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## INTRODUCTION

*« How extraordinary », said a journalist who had come to interview me in a city in the Middle West, « you are just like us! » Because I was travelling alone she was amazed to find that I was young, that I was smartly dressed and that I talked like any other girl of the 20th century. I incessantly discover when I am in other countries people who think that Italian women are either slaves or else complete nonentities, indeed one woman member of the British House of Commons invariably speaks of us as « those poor slaves ». Needless to say this point of view always amuses me, but at the same time it shows me how necessary it is that these misguided people should come to Italy to learn the truth, that they should get to know the Italian woman in her own surroundings, that they should see her at work and understand the respect and admiration that is felt for her in her own country.*

*This little book is therefore really an invitation addressed especially to my American friends and to all those who are interested in the position of women in the modern world, to come to my country and study matters for themselves. I have dealt particularly with social questions and the most important problems and victories of the women's movement in Italy; as I have always said, I do not believe that women should engage in fierce struggles with men in order to obtain the best posts. Like all living creatures women should be intelligent, but they should not gaze longingly at all the most comfortable chairs and say « We ought to be sitting in them! » They ought to choose those for which they are best suited; as Mussolini remarked « do not let us wander off into discussions as to whether women are inferior or superior to men, let us agree that they are different. »*

*Most women and particularly girls, choose the way of life to which they are best adapted; that is not to say that there are not exceptional women (as there have been in every century) who are able to compete with men in the*

*learned professions and in the arts, but to force all women into such competition would be useless and would only create « misfits »; they have gifts which men do not possess and have a different mission in life. It is this very diversity which is our strength, we should strive incessantly to develop the best that is in us so that we may help to build a better and a nobler world.*