the door to illegality and violence couldn't be closed again. And now that the fear is past and you're conscious of where the real danger was likely to come from, now you come to me and say a senate vote in favour will tie Mussolini's hands, make him captive, that it will be you, the senate, who'll choose the most appropriate moment to send him back home! How can anyone be so naïve? You don't realize then that by your vote you're handing Mussolini the breathing space he needs to take back control of the country just as he's on the brink of losing it, and to reorganize his party, which is in the process of splitting into fragments? In the summer holiday period, when there's no parliament looking over his shoulder, he'll have all the time in the world to promulgate any decrees he wants to tie the opposition's hands and prepare the ground for a legalized dictatorship. As long as he's afraid the king will get the senate's support for sacking him without offending against the constitution, he won't dare lean too hard on the king; but if the day comes when he can finally rely on your vote of confidence, who will stop him then from putting pressure on the king? You fancy you can hold him captive, control and influence his future behaviour. But how will you do it? If he doesn't stick to his promises (and it's odds on he won't), do you really think you're brave enough to summon him to an extraordinary session and denounce his policies or actually bring a charge against him? It would be an act of revolution – a *de facto* one even if the words were not – and I don't know how many of you would feel prepared for that; because normally the senators are more inclined to want a quiet life. Whether or not you're aware of it, by your vote of confidence you're wasting the last card that might be used by the state's constitutional bodies, you're throwing away the last chance to bring back, not just in words but in fact, the justice and freedom the fascists have massacred and will go on massacring in the future thanks to the complicity that history at a later date will find it hard to forgive you for.'

*I argued with the Emperor:
Of course it was in a dream
For ill would befall the knave awake
Who so rashly spoke to kings.*

That wicked quatrain by Heine, from his poem *Germany*,⁸ applies most appositely to my situation since, as the reader *emunctae naris*⁹ will have understood, not a single word was uttered of the proud reprimand here transcribed; I pondered it in my heart as I returned home – maybe with a few differences in the words used, but essentially the same. Of course it was the intimidation felt by an admirer that initially stopped me speaking out, but in addition, as I very well remember, the precise feeling I had then that speaking out would have been absolutely pointless, and that Croce, a sublime mind in the domain of theoretical thought, was not up to much, if anything, on the practical level of politics. The fact that he later realized this (he must have realized almost at once what a mistake he had made, if not what its deep causes were) does honour to his intelligence; it does honour to his honesty that he acknowledged it simply, in few words but plain ones, which, if I am not mistaken, belong

to the final period of his life: 'fascism, which, to tell the truth, I considered, *with a certain lack of foresight* (the italics are mine), a post-war phenomenon, with the addition of some features of juvenile patriotic reaction . . . would have evaporated without doing any damage, and even leaving behind it some positive aspects. I did not seriously think Italy could see its freedom snatched away, which had cost it so much effort and spilt so much blood, and which from my generation onwards we thought of as a permanent gain. Nevertheless the improbable happened.' If the man's greatness did not tinge with irreverence any comparison with the old woman in the proverb, I would want to cry, as Jan Hus did at the stake: *Sancta simplicitas!*¹⁰ I do not know whether history will in the end be able to absolve Croce from the responsibility he indisputably bore, which the calibre of his mind and moral conscience make still greater, for having helped shore up the fascist dictatorship just at the very moment when he was being offered a unique opportunity to help overthrow it. But if it is true that every error, even the gravest, is redeemed by good actions subsequently performed in compensation, then it must be said that there was no greater or more complete redemption than his: for 20 years he regularly defended those principles that fascism had denied both in theory and in practice; a lone voice, his voice, from a 'legal' opponent at a time when, for others, the only paths open for non-compliance were either silence or rebellion; one voice that also required, as well as courage, a certain measure of cunning. He magnificently proved that he possessed both those qualities throughout the difficult struggle he carried on, and for that he deserves eternal recognition, not only from Italians but from all those throughout the world who still believe in the ideal. May I add that I do not find the political action he pursued after the Liberation equally praiseworthy – in its execution if not its intention. But that is another matter. In the official tributes to Croce his early weakness, which nevertheless was so fully and gloriously redeemed, is not mentioned; a silence that I believe not only is unjustified but diminishes the value of the man to whom the tribute is being paid (granted, in much praise of St Peter the episode of the cock is not referred to). Because making a mistake and managing or wishing to correct it is even more praiseworthy than not making any mistakes at all.

I could stop there. But I cannot resist the temptation to give myself the pleasure, selfishly ignoring readers' interests perhaps, of conjuring up yet again the fascinating conversation that followed, in order to make up for the disappointment I had brutally suffered in the political domain. For when I realized that in that area there was nothing to be hoped for, I turned our conversation, not without a certain skill, towards cultural topics: I knew quite well that Croce would not remain deaf to that sort of appeal. And indeed we talked a bit about every subject; or more precisely he talked while I played the part of the character in classical theatre who is there only as a foil to the leading man. That was the true Croce. What a continuous succession of fireworks consisting of juicy explanatory glosses, original and perspicacious observations, *recherché* quotations, turns of phrase that were both side-splitting and profound! I felt I was present at the birth of a series of *Apostillae* in Criticism; and indeed that was what was in fact happening, because for Croce talking and writing were merely two aspects of a single identical activity. I could recount one after another the things that were said then, and which more than 40 not uneventful years have not effaced from my memory. And I think I still see his face, so expressionless

in repose, light up in a loud burst of laughter that extended from his eyes to his mouth, his cheeks, his forehead in a surge full of inexhaustible health and intellectual vigour. I even dared to tease him a little, saying it was basically his fault that young people turned their backs on studying and concentrated only on general problems, since he was the one who had started to make fun of the great learned masters of the positivist period, the D'Anconas, the Rajnas, the D'Ovidios. 'But', he replied (and indeed he had already done so on other occasions), 'I said that so that they would study more, not less.' 'That's true,' I said, 'but that's possible for you who are equally at ease in the situation of scholar and that of theoretician, but that did not mean those youngsters could in your name announce that there was no longer any need to study.' Who can say how at that stage the conversation turned to Gentile? There was already open disagreement between those two thinkers (much nonsense has been talked about the reasons for it), who for so long had been united in a 'Nibelungian friendship', but the disagreement was not yet aggravated by politics as it later was (but a shocked Croce was already criticizing Gentile for formally joining the fascist party claiming that he was the only one who could represent true liberalism); and the hurtful allusions to what he labelled 'a Dominican theologian's mentality' caused both hilarity and melancholy. And finally, as a savoury to end that deliciously witty feast, we talked about religion and mortality (no less!). He quoted to me Heine's words (which I did not know and have not turned up, but it is a fair bet that Croce included them in one of his publications) about the 'fine surprise' that doubtless our Lord has in store for us when we die. And on that note I left, sunk in a mixture of disappointment and satisfaction, and also edification.

I can say that was the last contact I had with Croce. My studies were too remote from his to hold any possible interest for him. If I had lived in the same city our personal relationship would probably have continued; but after 1917 I always lived outside Naples and despite his benevolent availability to the great as well as the humble, I did not feel able to take up his time with correspondence. From the many years that followed our June interview I think I still have only two or three postcards from him and the memory of a chance meeting in February 1933 in the Vatican library, from which there ensued a four-handed conversation with Alcide De Gasperi, then in charge of recording the books on cards, and the learned, energetic librarian Maria Ortiz, head of the Naples National Library then the Rome university library, one of the most faithful of Croce's followers. I related all this in a daily paper when De Gasperi died. It was probably quite wrong of me not to contact Croce after the Liberation, especially as I think I had not by any means slipped out of his infallible memory.

Nowadays it is fashionable to speak ill of Croce and to think that already he is showing his age and has been overtaken by the most recent developments in philosophical, historical and aesthetic thought. On the subject of this reaction of rejection he is today suffering I am very ill informed, and even if I were more knowledgeable I would not dare pass an opinion on things I am completely or fairly unfamiliar with. But I cannot forget, and no one should, that for 50 years he was the pivot around which the whole Italian intellectual firmament revolved, and that his disappearance left a great gap behind him. The uproar both his critics and his admirers are still making around his name ably demonstrates that this gap has not yet been filled by

someone carrying on his work or a successor who can replace him. And that truly is a sign; far more than knowing that my experience of Croce the politician gave me much less satisfaction than that other one, the great Croce.

5

I had one final stop to make on my political pilgrimage, an interview with Sforza. In his case too, as for Treves, I had neglected to arm myself with an introduction but he at once agreed to see me, even though I was more or less certain my name was completely unknown to him. The meeting took place in the senate immediately following my visit to Croce. Sforza was in the prime of life at 52, and anyone seeing him for the first time was struck at once by the ease and bearing of his physique, the sober, distinguished elegance of his dress, the courtesy of his manner in which condescension and detachment were cleverly mingled. In him there were two personalities, side by side but not completely fused, that were distinct and even diametrically opposed: on one hand there was the diplomat adorned with his unmissable aristocratic title, with the many qualities and still more faults typical of that social and professional class, which are finally summed up in what is normally called snobbery; and on the other hand the scholarly intellectual, serious and energetic, brave and determined, perfectly trained for the extremely responsible positions he occupied and for others as well, higher still, that he did not. His noble origins were genuine, even if they were not as elevated as was often thought and as he gave people to believe without, however, explicitly confirming it. To those who pressed him in order to discover whether he really was descended from the dukes of Milan he replied with a nonchalant air: 'Oh no . . . we are only descended from a bastard of Francesco's, the first duke' (which was absolutely true: the said bastard, Sforza Secondo, was the origin of the branch of the Sforzas of Borgonovo). In Italy the 'polite' custom of extending to the younger sons titles that should only have come to the eldest populated our country with a multitude of barons, counts, marquesses, dukes and princes to the astonishment of the Anglo-Saxons and the confusion of the Americans. Indeed as former colonists, these latter know the mother-country's aristocracy by reputation only and cannot imagine a count or marquess without his crown or his ermine robes, and unless he is lord of a vast estate and sits as of right in the supreme councils of his land; so much so that they are utterly confused when they see that the men coming over from Italy in large numbers are slightly less well turned out. I do not know whether Giovanni Sforza could genuinely claim the title of count (the estate had long ago disappeared and the family was comfortably off but not rich), but, as we have seen, he lived up to his coat of arms, not on the battlefield or in politics but in eminent scholarly books. His son Carlo was his second child. The story is told that Nitti, who, immediately the opportunity arose to annoy someone, never let it pass, had him in his ministry as an under-secretary and had the title 'count' before his name removed from the official list of the members of the government and replaced with '*dei conti [Sforza]*'.¹¹ Another element of this so to speak affected aspect of his personality was that irrepressible and I think unconscious vanity that made him constantly recall, not without sometimes obliging his inter-

locutor to turn away to hide an irresistible smile, his successes in the recent or distant past, giving them all equal importance of course, whether they were won at international gatherings, in salons or in bed. But all that was presented with such candour and such likeable spontaneity that the only people who could be shocked by it were those who did not know that under that frivolity there lay concealed one of the sharpest and most powerful minds contemporary international politics had ever known. Which reminds us of another great statesman, Luigi Luzzatti, who suffered from the same childish defect (but different in style), on the subject of which someone said (but I also vaguely remember reading the same remark about others) he could have been proud but he was happy to be simply vain.

...

I realized immediately how lively, sure and realistic Sforza's political flair could be when he made a rapid assessment of the situation and a forecast for the near future; in fact both were included in a book of memoirs written 20 or so years later, and the fact that they coincide for the most part with my own memories is a guarantee – in both senses – of their accuracy and authenticity. The right moment to overthrow the government under the impulse of popular indignation was now past and there was no possibility of going back; the senate vote, which he predicted would be in favour, and the king's inertia strengthened Mussolini's position and left him all the time he needed to disarm the little opposition that was still holding out and deal with the 'moral question' without any damage to himself. We were going back to square one, but with the advantage for Mussolini of having discovered how far he could go without taking any risks, and the drawback for the parliamentary opposition that it was paralysed by the prior matter of the Aventine. Nevertheless this was no reason to abandon the fight, but the battle was going to be long and hard. Then we talked about the senate vote, which was imminent. Some speakers were still on the list to address the house, among them himself: 'I've been warned,' he said, 'that I was taking a risk if I spoke. And that's why I'm going to speak.' In the slightly contemptuous emphasis he gave to the sentence with the intention of producing an effect there was something that sounded almost like boasting. But it was not so, and he proved it by the fact that he did speak and his speech was the most severe accusation that had ever been levelled at Mussolini in parliament. Threats were issued forthwith to shut him up, as he recounted with many additional details in his memoirs. Sforza did not lack courage, that is a fact, and he proved it on several occasions.

...

Between late 1924 and the following year I had various opportunities to talk to Sforza at the National Union. After its dissolution I lost touch with him. Shortly afterwards the advent of unbridled dictatorship indicated to him that he should go and seek refuge abroad, and he lived for a few years in Belgium, his wife's home country, until the Nazi invasion in May 1940 forced him to cross the ocean. In the course of that long painful exile he never stopped fighting for the noble cause, without letting himself be discouraged by the prospect that the struggle could not expect success in the short term. The effectiveness of his campaign is chiefly explained by the originality with which he waged it: rather than stressing the guilt of fascism and its leader, a guilt that was only too obvious, he attempted to render them both ridicu-

lous in the eyes of world opinion by focusing on and mockingly satirizing the clumsiness, presumptuous ignorance, comic exhibitionism and fundamental vulgarity, which had the effect of turning the *Duce* and his hordes into objects of derision, even more than the cause of indignation. The weapon of ridicule, as we know, is terrifyingly effective if it is wielded by an expert hand, and Sforza was a past master in this area. I am sure that Mussolini's bile was aroused more by his wounding mockery than the violent invective hurled at him by other exiles. And it is even likely that on this precise attitude the self-sufficiency of the aristocrat who deigned to lower himself to quarrel face-to-face with the *parvenu* quietly exerted a certain influence. But it should also be recognized that this was a good opportunity – if such a thing exists – to see the remains of that aristocratic arrogance used so appropriately.

I also visited or met Sforza several times in the USA during the war, when the memory of Matteotti, which was always present in spite of everything, had faded and other concerns weighed upon us. He had not changed: his little faults had remained the same as ever, his enormous virtues, and first among them his courage, seemed heightened and intensified by the long struggle. I would so much have liked to be with him when he was allowed to return, after the Allies had taken continental Italy. And I think he would willingly have taken me with him if it had been possible.

After the Liberation during the years when, as foreign minister, he focused with all a young man's energy on restoring the reputation of Italy abroad, giving our country back the esteem that had been withdrawn – because of the 20 years of *malgoverno* even more than the military defeat – working, with remarkable clear-sightedness, for a complete transformation in international relations and laying the foundations for a federation of European nations, during those years I saw him only once, I think, and then fleetingly. I have the defect, among others, of dropping friends when they are on the way up. But I should have contacted him during his last long illness, and I reproach myself for not doing so. It is only out of selfishness that I am sometimes glad the last memory I have of him is not of a sick man slowly fading away but of a man energetically committed to the struggle for his country and the ideals of justice and liberty.

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A justice and liberty that two of my interviewees were lucky enough to see triumph before they died at a ripe old age, in the homeland that honoured them during their lives and after their deaths. The other two passed away in shadow and exile, Amendola at 44 years of age, Treves at 64, in the darkest hours, without being sure that their sacrifice had not been made in vain. They were all equally deserving of esteem; but perhaps the dearest in our affectionate memory are those for whom our admiration and gratitude are tinged with sadness.

Giorgio Levi Della Vida

Translated from the Italian by Thierry Loisel

Translated from the French by Jean Burrell

Notes

1. It should be noted that the same advice, in the name of continuity of the domestic opposition, was given by the then clandestine Communist Party. A philosophical analysis of the problem of freedom in the face of coercion can be found in an article by Imre Toth: “. . . car comme disait Philolaos le Pythagoricien . . .”. *Philosophie, géométrie et liberté*, *Diogène* 182, 1998, which approaches it from another fascist event, the dissolution of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei in 1939.
2. Using the formal ‘you’ (‘Lei’ in Italian) (translator’s note).
3. Literally ‘black souls’ (translator’s note).
4. ‘Someone who praises the past’ (Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 173) (translator’s note).
5. Members of violent fascist gangs (*squadre*) (translator’s note).
6. ‘Whom God wishes to ruin he first makes mad’ (originally attributed to Euripides) (translator’s note).
7. *Fascio* was the usual name for a political faction: ‘the Party of Order’ (translator’s note).
8. H. Heine, *Deutschland, ein Wintermärchen*, XVII (free translation).
9. ‘With a discriminating nose’ (translator’s note).
10. The words that the Czech reformer, who was condemned to be burnt at the stake for heresy in Constanz on 6 July 1415, is supposed to have spoken when an old woman came up to add her few sticks in exchange for an indulgence (translator’s note).
11. A handle reserved for aristocrats who do not have a title (translator’s note).