

Fascist Memoirs

CIANO'S HIDDEN DIARY, 1937-1938 (220 pp.)—Dutton (\$4).

"Dead men tell no tales," Benito Mussolini once reminded Count Galeazzo Ciano, little realizing that the son-in-law he ordered shot in January 1944 would prove a talkative exception. As Italy's Foreign Minister from 1936 to 1943, Ciano jotted day-to-day entries in a red diary. The first volume, covering 1939-43, appeared in 1945. The latest covers 1937-38, the years of the German annexation of Austria, the forging of the Rome-Berlin-To-

entertained in the Party House in Munich—they even relieved themselves on the stairs. A disgusting incident, likely to lower us to an unbelievable extent in the opinion of the Germans. The Chief . . . let fly at the 'sons of slaves.'"

To turn the army, at least, into a Prussian facsimile, Mussolini introduced the *"passo Romano,"* a copy of the goose-step. When old soldiers and short-legged King Victor Emmanuel complained, the Duce's comment was: "People say the goose-step is Prussian. Nonsense. The goose is a Roman animal. . . . It is not my fault if the King is half-size. Naturally he won't be able to do the parade step



AUTHOR CIANO, FOREIGN MINISTER RIBBENTROP & FRIENDS
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kyo Axis, and Munich. Like the first, it packs no great historical surprises, but sketches in a lively picture of intrigue and ethical corrosion along with some gossip portraits of Fascist bigwigs. As a strutting I-witness of fateful events, Ciano thought that he and the Duce were swashbuckling through history like Renaissance princes, when actually, as the diaries reveal, they were only learning to heel every time the Germans heiled.

"The Goose Is Roman." The Fascist leaders were painfully anxious not to lose face with the Germans. "Pay attention to uniforms," Ciano cued himself for a visit to Germany. "We must be more Prussian than the Prussians." Mussolini repeatedly lectured Ciano on "the necessity for redeeming Italy's reputation as a faithless nation. Bismarck used to say that you can't have a policy with Italy when she is faithless both as friend and foe." Yet no one took a more contemptuous view of the Italian people than Mussolini himself. One incident or another kept him boiling. "The Duce has been made furiously angry . . . by the bad behavior of some farmers from Bari who were being

without making himself ridiculous. He will hate it for the same reason that he has always hated horses—he has to use a ladder to climb on to one."

The Silent Partners. In one mood, Mussolini would defend all his sedulous aping of the Nazis on the ground that "Italy will never be sufficiently Prussianized." In another, he would harbor black, if fanciful, designs against his ally: "I shall combine the whole world into a coalition against Germanism. And we shall crush Germany for at least two centuries." What irked the Italians most was that they were treated as silent partners of the Axis, and only called in when matters reached the sign-on-the-dotted-line stage. After the Austrian *Anschluss*, "the Duce was in a mood of irritation with the Germans . . . they ought to have given us warning—but not a word." Just before Munich, Ciano notes: "The Duce is disturbed by the fact that the Germans are letting us know almost nothing of their program with regard to Czechoslovakia."

Frustrated, but awed by Hitler's successes, the Duce and Ciano were reduced to scoffing privately at their opposite

numbers. "Ribbentrop . . . is vain, frivolous and loquacious. The Duce says you only have to look at his head to see that he has a little brain." On a visit to Göring, Ciano found him in mufti: "A tie . . . passed through a ring with a ruby. More large rubies on his fingers. In his button-hole, a great Nazi eagle with diamonds. A slight suggestion of Al Capone." When Hitler visited Italy, Ciano recorded: "The King . . . told the Duce and me that the first night of his stay at the Palace, at about one in the morning, Hitler asked for a woman. This caused a great commotion. Then it was explained—apparently he can't get to sleep, unless with his own eyes he sees a woman remake his bed . . . Mussolini believes that Hitler puts rouge on his cheeks in order to hide his pallor."

Spain Led to Speculation. Not love of the Germans, as such entries make plain, but contempt for French and British indecision made the vacillating Duce pick the German side. When the French and British governments failed to rouse after Italy's pro-Franco intervention in Spain, Ciano writes: "I am surprised. [It] is enough to make one speculate about the decline of the French and British peoples." In September 1938, when Ciano phoned Mussolini that Chamberlain was flying to meet Hitler at Berchtesgaden, the Duce exclaimed: "There will not be war, but this is the liquidation of English prestige." Ciano, who could "cry like a small child" when he heard Mussolini's voice on the radio, was hardly the man to change the Duce's mind.

As Ciano tells it, British and French envoys came to him "literally overwhelmed," "groggy," "white as a sheet." He greeted them with "perfect serenity" and "absolute calm." An occasional voice of sanity tries to puncture this ham acting. Flying General Italo Balbo told Ciano: "There no longer exists a taste for sincerity in Italy." He warned that the Germans "will let us down." Heedless and unprincipled, Ciano, at the end of 1938, was plotting the annexation of Albania, stirring up anti-French demonstrations, egging on the Japanese, like a retarded boy playing with homemade fireworks.

Good News from Spain

TORMENT (312 pp.)—Pérez Galdós—Farrar, Straus & Young (\$3.50).

Offhand, this novel has what seems a pretty used-up plot, the story of a tarnished Cinderella. Señorita Amparo Emperador was very beautiful, very poor, and an orphan, without beaux or hope of dowry. In Madrid, in 1867, that was about as bad a fix as a girl could find herself in. So Amparo had become a slavey for her distant, stingy relatives, Rosalia and Francisco Bringas, who kept her jumping from dawn to dusk and repaid her with spoiled food and a few rare pesetas.

Then Agustín, a cousin of the Bringases, came back from America, and Amparo's situation began to look up. Agustín was a jewel of a man, kind, modest, a bit awkward socially, but enormously rich, and generous to a fault. Pushing 45, he