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THE GEOGRAPHICAL WORK OF H.R.H. THE LATE DUKE OF THE ABRUZZI: *A paper read at the Evening Meeting of the Society on 15 May 1933, by*

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THE honour of commemorating H.R.H. the Duke of the Abruzzi, and especially of commemorating him in this place, is such as to cause deep emotion to one who has always, ideally, felt himself to be a faithful and devoted follower of the great Prince. But one thought is my encouragement, that in no place other than here amongst Englishmen who are accustomed to bold enterprises on all the seas and on all the mountains of this Earth, would it be possible to find a keener and a more complete understanding of this great and noble figure.

For us Italians however the figure of the Duke of the Abruzzi has a moral significance which reaches beyond his glorious activity as an explorer; for he has been, to us, an example and a pure symbol, a forerunner and a prophet, in grey times, of the actual rebirth of our country.

For this reason a thought full of gratitude goes, from Italians, to the proud and magnanimous resolution of King Amedeo, his father, who freed this great son of his from the destiny to which his birth would inevitably have bound him, and restored him to Italy, to be solely and completely an Italian Prince, free to obey that call which he felt towards all great actions and by which he has affirmed himself, not only as an Italian Prince with the age-long virtues of his family, but a truly national hero. To commemorate him in a worthy way will be an arduous task even later, when the pain has somewhat abated. Arduous, because H.R.H. the Duke of the Abruzzi was a sailor, a man of war, an alpinist, an explorer, a pioneer, and there is no one capable of speaking of the whole of his varied and complex activity, with any hope of describing it with the required efficiency. In this place we shall limit ourselves to remembering only the explorer.

Doubtless however two natural predilections—the sea and the mountains—which the Prince felt strongly even in his earliest youth, helped to form the explorer. He was bound to the sea before his love for it had shown itself; for the severe discipline of duty, which is a rule of life for all Italian Princes, made him a sailor in the Royal Navy at six years of age, when our sons are still left

to their mothers' care. When he was sixteen, he sailed along both coasts of South America. Then, on a small gunboat, he made long cruises in the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans. Immediately afterwards there followed the great voyage in the seas of India, China, and the South Seas, and North and South America. When he returned to his own country after so long an experience on all the seas, under every climate, by sail and by steam, in enervating calms or in raging storms, among every land and every people, the Prince, though hardly more than twenty years old, was already a really accomplished seaman.

And between one sea voyage and another, when any one would have felt the right and the wish to rest—for the sea does not signify rest for those who have the responsibility of obedience or of command—between one navigation and another, the Prince, still very young but already used to dangers and discomforts, to rapid decision and intelligent courage, felt the call of those Alps, which seemed like a perfect amphitheatre closing in around the plains of his Piedmont. After his first initiation, he immediately showed himself to be a first-class alpinist: he was only twenty-one when he could count the Charmoz, the Little Dru, and the Grépon, till then only climbed by a few foreign alpinists, the Dent Blanche and the Rothhorn, among his numerous climbs. He had conquered the Matterhorn, even by the Zmutt route, which required the perfection of alpine technique and a courage which seems to border on audacity.

And it was not a passing whim. When he left the sea he always went to the mountains. New ways and new climbs were added by the Prince to the history of Italian Alpinism. Let us record only the ascent from the Charpona glacier to that Aiguille Sans Nom to which he gave the name of his faithful guide Petigax, the rocky peak of the Grandes Jorasses which became then the Punta Margherita, and one of the slender, steep Dames Anglaises which is to-day Punta Iolanda.

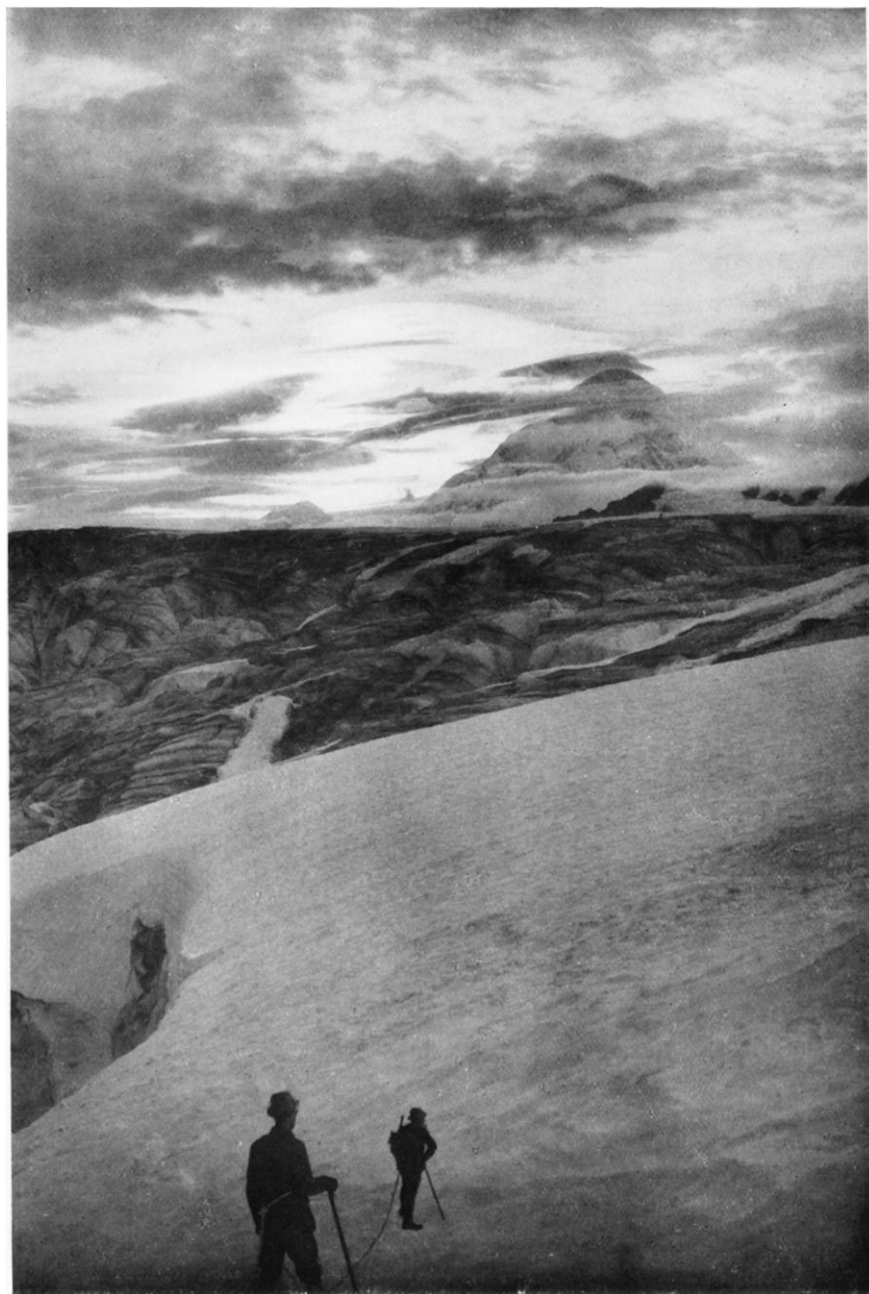
It is said, and truly, that those who love and understand and know how to conquer the mountains often remain indifferent spectators to the beauties of the sea, and that those who feel the fascination of the sea often remain without the slightest understanding of the divine majesty of the mountains. But he who has the full and complete understanding, both of the mountains and of the sea, must possess a remarkably keen and wide soul.

The sleepless and tiring nights on deck and the nerve-racking hours on the bridge of command, when the life of all and the safety of the ship may depend on one man's actions, are sufficient to harden a man. And he is also strengthened by the fight with the sudden burst of the storms, the solitary bivouacs, the anxiety of imminent danger, which must be measured and overcome by the alpinist, to ensure his own and his companions' safety and victory. But he who has had long experience in active navigation and also in alpinism is certainly prepared for any daring undertaking.

For us Italians however the sea and the mountains also form the boundaries of our country. And to be alpinist and sailor, at the same time, must mean a great devotion to our land and the wish to dedicate every thought and every action to its greatness. Few citizens have worked for the glory of Italy as much as H.R.H. the Duke of the Abruzzi, solitary, silent, almost taciturn, but ever sustained by the traditions of his great House, morally and physically prepared



H.R.H. the late Duke of the Abruzzi



Phot. V. Sella

Alaska 1897: Mount St. Elias from the Seward glacier

by his love and experience of all seas and mountains. The sea in fact had shown him that, for those who choose, the ways of the world are open; the mountains had taught him, with the conquest of our earthly summits, the way towards the ideal ones.

A little less than two centuries ago there appeared to the Russian navigator Bering, when sailing near the coast of Alaska, a high mountain, from the mighty pyramid of which glaciers and snowfields descended till they joined in an immense expanse of ice, between the foot of the mountain and the sea. The mountain was named Saint Elias after the Saint on whose day the discovery was made. Half a century later an Italian seafarer, Don Alessandro Malaspina, during his search for the North-west passage, again saw that mountain enthroned among the clouds; his name was given to the large glacier at its foot.

This was the period of discovery: much later began its difficult conquest, because of the distance from any base of operation, the breakers along the coast, a belt of woods and marshes, the immense expanse of ice, and also because of the frequent fogs and snowfalls. Because of all this, the progress was slow and the undertaking seemed as if doomed to fail. The repeated efforts of Russel, who succeeded at his second attempt in 1891 in reaching a col, 4400 metres in height, seemed superhuman. Russel's name is borne by this col at the northern foot of the final pyramid. Into this still unconquered field descended the young Italian Prince, although scarcely twenty years of age, in 1897.

Italy was a very distant base for organizing an expedition into Alaska; but already the perfect spirit of organization of the Prince showed itself, as though he had already had long experience in exploration. His companions were few: Francesco Gonella, who had initiated the Prince into the difficulties and the joys of Alpinism; Commander Umberto Cagni; Vittorio Sella, more an artist than a photographer of the great mountain world; Filippo De Filippi, who became later the historian of this and of other expeditions; a few alpine guides, and a small group of American porters to be employed only during the approach to the mountain.

Difficulties began on landing, which was delayed by the swell and the breakers; they were still greater on the large glacier, an immense extension which nearly forbade all access to the mountain. There were thirty days of laborious advance, with fog and frequent snowstorms, with much difficulty in pulling the loads, on the little sleighs, among a labyrinth of crevasses up the steep slopes from one plateau to another. Then began the real climb, more worthy of alpinists, and the Russel Pass was reached. So far they were on the tracks, so to say, of their predecessor. But from there onwards it resembled the charge of a patrol of *arditi*; the Prince at the head of all, the most untiring of all. Eleven hours of continual climbing from the pass upwards, with only the brief halts that were required to make necessary observations or to calm the breathing; but without uncertainties straight to the top. And on the top, at more than 18,000 feet high, ten Italians answered with one voice to the "Viva il Re" which the victorious Prince flung to the sky.

The return seemed like a race, first to the pass, then to the large treacherous expanse of the Malaspina glacier, then to the sea. In the first small village

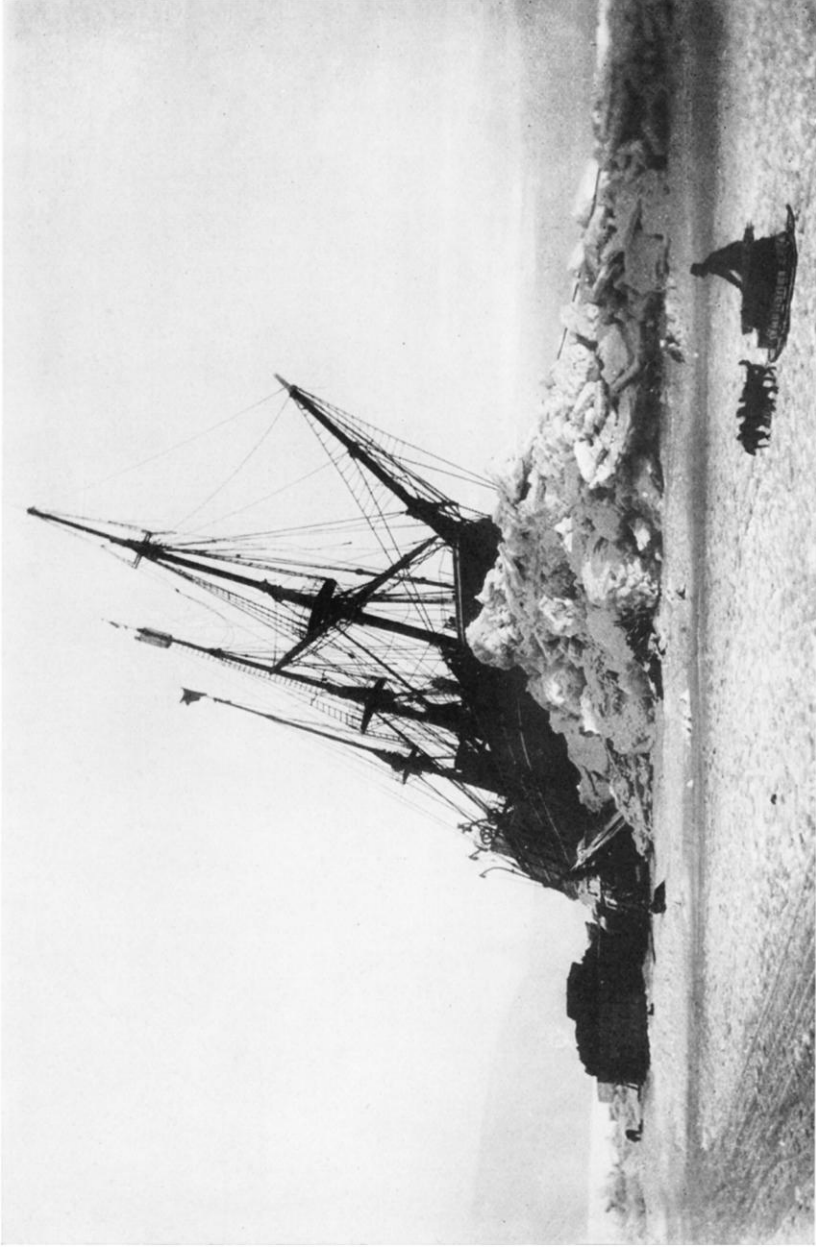
there came to meet the Duke an alpine explorer who had also attempted to climb that same mountain: he had landed there ten days before the Duke, and had also preceded him in the return, giving up however the final climb to the top.

For years seamen and students had been fascinated by the great unknown blank that surrounded the North Pole. But the general imagination—which tried to picture this gigantic polar dome as covered with ice, never visited by man, desolate, mysterious, almost hostile—gave an almost tangible shape to that point of it which constitutes its centre, and is at the same time nearly the apex of the Earth. Then there grew the anxiety, not only of revealing the polar mystery, but also of reaching the Pole, like a far-off and coveted ideal goal. Coveted, but far away and surrounded by its own ice barriers: not flat and uniform and motionless, as they were imagined at first, but drifting continually and subjected to pressure and expansion which continually form large abysses or raise tall shapeless banks.

It was also soon discovered that it was impossible for ships to break through that strong barrier of polar ice. Only man might adventure on its large expanse. The fight thus grew harder and more dramatic, also more fascinating: man, alone, amidst the immense and hostile polar solitude. It was a fight that became nobler the more immaterial the goal appeared: a truly ideal goal, made for the sanest and strongest virtues of man. The principal stages in Polar Exploration were the following: in 1773 Phipps, an Englishman, reached with his two ships a northern latitude of $80^{\circ} 48'$; in 1827 Parry, an Englishman, with his launches, that were transformable into sledges, attained $82^{\circ} 45'$; in 1875 Markham, also an Englishman, ventured as far as $83^{\circ} 20'$; in 1882 Lockwood, an American, went only 4 miles farther than his predecessor; in 1895 Nansen, the Norwegian, taking advantage at first of the drift of the ice itself, reached $86^{\circ} 13'$. It seemed as though this was a field open only to the daring of the more northern races.

But wherever there was an enterprise more daring than any other; wherever there was a goal to be attained that was above any other; wherever there was a battle to fight and glory to conquer, there the young Prince of Savoy stepped forward, to take part in the competition of heroism. So it was also in 1899. His two great loves for the sea and for the mountains showed him where to choose his men: Cagni, Querini, Cavalli Molinelli, were men of the sea; also two seamen who were chosen to go with the sledge parties; and four alpine guides from the valley of Aosta.

The remembrance is still alive in us of the perilous navigation of the *Stella Polare* amidst the island labyrinth of Franz Josef Land; the unsafe anchorage in Teplitz Bay; the daily and hourly conflict with the ice; the sudden abandonment of the ship, which seemed as if it was going to be hopelessly crushed by the powerful pressure of the ice; the feverish work to construct a shelter on firm ground and to save the ship. Then followed the dark, cold polar night. But during the polar night the last preparations were made for the final attempt; during this time also the patient training of the dogs continued, with the sledges, which were loaded as they would have to be for the final race to the Pole.



Arctic Expedition 1899-1900: "Stella Polare" crushed by the ice in Teplitz Bay
Phot. H.R.H. Duke of the Abruzzi



Ruvenzori 1906: Punta Alessandra (left) and Punta Margherita (right) from the Stanley glacier
Phot. V. Sella

During one of these experiments an unexpected slope, that ended in a sudden descent onto the frozen sea, made the dogs and the sledges go too fast to save themselves, and the Duke, from a bad fall. And when, after endless toil, they at last returned to their companions, the Duke's hands were frozen beyond recovery. What greatness in the simplicity of the words with which the Prince told us of this misadventure, which necessitated the amputation of part of his fingers and forced him to entrust Cagni with the command of the sledge parties bound towards the Pole.

Then began the long waiting, more tiring even than action itself. There was still some work to be accomplished at Teplitz Bay on the ship which was still in danger. But the wait for the sledging parties took up all the leader's anxious thoughts. One group, the first one, did not return: all honour be to the vanquished in the Polar strife! But the second came back. Then finally, when the waiting had begun to be almost unbearable, the third party arrived from quite an unexpected direction, imposed by the inexorable drift of the ice: Cagni and the sailor Canepa, Petigax and Fenoillet, the alpine guides, at the very end of their resources, but still steadfast of soul, as on the day of their departure towards their uncertain destiny: they had been victorious, for they had carried the flag which had been entrusted to them by H.R.H. the Duke of the Abruzzi to a latitude of $86^{\circ} 34'$, a latitude that had never been reached before.

An ancient tradition said that the Nile rises in high snow-topped mountains. Only about fifty years ago however the Italian Gessi, whilst exploring the shores of Lake Alberta, had what appeared like a strange vision of snowy peaks which seemed to float and vanish in the sky. He took it for an optical illusion. And it was only in 1888 that Stanley really saw a shining white massive-topped mountain, Ruwenzori. But Ruwenzori, because of its position, its natural surroundings, and also its height, is nearly always surrounded by clouds; for that reason many travellers had passed along the edge of its slopes, without seeing it, without even suspecting its existence. For the same reason all attempts to climb it had failed, even those who had succeeded in reaching a ridge or a peak of its vast massif had in the end been able to tell us little to add to our knowledge of the mountain. Ever since the first year after its discovery attempts to climb it had followed rapidly; men like Freshfield and Mumm had tried their skill on it. But the mountain held itself impenetrable amidst a barrier of its clouds. And this explains why Stanley, its discoverer, a few years before his death, begged that some person devoted to his work, some lover of the Alps, should choose Ruwenzori as a goal, and should make a complete study of it, exploring it in all its wide valleys and deep gorges.

H.R.H. the Duke of the Abruzzi took up this message, which sounded like a challenge, and during the first months of 1906 he was preparing, with his usual perfect spirit of organization, his new expedition. Amongst his old faithful followers the Prince chose again Cagni, Sella, Cavalli; added a naturalist, Roccati, and a strong party of Alpine guides from Courmayeur, and then left to attack the mountain. Perhaps during the inevitable delays of preparation, rapid though this was, he may have feared to arrive too late in this noble strife: in fact, whilst still busy with preparations, between the months of January and

April of that year, seven attempts were again made to conquer the mountain, which failed however like the preceding.

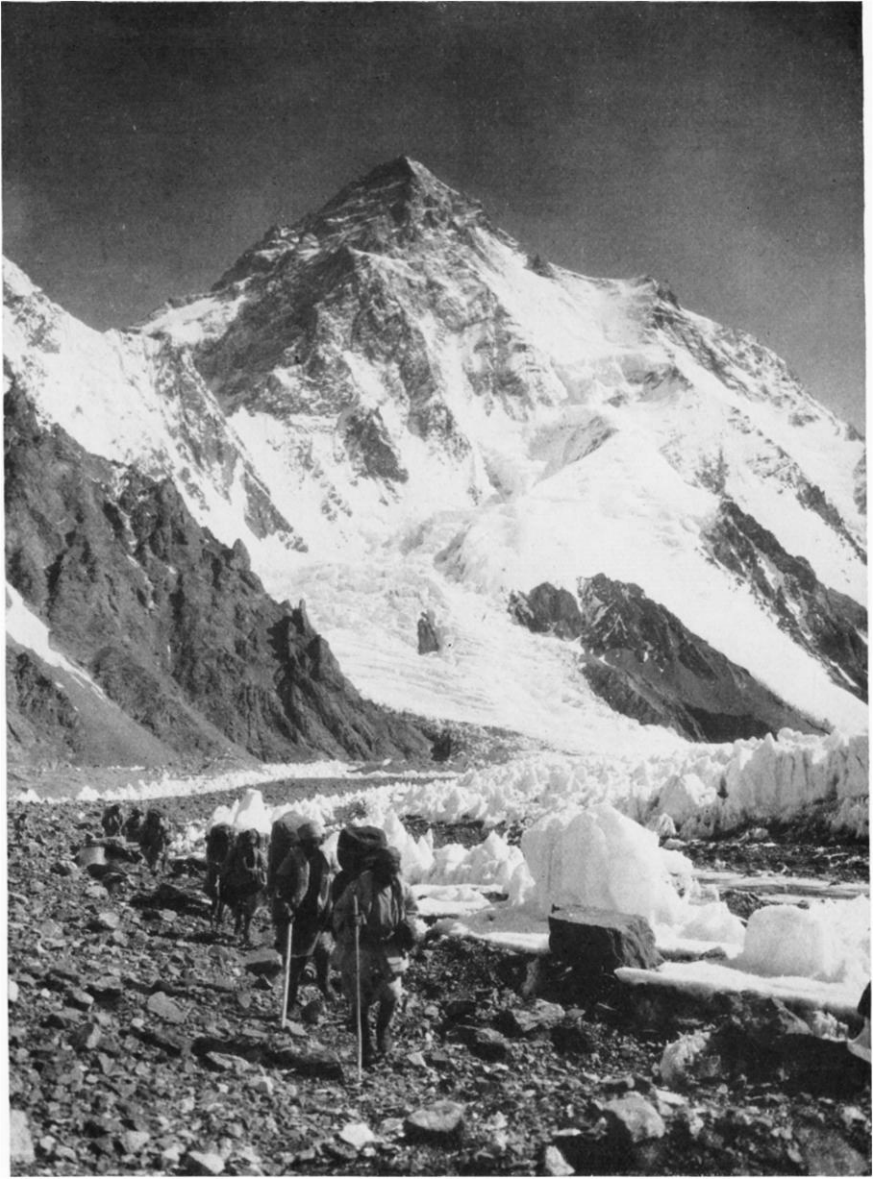
To climb Ruwenzori was a really new undertaking, new even in the means and in the surroundings: instead of the great extensions of ice in the polar region, here were the warm and damp and thick equatorial forests; instead of sledges, the long line of native carriers; instead of complete solitude of the most desolate nature, an exuberance of life and a little crowd of primitive humanity. But when the expedition finally reached Bujongolo, it was then on the threshold of a high-mountain world, and the high-mountain world is everywhere the same, under every climate, and in any part of the Earth, and it is ever admirable in its magnificence, even if, as with Ruwenzori, it likes to hide amongst the clouds and looks as if it wanted to escape from the equatorial heat into the frequent rain of thunderstorms. There were fogs and threatening clouds, insistent thin rain, or sudden and violent downpours. But "The King of the Clouds" was conquered at last; conquered with all its peaks: nineteen above 4500 metres high were climbed, and of these sixteen by the Duke, including the highest of over 5100 metres. And the course of the ridges and of the valleys was determined, the structure of the large massif finally recognized. The wish of Stanley was now fulfilled, the challenge, that had been accepted, was won.

With his predilections and with his experience the Prince could not remain insensible to the appeal of that part of the world where the mountains assume such shapes and heights as to appear almost the consummation of all alpine beauty. I speak of the Karakoram, one of the numerous Himalayan ranges, wherein the Baltoro glacier offers a field worthy of the most daring effort.

You will remember, among the first pioneers in this field, Sir Francis Younghusband, who penetrated into it in 1887, when, at the end of his memorable journey from far-off China to India, he found his way suddenly blocked by the high range of the Karakoram. Godwin Austen had already been over the main tongue of the Baltoro glacier, as far as that large terminal basin where immense glaciers join from all directions and which is dominated by K_2 , more than 8600 metres high. Then Lord Conway, who made the first climb in this range, had reached in 1892 the top of a peak of nearly 6900 metres high. The following expedition, led by Eckenstein in 1902, proved only how the mountain, K_2 , in all its grandeur, showed itself adverse to being conquered.

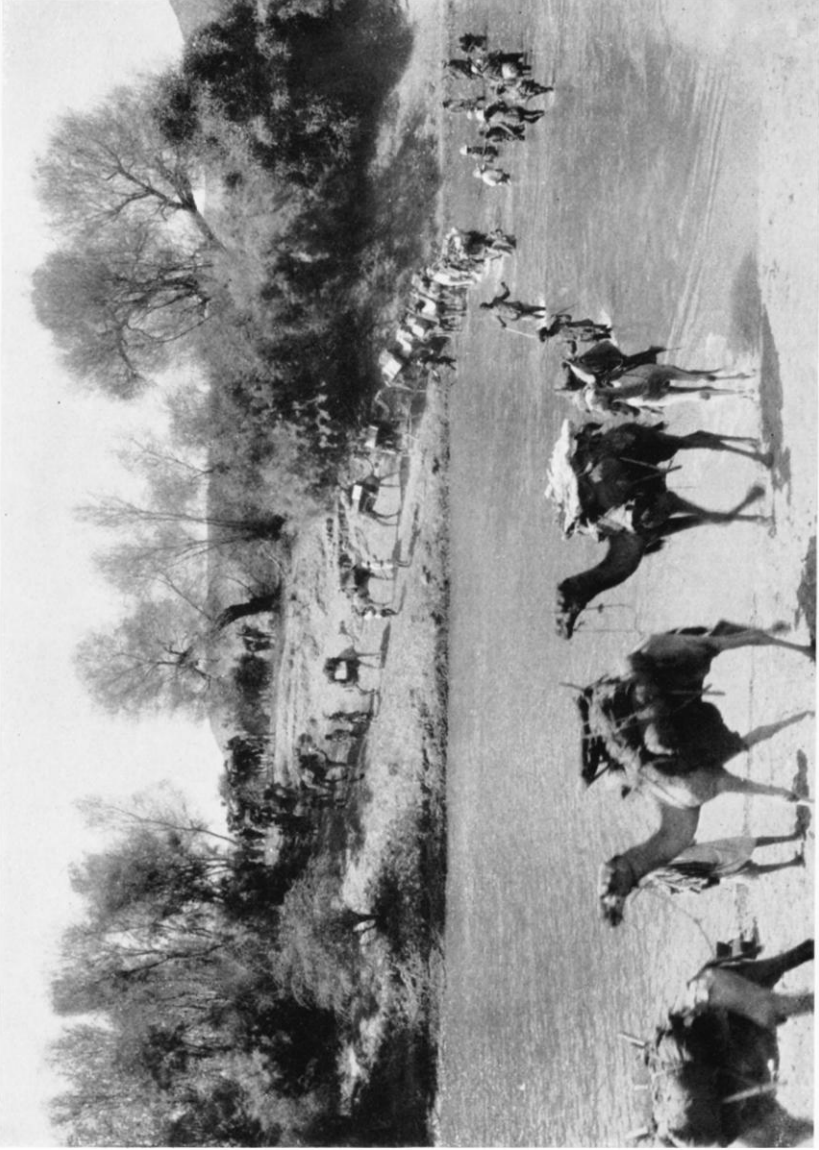
H.R.H. the Duke of the Abruzzi, always ready for every great deed, set out in 1909 towards the Baltoro. His companions were Sella, Negrotto Cambiaso, De Filippi, and a reliable group of alpine guides from Courmayeur. But in the attempts to climb the giants of the Karakoram, the Prince this time went alone with his faithful mountaineers from the Val d'Aosta. And K_2 , the gigantic and majestic pyramid, was studied, was attempted on every side, up to the last lateral saddles, which gave one a view over the northern slopes of the range, towards a sea of peaks and glaciers until then unknown. But K_2 , the giant of all, remained unconquered.

Others might have been content with this fine exploring campaign; not so the Duke, and while he was leaving the untamed giant, he saw in front of him a high snowy mountain, the Bride Peak, lower than K_2 , but still worthy of being attempted. And the patient climb began, from one fall of séracs to



Phot. V. Sella

Karakoram 1909: K2 from the Godwin Austen glacier



Somaliland 1928: the Duke's caravan crossing the Webi Shebeli

another, till the last short slope that would have led directly to the summit. But there, within 150 metres of the summit, with only a moderate effort needed to reach it, the mountain seemed to defend itself against the daring climber, who clung to its rugged shoulders cloaked with snow. It shrouded itself in a sea of dense fog; and this barrier would not be removed. It seemed, on the contrary, to enclose it the more surely; and in the end, when every hope failed, it became necessary to abandon the final achievement.

To reach the summit has a moral significance, which only the true alpinist can feel in all its power. On the Bride there was something greater than merely reaching the summit, even though a new summit. Here men were striving, in ideal competition, toward the greatest altitude yet reached by man. Dr. Longstaff had reached 7134 metres on Trisul, and he, an Englishman, then held the record, though some doubt remained concerning a slightly higher altitude Graham was said to have reached on Mount Kabru. These records however had now been conquered by the Prince, who with his bivouacs at 7500 metres attained the greatest altitude then ever reached by man by his own efforts on the mountains.

Twenty years elapse, many years of war and of turmoil. When this was at its worst the Prince again wished to be an example to all Italians. In 1920—it is necessary to remember that date—when many things seemed about to fall in ruins, he showed that, on the contrary, it was necessary to begin to work tenaciously to build up, with courage and faith, “*Ardisci e spera*,” as was the motto which the August Queen had given him for one of his great enterprises. In 1920 H.R.H. the Duke of the Abruzzi, as if he wished to start a new life, went to Somaliland, into the interior, where the woods near the river Webi Shebeli are only a feeble defence against the heated plains, arid for the greater part of the year, and showing, only after the rains, some green but meagre pasture for the nomads’ flocks. And there along the Webi Shebeli he became a pioneer, and gave life to one of the most important agricultural enterprises that our colonies have known. Where the herds of cattle used to linger and graze there is now a great fervour of initiatives: new works, machines, cultivated lands, villages, canals, factories, where throbs the life of the colonists and of the natives.

But because of the unchanging laws of the climate it is only from the river that the ground can get the fertilizing water, and the river shows itself, in its floods, to be strangely irregular, perhaps also insufficient, if one is thinking not only of to-day’s works, but also of to-morrow’s. The Webi however, except for the last part of its course, could still be called an unknown river. Many travellers had partly followed it, or crossed it, or only just reached it; but they were travellers of that epoch of exploration which had given us only the general lines, not the details, of the Earth’s features. In 1928 the Duke of the Abruzzi, no longer young, organized his last expedition between Abyssinia and Somaliland, and reaching that region of Sidamo, where the sources of the Webi were still hidden, he followed that river in its entire course, from gorge to gorge, from one bend to another, until it opens out into the plains of sand and there loses part of its water. The work of his predecessors is completed, because that river to-day holds no more mysteries.

These are the achievements of the Prince explorer, and we need not record all that he brought back, from each of his undertakings, for the progress of Science. Even had he not done so, his high moral figure would not be diminished in the least, for it has a very different and deeper and more essential root. Because he has shown that human life is fine and noble and worthy of being lived, only if it escapes from a too comfortable and quiet life, and knows, on the contrary, how to accept, always and in all places, the fight for an ideal aim. His life indeed has always appeared like a striving without end, because always renewed, towards always more distant and always more elevated goals: towards those same goals which are well known to you, my English friends.

Therefore his is a figure that dominates and seems surrounded by a halo of heroism: and great he was until the very end.

A comparison comes to my mind with one of your heroes. When Captain Scott was dragging himself along in his tragic return from the Pole, Oates, one evening, feeling himself to be at the end of his strength, got up and went out of the little tent, saying simply to his two companions: "I am just going outside and may be some time." And he walked off in the ice, amidst the snowstorm, to die, all alone, where he had fought and won.

And the Prince explorer, when he knew that the end was inexorably near, left his town and his palace, and to those who had the sad fortune of greeting him for the last time, he simply said: "Don't ask for news of me any more," and he too went, to die on the field of his last struggle and of his last victory. And perhaps, when sailing from Genoa, he may have gone back, in his thought, to all his voyages on the sea, from the time when he learnt as a princely child that life must be, always and for every one, a school of duty; but a duty which it is given to few to accomplish heroically as the Prince has done.

Sailing from Genoa, he may indeed have gone back, to all his enterprises: Saint Elias, *Stella Polare*, Ruwenzori, Baltoro, Shebeli, and perhaps he may have heard as an echo the distant voice of the poet who had sung him on the glorious and sad day of his return from the Pole.

And as he left his beloved Italy for ever he may have felt the love made of endless devotion which floated about him, the love of those who saw in him an example and the purest of symbols; above all, those who were young when he was fighting and winning his noble battles, young himself, remembered how their love for their country and the infinite craving for its greatness were upheld by an unshaken faith, even during the mediocrity of the greyest times; but this faith was again and again animated and strengthened by the young Prince, who, with every new action of his, always knew how to stand up high again, for Italy, in the world.

For to him, to the Prince, in those hazy times in which he lived his vivid youth, there must have appeared as in a vision of light an active and productive Italy such as the poet had sung, inspired by his great deeds, almost foreseeing the great renewal of to-day. Inspired indeed was the poet by the great deeds of our hero Prince, for whom the path marked by destiny seems to have been unique and immutable: TO WILL, TO DARE, TO CONQUER ALWAYS!