

FRANCESCO CRISPI

FRANCESCO CRISPI, Italian statesman and "Liberator," was born at Ribera, Sicily, Oct. 4, 1819, and died at Naples, Aug. 11, 1901. After studying law, he took part in the Sicilian expedition of Garibaldi, and served under him as Major at Calatafimi, in 1860, and a year later was elected to the first Italian Parliament for Palermo. He became President of the Chamber of Deputies in 1876, and Minister of the Interior in 1877, but retained the latter office only for one year. In 1878, he became Prime Minister of Italy, a post he held until 1891, and again from 1893 to 1896, when his administration fell in consequence of the disastrous results of the government's forward policy in Africa. In politics, Crispi was a pronounced Liberal, and, despite threatened impeachment for alleged illegal practices, he rendered his country signal service. When the Garibaldi monument was unveiled, in 1895, Crispi was chosen as orator of the occasion.

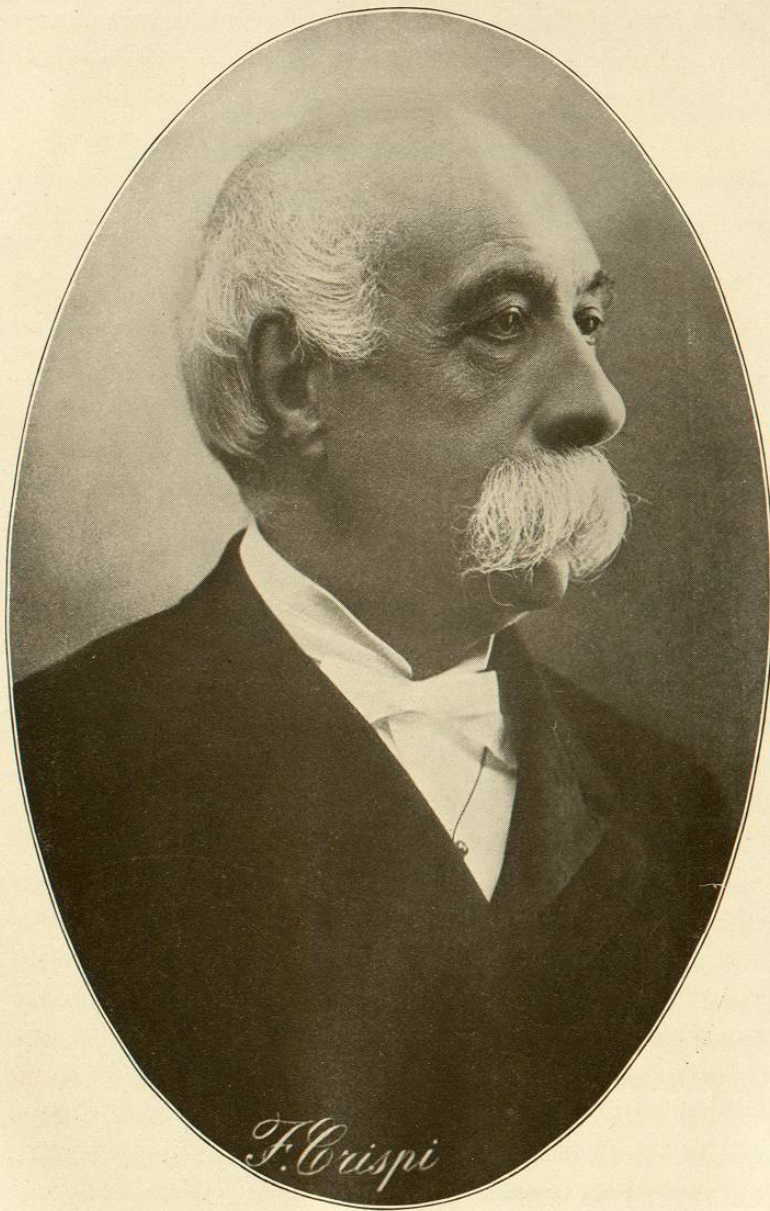
ADDRESS TO THE ITALIAN ELECTORS

DELIVERED MAY 23, 1895

FELLOW CITIZENS, DEAREST FRIENDS,—I speak to Italy from Rome, and this is for me, an old Italian, the greatest comfort. Who has seen the past understands me and therefore knows my mind in regard to those to whom I owe highest honor. But the duties which press upon us all in face of the problem which the dying century cannot leave unsolved, and which weigh inexorably upon us, make me tremble. Therefore I beg of you the greatest indulgence. I will be brief and clear, as is my wont.

I held the direction of affairs from August, 1887, to February, 1891. I had it again at the end of December in 1893, not by my will, but constrained by duty. I have never desired or sought power, conscious of its grave responsibility,

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familiar with the pains which flow from it. And here let me record facts now belonging to history.

About the end of 1893 the constitution of any government whatever appeared impossible and was nearly so.

At home, rebellion already broken out in some provinces, latent in others, the national solidarity severed; men's minds perturbed not only by evident ills, but also by the fear and almost the presentiment of greater.

Material disturbance like unto the moral—credit debased, trade hampered, revenues insufficient for the government's needs, and because of the general disorganization the fountains of public and private resources drying up.

Abroad, surprise at all this was attested by diffidence and distrust, and by its reflex action even increased the domestic difficulties. In one word, the government of the last three years had done more harm to Italy than a rout in battle. In that sad moment Italy turned her thoughts to me hopefully.

Was it well, was it ill? I can answer less than any other. Certainly the will of the crown seemed to be, and was ever, one with the will of the country, when his Majesty the King, advice being taken and it appearing that my name was proposed on all sides, including even those who are to-day my bitter enemies, wished to entrust again to me the reins of state. To refuse would have been cowardly. I obeyed.

On December 20, 1893, I spoke thus to Parliament for my colleagues and myself: "We charge upon none the actual state of things; it is the consequence of a series of events which we can record, but should not judge. We will but say that great are the difficulties to be conquered; and that to uplift credit, put in order the finances, strengthen the authority of law, and to bring the country to a true knowledge

of itself, we need the support of the chamber without distinction of party. To this end we ask of you a sacred truce. When Italy's future is assured, each shall resume his place. To combat now, to set ourselves one against the other—let me affirm it with patriotic breath, would be a crime. When peril advances we should all unite in the common defence.

But we spoke to a chamber which could not act. It had been disorganized because the electors had not been called to vote upon a programme based on principles. The manner of the elections, the seductions practised, the freedom of the ballot taken from many by violence or corruption, the lavish, lawless, promises impressed on the new representation the stamp of an original sin. The chamber showed itself convinced of this, like us, when it consented to the revision of the electoral lists, explicitly declaring its own corrupt origin.

At all events the contagion of good appeared at first to be possible and effective. Whether it were the sinking of public and private fortunes, the shame of recent ill success and proved incapacity, and the fear of arousing by partisan instability the popular wrath—a productive period of restorative work even with that chamber seemed possible. The effect was soon felt.

The sight of Italy showing herself capable of re-creating her government, with sincere and practical seriousness, surrounded by the sympathy of the country, gave new life to foreign confidence. At home rebellion was turned, credit uplifted, the finances on the way to restoration, through a programme dependent upon the truth, replaced a false consideration for the taxpayer with the evident utility of a final effort. This effort, partially, but with some reluctance agreed to by the chamber, was accepted by the nation with that good sense which is the real basis of Italian character.

The path was regained, the career resumed. The moment for evil to reassert itself had therefore come.

The violent, certain of the unpopularity to which they would have condemned themselves, had been silent while there was danger of disruption, the unworthy who had been hurled from power, the incapable who had had to put away ambition and should have renounced it, now all took up the cry, and when we were almost at the goal, the invidious and jealous coalition of the disaffected sought to turn Parliament from its path and to again cast the country over a precipice of miseries.

Thus the national tribune became a seat for defamation; parliamentary immunity, an immunity of offence, and personal encounters replaced the contest for principles.

Calumny is no new weapon in politics; in democratic countries it has succeeded to the mediæval poison and dagger, and recourse to it is had all the more readily, when the pebble of some unsuccessful David, or the bullet of some fanatical assassin have failed. Never was it so clamorous, violent, and insinuating, keen and comprehensive as now, tricked out artfully and ably ordered.

It counted upon the disguise which such warfare would arouse in a man who, reaching the decline of a long and wearisome career, must aspire before all else for peace.

If I had yielded and bent before this new system for provoking ministerial crises by defamation, accepting the convenient theory that a minister (however much culminated), ought to defend himself and resign his powers meanwhile, thus giving to the meanest of insulters a right to change the government of the country—the country would have quickly seen with more disgust than wonder, vituperation freshly changed into hosannas.

But before to-day I learned to suffer in the fulfilment of duty, and I resisted. I resisted because I could prove that more than ever there was political nihilism outside the government, and because war was being made far less upon the man than upon the régime he represented.

I never compromise and they all know it. I resisted and my suffering was dear to me, because to suffer for a just cause is the greatest of honors. Ours was just and most noble; and since the means of which a Parliament ordinarily disposes were insufficient to unveil the plot, the ministry concordantly proposed to the crown the prorogation of the session. This was without hesitation, but not without regret.

Still we all took comfort that in the prorogation we all submitted ourselves to the primary judgment of the country, and this judgment was as explicit as just.

This régime, which is wont to be called the decree-law, is a serious matter; it is declared to be in contradiction to the statute by those who have been first to recur to it, not alone needlessly, but fruitlessly, for the finances of the State and national economy. Our use of it apart from our purity of intention was legitimized by success.

To be sure the very insuccess of the most fierce and predatory opposition made these opponents still more fanatical. Insomuch that losing entirely the sense of patriotism and humanity more than one among them augured—to the advantage of barbarisms—defeat to those arms which we had been obliged to take up in Africa, to defend ourselves from treason and to guard civilization.

But victory smiled upon us. Our soldiery, valorous, patient, and ready for fatigue, battle, and sacrifice, the stuff for heroes to-day as for martyrs yesterday, strengthened by wise organization, guided by that wise boldness which is one na-

tional tradition in war, renewed the bright days of that glory which seemed to have set forever.

Blessed be that victory! The Italian heavens, clouded by the fogs of defamation, shone again, and the atmosphere, heavy with speculation and scandal, cleared away. A thrill of renewing vigor ran through the national fibre, and a wave of sympathetic respect flowed in from all the world.

We can to-day vaunt of peace with honor, since if bloody conquests have spoken of our valor, our diplomacy has found pleasure and success in demonstrating the union of our interests and our ideals. From Morocco to the extreme Orient, from one America to the other, my colleague of the foreign department has proven that equity is with Italy, and equity means advantage. So that there has never been as now such cordial relationships between our own and other governments—never greater respect for our country in its international rights. Thus was crushed the other story of provocative politics; proved futile the attempt to gain belief in a plan of crazy adventure in Africa, while we were measuring only too closely our successes by our immediate financial possibilities, watched over with the glance of a miser by my friend and colleague of the treasury, and by other eminent associates not less severe than he; accused men of acting as slave-traders in the face of our country—but all this in vain, the opposition at last shifted over to an effort to excite compassion as victims—or authors, as might be—of a social conflict.

But we do not hide from ourselves certainly either the gravity or the urgency of the forms which the social problem assumes among us. Is it possible to distinguish socialists from anarchists?

Certain it is that in other countries—although one cannot tell clearly where socialism ends and anarchy begins—there is serious study and sincere conviction, together with an assumption of great interest in the masses which can make respectable that principle of socialism which is indeed a negation of individual freedom, while anarchy is only perpetual war.

But among us on the other hand there are only the caprices of theorists changing their programme daily, banners waving in the wind of popularity; shameful sentimentality shifting from one object to its extreme opposite; and the ambition of politicians turning indifferently to any party if only they may succeed; even good faith undeniable to many is seldom strengthened by authority. Indeed this propaganda of socialism has brought no benefit to the real sufferings of our people, sufferings which I shall be the last to deny. So socialists and anarchists have accomplished nothing but to distract the government from effective provisions, to render repressive laws inevitable as the exceptional but necessary result of their behavior. We might have responded with violence which the peril and the injury to society would have justified, to the crimes committed with weapons, dynamite, and fire, to robbery, to evil provocation wrought with wicked words upon ignorant and senseless crowds. But we have limited ourselves in most instances to that measure of preservation found in the supervision of a prescribed residence and restriction of that personal liberty which had been abused.

Further, what was the disposition of the government toward those on whom less merited punishment has fallen, is proved by the clement measures proposed by us to the king's compassion, and by the many who have been liberated in these recent months, no less than the care given to studying

that part of the social problem dependent upon legislative provisions, as attested by projects which may be opportunely modified, but show undeniable inspiration.

Yet we have seen these projects combatted by the very people who on the other hand allied themselves with the authors and encouragers of disorder—a monstrous amalgamation of contradictions. Aristocracy, socialism, radicalism, and anarchy were to be seen marching in affectionate embrace, one party approving whatever legitimate demands another made, and together all aiming at a general destruction. Thus the disorder is double—material and moral.

One would say that history teaches nothing to those who should most treasure its lessons, still they aspire by governing the country to become historical themselves. This is no republic, and we have not then to fear that the excesses of any sort of radical will lead us to Cæsarism; the modifying power here is fortunately permanent and loyal, and our institutions rest upon the heart as well as the good sense of the people.

Still it is edifying—this strange marriage which unites in the name of liberty, those who are for opposite reasons the negation of it—those who invoked the scaffold in its defence, and they would attain it by distinction.

Liberty does not lack in Italy, but a wise use of it rather. It is less in our habits than in our legislation, where I think it an honor to have taken a large part. This the public knows so well that every renewed effort to bind together those who would make liberty the pretext for vain agitation, falls under popular indifference.

The statesman's duty is to oppose public opinion whenever he sees it deviate from the ends toward which it should tend for the good of the fatherland, and guilty are they who yield

and flatter, in the craze for mere popularity, when they should protest and resist. We needed no proof of it, for the conviction was deep and general that a new chamber was indispensable—new in origin, elementally in part, in discipline, in programme and a firm will to adhere thereto. Therefore it is that we have summoned the electors, and that we stand before you that you may judge us according to our desires and our accomplishments.

Our intentions are not to be counted with those which pave the infernal streets. All have seen and know how they have been prevented from becoming facts and by whom. Facts they will yet become if you continue your favor in this same effort.

In spite of most adverse circumstances and of the attempt of the hostile coalition to arrest government action, this has moved on surely, and this ministry, presenting itself for judgment to the nation, has to credit results so incontestable that our adversaries, knowing them undeniable, have had to seek elsewhere arms with which to fight us.

More and better we feel we can do when we may labor no longer alone, but with the concurrence of Parliament. We desire above all to make the Italian people forget the dark and shameful things which have perturbed in this late period of its national life—and this with a civil as well as material reparation.

The union into a political statehood lived in Italian thought before it came to pass. Such thought was the Italian's ideal patrimony and fortune; and foreigners themselves, though dominating it, respected it, such light beamed from it and hallowed the cause of our redemption. To-day memories are not life but death; hence the supreme need of a national education, serving above all as a stimulus to good. Instead there

is moral inertia in many, and, worse yet, such a scorn of what is patriotic, spiritually active, and fruitful, that the best can sometimes accomplish little.

I tried to put Italians on their guard against this scepticism of thought and action when I pointed out the existence of a new monster, bearing upon its banner "Neither God nor Chief," and summoned to combat it a gathering of honest men of whatever faith, inscribing instead upon our banner, "With God and the King for Fatherland." Some made believe to be afraid, crying out against me as a reactionist, pretending that I sought to initiate an anti-liberal movement and renounce the conquests of civilization.

Puerile accusation! The modern state lives not without liberty in all classes of its society, in every manifestation of its practical vitality. But as liberty means not license, and as the liberty of each finds natural limits in the liberty of all, there is no offence to liberty in reacting against nihilism of every kind—of conscience no less than of government.

Government should imply providence, and to be provident a government must be free in its actions. But on account of much that happened during the last period of the closed legislative session the need has become most evident that some points scarcely indicated in the constitution should be elucidated and confirmed by a duly sanctioned ministerial responsibility.

But to prevent the repetition of past melancholy phenomena you must assume your share of the burden, Italian electors, renouncing nihilism above all things, at the polls.

If you wish the public life to develop itself as you would have it, you must begin by participating in it, by a judicious use of your own votes. Choose, then, between us and our friends and our adversaries! Who and what we are you

have seen to know! What our adversaries are and what they could give you needs not to be said. Conspirators disguised as moralists, knowing that the country was with it, they have substituted calumny for criticism, some careless, others even desirous that perils should gather about our institutions in their overthrow of the existing government.

Why thus destroy? Because a coalition of anarchists, monarchists, "plebiscite" radicals, federal republicans, socialists, and pseudo-conservatives could have no other aspiration. Before such discordant elements could combine in real unity they must begin by converting one another, which their own contradictory programmes recognize as impossible. If it conquered it could not form a government even of the worst, and assuredly not good. But it will not conquer!

The dilemma before the electors to-day is simple but solemn—the choice between the national monarchy and social, moral, and political anarchy. To fight such anarchy is the duty now imposed on every good citizen.

In the king, symbol and strong safeguard of national unity, the king surrounded by democratic institutions, is our trust. Let not fail that trust. Neither by doubt nor by the withholding of votes. To refrain from the ballot is desertion in the hour of battle; to doubt, the first step toward defeat.

So I make my appeal to all Italians, and I believe that my voice will be heard, because all good men have herein one common interest. Parties must be reformed upon honest and logical bases, so that there may be an interchange of ideas between men and their government. And the renunciation of power will be welcome to me when I can retire without baseness, without fear for the security of our institutions.

Let us unite our hearts then, elevating them in the senti-

ment of a supreme duty, alert and calm as in the best of days, assured that the work of social pacification and the reorganization of the state are no less important than the struggles for independent unity and their national, final development.

Close up, then, around the king, and with our glance bent on the Cross of Savoy, resplendent upon the nation's banner, let us, too, cry "*In hoc signo vinces!*"

[Special translation by Mary E. Adams.]