Il Duce—A Study in Dramatic Expression

By Joseph Dugan

HE'S greatest art is to take the part of the stage to play his favorite role. He is addressing thousands of small boys, assembled in military formation, and their adoration before the Palazzo Venezia in Rome. At the precise dramatic moment Il Duce appears upon the balcony. Subduing in the high-pitched cheer which greets him. Then suddenly, dead silence. The chief perhaps the dramatic effect better seconded daringly. Slowly he raises his right hand, index finger pointed upward. His grown eyes are surprised many times by bold expressions, and the show is on.

For each moment of his right arm and pointed finger there is a corresponding facial expression. At each outburst of applause his countenance is benign. He plainly revels in the acclamation of the throng. Benito Mussolini, original pattern for post-war dictators, presents perhaps the most successful example of self-aggrandizement in the world today. He

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chamber is accentuated by a ceiling as high as the room is long. As the visitor walks toward Il Duce his visitor assumes one of two poses. When he first glances at the caller he smiles amiable. If the caller is in the pose, the caller stands for several moments before the wall, which Il Duce addresses of papers on his desk, apparently unaware that he is not alone. Finally he looks up with an expression of composure and the interview is begun.

If he is in a cordial mood, however, Il Duce rises when his visitor has reached the table, comes around, and shakes hands. Few callers, however, are completely at ease, no matter how cordial the host may be.

At the same time, according to many who have had the experience of attending a theatrical performance. Mussolini is frankly theatrical. His facial expressions are studied and his repertoire in this respect seems limitless.

At 51 Mussolini is as much the human dynamo as he was in 1922 when he led his black-shirted Fascists on Rome. His large head today is almost completely bald. He has a large mouth and uses it effectively as an aid to his many expressions of emotion. When speaking he pronounces his words to resemble a whisper. His sharp facial features and a small build add charm in his appearance of little about him. He wears a suit that is perfect until for his baby-polished shoes. From his height, a poor blacksmith, he received his first ideals of socialism. A born leader, he soon found himself a target for the conservatives, but jail sentences and persecution served merely to strengthen his determination. His pose in those days was one of martyrdom. It brought him more followers than any early success could have done.

No dictator of history served as model for Il Duce. Had he emulated Oliver Cromwell, for example, he would have needed a quality of religious asceticism which he does not and never will possess. Mussolini designed his own pattern, and he emerged the world's most theatrical figure.

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