

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF CRISPI.

BY SIGNOR RAQUENI.¹

FRANCESCO CRISPI, who has just disappeared forever from this world's stage, I knew in Florence, in 1867, at the moment when the cry, "Rome or death," was echoing from one end of the peninsula to the other, and was the devise of the aggressive Garibaldian party, which had taken a solemn oath to free Rome from papal domination. Crispi was then member of our committee at Florence, for the moment the temporary capital of Italy, which committee was made up of revolutionists collected from all Italian parties and eager to fight under the orders of Garibaldi. It was Crispi himself who brought me into the service and sent me to Terni where was being organised the brigade of the Hungarian Frigyesi, which participated in the fights at Monterando and Mentona. At the latter place our four thousand Garibaldians were crushed by the twelve thousand French whom Napoleon III. had sent to the succor of the Pope. From that moment Crispi never ceased to hate France and the Vatican.

When, at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war, Victor Emmanuel wished, in return for what France did for Italy at Magenta and Solferino, to send one hundred thousand men to the aid of Napoleon III., Crispi convinced the king that by so doing he would endanger his crown, for, he declared, Italy would rise to a man against such a policy. I have this historic fact from the very highest authority.

It was also Crispi who, after the Sedan disaster, pushed the then Italian ministry, to occupy Rome by force, in spite of the expressed disapproval of the crumbling Second Empire. Crispi was

¹ Signor Raqueni is a well-known Italian publicist residing in Paris, where he is the founder and Honorary Secretary of the Franco-Italian League, whose chief aim is to draw more closely together France and Italy. During the long struggle for Italian unity Signor Raqueni was an ardent "Garibaldian," and risked his life in the patriotic cause more than once.—ED.

then a brilliant journalist and in his powerful organ, *La Riforma*, carried on a violent editorial campaign against the policy of the moderate Italian party who hesitated to take advantage of the circumstances to complete the unification of Italy, and thus crown the work of Cavour, Victor Emmanuel, Garibaldi, and Mazzini. At that time the whole Italian democracy shared Crispi's feelings.

But when the Napoleonic Empire had fallen and the Third Republic had risen on its ruins, the democracy of Italy became Francophile, while Crispi remained Francophobe. Garibaldi offered his own life and that of his sons in defence of France against the invading Germans, generously forgetting Mentona. But Crispi could not and would not forget.

I had a long conversation with Crispi on this point in 1871 at Rome where I found him living in a plain hotel. Referring to Garibaldi's taking of arms for France at this moment, he said to me: "He would have done better if he remained at Caprera. I am not an enemy of France. I regret her misfortunes, but she brought them upon her own head. She should not have interfered in German affairs. They did not concern her. The fall of the Empire was a benefit to France and Italy. If Napoleon had won, Italy would not have obtained her historic capital and France would have fallen under the yoke of a despot. Italy has been free and independent only since the disaster of 1870. Until then, she was little else than a French Department. All our ministers had to be acceptable to the Tuilleries. Nothing was done without the consent of the Emperor who was our real master. The French Republicans ought to thank Prussia for having rid them of the Empire. Unfortunately they are *chauvins*. They will not abandon the *revanche* which is their dream. If, after Sedan, republican France had proposed a general disarmament, she would have rendered a good service to the cause of peace and civilisation."

Signor Bovio, the distinguished professor of Naples University, Deputy and one of the leaders of the Republican Party in Italy, told me recently how the threatened war was prevented between France and Italy, while Crispi was Prime Minister, apropos of a violation of the French Consulate at Florence. It well illustrates Crispi's tendency to exaggerate the importance of the Triple Alliance by giving it an aggressive character. Bovio said to me:

"As was his custom, Crispi, on this occasion, consulted Bismarck, of whose friendship he was so proud. The Iron Chancellor who at bottom did not like the ex-revolutionist, although the latter had become more conservative than he himself, sent him these

words by telegraph: '*Non est casus fœderis,*' which meant that this was not a case in which the treaty of the Triple Alliance called for German support of Italy. This caused Crispi to pull in his horns, and the trivial matter was arranged in a friendly manner."

In 1895 I had another interview with Crispi who said to me: "I do not hate France as I am wrongfully represented as doing. I have always regarded a war between France and Italy as fratricide, but I wish Italy to be held in esteem and the treaties between us strictly observed. Furthermore, Italy, backed by her allies, can compel the keeping of the peace. I have been," he continued, "the friend of Gambetta and other French Republican leaders."

But he forgot to add that when he went over to Bismarck bag and baggage, he ceased to be their friend, and from that moment to the day of his death was rightfully classed among the enemies of France.

The terrible Italian defeat in Abyssinia a few years ago drove Crispi from power, and he never afterwards succeeded in becoming Prime Minister. General Baratieri who died just a few days before Crispi, and who was one of the bravest and most brilliant of Garibaldi's officers, commanding the Italian forces on that lamentable occasion, said to me on this subject, when he came to Paris last year to visit the Exposition:

"Crispi expected me to bring him to Rome as prisoner Mene-lik. If my orders had been obeyed, I would have won the day at Adana notwithstanding the inadequate strength of my army. Rest assured that history will severely condemn Crispi for the unjust accusations and absurd calumnies which he has heaped on my head apropos of this disaster. He always sought to make me the scape-goat of his political shortcomings."

Francesco Crispi, who did so much harm to his country during the last years of his political career, would have left a fine mark on history if he had died after the success of the Sicilian uprising, of which he was one of the heroes and which had such a powerful influence on Italian unity; or after Victor Emmanuel had entered Rome, to the accomplishment of which he had so powerfully contributed.