



ITALY IN RUINS

by

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An account of some
of the troubles
facing the Italian
peasant.

IF, IN these pages, I appear sympathetic towards the Italians, it is not because I approve of Italy's Fascist war, nor because I love Italy in any way. It is because I spent last year in Italy with the N.Z. Artillery, and saw something of the *real* Italian people, the peasant people. In pre-Fascist times, almost half the Italian people were employed in agriculture. In spite of fascism and war, both of which caused vast upheavals, Italy is still agricultural and the peasant is the backbone of the country.

To some people the word "Italy" conjures up cultural associations—memories of painting, music, architecture, sculpture, literature, science. To me it means (apart from the war) a country of villages and peasants, of impoverished and unfortunate people. Living with them at times, I found them simple, ignorant people who did not understand the war and did not wish it. They were at the mercy of forces beyond their control.

Now, and in the post-war years, these forces will be mainly economic. I mean that the Italian is not so much in need of political liberty as of something to eat, some means of livelihood. The following is a discussion of the forces at work, and of the future prospects for Italy.

Feudalism

The first fact about Italy is that she is a nation overpopulated and short of raw materials. The country which we passed

through in central and southern Italy could not be called rich. It is too mountainous. Official estimates class about one-third of the land as either absolutely sterile or extremely poor. Even in normal times Italy cannot produce enough food for her population, and must import wheat, maize, and meat.

The second important fact about Italy's economics is that this land, mediocre though it is, is not owned by the peasants. Figures for pre-Fascist times (there has been no great agrarian revolution yet) show that 24,000 large landed proprietors owned among them about one-third of Italian land. Another third was owned by about 200,000 middling proprietors. The remaining third was divided among several millions of small proprietors, possessing very small portions of land—portions by no means large enough to make a living for themselves and their families. These were the people we lived amongst. They did all the work and suffered all the injustice.

The differences in income under such a system are astounding. In an article in *Kovero* of September 25, 1944, the writer estimates the income of the Marquis of a "masseria" 940 acres in size as £20,000 a year. About 150 girls working as casual labourers would get not more than 2s. a day at pre-war rates. Nine workmen employed permanently would get not more than 30s. a week. The great majority of these people would be