THE STORY-TELLER'S HANDBOOK

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Preface

The Story-Teller, the Teacher and the Mother who entertain their children with stories during these times, have often come across the difficulty of answering the desires of their little public for something new, something that has to do with the great events of the present, rather than with the fanciful world of fairies and of distant ages. The war is full of incidents, romantic and heroic, which well bear repeating; but, so far, the only documents of such deeds have been the newspapers, and it is practically impossible for a busy person to follow and clip from such swiftly passing things.

Our purpose in gathering and presenting to the Story-Teller, the Teacher and the Mother these few well selected stories of adventure and courage was to place in their hands a source from which they could draw when their children ask. By grouping the stories under different chapters, we have also pointed out the moral to which the stories lend themselves, if such a moral is sought.

The tales are taken from the history of the Italian war—the war that is the most romantic of all wars fought by allies. Italy went to war for an ideal; was led by her King and her Poet; fought in the clouds of the Alps in a most fantastic setting of snows, rocks and forests; won in a blaze of glory. All of the elements of old time romance are here to be found, commingled with the ever present scenes of modern warfare: and all the stories are authentic.

THE EDITORS.
The place—somewhere in Italy within the war zone not far from the roar and the smoke of battle. The representatives of the Italian armies are lined up on the wide expanse of a plain whose southern outskirts dip down to a large river, while towards the north it abuts in the last vine-covered spurs of the majestic Alps.

The King of Italy is present. He is surrounded by a throng of officers, and all are waiting for the adjutant-general of the staff to call loudly the names of the heroes who by their valor added to the lustre and glory of their beloved country. It is proper and fitting for so impressive, so soul-elating a ceremony to take place on the Fourth of July, the national holiday of the great republic whose representatives are worthy witnesses of the solemn proceeding. They come from the land of the brave and appreciate patriotic virtues.

The hero whose name is called deliberately detaches himself from the ranks, strides smartly but without swagger to the reviewing stand, receives the token of his gallantry, proud of being the cynosure of so many eyes—Italian, American, French, British eyes—all agleam with joy and the friendly spirit of emulation.

At every new name of the roll call of honor the bands strike up a lofty tune, the plaudit of martial muses, or rather does it not sound like the approval of the heroes of the races expressed through the harmonious tunes of the band?

Let us approach the stand as near as the sentries allow us and hear the reasons for the awards—gold, silver, bronze medals.

Carlinno Pasquale is called. There he comes. He is an infantryman—a fusileer they call them in Italy—a simply private. On the Col dell’Orso, in the famous Mount Grappa sector of the front, the lieutenant of his company fell severely wounded while trying to reconnoiter the ground in No-man’s land, that is, in the zone dividing the lines and trenches occupied by the
opposing armies, protected by a system of barbed-wire fencing and other similar contrivances.

Nobody is supposed to enter No-man's land, the odds are always frightful. Only when the big guns have battered and pulverized the hostile trenches, then only, when going over the top, are the stretches of No-man's land crossed in a hurry by the assaulting infantrymen. This private, Pasquale Carlino, in order to save the life of his lieutenant, took ninety chances out of a hundred of getting shot and succeeded in carrying back on his shoulders his superior officer, severely wounded but with a chance of recovery.

Salvatore Reina—another name is called. It is not a private this time, but a major and his name is Salvatore Reina. The reason for pinning a silver medal on his manly breast is that on the 15th of June, 1918, when the Italians had their first glorious revenge for the Caporetto reverse, he displayed such admirable energy and activity, sustained by such an unbounded enthusiasm, that to him goes the chief credit for the fact that that section of the Italian line entrusted to his battalion resisted the assault of an enemy vastly superior in number.

Emilio Cattaneo—The adjutant-general shouts another name. Another warrior steps forth to be decorated. It is a private again, a mine-thrower by the name of Emilio Cattaneo, who at the defence of Monte Salton, displayed such unwonted courage as to bewilder even the enemy, and strengthen magnificently the morale of his companions.

Enthusiasm

When we read the government's official reports stating very succinctly the reasons why military rewards were granted in various instances for heroism displayed during the war, we very often find enthusiasm mentioned as a main cause of it.

This emotion seems to be the mainspring that urges the man on in the thick of the fray, that causes him to distinguish himself for valor or endurance or initiative. It is this noble elation of feeling that makes him in an unaccountable way a natural
leader of men, otherwise left hopelessly to themselves. It is this super-refined sense of duty that supplies him with a surplus of energy when in ordinary men this quality is exhausted and they need heartening from an outside source.

This precious gift, not entirely innate, can be developed by education.

While some natures of nobler mould have it by right of birth, in most people it is latent and, alas, very often crushed by rough contact with the world. It deserves to be tenderly nursed and carefully cultivated in the young.

Among the thousands of cases that we might mention of noble deeds prompted by enthusiasm in the Italian armies, we shall content ourselves with citing only a few taken at random from a long list.

Giovanni De Giuli, lieutenant in an infantry regiment stationed in the trenches of Monte Pertica, was awarded the silver medal on the 15th of June, 1918, during the tremendous battle of the Piave, on account of a display of enthusiasm that aroused new energies in a little group of men, sole survivors of an entire battalion. He managed to rally them and launch such a brilliant counter attack that he brought the furious enemy drive to a standstill.

Enthusiasm, as we have said, is contagious. The sparks of enthusiasm in Lieutenant De Giuli set afire the souls of his soldiers and what they had failed to do when in greater numbers, they succeeded in achieving when reduced to a few.

On Monte Oro, Giovanni Santorelli, a corporal in a sappers company, was decorated with a silver medal because with magnificent enthusiasm, as the report says, inciting his men by word and example, he flung himself three times in succession against the surging enemy and did not desist until he fell severely wounded.

Giuseppe Casati—Let us take the case of a simple private, showing the elating effects of enthusiasm in an uneducated sol-
dier. On the Colle del Miglio, on June 24th, 1918, Private Giuseppe Casati sustained, by his unbounded enthusiasm, during five fierce attacks on an Austrian column was always the first to jump onward, dealing terrible blows to the enemy and encouraging at the same time his companions to jump with him into trenches strongly manned by death-dealing fusileers.

Euphynia is responsible for many another deed of bravery, intrepidity and abnegation among Italian soldiers, according to statements of the military authority, scrupulously accurate in pointing out the reason for according a reward.

**Sense of Duty**

If enthusiasm is the foremost cause urging man to achieve deeds of valor, abnegation, and bravery, another essential moral quality altogether necessary, although not as conspicuous, is the sense of duty, the capacity to obey orders. Oftentimes it is a substitute for enthusiasm.

When the sense of duty is so keen, so well rooted as to outstay any consideration of self-protection, when impending danger calls out the natural feelings of self-preservation, yet in the agony of the moral struggle the idea of duty comes out uppermost, then the man who won this moral fight has become a hero. He is twice a hero, for he is the winner over his own instinct for self-preservation and the doer of glorious actions. He fights with himself first, then with the enemy.

**Antonio Leone**—Habit of discipline and natural fortitude are needed to uphold the sense of duty in conflict with adverse circumstances. These are virtues that most of all help to win wars. Here is a shining example of a keen sense of duty afforded by Corporal Antonio Leone, a bugler in the Alpine corps.

The war, when waged in mountainous regions, requires a different distribution of forces than it does in a flat country. It stands to reason that, while a column of, say, three thousand men may occupy a very reduced space in a meadow, when distributed in a broken mountainous region they are likely to spread wide apart with some units losing sight of and immediate
contact with others. Then the signal corps is important in keep-
ing the three thousand men in connection, but buglers perform a
paramount service. The clear sound of the clarion carries the
orders far down into the valley where the echoes of the can-
yons retransmit them into the lateral glens.

You can readily understand, therefore, that the duty of an
Alpine bugler is a peculiar one of no little significance and
requiring implicitly a stout heart, since to transmit orders he
has to choose a conspicuously eminent position from which he
must be able to see the commanding officers imparting orders.
Through him the commander directs the movements of the
troops in cohesion though separated by spurs, crags, mamelons,
and deviations of valleys. The bugler, we say, must needs
have a stout heart and powerful lungs and must be a first-
class man. As a matter of fact, he is selected with care and
made a corporal when intrusted with the important task of
signalling for a whole battalion.

The above named corporal, Antonio Leone, was awarded
the silver medal because during three hours he stayed in evi-
dence calmly signalling to the troops scattered in various glens,
ever losing self-control, not even when his assistant bugler
fell at his side hit by a fragment of shrapnel. He retired
only when ordered to leave. His departure was not hurried,
either, for he had on his shoulder the body of his wounded
companion. The path amidst the crags was difficult and bul-
lets were falling thick.

When man is properly taught to have duty always at the
helm of his moral conduct, he may sometimes reach such noble
heights as mix with enthusiasm and heroism.

More frequently in military strife than in the humdrum
of civil life the moral obligation of duty is likely to exact
heavy demands from men.

It is in a way the touchstone of the worth of the man,
and demands the cementing qualities of bravery and fortitude,
those virile qualities that constituted the ancient "virtus ro-
mana" that overran the world.
This virtue flared again in the breasts of the descendants of the ancient Romans during the present war. In fact, the highly developed sense of duty is responsible for most of the heroic actions achieved by the Italian soldiers.

Giuseppe Zanella, a corporal in the mountain artillery corps, stood by his gun unmindful of the terrific fire opened against his battery, unruffled by the jets of liquid fire, undeterred by the dreadful effects of the suffocating gases. Always alert and prompt to obey orders, when signalled to open fire he succeeded in silencing the enemy’s battery. Wounded in the arm, he had to be carried to the infirmary station. No sooner was he treated than he asked to join his battery again and continue the fight. A high sense of duty never deserted him, therefore his manly breast was decorated with the shining token of military virtue.

Hundreds of Italian warriors fighting high up in the fastness of the famous Mount Grappa, received silver medals for heroism displayed. Their names are legion, too numerous to be mentioned individually. Heroism was so in evidence everywhere as to give birth to the expression that heroism among Italian soldiers on the Grappa Mountain was endemic, enveloping the whole line of defense.

During the June battle of the Piave the obstinate Austrians made without interruption twenty-three drives on the Mount Grappa sector and all were repulsed. And please remember that the Italians were inferior in number of men and guns and ammunition. They were facing an enemy full of confidence in his superiority, an enemy that still went bragging of his previous successes from Caporetto to the Piave. Notwithstanding the odds, the Italians, guided by the sense of duty, fired by the love of their invaded country, made short work of the blatant, sneering, truculent enemy.

Francesco Trentini was awarded the silver medal for military valor because on June 15, 1918, between Montello and the Brenta River, where he was manning a gun with a handful of privates, he carried out without flinching the order received to occupy a peculiarly deadly spot, an easy target
inviting the enemy’s fire. Not only that, but, heedless of the bullets falling thick all around, he encouraged his men in the most commendable manner, exhibiting a calm demeanor throughout and keeping his men on the deadly spot by impassioned appeals to duty and love of country.

For the successful defense of the Col Moschin during the Austrian offensive of June, 1918, there was at one time urgent need to connect the telephone line on the summit of the mountain pass. Col Moschin is a mountain ridge on the lower section of the Alps along what was the Italo-Austrian line of battle.

Luigi Gentile—The work called for a man endowed with extreme devotion to duty, an heroic soul, the operation being of the most risky nature, the spot where the wires were to be connected being entirely exposed to the foe’s artillery and machine-guns.

And yet the man was found at the first appeal, Luigi Gentile, a private in the Signal Corps, who offered himself for the job, although he knew perfectly well that his chances of returning unscathed were practically nil. He went on with his stout heart and calm, clear head, knotted the dangling wires, then fell riddled with bullets. He was decorated for sacrifice displayed in the fulfilment of duty and for disregard of personal danger.

Individual Initiative

There can exist no spur to spirited action where there is not a well-marked individual will power. Individual initiative is nothing else but the external expression of the will power of the individual who, having clearly outlined the field for the exertion of his free will, sets himself to his duty.

So precious a quality, common among Americans, to which sense they owe the wonderful development of the New World, is also a pretty well marked characteristic of the Italian race and in many cases to a forceful degree. In fact, it worked for quite a bit of evil in former times, when Italy was hope-
less and divided into many petty states. Individual initiative was then so damagingly in evidence as to richly deserve the sardonic rebuke of Dante, the poet: "... e un Marcel diventa ogni villan che parteggiando viene," meaning, "Any ill-bred ruffian starting factious politics becomes a great general, a Marcellus."

And yet this individual ardor for starting something, when kept under discipline, when it has the good of the commonwealth for its aim, bears the choicest fruits of heroism. This moving spirit is responsible for many admirable achievements during the present war among the Italian troops, and as frequently in the rank and file of the privates as amongst the officers, thus demonstrating that it is a marked trait. We select at random the following examples.

**Ermanno Zanotti Bianco** was "bombardiere," bomb-thrower, by choice. He was continually performing individual deeds that marked him as a young fellow full of initiative and at the same time a dare-devil. Danger had a fascination for him. The cutting of the enemy’s intricate system of barbed wire fencing, the bombing by hand grenades of hostile trenches is so risky an errand for the attacking forces that it is left entirely to private and individual initiative.

Ermanno Zanotti Bianco never failed to respond when such feats of bravery and daring were requested. Once, after a reconnoitering excursion in the enemy’s lines, he came back with eleven prisoners caught by him single-handed.

On another occasion, being told that a squad of enemy troops were intent on placing a machine-gun in a spot, particularly dangerous to the Italians, he reached the place by stealth and by sheer moral force and rapidity in covering the enemy with his pistol, he made them prisoners. There were thirteen of them, and they were also compelled to carry along with them the machine-gun.

No doubt the heroic soldier was endowed with singular personal magnetism, a precious gift seldom bestowed on men by nature.
On the 14th of May, 1918, a fragment of a bursting bomb hit him when storming alone a trench in the foothills of the Grappa Mountains, and put an untimely but glorious end to a life that initiative in daring and brilliant deeds had made heroic.

Aposito—A fine example of bravery, to which a touch of cool-headedness gives a refreshing zest, is the case of a stretcher-bearer, Aposito by name, who, while attending to his duty, was nevertheless deeply concerned with the progress of a peculiarly hot encounter between two hostile sections of infantry, not far from the boggy banks of the Piave. The outcome of the encounter was dubious, the Italians were now receding, almost reeling under a more furious onslaught of the Croatians as wild as the hogs they herd. Then again they would surge like a powerful swelling wave and hurl themselves against the foe with telling force, then recede again as if their fury had spent itself entirely.

Our stretcher-bearer could stand it no longer. His blood yearned for the fray. Discipline and international rules forbade him, a Red Cross subaltern, to participate in the battle. Still the itching was becoming unendurable. He ran back until he met his superior officer, saluted and bluntly asked him permission to stop carrying wounded soldiers for a while, just to help along the boys and get into the thick of the melee.

Of course he did not want to take part in the battle as a Red Cross soldier, that would be taking advantage of the immunity to which a Red Cross man is entitled. That might do for an unscrupulous Austrian, not for a civilized Italian. He tore away the Red Cross sleeve-band, grabbed a rifle, a handful of cartridges, and sailed with glee into the fight, and got his silver medal, too. Gallantry was impulsive in him. When the worst was over, he calmly returned to his allotted task of carrying wounded companions to the field hospital.

Giovanni Pucci—A decidedly fine case of initiative was offered by Giovanni Pucci, barely eighteen, but already a corporal in a regiment of fusileers. The ebbing to and fro of the battle raging on the slopes of Montello had separated him
from his company. Trying to find his way back to his place, he noticed a few scattered soldiers inactive because no officer was in sight whom they could follow. Though very young and only a corporal, he undertook the task of grouping these scattered units, succeeded, and, setting a noble example of pluck showed himself their natural leader. Their new head charging with them, a scanty score of them at that, they completely routed a full company that was confronting them. Out of this company sixty-nine were taken prisoner, and the Italians were twenty-two headed by a mere corporal, a youngster, but a brave lad and well deserving the medal for distinguished service.

**Battista Sanna**—Here is a splendid case of individual initiative, to which quality the possessor added the rare virtues of bravery and fortitude combined.

Battista Sanna was a private in one of the infantry regiments located in Val Manara, there to make a stand against the surging waves of the enemy during their drive on the Mount Grappa sector in June, 1918.

The captain, subaltern officers and sergeants of his company had already gone the way the brave go during hard-fought battles. The company, left without a guiding head, was becoming unmanageable and undisciplined. It was on the verge of disruption. Battista Sanna, who certainly was an able man, besides being a very virile one, re-established order in the ranks, discipline and courage. The reformed company not only stood its ground, but held it for 48 hours, under the guidance of Private Sanna.

He did more. Nearby a machine-gun nest had ceased harassing the enemy, those manning the gun lying dead or wounded around the piece of artillery. Sanna took charge of that part of the firing as he did of the company’s rifle fire. He kept at it for 48 hours in succession, always alert, always encouraging his companions, who instinctively recognized him as their natural chief, until some reinforcements came and the enemy was definitely thrown back in confusion.

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Fortitude

Certain virtues seem to be more the common inheritance of women than of men, probably on account of the different duties, activities, and intercourses that exact from womankind more of certain virtues than they do from men. Therefore, we expect women to show fortitude rather than daring. From the man we expect both, of course, but daring appears to be more of a virile attribute.

Passive fortitude is naturally a moral inheritance of women, and yet the mother who teaches her baby how to control his feelings, how to bear physical pain, how to moderate his passions and appetites, how to subdue his will to authority, is building a solid base to the son’s character and cultivates the virtue of fortitude, the keystone virtue on which a nation stands firmly and nobly in times of stress.

This virtue is not heralded with clangor of clarions and trumpets, nor are for it the glaring headlines of newspapers or the thundering acclamations of the throng. It works in silence. It seems to gather strength in self-concentration rather than in outward expansion. In the darkest hours of anguish and fading hope, this virtue comes forth to the rescue, the only one with the real strength to save, for it implies an innate belief in the principle of an eternal justice. Without this basis human virtue cannot stand long the battering of adversity.

Fortitude the Italian women demonstrated in no mean degree.

Heroic Italian Womanhood

We doubt whether the feverish activity of the manly virtues on the battlefields is more to be admired or wondered at than the silent, passive heroism of women folk in deserted homes. What more distressing, more consuming than the persistent strain caused by the apprehension of an impending calamity?
From which spring of inexhaustible strength did the Italian women get their force of resistance? Not only moral strength, mind you, but also physical strength. Their allotted task in the daily fight for bread in the homes, in the factories, and especially on the farms in times of peace was far heavier than might be imagined by people prone to judge by American standards. It was heavy enough then to make them quite conspicuous examples of physical endurance. Since the holy war for democracy was started, the burden that fell on their shoulders assumed such tremendous proportions as to beggar description. You must not lose sight of the fact that the tilling of the soil and other rough field work in Italy is not done with machinery as is the case in America. It is all a muscle-aching, nerve-racking process, that which the male labor used to perform in the fields. In this most strenuous of agricultural tasks five million women replaced five million men four years ago and are still at the job that war necessity added to their usual field work, as well as to the usual household drudgery.

Moreover, they knit extra sweaters, caps, mittens, socks for their boys and husbands squatting in trenches cut, not in the soil of the plains or the rocks of the hilltops, but in the ice of the eternal glaciers high up in the Alpine range, above the clouds.

Furthermore, they sent their mite to the relief committees; they wrote comforting letters to the defenders of their native soil with aching hearts and trembling hands, but firm in the thought of iron resistance; they faced unflinchingly penury, stint and starvation.

The fineness of their soul is without doubt worthy of a poem. God, no doubt, will call a poet to sing of the heroism of Italian womanhood.

**A Maiden Hero**

Although we do not expect from the gentler half of humanity the display of such virtues as require physical courage and disregard of bodily injuries in violent encounters, we
could relate many an instance of splendid behavior by Italian heroines in the face of a death-dealing enemy.

As early as May 27th, when the Italians were beginning to force the cruel Austrians out of Italy, it happened that a formidable body of the enemy taking advantage of the strong position of the town of X . . . stopped there to make a last determined stand. Nests of machine-guns cunningly hidden here and there were pouring a thick rain of bullets on the advancing Italian shock troops who were looking for an opening for a forward dash.

A young girl about seventeen years old, her heart throb-bing with anxiety lest the resistance prove too stubborn and protracted, thus affording time for more Austrian troops to come back and renew a general battle, fired by love of her country, risked her tender life for the noble cause of Italy. She knew of a path hidden behind the spur of a hilllock, whence the shock troops (Bersaglieri) could more safely approach the city gates, a narrow stretch of ground that had been overlooked by the besieged Austrians.

Unhesitatingly she ran to the nearest group of Bersaglieri and offered to guide them to a point so near to the offending machine-guns that they might venture a sudden dash on the enemy with the inevitable, frightful losses they were sustaining under the present circumstances.

The entreaties of the commanding officer that she should retire at once and not expose herself to imminent danger were of no avail. Nothing could move her and she was determined to see the Austrians dislodged from the city of her birth.

She won her point. She went ahead and the soldiers following the maiden, living emblem of their country, fell on the Austrians from the vantage point that she had revealed to them, and after a fight as fierce as it was short, cleared the city of the foe.

The young girl was made an honorary corporal of the Bersaglieri.
Heroes of the "Irredenta"

Cesare Battisti—The figure of this Italian patriot, one of the last to pay with his life for the love of his fatherland, already looms large among the heroes and martyrs of Italian independence. His story is one of those that remind us that no nation achieved freedom through greater or longer sustained moral agony, material sacrifices, and bloody wars, than did Italy. Witness this last war, the greatest and most bloody of all, in which the enslaved Italians of the "Irredenta" have at last won their liberty.

Cesare Battisti was born in Trento in 1875, where his education began. Like all Italians of Trentino, Istria, Dalmatia, who wanted a superior education, he finished his studies at the University of Turin and Parma. He returned to unredeemed Trentino a broad-minded socialist and when he entered the political field, was elected member of the Diet at Innsbruck. His ideas of socialism did not interfere at all with the ideal of nationalism, which means that they were free from the taint of German internationalism.

When war broke out he fled to Italy and became a warm supporter of war with Austria among the Italian socialist elements who were for the most part at that time following sheeplike the German socialist leadership. Cesare Battisti was instrumental in opening the eyes of many Italians to the subtle work of moral disruption that had been very successfully undertaken by the Germans, whether socialists or not.

When the Italian army was launched against the Austrians entrenched on the impregnable peaks, as the world thought, of the Alpine barrier, he was with it, of course, as lieutenant in the Alpine corps and fought valiantly. Unhappily, in one of the individual fights so common in mountain warfare, he was lost sight of and, having been wounded, was found later on by hostile patrols. Some one recognized him. He had been a conspicuous figure in local and state politics before his flight to Italy. No sooner did the military authorities know that Cesare Battisti was a prisoner and powerless in their hands than Austrian brutality asserted herself. He was sent immediately to Trento although wounded, and badly too, without
even a preliminary medical attendance and after a mockery of martial trial was sentenced to death and hanged. He was denied the honor even of a bullet as a soldier’s due.

Austria is dead forever. But Cesare Battisti will be for all time a living spirit, dear to the memory of Italy as a national hero, revered as a martyr to the cause of liberty by all nations that follow the beacon of a progressive humanity.

**Nazario Sauro**—An Italian from Istria, therefore under the Austrian yoke, was another “Irredento” who paid with his life for his ardent love for his mother country. He was a born sailor, familiar with all the nooks and corners of the eastern coast of the Adriatic. At the beginning of the war between Italy and Austria, he, too, fled to help his mother country and offered her his knowledge of the sea. He made sixty-three raids on various Austrian naval bases and was absolutely fearless.

A spy one day pointed him out to the authorities while he was strolling in disguise on the wharf at Grado. He denied that he was Sauro but the military judges dragged his old mother into court and tortured her for a whole week, until the poor old woman gave way under the strain and admitted the prisoner was her son. When he was hanged, the poor mother was forced to stay under the gallows and watch him die.

The last command he left to his sons was to keep sacred and warm in their hearts the love of the land to which he had given himself. They knew, these Italian martyrs and heroes from the unredeemed lands, that their sacrifices, including the last supreme one of their life, would not be in vain. A great Italian poet, also an “unredeemed” from Dalmatia, had sung it to them long ago—“a egregie cose il forte animo accendono l’urne dei forti”—“the grave of heroes fires the hearts of the brave.”

**Francesco Rismondo**—This hero was born in Spalato in Dalmatia, the oldest of Italian provinces. There he developed into a hardy youth. The first months of war between Italy and Austria saw him fighting bravely in the Bersaglieri corps on
the denuded craigs of the Dolomitic Alps. Badly wounded in a fierce encounter, he refused to give up, but physical weakness having gotten the better of his undaunted spirit he was made a prisoner and burned alive in the main square of Gorizia by the ferocious Austrian soldiery on the 26th of October, 1915.

We might multiply indefinitely examples of the love for the mother land for which Trentins, Istrians, Dalmatians, gave proofs of their heroic valor. Their names and their deeds are written in golden characters in the history of Italian patriotism and engraved deeply in the hearts of their countrymen. We shall content ourselves, in conclusion, however, with a comprehensive reference to the three thousand who in a single body crossed Russia, Siberia, the Pacific Ocean, the broad stretches of the United States, then the Atlantic Ocean again to re-enter the fight in the Italian lines. Compelled to serve in the Austrian army at the beginning of the war, they had been taken prisoners by the Russians at the Galician front and welcomed their release as an opportunity to assert their true allegiance.

Sea Exploits

Rizzo—in the realm of heroism some deeds are so magnificently, we might almost say so absurdly, simple in their greatness, that our minds must grasp their meaning bit by bit before we fully understand them.

On the 11th of June, 1918, a cablegram from Rome reported that two Italian submarine chasers had sunk an Austrian dreadnought, badly damaged another one, besides crippling some cruisers. Very summarily told and very quickly read—but what about the details? Here we have a case, embodying in the superlative degree the virtues that go to make up the hero par excellence.

In the Adriatic Sea the Austrian fleet always refused the challenge of the Italian navy to an open, decisive contest. It kept hidden in its impregnable naval bases, making a dash now and then, when immunity was certain, on some defenseless
Italian city along the coast, to retire rapidly to cover again like a snake in its hole, before the Italian fleet could wreak vengeance.

Captain Rizzo, commander of a submarine chaser, was patrolling the sea with two such boats. In the mist of the morning atmosphere he noticed two Austrian superdreadnoughts surrounded by cruisers and torpedo boats under full steam speeding toward the Italian shore, no doubt with the intention of carrying death and ruin to some of the Italian cities scattered along the coast.

The idea of fleeing from the powerful foe did not even occur to him. The vision of the impending disaster that the Austrian fleet was bent on dealing flashed in his imagination and he unhesitatingly bade the attendant boat to follow him and attack the hostile fleet. It was like two mice tackling a bunch of lions.

Protected by the early fog they were able to approach the enemy, dart through the outer circle of defense, avoid the smaller cruisers’ fire and head straight for the superdreadnought.

Everything happened so quickly, so unexpectedly, that the two big monsters of the sea, the superdreadnoughts, were hit by the two small boats before the enemy could retaliate. When the Austrians collected their wits again and began to pound the two craft with their guns, the latter, which had tarried long enough to ascertain the effects of the torpedoes they had launched against the dreadnoughts, had the satisfaction of witnessing the sinking of one of them, the Wien, and noting the heavy damages suffered by the other, the Saint Stephen.

Then only they thought of their own safety, but luck helps the daring. With an ably manoeuvred zigzagging course they succeeded in recrossing the circles of enemy units, veritable circles of death, and in disappearing again in the misty horizon.
Giovanni De Giuli—In noting the epic encounter of Rizzo and his handful of companions in two fragile craft with the thousandfold stronger fleet of the Austrians, we must not lose sight of the fact that the heroic Rizzo was very ably seconded by his not less valiant crew of seasoned sailors.

This encounter emphasizes the truth many and many a time proven all along the Italian front, that bravery is contagious. A lion-hearted man makes an army of lions. This ancient Greek aphorism holds good universally. Let us record one case out of the many known and probably thousands that never will be known.

During the fiercest days of the battle on the Piave in the second week of June, 1918, a lieutenant, Giovanni De Giuli by name, gathered the dispersed remnants of an infantry battalion that had lost all of its officers. The foe was pressing hard and inflicting heavy punishment with machine gun and rifle fusillades.

Notwithstanding the din, the disorder, the wavering of the men left without officers, he succeeded after superhuman efforts, in rallying them and whipping an enemy vastly superior in number.

Viribus Unitus—The impregnable of the Austrian bases in the Adriatic and the refusal of the Austrian commanders of the fleet to meet the Italian battleships on the open main, together with the sneaky submarine warfare, had compelled the Italians to resort to some new way of destroying the naval strength of their historic foe.

The superdreadnought, Viribus Unitis, the pride of the navy of the Dual Monarchy, represented the strength that the union of Germans, Hungarians, Slavs, subjects of the Hapsburgs, could muster before an awed world, an intimidated Italy. It truly symbolized the Austrian Empire in its cohesion before the war.

A small craft, designed by an Italian major, entered the supposedly inaccessible port of Pola only one day before the
once overbearing enemy, crushed on land and sea by the Italians, was humbly craving for an armistice, and bombed the "Viribus Unitis," the symbol of strength of a mighty state. Both symbol and state were blown into fragments in a single day by a single nation that the enemy formerly so despised.

The blow that destroyed the superdreadnought was like the last sonorous crash of a symphony. Major Rosetti of the Italian navy dealt the blow.

**Pellegrino's Raid on Pola**

During one moonless night of April, 1918, a small Italian squadron was nearing the Austrian naval base of Pola, in the Adriatic Sea.

Pola, in Istria, was then the most important naval base of Austria and was jealously guarded from the audacious attacks of the Italians by mine fields, by chains and barrages at the narrows of the inlet to the port and sundry other naval defensive devices, not to mention the powerful guns of the coast fortresses and interned dreadnoughts. Only one thing these powerful dreadnoughts of Austria dreaded, their Italian rivals, and never during the whole war accepted the gallant challenge of the tars of Italy to come out in the open and have a real sailor's fight. This persistent refusal of the Austrian sea-dogs was the reason the little Italian squadron was nosing so near the haven of refuge of Emperor Charles's prudent warships.

The commander of one of the torpedo-boats among the Italian cruising ships had sworn to get into Pola harbor and blow up one at least of the biggest men-of-war, since there was no way of coaxing them out and giving the Italians a chance at them.

Commander Pellegrino well knew, the brave boys with him well knew, that their chances of coming back from the raid were very slim, not to say nil. Theirs was to be an unmitigated sacrifice of themselves; theirs was the aene of cold-blooded daring to add glory to the flag, the bright flag of
Italy, and pride to the navy they loved so well; theirs was the natural impulse of the thoroughbred.

They would sneak in, try to avoid all obstacles, mines, torpedoes and chains, trusting to luck that helps the audacious, the detecting glare of the electric radiators from the forts, criss-crossing uneasingly the expanse and the specks of the sea, and would show the Austrians that if they, the Austrians, were bent on eschewing danger, the Italians were not less obstinate in courting it at any cost.

But weren't the odds overwhelming; wasn't the undertaking too risky, so risky as to make it absurd? Perhaps, but there are sublime absurdities and this was one of them.

Commander Pellegrino and his crew of a few men made their wills, saluted their comrades, then soon disappeared in the darkness of the night.

How they evaded the floating mines, the devices barring the port, the luminous shafts of the radiators, we do not know yet.

What is known from the little Italian squadron waiting anxiously in the offing for the outcome of the daring raid is that the signal agreed upon with the raiders in case of success took place at the stated time. What is known from enemy reports is that Austria lost that night a powerful dreadnought.

Once more had Italy demonstrated that her sons were the very men, the only men to which the policing of the Adriatic Sea against German intrusion was to be entrusted.

Fishing for a Floating Mine

The sailors of the Italian navy came in for no inconsiderable share of glory during the battle of the Piave in June, 1918. They were asked to lend their gallant support to the right wing of the army fighting in the marshes of the lower Piave, close to the sea.
A splendid instance of daring and abnegation was given by two sailors, Di Mario and De Leo, both entrusted with the duty of piloting the land army shock troops through the meanders of the numerous canals into which the Piave branches when reaching the low shores of the Adriatic.

They were patrolling the banks of the main stream of the river above the bridges hastily constructed for the men, guns and carriages to cross the river, just then abnormally swollen by the spring rains, when these two sailors noticed a big floating mine, swiftly carried down by the rushing waters. It had been thrown in the Piave by the Austrians for the purpose of blowing up the bridges, thus arresting the Italians pressing on the heels of the fleeing enemy. The danger was imminent; the nearest bridge being not far down in full view, teeming with infantrymen intent on crossing the river.

There was no time to lose, no room for hesitation; the bridge must not be blown up, the hundreds of human beings on it must be saved from an awful death. Di Mario and De Leo flung themselves into the swift, dangerous current, made for the death-carrying ball of iron, and accompanying it in its course down stream succeeded in discharging it in ever present danger of their own lives. Before the bridge was reached, they had fulfilled their heroic mission; the mine was disarmed and made innocuous iron junk.

These two sailors are a fair example of discipline and abnegation, virtues that are painstakingly inculcated in the hearts of the crews by the Italian navy.

A similar example of conscious self-sacrifice which is so grand that it offers few parallels, is afforded by the glorious feat of an Italian 'carabiniere.' An Italian carabiniere is a military man entrusted with police duty.

Not far from the battlefront, where munitions were stored so they be handy and promptly brought to the fighting line, a bomb with the fuse still burning fell close to a storage place of high explosive munitions. It was during one of the hotly contested fights near Montello on the Piave.
This carabiniere was patrolling around the stores and keeping an eye on the men in charge of the loading of the munitions. He saw the bomb fall; he also saw the stub of the burning fuse; they all saw with that feeling that gives the creeps that the stub was burning so close to the bomb that the explosion was due any second.

While the minds of all present were working hazily under the impressions of the impending catastrophe, the carabiniere had flung himself on the bomb, had grabbed it, and, the fuse being too short to be successfully caught between the fingers and yanked off the bomb, he had munched away the burning bit of fuse with his teeth, thus averting a tremendous disaster. Death certainly stared him in the face those seconds, and he knew it. He was hundred per cent a hero and was rewarded with a gold medal.

Still another spectacular example of abnegation was afforded by a corporal in the aviation corps, Giulio Acrocca. His was an astounding exhibition of physical endurance, nerve control and fearless courage.

It was somewhere in France; Italian Capronis were flying towards their base high up in the air above the zone of battle after a successful bombing expedition. Suddenly a volley of bullets riddled the left wing of the airplane that carried Giulio Acrocca with two other companions. Like a wounded eagle the majestic Caproni with its splintered wing lurched perilously on one side and the danger of a total loss of equilibrium was becoming every second worse. No remedy was available. But yes, there was a way to safety; Giulio Acrocca had found it. What was needed was a counterbalance to the sound wing; his young body would be that weight on the extreme fringe of the broken wing; with men of such mettle to think and to act are almost synchronous.

Relying on the strength of his wrists, on the bulldog tenacity and solidity of his jaw and on the agility of his limbs, he got off the seat and reached the spot of just counterbalance; there he stood hanging for life (there is no truer expression) for three-quarters of an hour by sheer strength
of muscle and grit, on the outer corner of a broken airplane, with three thousand feet of emptiness between him and the solid ground.

This heroic and most assuredly spectacular feat of superhuman daring ended happily with the Caproni safely taking ground in the friendly zone.

Francesco Baracca

Whenever the moral nature of a hero is made an object of research, we most assuredly find qualities like those of this hero most prominent in the soul we are analyzing.

The ace of aces of the Italian aviation corps, Francesco Baracca, had these qualities in a high degree, and to them we may add the refining influence of his patrician family. He was a count from Bologna and an officer in the cavalry branch of the army.

Aviation had so powerful an attraction for him, however that his insistent demand to be transferred to the aviation corps was granted. In a very short time he developed into one of the most daring, cool-minded, level-headed aviators of Europe. He soon became the ace of aces of Italy. Thirty-three were the hostile airplanes he downed, a very high figure, considering the fact that aviation on the Italian front was reduced in size and importance as compared with the western front.

He was in the habit of hunting hostile planes all alone. The thirty-three Austrian planes that were his prey were destroyed one and all by him alone, single-handed.

Not unlike the solitary royal eagle of the Alps, he sometimes circled high above the battle line of the Italians and Austrians looking for a worthy antagonist. Other times, like a hawk, he darted on the enemy airplanes, always victorious because fear was unknown to him and his knowledge of aviation masterly. The enemy knew his ways in the air and cautiously avoided encounter. His skill in manoeuvering the apparatus was proverbial and meant unnecessary risk for
them. He was idolized for his daring, his bravery, his unassuming ways, and for his goodheartedness.

Like Quentin Roosevelt at the western front, Francesco Baracca came unexpectedly to an end not far from his lines flying low over the enemy in pursuit of a fleeing Austrian airplane. Hit by bullets the gasoline reservoir took fire, burning the wings of the machine. Later on a searching party found his charred body lying on the ground, the wreckage of the airplane on top of him.

To the sorrow that the loss of a hero causes, his death added grief for the loss of a lovable character.

The Flight of the Poet

Not all acts of heroism are blood-stained. There are kinds of heroism demanding probably more real courage than actual disregard of bodily hurt, or the dealing of blows in battle.

Passive heroism, though not so brilliant, not so epic, draws its energies more from the psychical than from the physiological forces.

To this kind belongs the famous flight of the national poet of Italy, Gabriele d'Annunzio from the Italian battlefront to Vienna on the 9th of August, 1918.

The flight of about a thousand kilometers lasted six hours both ways and was successful, notwithstanding contrary winds in the higher strata of the atmosphere.

Vienna was bombarded by the Italian aerial esquadrine numbering eight aeroplanes, not with bombs, but with leaflets ten thousand of them, warning the Viennese of their impending plight.

We do not doubt for a moment that the impulse of the poet and his companions in adventure to refrain from retaliation for the stupidly barbarous deeds of the Austrian airmen on various occasions must have been hard to resist. Here, in his real passive heroism the acme of self-restraint, a noble
quality, is shown the inheritance of a genuinely civilized race.

The poet of the Italian nation, the finest exponent of her aims, since he abandoned sensual poetry, was truly demonstrating to Italy’s enemies and to the world at large the heroic essence of the “Latin sangue gentile”—the thoroughbredness of the Latin blood.

Swarms of Heroes

Modern war has brought many changes in tactics and strategic formations of troops. Shock troops have received special attention from the military staffs of the various armies. Old formations have been transformed into liquid-fire and gas throwers, hand-grenade throwers, and barbed-wire cutting platoons.

They went a step further. They selected for a special corps from among the flower of the youngest military elements not only those best adapted physically to any imaginable hardship, but admitted to the newly formed corps only those youngsters who were willing to enter them. This novel form of shock troops took the name of Arditi, meaning bold, audacious. The choice of that name was quite proper. Was not Italy in ancient times known under the appellation of Ansonia, which meant, probably, the land of the audacious? Be that as it may, the young Ardito, the rookie in that new corps, had from the start to undergo a very severe athletic training. The expression, “acrobatic training,” would probably express more truly that kind of physical preparation. They were made to live in an atmosphere of heroism based on nimbleness of limbs and energy of action.

Does an order of attack come from the general staff quarters? The bugler has the Arditi running and ready in an instant to jump into any kind of conveyance, then at topnotch speed meet the advancing hostile columns as far as the vehicles can go. Then out they jump, onward they rush, free from any handicap except hand-grenades in each hand, an unsheathed knife between their strong white teeth and the carbine strapped on their shoulders. Forgetting everything else
their only aim is to court hand-to-hand fighting. They were taught to live in an atmosphere of heroism where action follows thought like thunderclap after lightning, and here is where agile limbs, strong muscles, tough bodies tell. Their object accomplished—to hold a position, destroy a bridge, smash a barbed-wire barrage, silence a heavy-pounder, destroy a machine-gun nest, or enter a stubbornly resisting trench—they promptly retire, taking no prisoners, leaving no prisoners. Somewhere else they are sent to perform a similar martial errand, always in the thickest of the melee where danger and death are always at hand. That is their everyday task, to deal in heroics.

Saving Wrecked Servia

The dawn of the 24th of December, 1915, saw old King Peter of the Serbs, seated between two guns on the wharf of Vallona, Albania.

He had left Serbia, overrun by Austrians, Germans and Bulgars, and was seeking hospitable refuge in Italy. His disgruntled army was to follow with hordes of refugees fleeing the truculent enemy.

Before leaving with the boat that was to take him across the Adriatic, Vice-Admiral Cutinelli, addressing reverently the war-scarred king, made him the solemn promise that the Italian ships were to take care of the exodus of the whole Serbian army to the last man, to the last gun.

Just a few words, but implying a portentous amount of work that was to be performed; manifold dangers lurking in the sea, on the land, in the nooks and corners of the numerous islands; sacrifices exacted from the sailors that, though barely known to the few, must be read to be appreciated. It reveals the untold devotion to duty and humanity that was really rampant in the Italian navy, a part, a vital part of the moral makeup of that finest of military organizations.

One simple instance among hundreds will suffice: Captain
Guasso of the medical corps, in charge of a boatful of sick and wounded soldiers, panic-stricken by a fire that threatened to reduce the boat to ashes, succeeded, though wounded himself, in restoring order, calmness and confidence. He attended to his medical duties, and only when he was through with all of them did he allow himself to be treated for his own wounds.

On the 26th of February the whole Servian army, infantry, cavalry, artillery, the tens of thousands of wounded, the tens of thousands of soldiers and refugees convalescing from typhus, cholera and other diseases, the whole Servian nation, in a word, was safely spirited away from the raging enemy either into the Turkish island of Corfu or into different parts of southern Italy.

During the months of January and February, 1916, besides this difficult rescue work, the Italian navy had to ward off Austrian assaults of dreadnoughts, super-dreadnoughts, cruisers and insidious dashes of submarines against the transports. They had to contend with incredible obstacles and difficulties in loading and unloading troops, refugees, material, ammunition, the low Albanian coast having no secure harbors and such harbors as there were no wharf facilities. They had to fight disease, weather, contrary conditions, wilderness, treachery; cheer up sagging spirits; be heroes on the battle ground, on the deep main, in the hospitals. And yet, against incredible odds, Admiral Cutinelli was able to make good his promise to King Peter of Servia. Not a single man, not a single item of war material, ammunition, provisions, live stock, was lost; a feat not widely known, of course, but nevertheless truly marvelous.

Mount Grappa a National Memorial

Mount Grappa is a massif overlooking the fertile plains of northern Italy and constitutes the most southern Alpine barrage to the plain, the last bulwark of the defenders of Italy against an invader eager to storm his way from the icy gullies where even torrents are stilled in their precipitous rush by the intense cold, down into the luxuriant valleys mellowed by
the balmy southern winds and made pleasant by the joyful sounds of a happy country life.

Against this last bulwark of Italy the enemy hurled himself with utmost fury. Not unlike the waves of an angry sea thundering one after the other against the rocky walls of a cliff, so the Austrian legions, having been worked up to a frenzy of anger by the heroic resistance of the Italians, threw powerful waves of compact battalions always surging in never ending succession against Mount Grappa.

Twenty-three times did these human waves try to swamp the defense, twenty-three times did the fury of that sea spend itself futilely. Such valor as the Italians displayed on their last bulwark could not be overwhelmed by any barbarian fury.

The chief of the Italian army was so impressed by the grandeur of the military clash, by the extraordinary display of all the virtues that concur in the formation of heroism, that he requested that Mount Grappa be dedicated as a national memorial, for the admiration of the nations, for the reverence of all future generations forevermore.

Mottoes

Owing to the natural conservatism of man we are so wont to admire and revere the past that the heroic deeds of the living are never appreciated as are the deeds of ancient heroes.

Time seems to be the only agent endowed with the prerogative of setting the halo of glory on the brow of heroes.

Sometimes it is not the name of the individual hero that is recorded, but a phrase, a motto, preserved and transmitted through centuries, inspire admirable feats of valor. These slogans of the past preside like living spirits over the long stubborn resistance of a nation bent on preserving her moral and territorial integrity.

No doubt future generations of Italy will treasure the motto, “They shall not pass.” It was created at the time of the formation of the special corps of “Alpini,” the Italian mountaineer soldiers entrusted with the defense of the Alps, the natural boundaries of Italy.
It was adopted in the present war by the whole Italian army and even inscribed on the Altar of the Nations erected in Madison Square, New York. There it stands. It was finally made good by the overwhelming defeat inflicted on the more numerous, better seasoned and more completely equipped Austrian army during the last week of October, 1918.

Other mottoes sprang up during the war in various parts of the Italian battlefront. Let us record just one found written on the wall of a ruined farm not far from the Piave River.

An unknown private wrote it in his coarse hand, possibly—who can tell—the hand of a former bootblack in New York City; a noble soul is sometimes enveloped in ragged garments. The writing was crude, the meaning was sublime. No doubt it confirmed the readers in the resolution to resist to the death rather than to give way, to give the full measure of their valor when the hour of the fray had come.

The simple words he wrote were: "Better live one hour like a lion than a hundred years like a sheep." Simple words, epic words; simplicity and the epic go hand in hand and have a telling effect on the unsophisticated Italian soldiers, by whom any appeal to their better, higher nature is promptly obeyed.

It was obeyed without reserve and with enthusiasm by the young recruits, seventeen years old, thrown into the horrors of war to withstand the brunt of the seasoned hordes of the Austrians, veterans of hundreds of battles. Yes, the young Italians of seventeen years of age were called under the colors in March, 1917, and in June of the same year, after barely three months of intensive training. They were pitted on the banks of the Piave against an enemy that menaced the invasion of their fatherland.

How they routed the ruthless Hungarians, the cruel Magyars, the wild Slavonians and the unspeakable Germans is now a matter of history. The babies of the Italian army were no sheep. They remembered the trust reposed in them. They remembered the motto, "Better live one hour like a lion than a hundred years like a sheep." The history of the world has no better example of collective heroism.
Don't Let Them Pass!

During the first day of the drive by the Austro-Hungarian army against the Italians on the Piave battlefront, the impact of the onrushing battalions was so severe, the waves of the foe so thick and so pressing one on another that in some weaker point of the defensive line small units of Italian infantry, having lost most of their officers and sergeants, were naturally wavering and in great and urgent need of a leader.

It happened that one of these companies, without captain, lieutenants, or even corporals, badly battered and confused by the furious onslaughts of a savage Herzegovinian regiment, was wavering and tottering out of sheer helplessness and lack of a leader, so that their fire was not so telling as it should have been. The vantage points were not seized with rapidity, and uneasiness, forerunner of defeat, began to spread among the men.

The moment was critical in the extreme, the point they were defending being an important one. Conscious of this fact, surmising the state of affairs and the need of a lightning-like infusion of new courage in the company, a sergeant of the military police (they are usually kept behind the lines) began to shout: "Don’t let them pass, don’t let them pass!" while at full gallop he came up to them, though wounded, rallied them, stopped by his manly words of exhortation the oozing-out of their courage, and led them in a brilliant charge that turned the tide of battle in that important part of the widely stretching battle line. He fell on the spot after a more severe wound had crippled him, and, while lying on the ground, moist and hallowed with his generous blood, he kept on shouting: "Don’t let them pass, boys, don’t let them pass!" And the Austrians did not pass!

"Don’t let them pass," these were the last words uttered by this hero to the boys he urged and spurred on to victory. He saw the glorious light of victory dawning, then died.