

Italian Spirit in d'Annunzio

WHEN Gabriele d'Annunzio offered himself recently as a common sailor in the Italian navy, some of his critics smiled and put it down to the theatricality of the man. But, apart from the fact that there is a different measure for theatricality in north and south, they were almost certainly wrong. The Italian authorities took him at his word, gave him a chance of varying his offer, and the poet of fifty-two is now a lieutenant in the army. Long ago, before the end of his military service, he won his stripes.

Politically d'Annunzio is hard to place. He has called himself socialist, but there is no vaguer term. Undoubtedly his tendencies have been jingo. That, however, is not the whole of him, publicly considered. In a man of his active temper enthusiasm for the Latin spirit could not exhaust itself in efforts to foster that spirit in literature and art, but sought an outlet for it in race predominance. Pan-Germanism, Pan-Slavism, all the ultra-nationalist aggressive movements emanating from other peoples, were to him merely ridiculous by the side of one which had for its center the ancient, the eternal, idea of Imperial Rome. When Carducci died d'Annunzio swore to take the national torch from the dead hand and keep it burning. An empty vow it seemed to many, who saw in him merely the special apostle of self-expression and of a lower kind of Nietzscheanism. Nevertheless, in his own way, with his limitations, by his splendid gifts, he has fulfilled it; and to-day he has traveled far beyond his own past as represented in "Il Fuoco." The Tripoli expedition some of us looked on as an outburst of vulgar jingoism; and when Italy came out of the war exhausted in resources we hoped she had learnt a lesson. But the whole truth was not with us. The war united the nation in a most undoubted fashion; and though with another country in our minds we see that national unity may be a terrible evil, yet the popular impulse which supported the government in its aggressive policy was not backed by greed alone; rather was it due to a conviction that war with its sacrifices might be the one effective weapon against the ultra-commercialism which threatened the rational soul. It was this latter instinct that d'Annunzio blessed in his "Canzoni della Gesta d'Oltremare." He saw himself a Rienzi with a farther-reaching voice, who was to revive the ancient Roman spirit; and what better "geste" was there than to recover one of the old provinces of the empire? Even his hardest critics may concede that Italians fought better for his call, for his reminders of Rome, "ever reborn, flower of all the races,

the whole world's fragrance," for his assurance that a wider and a worthier future was theirs for the earning.

But there is another element in the man which may fit in strangely with his imperialism, yet is sincere none the less. To him Garibaldi is no ghostly hero of his dead youth, but real and living still. The "Notte di Caprera" is as genuine as the "Gesta d'Oltremare." With all his faults d'Annunzio is no cynic. He has never acquiesced in the "Triple Alliance"; and in the "Song of the Dardanelles" he attacked Austria, the old enemy, in words of virulent energy. The first edition of the "Gesta" was suppressed. He published a second with the lines omitted, and in the gap he pilloried the head of his country's government, Giolitti, who gave the order for the mutilation. To-day he has his revenge.

There is one more significant fact about the poet who has been inciting Italy to its newest adventure. His birthplace is Pescara, the little fortified fishing-town, with its orange-and-red-sailed fleet, which stands at the Adriatic extremity of the Valerian Way. The color and scent of the Adriatic are in his blood and fibre. No poet has been a more spontaneous lover of the sea—"the goddess who tempers my nerves and my songs." After his first, almost tragic, success in Rome as a lad, he returned to the Adriatic, to Francavilla. To the Adriatic, his first love, he has ever been faithful; and he wrote his "Odi Navali" long before he made any self-conscious vow to be the poet of his nation. In the light of this, his offer to serve as a common sailor loses some of its theatricality.

In Berlin there has been talk of Italy giving way to mob rule. There could be no greater mistake. The Italian population contains turbulent sections, but in no country is the mob less likely to dictate to the government in international affairs. Underneath her emotions Italy's racial temper is definite even to hardness. Recently she has been devoted to science, to commerce, to material welfare; and many of us have groaned over the loss of the old artistic sense and of the lofty spirit of the war of liberation. For months the outer world has watched her bargaining, ready, some have said, to sell herself to the highest bidder. They do not understand her who have said so. The bargaining and the self-interestedness of this new-old country, whose life and fortunes are still precarious, are very real. The commercial spirit is strongly characteristic. If substantial concessions could have been wrung out of her late partners—that is, if the word of Germany could have been trusted—there is an Italy that would have felt justified in taking everything without the price of a drop of blood. But at the back of that

Italy, of every Italy, stands an old proud tradition. You will find it in unexpected places, behind the plough, behind the counter, in the slum, in the stucco palace of the *nouveau riche*. It gives to this democratic race a haughty air, and explains why, with all her wiliness, Italy is rarely hypocritical. Through recent months she has borne the accusation, expressed or implied, of gross self-interest, without stooping to declare that the bargaining was not the whole truth, but merely what she deigned to show to the world. She wanted no advice—*Italia farà da se*—and she has only scorn for those who will not trust her to act in great moments as the daughter of an ancient house with responsible memories of noble enterprise.

Underneath the commercialism the Garibaldian tradition is still strong, a tradition nearer to old-fashioned English Liberalism than to any other political faith; a conviction of the sacredness of individual and national freedom, and a respect for the liberties of other peoples. It has made the Triple Alliance a hard yoke. Italians have borne it without murmuring, believing that their nation needed the support of the Central Powers; but in their hearts they have always felt they were in the wrong house and serving strange gods. The commercial spirit modified this, of course; and lately you might hear some prudent Milan man of business say, "Yes, we'll fight, but six months is enough. We'll make sacrifices, but we are not going to ruin our country quixotically." Yet the spirit was there; and in the less sophisticated it was there without alloy.

The newspapers did not tell us all in those trying weeks before the break with Austria. It is no exaggeration to say that in the few days which

followed the resignation of the Salandra Cabinet, when Giolitti like an evil genius hovered about Rome, Italy, all that was best of it—and the best was not in little sects and coteries—underwent a veritable agony. Up in the unemotional north men wept for rage and grief at the possibility of Sonnino's anti-Austrian lead being permanently defeated. And this not merely because they saw their own freedom and interests at stake. They knew themselves joined in soul with other nations in a common struggle and a common test. Poor unlearned peasants, who knew little of politics and cared less, followed the main issues of the war with the perspicacity of the simple for the large things of life; and when the Lusitania was sunk, rough mountaineers of Piedmont cried, "It is not England's enemy alone that has done this, but ours."

Thus in the fulness of time d'Annunzio, who had seemed for long to stand apart from common life by his superman nonsense, has come to express the national spirit. The old Roman pride and the Garibaldian love of liberty, the Venetian cult for the sea, the insight of a people which in its thinking is rarely crude, and has an intellectual disdain for inhumanity, all these have come to grips with the spirit of gain and bargain, and have conquered. D'Annunzio, who has sulked with his country of late years, is reconciled. The subtle currents in the people and in himself have met. At the Genoa commemoration of The Thousand he had his chance; and as much led as leader, he has found himself fulfilling the vow made at the grave of Carducci. And so the Dresden bookseller burns the poet's books.

ANNE MACDONELL.

COMMUNICATIONS

Letters from Missouri The Goose and the Golden Eggs

SIR: We have been greatly stirred these last months by announcements that because of the European war the United States would shortly capture the trade of the world. Our Chamber of Commerce has created a Foreign Trade section, and we have adopted resolutions urging the rehabilitation of our merchant marine. We are now much disturbed to hear that the LaFollette bill is going to put American shipping entirely out of business. In explanation we are told that both the House and the Senate are supposed to have indulged in the national sport of passing the buck, hoping that the bill would receive Mr. Wilson's veto. But it didn't, and everybody seems to be getting very excited about it all.

Somehow it appears to us, with our perspective—perhaps it is our ignorance instead—that a great many of our

most popular writers have failed to read either the bill itself or the ingenious memorandum presented to Congress by Senator LaFollette on behalf of Mr. Furuseth and his fellow representative of the Seaman's Union. Of the two the latter document is the more illuminating. It is not so technical, and almost smells of the sea.

Mr. Furuseth pleads for the adoption of the bill which he is supposed to have written and which Senator LaFollette introduced. He aims to accomplish two things: to improve the standards of living for American sailormen, and to assure the safety of life at sea. He claims that the cost of running a ship depends not upon the flag she flies, but upon the port where she engages her crew. He recognizes that his bill may make it impossible for American ship-owners profitably to operate their vessels in competition with foreigners. He therefore proposes in effect to facilitate desertion from visiting vessels, on the theory that foreign owners, by being forced to ship crews in American ports,