The Geography of the Italian Front

Author(s): Filippo de Filippi

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THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE ITALIAN FRONT

Magg. Cav. Filippo De Filippi, Hon. K.C.I.E.

Read at the Meeting of the Society, 26 November 1917. Map following p. 128.

WHEN little more than a month ago I gratefully accepted the honour of describing to you geographically the line of the Italian front, little did any of us anticipate the rapid and radical change of the situation which has taken place in the interval. The most successful campaign of the war, fought almost entirely on the enemy's territory, has become a grim effort to stem an already advanced invasion. The blow was indeed a cruel one, depriving us, as it did, in a few days' time of all the advantages gained during two and a half years of tenacious and incessant struggle, carried out under difficulties which no one who has not actually lived at our front can possibly realize. But in these dark and anxious weeks we have at least had the sustaining proofs of how close and loyal are the ties of fellowship and sympathy which bind us to our Allies. I do not allude only to the generous manner in which France and England rushed immediately to our aid with men and material, but also to the numberless expressions of sympathy and goodwill towards my country which have not ceased to flow in from every quarter—from the Press, from public platforms and from private individuals, and of which you have given me an eloquent instance in your warm and touching welcome of to-night. These weeks have proved once again on what a firm foundation stands the friendship between Italy and England—a friendship based upon common ideals of justice and liberty, and born and cemented during Italy's great struggle for independence in the epoch-making days of the Risorgimento.

Once more the Austrian is on Italian soil; and yet, in a sense, my country has never been more strong and independent than now. We Italians are one and all firmly united in an invincible determination to fight on till the day of liberation and indisputable victory. We are confident that our struggles and sacrifices will not have been in vain, and that we shall still take our full part in the coming triumph.

What I propose to do to-night is to illustrate to you, as fully as is possible in the short time allotted to this paper, the territories over which

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Italy has fought for two and a half years. Even had it been possible to give you a review of the continually changing fighting line of the past few weeks, I should still have preferred to show you the ground which has not only been the scene of by far the greater part of our struggle, but also of the reverse of our fortunes, and which geographically is infinitely more varied and interesting than the flat alluvial plains of Friuli and Venetia. The subject will not be altogether new to you. Two years ago Mr. Freshfield read you an admirable paper on "The Southern Frontiers of Austria" (*Geogr. Journ.*, 46, 414), and as our subjects necessarily overlap at many points a certain amount of repetition will be unavoidable.

The Italo-Austrian political frontier is 470 miles long, and a detailed description of such a vast territory would be quite impossible to attempt within the limits of a lecture. I trust however that I may be able to give a general idea of the diversity of conditions under which the struggle has been carried on at the Italian front, and of the enormous difficulties with which we have had to cope. These difficulties have tested to the uttermost the skill and inventive powers of our engineers in every field of the specialists' work, and have put to the severest proof the resistance, pluck, and determination of our men.

I regret that time will not permit me to touch except very briefly on our front beyond the sea—the line of 150 miles which we hold between the Vojuca and Monastir, to ensure the strategical position and the communications of the left wing of the Macedonian army, and the sector assigned to Italy in the same army.

The whole of the Adriatic coast of Italy lies open to enemy attacks. From the broken Illyrian coast or from the labyrinth of the Dalmatian islands, Austria can launch her battleships to raid the Italian towns scattered along a coast which from Venice to the extreme end of the peninsula has only the harbour of Brindisi available as a base for our protecting ships. Our navy has even had to create mobile batteries on armoured trains to assist the ships constantly cruising at a distance of many hundreds of miles from their bases in the defence of the coast.

Until the end of October last, the fighting front overstepped the boundary over practically its whole length. Only on the Asiago plateau was the fighting line at some distance on the Italian side of the boundary, showing the point to which we had succeeded in pushing back the invading Austrian army after its great offensive of May 1916. But the fighting line and the boundary have to be considered in relation to the watershed of the Alps between the Adriatic and the Danube. The watershed coincides with the boundary only along the stretch of about 50 miles along the Carnic Alps between the Passo di Monte Croce and Cima Timau. Along the rest of the frontier Austria has held the headwaters and the upper course of every one of our rivers. In the Trentino she has held the wide basins of the Adige and the Isarco with all their affluents; the Chiese, the Sarca, and the upper affluents of the Piave, nearly down to

their discharge into the plains; and also the northern extremity of the Lake of Garda. There is not one single small valley which is not held by Austria to within a short distance of its opening into the plain. The military situation thus created need not be emphasized.

Bad however as is the frontier on the Trentino borders, it is even worse to the east of the Carnia. It would seem as if Austria had decided to compensate herself for the one short bit of mountain barrier which she has left to Italy in the Carnia. Beyond Carnia Austria possesses the whole basin of the Isonzo from its source to the sea, and the resulting political boundary bears absolutely no relation to any of the geographical features of the land. In the plains of the lower Isonzo the boundary was marked for miles by a wire fence about 12 feet high supported by poles and stretching arbitrarily across fields and ditches and all the irregularities of the landscape. It was not unlike the boundaries which are sometimes set up in Africa to mark the various "Spheres of Influence."

But in the plan of our frontier there is one drawback which is still more serious and which cannot be too much insisted upon. Drawn as it is with a longer stretch extending in a general direction from west to east and a shorter section extending from north to south, it is obvious that the army facing it is permanently exposed to the danger of a flank attack and having its communications cut. And, as a matter of fact, all our past strategists have been much more concerned in studying lines of resistance than plans of attack. The Tagliamento, Piave, Brenta, Adige, Mincio and Ticino Rivers, which are our natural lines of resistance, are each connected with one or the other of the northern passages from which an invasion of the plains north of the Po might but too easily be effected.

It follows therefore that while the eastern sector, being the only vulnerable spot of Austria and the only part of our front where modern armies could manœuvre, was the only point at which a forward movement might be attempted, it was at the same time imperative to hold strongly all the northern border which on the other hand was our vulnerable side, on which flank attacks were most likely to be attempted. Therefore we were obliged to fight hard and continuously on two separate fronts. We had to secure our flank and our communications against all attacks from the Carnia, the Dolomites, and the Trentino, while maintaining a vigorous offensive on the Isonzo front.

Due credit has been given to Italy for entering into the war while its fortunes were especially unfavourable to the Allies; but to many who knew how unprepared she was for the undertaking, her decision seemed incredibly foolhardy and likely to lead to an immediate disaster. The Lybian campaign had strained our resources more than is generally known; and only a few months before our declaration of war the country was afflicted by another of our disastrous earthquakes. During the nine months of our neutrality no country could be found to supply us with

either steel or coal; besides which the few factories and works we possessed at that time would have been totally insufficient to cope with the demands of military preparation.

Every door leading into Italy lay open to Austria. We were faced therefore with the alternatives either of retiring at once to one of our lines of defence and giving up part of our country to the enemy, or else of attacking along the whole front in a violent effort to wrest from him the keys of the doors of Italy. You can now perhaps appreciate the boldness of General Cadorna in taking the offensive along the whole 470 miles of our frontier. To the fully equipped army of Austria, seasoned by the lessons of nine months of war and fed by all her factories working at full pressure, we could oppose only an insufficiently equipped army of inexperienced recruits. And yet in the first two days of fighting the crest of the high glacier-covered range from the Stelvio to the Adamello was carried, the Val Giudicaria, the Lagarina, and Val Sugana were invaded, the two buttresses west and east of the northern extremity of the Garda were in our possession, the frontier of the Cadore was everywhere overstepped, the summits of the Carnic Alps were lined with our troops, and the Austrian territory to the east was occupied as far as the Isonzo. All these gains we held with a prodigious effort, being extremely deficient in big guns, ammunition, and aeroplanes. But meanwhile throughout the country with an almost incredible swiftness there sprang up factories and works and skilled workmen who multiplied by thousands; with the result that in less than a year's time the most anxious period was at an end and we were at least able to face the enemy at not too absurd a disadvantage.

We will now examine the physical features over which our front extended up to the end of October last, starting at the north-west corner, at the Stelvio Pass which adjoins the meeting-point of the Italian, Austrian and Swiss frontiers. South of the Stelvio Pass the Italian front runs over the glacier-covered crests of the Ortler and the Cevedale, and except for a small stretch in the neighbourhood of the Stelvio practically coincides with the boundary.

The Cevedale range is separated from the Presanella group by the important Tonale Pass which connects the Val Camonica (River Oglio) with the Val di Sole (River Noce). The Tonale Pass is held by the Italian army, and south of it the front stretches still further into Austrian territory, including nearly the whole of the Presanella group and all the eastern slopes of the Adamello.

The crest of the Adamello, over 10,000 feet high, was captured by two very brilliant attacks of Alpini in April 1916, when the mountain was still in full winter conditions. The Austrians at that time held the crest, and the Italian troops were confined to the rock-ridges which cut the lower part of the Great Adamello glacier. During an attack on a stormy night the Alpini succeeded in dislodging the enemy from the crest. Six-inch guns were then carried to the edge of the glaciers, and in successive

Az. 257°

Val d'Astico.

↓
W.

↓
W.N.W. Pennar

1. THE ASIAGO PLATEAU FROM

Az. 96°

6.5 km.

18 km.

↓
E.S.E.

2. VALLEY OF THE ISONZO FROM M. PRE

W.N.W. Pennar

N.W.

1. THE ASIAGO PLATEAU FROM SLOPE OF CIMA ECHAR, 5 km. S.E. OF ASIAGO

S.E.

2. VALLEY OF THE ISONZO FROM M. PRESTRELJENIK, 6.5 km. W.N.W. OF PLEZZO (FLITSCH), JULIAN ALPS

18 km.

Az. 34°

N.W.

Bertigo

N.N.W.

CHAR, 5 km. S.E. OF ASIAGO

Caporetto 15 km. 7 km.

17.5 km.

Az. 172°

S.S.E.

N.W. OF PLEZZO (FLITSCH), JULIAN ALPS

Az. 85°

8.5 km.

Valley of Bata, with rail to Vienna.

3. VALLEY OF THE ISONZO FROM 4 k

Az. 56°

Skyline 30 km.

17.2 km.

5.2 km.

↓
E.S.E.

↓
S.E.

3. VALLEY OF THE ISONZO FROM 4 km. WEST OF TOLMINO ON S.E. SLOPE OF M. HEVNIK

5.2 km.

19 km.

Skyline 21 km.

OLMINO ON S.E. SLOPE OF M. HEVNIK

km.

Skyline 21 km.

9.3 km.

Az. 72°

actions we won the whole of the glaciers on the eastern slope of the range, and pushed right on beyond the crest of the Larés and the Caré Alto, which runs parallel with the Adamello range.

On the Adamello in winter the men live under truly arctic conditions. Large bodies of troops have to be permanently encamped on the edge of the glaciers, and live throughout the year practically at the snow-level. Between the barracks and the outposts there is an incessant coming and going of caravans whose path is frequently obliterated by fresh snowfalls. We have been obliged to invent a completely new equipment for the soldiers to protect them against the rigours of the climate, and to render them less conspicuous against the dazzling white background.

Long stretches of aerial wires, the so-called 'teleferic' lines, have been built to carry ammunition, supplies and men from the valley to the upper crests, and often to bring back the wounded. But there are many heights which these *teleferiche* cannot reach, and a good deal of transport has to be done by the men themselves toiling on foot up the steep snow-covered slopes. Packs of strong sleigh dogs have been found very useful in our mountain warfare, and add yet another arctic touch to the picture.

At Monte Castello the line of the front turns abruptly eastwards, and descends into the Val Giudicaria by the Val Daone (upper River Chiese); it then runs across the top of Val Giudicaria, crosses the ridge to the left of it, and continues along the mountain buttresses to the north of Val di Ledro as far as the Lake of Garda, barely 2 miles below Riva. To the east of the lake the front skirts the Val di Loppio to its junction with the Val Lagarina (River Adige).

We have now come to the important sector which in May 1916 was the scene of the determined Austrian attack against our left flank. It is formed of the tableland of Asiago or Sette Comuni plateau, and is sharply defined on the west by the Valley of the Adige, and on the east by the Valley of the Brenta or Val Sugana. The centre of the attacking army advanced over the whole extent of the plateau, while the two wings pushed vigorously in the Val Lagarina and the Val Sugana. The object of the attack was obviously to cut the rearguard of our army in the plains of Venetia and the two railway lines which were the only means of communication with the Isonzo front. For this purpose the Austrians had concentrated in the Trentino some 400,000 men and over 2000 guns, 800 of which were of big calibre, including the huge 420 mm. and many 15-inch naval guns.

The great bombardment began on May 14. On the 20th Cadorna was compelled to withdraw his centre almost to the southern edge of the plateau, relying on the resistance of our outposts in the side valleys of Lagarina and Val Sugana to hold back the enemy's wings and so paralyze the advance of the centre. Meanwhile by an admirable co-ordination of every means of transport, in which the lorries played quite as large a part as they did at Verdun, a whole army with all the necessary

artillery, ammunition, etc., was carried with astonishing rapidity from the Isonzo to the top of the tableland, 3000 feet above the plains. By June 3 the offensive was arrested, and a week later we had begun our counter-offensive which pushed the enemy right back beyond Asiago. This is the only set-back which we had suffered during the whole campaign before the present Austro-German attack. Two months later the situation was reversed. With the capture of Gorizia we had dealt the enemy a blow which more than re-established the situation in our favour.

The Sette Comuni plateau rises nearly 3500 feet over the plains of Venetia; the gradient is very steep and towards the Adige and the Brenta valleys which bound it west and east it becomes a sheer wall. The top of the tableland is studded with villages and strewn with detached farms, all of which are now in ruins. It is here on the Asiago plateau that the present defensive line detaches itself from the former front, and directs itself towards the Piave by a sinuous course across the heights which are cut through by the deep Val Brenta.

The former front bent to the north above Asiago, crossing the margin of the tableland opposite the village of Strigno in the Val Sugana. It then ran deeply into the Austrian Cadore along the Dolomite ridge enclosing the wide basin of Primiero. We had thus gained possession of the Val Tolva, the Val Cortella, and the Val Cison, all of them tributaries of the Brenta. Beyond Primiero the front came once more into contact with the boundary over the glaciers of the Marmolada, leaving it again to enclose the basin of Cortina, from which flows the Boite, a tributary of the Piave.

In the Cadore the scenery is truly fantastic. The richness of detail in the Dolomites, the complicated meshes of the ridges, the multitude of peaks, teeth, pinnacles, and needles, make of this region a unique battleground, where the struggle is rich in romantic episodes and the adventurous side of war is still uppermost. But it would be impossible to gauge the difficulties added to the work of our troops by the picturesqueness of the scene. Peaks whose summer climbs are considered as mountaineering feats have been lived on uninterruptedly by our soldiers through clear and stormy weather, encamped under the fierce solar radiation of summer days or banked by thick layers of winter snow. By miracles of engineering devices, tons upon tons' weight of guns and ammunition were hoisted on to peaks and crests rising from sheer perpendicular walls; and hundreds of victims were swallowed by avalanches while engaged in the never-ending toil of bringing up the supplies.

Our advance into the enemy's territory in the Cadore district had allowed us to cut at several points the long Dolomite road which the Austrians had built mainly for strategical purposes. Starting midway between Trento and Bolzano (Botzen) this road runs right across the whole Dolomite district and roughly parallel with the boundary as far as Cortina d'Ampezzo, from which it runs northwards to Toblach.

This road is joined by two main communication roads from Italy : one from Feltre to Predazzo by Fiera di Primiero ; the other from Belluno to Cortena by Pieve di Cadore. We held the first of these roads up to a point beyond Passo di Rolle, which leads out of the Primiero basin ; and from the Colbricon, the Pale group, the Cima di Vezzana, and other important points of advantage we dominated its whole length down the Val Travignole to Predazzo. Our guns on the Marmolada ridge swept the Dolomite road on both sides of the Pordoi Pass ; while the whole stretch of it running across the Falzarego Pass and the Cortina Basin was in our possession. Among the peaks towering above Cortina and the adjoining Misurina basin over whose tops ran our fighting line, I mention only the three Tofane, Monte Cristallo, and the Tre Cime di Lavaredo or Drei Zinneñ on account of their popularity with mountaineers, who are all well acquainted with the difficulties of their ascents. Before this war it would hardly have been thought possible that troops should ever climb these peaks, fight upon them, and hoist artillery over their precipitous sides on to their tops.

The Dolomite district ends at the western extremity of the Carnic Alps ; here for the first time the political boundary coincides with the watershed, and the fighting line with both. This coincidence, however, only lasts for about 50 miles along the Carnic crest up to Mount Timau, where the boundary again separates from the watershed, leaving the whole of the upper Val Fella in the hands of the Austrians ; after which the two lines come into contact at only one more point—at Monte Canin. Beyond Monte Canin the whole basin of the Isonzo intervenes between the boundary and the watershed.

In the Carnic region, although the task of the troops was merely to hold the frontier, they nevertheless had many hot encounters with the enemy, who was striving to gain positions of advantage. We were forced to keep the whole crest permanently lined with strong forces, especially at the points dominating the important Passo di Monte Croce above Comelico, the Forcella Dignas, the Oregone, and Monte Croce Carnico passes, all of them situated at no great distance from the roads in the Italian Carnic valleys.

In Carnia the severity of the winter is extreme. Snow falls in enormous quantities ; and even in the lower valleys trenches many yards deep have to be dug in the snow to keep the roads open, while it has often been necessary to tunnel through huge avalanches fallen from the upper slopes. This snow tunnelling had to be extensively carried through in the upper valleys where the roads become mule-tracks. Only the well-known resourcefulness and inventive powers of the Italian Alpino have enabled him to withstand two severe winters in the high Carnia, in transportable barracks which were necessarily of a most primitive character.

The wide opening of the Val Fella, traversed by the boundary, and through which runs the important Pontebba Railway, the direct line of

communication between Venice and Vienna, was evidently a spot to be strongly guarded. The whole of the Fella 'and its side valleys to the north of Chiusaforte and Dogna were bristling with strongholds which here had more an aspect of permanency than is usually seen in this war.

There only remains to be described the sector of the Isonzo which covered the whole of the Italian eastern front. It was by far the most important on the whole of our front. On this portion of the Italian frontier there were literally no natural barriers between us and Austria, which not only held all the high ground but spread over into the plains. Here we were able to push the enemy right back into the heart of the mountains, shortening the front to 50 miles against the 82 miles of the corresponding boundary, which shows what a straightening of the crazy political line we had already accomplished. Unfortunately we were still situated below the enemy, who everywhere occupied hills overtopping us.

With the exception of the short crisis of 1916 on the Asiago plateau, our whole military effort had been continuously employed on this eastern front. Here, and only here, was it possible to strike a blow which might endanger the empire. In spite of the heavy odds against us, of the extreme difficulty in ground, and of the enormous sacrifice in lives which the undertaking must inevitably entail, here was real victory to be hoped for—a victory, I repeat, which would have put the enemy at our mercy. I do not think I exaggerate when I say that 90 per cent. of our total losses, before the recent disaster, took place on this portion of the front. It would be impossible to give you even an inadequate idea of the terrible fight which was waged incessantly during two years, for the capture of the core of the position of the Carso plateau. In the whole theatre of war, nowhere was the enormous strength of defence in modern warfare in comparison with attack proved more clearly. Gorizia, the key of the Austrian front, a fortified camp of 200,000 men, protected by the strongest bridge-head of any of the theatres of war, and defended by numberless guns stationed in the surrounding hills, fell to the Italian troops on 9 August 1916.

The whole Isonzo basin, as I have already told you, is here interposed between the frontier and the watershed. Only in the lower part of its course, below Gorizia, does the river flow out through the plain. Above Gorizia it flows from north to south in a narrow long winding defile which widens out a little at three points where side valleys meet it, at Plezzo, Caporetto, and Tolmino. Above Plezzo the river turns sharply to the east. These three widenings of the valley were the scenes of the big Austro-German inrush at the end of October last. Plezzo was in our hands; and Caporetto. Above the latter towers Monte Nero (called "Krn" in the Austrian maps), which attains an altitude of 6800 feet and which was conquered by the Italian Alpini in the early days of the war. The assault was carried out on the northern sheer wall of the mountain during the night. The Austrians were not expecting an attack from that

quarter, and our men fell on top of them literally as if they had fallen from the skies. When our armies had to retreat from the Isonzo, the garrison of Monte Nero, surrounded by miles of territory occupied by the enemy, held out for several days and to the last man. Facing Monte Nero on the other side of the valley is Mount Matajur, whose fall opened the road into Italy for the Austro-German army.

Tolmino, in the third widening of the valley, had resisted all our efforts to capture it. Here below the hill of Santa Lucia the Austrians had succeeded in holding a bridge-head across the Isonzo, through which the Austro-German masses, pouring out from the opposite valleys of Idria and Baka, were able to gain a sure footing on the right bank of the river.

Below Tolmino, the gorge of the Isonzo, stretching from Auzza to Monte Santo, witnessed the victorious attacks of the Italian army in May and in September of this year, when the Kuk-Vodice crest and the Monte Santo and Bainsizza Plateau were carried.

Below Gorizia the Isonzo describes an ample curve, encircling the edge of the Carso tableland. You have often heard or read of the "Carso Maledetto," where trenches and shelters have to be hewn out of the solid rock. It has become a vast cemetery of our men, still more of Austrians: a cemetery without dead. The rocky ground does not permit the digging of graves, and the dead have to be transported side by side with the wounded to find a resting-place in the valley at the foot of the plateau.

Time does not allow me to describe to you the physical features of this wide limestone undulating plateau, intersected by series of hills and dotted with the characteristic "doline" or bowl-shaped concave hollows. Each of these "doline" had to be carried by storming parties. In your bulletins you have often read of the stirring episodes attending the capturing of shell-holes or mine-craters. The "doline" are also craters, but about ten or twenty times the size of an ordinary mine-crater, and can easily be made into fortresses admirably sheltered from view by their rocky natural edges. The war on the Carso has partaken of all the savage character of the war waged on the Anglo-French front. There the Italian troops had frequent gas attacks launched against them, followed by Austrians armed with barbarous bludgeons to brain their gassed victims—hardly an advance on the Middle Ages when the mace was used against a standing and not a fallen foe.

The trenches of the Carso are naturally entirely different from the trenches dug in the earth on the western front. Very frequently the first-line troops had to put up with the scanty protection afforded by a few stones piled upon each other. The effect of the enemy's shells bursting upon this rocky ground was extremely deadly, on account of the innumerable rock splinters, which greatly multiplied the effects of the projectiles.

This review of Italy's struggles of two and a half years awakens recollections of hopes and dreams which only yesterday seemed on the point of realization. They refer to a not inglorious chapter in the history of

the war, covering untold sacrifices and deeds of endurance, of courage and bloody encounters in which we vanquished the enemy in eleven great battles. It is also the history of dangers and hardships which British units shared in complete comradeship with the Italian soldier.

On October 24th compact masses of troops, German as well as Austrian, backed by innumerable pieces of artillery and equipped with every infernal device of German invention, attacked on the Isonzo front. Men were thrown recklessly into the openings of Plezzo, of Caporetto, and Tolmino, while a front attack was launched to force away the line from the Bainsizza plateau and the sector of Gorizia and the Carso. Our front withstood the onslaught, but our left wing, less strongly organized, was forced to retire on the frontier from Monte Maggiore to Auzza. The troops holding the Bainsizza were thus in imminent danger of being isolated and it became necessary to evacuate the plateau. With the Bainsizza fell the ridge of Kuk-Vodice—Monte Santo. Then on the 26th–27th Monte Matajur, the stronghold defending the head of the Natisone, fell to the enemy; and the Austro-German armies were free to pour through the valley into the plains of Italy. The defence of the Valley of the Judrio which had stood firm against every attack, owing to the heroism of the troops which had lost and recaptured Monte Globocac, then became useless and was relinquished. On the 28th, when the enemy was almost at the gates of Udine, the army of occupation of the Carso was also forced to retire. It was none too soon. Already it was outflanked by more than half the distance to the Tagliamento and in imminent danger of being cut off. It just succeeded in reaching the rear positions, thanks to the desperate attacks and counter attacks of the cavalry and infantry divisions which protected its flank.

Then, about one million soldiers with what artillery could be removed, the medical units, the lorries, motor cars, and all the immense bulk of impedimenta of a modern army, together with the civil population of the invaded district, had to cross to the right bank of the swollen Tagliamento over only three bridges. By November 1 the Italian army had taken up its new Tagliamento line. The number of prisoners and the booty claimed by the enemy is indeed small, considering the magnitude of the numbers retiring, and the terrible circumstances under which the retreat had to be effected. By November 7 our line had retreated further west to the Livenza; and by the 10th to the Piave. The armies holding the northern front—the Carnic Range and the Cadore—had to fall back, pivoting southwards so as to fall into line with the armies retreating from the Isonzo.

The sudden relinquishment of all the advantages ungrudgingly paid for with the pick of our youth, and gained after ceaseless effort and sacrifice, is indeed hard to bear. But wounded Italy remains at her post, more compact and tenacious than ever, ready at the cost of any sacrifice to realize the aims and ideals for which she entered this war. The disaster must and shall be retrieved. Italy and her Allies are inspired by

something deeper than common interests; they are fortified by a consciousness of right. That is the moving impulse in this struggle against a savage and predatory people which has presumed to raise itself against all civilized humanity.

Before the paper the PRESIDENT said: I have now to introduce a very old friend of the Society under a somewhat new name, Maggiore Cav. Filippo De Filippi, to whom we are all prepared to offer a cordial welcome on his visit to us from what was the late front of the Italian Army—which we all firmly believe will soon be the front of the Italian Army again.

(Sir Filippo De Filippi then read the paper printed above, and a discussion followed.)

Baron MAYOR DES PLANCHES (Chief of the Italian Mission): I beg to be allowed to thank you for the kind and benevolent attention with which you have listened to a very instructive and interesting lecture by Maggiore Cav. Filippo De Filippi. I should like to be allowed to thank Maggiore De Filippi also on behalf of the Italian Ambassador, unfortunately absent, for the very excellent description he gave us of the Italian Army all along our front, and for having shown the difficulties both of the offensive and of the defensive. I express the confidence that in the very near future Maggiore Filippo De Filippi will be able to describe to us another boundary, a boundary along the Isonzo, a boundary including all the population who speak Italian, and who have the strength and will to be Italian.

Mr. DOUGLAS FRESHFIELD: I am sure the first feeling of all our Fellows who are here to-night is the desire to express to the Italian guests whom we have with us, particularly to Maggiore De Filippi, our deep sympathy with Italy in the trial she has lately undergone, and the eager interest with which we watch from day to day the heroic struggle of her soldiers on the plains of the Piave, and on the beautiful hills of Bassano, to save Venice, the most precious of cities. That a single Austrian or German soldier should strut in the square of St. Mark's would in itself be an outrage to every lover of Italy; that it will be prevented, there seems good hope. Next, I am sure you would like to thank Magg. De Filippi for having, at a moment when it is in some ways painful, come forward to give us an admirable description and show us such a fine series of pictures of the late Italian front in the mountains. We have to-night been helped to realize how the snows have been made into human ant-heaps, flown over by strange birds compared with which the Alpine Lammergeier would appear a pigeon, I might almost say a sparrow. There is one thing I should like to say on the pictures we have seen: they give one a somewhat exaggerated idea of the snowiness of the Dolomite district. You would hardly believe that for three or four months in the summer you may go through all this and hardly see any snow. Most of the photographs were taken in the middle of winter, and tell little of the beauty of the mountains when seen in their summer clothing, though as illustrations of the scene of war they are, perhaps, the more faithful in leaving out any trace of beauty. It is distressing to reflect that the front built up and held for two long years with so much energy, with such cost of labour and life, should have collapsed. In face of such a misfortune it seems to me our duty as geographers is to bring to bear such special knowledge as we may possess, in an effort to ascertain its causes so far as they are natural causes arising out of the character of the Italo-Austrian frontier. I want you to consider a proposition I shall put before you, even despite Maggiore De Filippi's recent

Map to illustrate
THE GEOGRAPHY
 BY MAG

International Boundary, July 1914
 Watershed
 Railways
 Roads

Published by
 Scale
 Miles 10 5 0

Map to illustrate the paper on
THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE ITALIAN FRONT
 BY MAGG. CAV. F. DE FILIPPI.

Published by the Royal Geographical Society.

Scale 1/1,000,000 or 1/M.
 Miles 10 5 0 10 20 30 Miles.
 1 inch = 15.78 Miles.

Furthest Italian limit
 Austro-Italian front
 Present Austro-Italian
 Range of panoramic
 point indicated by

aper on TALIAN FRONT LIPPI.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL JOURNAL FEB. 1918.

al Society.

0 M.
30 Miles.

Furthest Italian Invasion of Trentino ++++++
Austro-Italian Front, Oct. 1917
Present Austro-Italian Front
Range of panorama taken from
point indicated by Roman Numerals } IV

THE ITALIAN FRONT
Filippi.