

MY ESCAPE FROM ITALY¹

BY FILIPPO TURATI

TO-MORROW the court at Savona will begin to try the case about my escape from Italy on the eleventh of last December. This escape, which took place a few days before the flight of Nenni, Schiavetti, and Treves, and which followed the departure of Cianca, Gianini, Bocconi, Labriola, and other well-known deputies, journalists, and politicians, caused the Fascist régime to exceed all ordinary bounds. My escape was a violation of the absurd and outrageous law that imposes a prison term for as much as six years, and even plans to extend that to as much as forty-eight years, and levies unlimited fines that may include complete confiscation of property, upon anyone who leaves the country without a passport — that is, anyone who is not a Fascist; for it is common knowledge that anyone suspected of anti-Fascism in Italy experiences great difficulty in getting a passport at all. And on top of all this the death penalty may be inflicted upon anyone who tries to cross the boundaries of the country secretly. A man like myself, sixty years old, and sick into the bargain, who, in spite of the threats of such a régime, leaves his native land knows better than anyone else how impossible life is in Italy to a person who refuses to support the dictator. As a matter of fact, after I had left, everyone who formerly visited me, not only my friends, but even my doctor, was arrested — in brief, any person who could be suspected of hav-

ing been in any kind of intercourse with me. Most of these had to be set free later, but some were held as suspects and either thrown into prison or deported to various islands.

Eleven such persons were accused — I myself; the lawyer Pertini of Savona, who fled with me; Professor Ferruccio Parri, former editor of *Corriere della Sera*; Professor Roselli, of the University of Genoa, who accompanied me; Ettore Albini, former dramatic critic on *Avanti*; and six other companions. Through the good offices of Léon Blum, I sent a written communication to the court of Savona, not with the idea of pleading in my own behalf, but in order to give evidence concerning the alleged misdeeds of my friends. I still feel that, although the Italian prosecution laid this communication before the court, the presiding officer will have it suppressed when the time comes. Everyone knows that since the Fascist régime has been set up in Italy Italian judges must beg their bread if their conduct 'goes against the policies of the Government.'

I must therefore turn to the newspapers of free countries, begging them to print my side of the case. I have no illusions that I shall be able to help my fellow defendants or get them off in this way. I only do it to shield these friends of mine from the moral disapproval of free and independent citizens when the trial goes against them.

During the months of October and November last year I was desperately ill. On the advice of my physicians,

¹ From *Arbeiter Zeitung* (Vienna Conservative-Socialist daily), August 18

Doctors Pini and Gilardoni, I applied to the prefect of Milan for a passport to go abroad, since at every native sanatorium I had visited the Fascisti had made it impossible for me to find the relaxation I urgently needed. I brought all the necessary medical testimony forward. The prefect promised to deliver my application to Rome, and told me that an answer would be forthcoming presently. The only answer I received — and it was quick and explicit enough — was that within a few days each of the two entrances to my dwelling was guarded by two policemen, so that I might as well have been living in a prison. These police were given instructions not only to watch me in the house but to follow me wherever I went, and even to sit in my carriage with me when I traveled. All this meant that I was absolutely isolated from everyone, for no one dared to visit me any more, and I could not ask a single friend to come and see me for fear of making the police suspicious of the house and of the other families who lived in it.

I vainly protested to the prefect against these suffocating, illegal excesses against a citizen's ordinary rights. I even begged the authorities to put me in jail if they had a specific complaint against me, for it would be less insulting to my human dignity, and less hypocritical.

Thus life was made impossible. The conditions under which I lived were more intolerable than those to which a criminal under police observation is subjected. Moreover, I lived in the constant fear of a real or pretended attack upon my dwelling. It even went so far that after the last attempt on Mussolini's life the Chief of Police of Milan forced me — under protest — to leave my dwelling by night and to flee under police protection in a police automobile. He had been assured by his commissioner that if I did not do

this he could not protect me against the attacks of the Fascisti.

In order to find some peace, I finally decided to quit my house and to escape unknown to the protection of some friends of mine in Milan. This I did one November evening. I departed from my home simply by going out by the servants' entrance, which led to the yard of a neighboring house, through which I passed under cover of darkness, while the police who were supposed to guard even this unfrequented passage were clapping each other on the back. For several days the police continued to watch over the house, unaware that their bird had flown. Not until two weeks later did I think of leaving my country without a passport, and it is therefore absurd to credit me with having worked out in advance a plan that had never occurred to me until the last minute. Finally, my old friend Ettore Albini took me to visit him in the country for a few restful days, for on account of our old friendship he could not refuse me shelter in such a secluded retreat. I stayed there quietly, since I was convinced that I was being looked for unceasingly. At last, however, not wanting to make my host and his wife suffer any unpleasant consequences that might be involved in thus sheltering me, I left the house. On the very next day the prefect of Milan himself, accompanied by the Central Police Inspector, who had been sent on from Rome for the purpose, and several other officers, entered the house that I had just left. It was clear that they were not coming to bring me my passport or to give me encouraging news. I also heard of friends of mine being arrested or picked for exile.

During the week of the third to the tenth of December I felt myself so hunted and oppressed that I saw it would be impossible for me to get any rest while enjoying my friends' hospital-

ity, because the most unpleasant results might follow. It was then that I first felt the absolute moral necessity of devising some means of flight.

It was not that I wanted to leave my home. I had literally been hounded out of the country by a succession of dishonorable and illegal outrages. My real companions in crime — or, I should say, the real instigators of my flight — were the authorities themselves. In fact, these people incited me even more than they did those of my friends who had already left home, to say nothing of other friends who could not get away but who came to me often and gave me advice and encouragement and promises of loyal support. First of all, the police had been stationed around my house under the pretext of protecting me from attacks by the Fascisti. They made me, against my will, a prisoner in my own home, a victim of daily torments that even the most primitive state should never inflict on the least of its citizens. After this I decided that I had to leave Milan, but I discovered that I was being shadowed even more closely, and that wherever I went my host was subjected to unendurable inconveniences. Therefore my decision to leave the country was arrived at only as a last resort.

My departure, as I have already said, took place on the night of the eleventh of December, in the vicinity of Savona. On a stormy sea and in a raging wind that filled our frail motor boat with water, under a starless sky, with a wildly whirling compass to guide us, ignorant of our course, frequently terrified that we should be compelled to land on an island in the Tuscan archipelago, or in Spain, or on the coast of Sardinia, we set forth on our mad journey. Suddenly, on the morning of December 12, we saw something that we imagined was probably Corsica, though none of us had ever seen it. We were

not in the vicinity of Bastia, toward which we thought we were steering, but on the opposite side of the coast, whither the wind and the waves had carried us.

On Sunday the twelfth we landed at Calvi. On Monday, together with my lawyer Pertini, who had accompanied me, I embarked on a steamer for Nice in order to escape deportation, and from there we set forth for Paris. From Savona to Calvi I was accompanied by Parri, Roselli, and a few of my Savona friends. They insisted on accompanying me, not because their presence was necessary, but out of pure friendship, and in order to be with me during such an unpleasant episode in my career. We were received extremely politely by the native authorities in Corsica, but naturally they had to take us before the local officials. Parri, Roselli, and I swore not to go back to Italy again, although they wanted to return at any price. I have since learned that a correspondent of the *Petit Provençal* immediately set out for Bastia to get news of this affair for his paper.

Parri and Roselli went back to Italy on Sunday-Monday night, landing on the sandy shore between Liguria and Tuscany, where they were at once arrested by the customs officials, who believed, if I am rightly informed, that they were laying their hands on the renowned bandit Poliastri and one of his comrades. My conviction that I did not need any help seems to contradict the explanations made by Parri and Roselli, who took the blame themselves and confessed to being the instigators and organizers of my flight. With a magnanimity and pride characteristic of men of their temper, they tried to give such answers as would free their friends of all responsibility. The truth, however, is that I alone made the final decision, and resolved upon it very shortly before I left. I could have gone

some other way — across the sea, or over the mountains in an automobile. That these friends stood by me is only due, I repeat, to the fact that they did not want to make me live through such terrible hours of my life alone. Actually, their presence was not necessary. They were not the ones who decided upon my flight or helped me; I made the decision myself of my own free will, as a result of the illegal humiliations to which I had been subjected. In this kind of behavior I detected, and still detect to-day, a misuse of governmental power that the custom of every civilized country, and even Italian law, expressly forbids. I had been refused a passport that I had asked for on account of my health in the usual way, and I had been made the victim of an illegal outrage. This treatment calls for a straightforward reply, and I conceive it my duty to set down these facts, which are true and capable of proof.

I am passionately eager for Italy to be delivered from her present outra-

geous political situation as quickly as possible. If this state of affairs lasts longer, it can only become a country of distress and civil war, of hate and revenge. But this reign of terror must not and will not last, because it is finally bringing about the economic and moral ruin of the country and of all classes of society. It denies all true patriotism, and is merely a school of hooliganism for the majority of the people. It annihilates the most valuable benefits of the bourgeois revolution, which itself was the logical and necessary precursor of the Socialist movement.

A free-thinking man finds it unbearable to see his country turned into a kind of prison in which it is a crime to live a humane life and from which he cannot freely depart. I would gladly rejoice in my fate if this life in exile that clouds the evening of my days bore sufficiently eloquent testimony to my own beliefs and made me into a tool, a simple but decisive means, for aiding civilization and human history.

ON ANNE BOLEYN'S CLOCK IN THE ROYAL LIBRARY AT WINDSOR

BY W. W. WINKWORTH

[From the *London Mercury*]

THE gayest little clock that ever ceased to go,
Stuffed in a narrow glass, a specimen for show,
A corpse with staring eyes, a shameless thing, it stands,
And shows the helpless stiff unreason of its hands.