

NEW ITALY

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New Italy by Helen Zimmern & Antonio Agresti

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HELEN ZIMMERN & ANTONIO AGRESTI

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BY
HELEN ZIMMERN
AND
ANTONIO AGRESTI



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AUTHORS' NOTE

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FOREWORD

WHILE this volume does not belong to that class of more or less romantic, more or less inaccurate publication compiled by travelers who have paid a flying visit to Italy, neither does it claim to be a profound and exhaustive treatise on Italy as she is to-day and as she promises to become in the near future. The authors aim at striking a happy medium between the shallowness which touches upon everything with a facility as comprehensive as it is ignorant, and the social science which constructs elaborate systems and theories based upon the evidence of statistics and historical documents—a type of work which naturally appeals only to the student.

New Italy is intended for the intelligent general public, and endeavors to give its readers an account of Italy as she was at the outbreak of the war, as she is to-day, as she is likely to be after the conclusion of peace—in short, a synthetic view, as complete, exact, and dispassionate as possible; hoping thus to supplement the old books on the subject. It must of necessity be a brief survey since it is but a summary for the general reader of many facts and events, but it endeavors to give as clear an outline as possible of the progress of Italy and of the characteristics and motives which led the nation as a whole to declare war upon Austria and Turkey, in order not only to realize her national aspirations,

but also to defend the rights and liberties of the peoples so brutally attacked and downtrodden by Germany and Austria.

The English love Italy, have always loved her indeed, ever since that far-away day when Chaucer visited her and returned to his native country fired with enthusiasm for what he called "this earthly Paradise" with its blue skies and flowery countryside. They have loved her alike in the golden days of the Renaissance and in the sad though glorious days of the Risorgimento; they have revered her artists and her exiled patriots, but they have too often loved her without understanding her.

Much, perhaps too much, has been written in England about Italy. She has inspired artists, poets, and writers alike, and we owe to her spell immortal works such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Pippa Passes*, *Griselda* in the *Canterbury Tales*, the fourth canto of *Childe Harold*, some of Spenser's poems and many of Swinburne's odes and sonnets, to give but a few examples culled at random from every age. But poets, statesmen, artists, and men of letters have all regarded Italy from a conventional point of view—one that has, it is true, changed to a certain extent with the times, but has never been quite in accordance with them, for Italy's glorious past seems to stand in the way of comprehension of her present. The English know Italy, but their Italy is partly a country which has never existed out of the pages of romance, partly one which ceased to exist about the middle of last century.

There are, of course, many books on Italy written by men who speak with authority, such as Bolton King and Okey, Trevelyan and Bagot, who depict

an Italy differing widely from that of the ordinary traveler, but these works generally deal with special historical periods or with the lives of certain illustrious men or with some form of art, and some of them are already out of date, so rapid has been the march of events in Italy of late years. Strange as it may seem, when we consider the wealth of literature dealing with Italy, she is still for the average Englishman and American the land of the Renaissance and the Risorgimento, the intervening and subsequent centuries being a blank, or, still worse, the country of the picturesque brigand and *lazzarone*, the mandoline-player and impassioned lover dear to the novelist, a description that would at most apply to the most backward districts of Southern Italy, which unfortunately supply the bulk of emigrants to Great Britain and America, and even here these conditions are rapidly becoming things of the past. Foreigners do not grasp the fact that the modern Italian, far from being a romanticist, is a positivist; not an excitable, emotional individual, but a reflective one, who has himself and his feelings well in hand. Machiavelli and Mazzini have helped to shape him, and he has assimilated both the clear-sighted astuteness of the former and the generous, warm-hearted idealism of the latter.

Any one who has made a thorough study of modern Italy—admittedly a most difficult task for the foreigner even with the best will in the world—must have realized that a great change has come over her people since she became really united, and more especially during the last twenty years. All the conditions of the country—industry, trade, means of communication, finance, and education—

have altered almost beyond knowledge, while the character of the people has undergone a very marked process of evolution. Italians themselves have been amazed at the revelation of latent force in the nation and at its unanimous display of will and energy. The nation, to its own surprise, has come to know itself for the first time. If the Italian has been taken by surprise, how much more the foreigner, who had hardly realized that Italy had emerged from her swaddling clothes, much less that she had come of age, and, while needing the friendship of the Great Powers, as all nations must ever need each other's good will, no longer required their guardianship, but could take her place amongst them as an equal.

It must be admitted that Italians are themselves largely to blame for these misconceptions. The Government has hitherto done but little to acquaint other countries with Italian industrial conditions, both actual and potential, whilst it is only of late years that Italian manufacturers have turned their attention seriously to foreign markets. Moreover they have attempted the conquest of these markets with inadequate means, especially when it is remembered that German commercial activity, backed as it was by Government support, both moral and financial, offered a stubborn resistance to every endeavor to oust it and hampered all Italian enterprise abroad.

However, when once the war is over, Italy hopes to improve the friendly relations existing between herself and her new allies and old friends in the realms of art, politics, and commerce alike. Now that she has, moreover, clearly shown the world that

she is no longer a minor, it is specially desirable that her friends should know her as she really is to-day, and it is hoped that the present volume may do something to bring about this better mutual comprehension.

When peace is restored to a world which has thrown off the yoke of German militarism at such awful cost, the nations now fighting side by side on land and sea must be ready to fight German commercial enterprise as well, and to this end they must so organize their respective markets as to further their commercial interests and make themselves independent of German wares. If they are to be successful in so doing, they must be able to form an accurate estimate of each other's conditions and abilities. This knowledge is more especially desirable in the case of Great Britain and Italy, each of whom is in a position to supply much that the other lacks. When Italy threw off the shackles of the Triple Alliance and joined the Entente, she proclaimed to the world that she intended to be true to her own ideals and to be no party to schemes of aggression and oppression; and since the commercial activity of a nation is closely bound up with its history and foreign policy, this attitude of hers must have important consequences in time of peace. Hence it is hoped that this book may help these two great nations to work together in the future to their mutual advantage, and thus to cement yet more firmly that ancient friendship of which their alliance in the great struggle of civilization against barbarism is but the natural and logical outcome.