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Camp News

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Wellington, Friday, April 24, 1942

He Learnt Torture from Them!

Hitler didn't invent the Concentration Camp. The Lipari Islands have been Mussolini's Isles of Hell ever since he came to power, and the man who writes this was there for five ghastly years.

Laugh at the Duce if you like, but do not let pity enter into your laughter.

Your are too generous, you British. Remember, if Hitler is the father of Nazism, of the concentration camp, of torture and of lies, Mussolini is the grandfather of all these things.

He is an old man now, but do not pity him for that. He sends the best youth of Italy to die in a fruitless attempt to save his Empire. An Empire built on skulls. Yesterday he was sending that same youth to the Islands of Hell which dot the southern seas between Sicily and Africa.

They have beautiful names, these islands: Pantelleria, Ustica and Lipari. But to many thousands of my countrymen these names have only one meaning: Banishment, Torture, Death.

Mussolini copies the Romans in everything, so he says. The little Caesar has not their invincibility. He has collected their vices, their tortures and their places of banishment. Lipari is such a one.

It is a dishonourable place of exile where murderers, pimps and the lowest dregs of Italian cities are sent, together with political prisoners—men whose only crime is that they believe in democracy.

With his rise to power, Mussolini took the insignia not only of the Fascists, but the truncheon and the castor oil bottle. But he could not kill all who opposed him. He preferred to send them to the islands which Italian tourist blurbs proclaim to be "generally considered amongst the most beautiful spots in Italy."

Even the flowers which grow on Lipari are bent. Not for humility or shame at Fascism's black deeds but because of the dreadful sirocco, the mad wind which smites this island day and night through winter and autumn making life, already intolerable, more terrible than ever.

It was a long time ago, ten years precisely. My offence? Does it matter? I was guilty of being loyal to a friend. I placed flowers on the grave of Matteotti, one of the most loved

and most notable of men. Opponent of Fascism, Mussolini had ordered his death. It was touch and go whether Mussolini himself would be overthrown by the outcry which rose in Italy at this dastardly act.

I was young, just graduated as a barrister-at-law. I knew Matteotti. My gesture had no political implication. I was foolish to have shown my affection so openly. My sentence was *confino di polizia*, deportation to Italy's Siberia, Lipari, for five years.

When I arrived there (after paying £15 so as to make the journey by train and not by "prison wagon"), the chains were taken off my wrists.

The light burnt into my eyes like acid. For six hours I had been stuffed into the hold of a small ship together with my "brother criminals." Without food, without water for the whole journey. We were glad to leave the rolling hulk and set foot on land.

Land? It was lava. Hard, crumbly lava. Everything crumbled before the fierce wind. Houses, roads, trees and men. A bitter sun added to the discomfort.

At the police station a bull-faced imitation of Mussolini, the Fascist Commandant, told us that we were free. "Of course, there are the rules," he said.

Of course.

There were ten of them. Ten rules which made a joke of our freedom. To disobey any one of them even so much as to take a walk beyond the prescribed boundaries, would mean instant punishment or a prolongation of our sentence.

Life on 1s. 1d. a day, the amount allowed to us by the authorities, was not easy. We ate together to economise.

And we suffered together. It made us braver, sometimes.

At other times we hated the proximity of our fellow-sufferers. They showed up our powerlessness, our humiliation, too much.

The cliffs were high, however. The brave and the cowardly made their exit that way. The rocks down below

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