

Italian Art of Today

By CIPRIANO E. OPPO

THE nineteenth century is that of French artistic power, at least as far as the plastic arts are concerned; because in Italy the political *risorgimento*—the unification of the country—was the chief preoccupation, the arts which developed those which speak most directly to the heart and head: music and literature, painting and sculpture (architecture was almost dead) withdrew into the provinces where they jealously conserved the great native qualities. The ugliest period of the nineteenth century is that of the last thirty years, after unity was attained, when Italy, forgetting its best, launched its official artists—as the Tuscan *Macchiaioli** and those of the *Scuola di Posillipo*—who had preserved purity and nobility of purpose during the degeneration, the young despoilers left for the discovery of the Golden Fleece which they believed was to be found in France.

Only in the first years of 1900 did the youthful and violent reaction begin. The young people were inspired to become acquainted, to know, to throw themselves into the current. And in a feverish manner, esteeming only those artists—as the Tuscan *Macchiaioli** and those of the *Scuola di Posillipo*—who had preserved purity and nobility of purpose during the degeneration, the young despoilers left for the discovery of the Golden Fleece which they believed was to be found in France.

Finally loaded with the dynamite of accumulated passion, the futurist bomb burst in 1909. The futurist explosion taken in connection with the rebirth of national pride, stimulated by the propaganda of the Nationalist Party, was to prelude and in a sense prepare for the much more powerful, brilliant, electrifying explosion of Italian participation in the Great War and later for fascism, the most original movement to appear after a century-long domination by the thought of the French Revolution.

The principal factor in the pride which shines in the eyes of Italians today is undoubtedly the victory of the army which made them realize the prestige of Italy as a people and a state. But in order to exert a stronger stimulus upon the self-love of the young generation, fascism is concerned seriously in favoring by the best means that spiritual, artistic and cultural atmosphere which is in germ. The encouragement to make ourselves worthy of the past makes us less tolerant toward those foreign doctrines which in the name of new and dazzling artistic conquests have tried to obscure, not to say, bury the brilliant past of unparalleled achievement which made Italy the leader and teacher in European art. One characteristic of Italian artists today is the greater learning and facility with which they write.

* The *Macchiaioli* agreed in the necessity of a return to the intuitive and empiric acceptance of perceptible reality and in maintaining that the truest and most effective technical mode in painting was the *macchia* or spot (whence comes the name of the school); that is, the interweaving of form and color obtained by means of *chiaroscuro* modulated according to the law of "values" and "relations." In this return to nature was implied a return to expressive beauty in opposition to the formal and conventional beauty of the "neo-classicists." The Arts, October 1926; Giovanni Fattori by Mario Tinti.

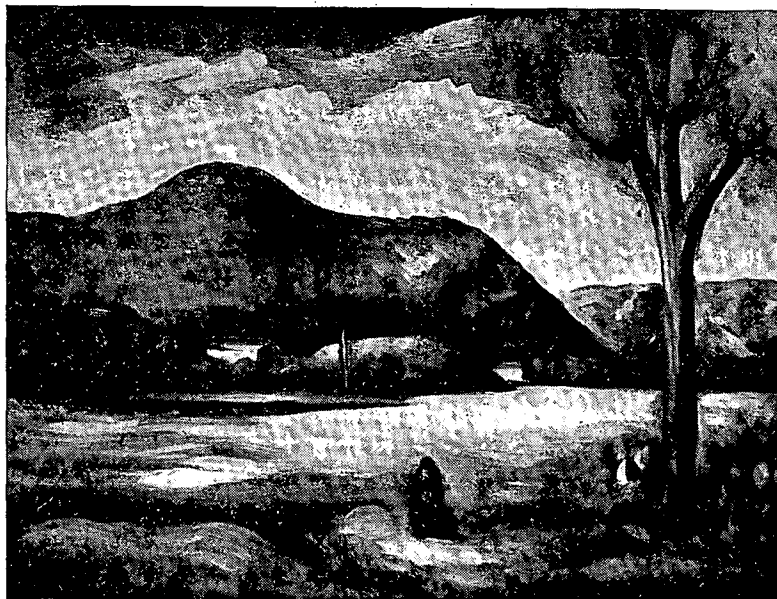
But in art any kind of nationalism conceived as a theory must be regarded as a mortal enemy. What is done outside our country must be known and ideas exchanged. Before fascism some pretended to exclude from our exhibitions and magazines all the precipitate or decadent expressions of modern art, forgetting that to close our eyes in order not to see the errors of others would end by remaining blind and losing every contact with reality.

We must therefore agree as to what is the true Italian tradition; we must understand the spirit and seek the motive force of continuity in the pictorial impulse rather than in the forms of artistic expression of our old and noble race.

Italian tradition consists in, we think: clarity of description; aristocratic spirit; healthy sensuality; an idea of beauty referred to the inspirations of nature (in other words, the selection and embellishment of natural elements); grace and strength at the same time; joyousness without frivolity; method without pedantry; never the cold, analytical copy of nature, but no distortion either, whether through idealization or depreciation or the search for the ethereal; never a taste for the deformed, the monstrous, the weird, the disgusting, the capricious.

The foreigner who wishes to form an exact idea of the true condition of art in Italy today must forget all the pseudo world-famous names, except two: that of the old and glorious Roman painter, Antonio Mancini, and that of the bold Neapolitan sculptor, Vincenzo Gemito: two artists enamoured with their material and faithful to the truth, perhaps too faithful, although very powerful in plastic expression. To these Medardo Rosso, may be added—a Piedmontese sculptor who has lived in Paris a great deal.

While the futurists (Boccioni, Carrà, Sant' Elia, Severini et cetera) and a Tuscan painter—also a critic and very in-



Houses on the river Sesia, a painting by C. Carrà in the exhibition of the "900", Milan

telligent writer—Ardengo Soffici, helped by articles, polemics, interpretations, to make modern European and especially French art known, a highly talented painter lived and worked in Rome—likewise a Tuscan, Armando Spadini. He died last year at forty, leaving a heritage rich in work and spirit. He managed to hold his faith as a traditionalist high even in the midst of the disorder which acquaintance with the daring French art had brought into Italian life.

During the years 1913, 1914 and 1915, before Italy entered the war, the beautiful expositions of the *Secession* were held, where by the side of the impressionists and of Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, hung the painting of the most modern Italians. In *La Voce*, a periodical of Florence, and later in the newspaper, supported by the futurists, *Lacerba*, Soffici waged a courageous fight against so-called official art.

○ Mario Sironi is another artist who comes from futurism and with greater sincerity he has remained the most modern of all. Illustrator of the newspaper directed by Benito Mussolini, Sironi is the most pleasing and effective of the Fascist caricaturists. His imagination never fails him and form comes spontaneously. Around him a group of young artists has formed in Milan. All the Fascists, as well as the other artists who count for something in Italy, believe in the possibility of a new classicism. In hearty contrast with the groups in Florence and Rome who are rather trying to discover a "realism" which was always at the base of Italian art, these youngsters work indefatigably not to create an artificial fascist style but to express by their individual and collective efforts faith in a new Italian greatness.

With us, criticism is more incisive than in France, less



Anna in the Sun, a painting by Armando Spadini in the Signorello collection



Soldiers, a painting by Cipriano E. Oppo in the exhibition of the "900," Milan

extravagant and also otherwise free and unprejudiced. Therefore our painters as well as our sculptors know that in order to succeed it is not enough to present something apparently bold and modern. By this we Italians wish to serve notice that no movement in the plastic arts can longer be accredited among us when based wholly upon eccentric or capricious refinements of a bookish or erudite nature.

Italian architecture has made gigantic strides in the last years. Fallen so low as not to have any originality left, repeating the old academic formulae with an exasperating monotony, it had given such few causes of satisfaction that our magnificent ancient cities had every reason to fear the reconstruction and expansion ever more urgently demanded by the requirements of modern life. We cannot repeat often enough that we Italians who have so many museums and who indeed may call every Italian city a museum flatly refuse to produce a counterfeit "old style," antique. Our dream is to be able to find the new style of our time worthy to survive a side by side comparison with the antique.

The Fascist Government has greatly stimulated architecture by its bold plan of renovating the large cities and chiefly the Capitol, Rome. We must create something essentially new, typical of our age. Those who believe that fascism is a good vehicle for a new imperial art of the Roman type must remember the artistic fruits borne under Napoleon: academic, with false grandiosity, second-rate stylism. We are persuaded that such an imperial art would be ridiculous and weak, as ridiculous and weak as a modern army if it were togged out and armed in the manner of the ancient Romans. Fascist architecture will not make a false Rome of the cinematograph but will seek to express in all its beauty the passionate spirit of the new Italy.



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The Virgin
by Adolfo Wildt

WASHERWOMEN
a painting by Antonio Donghi

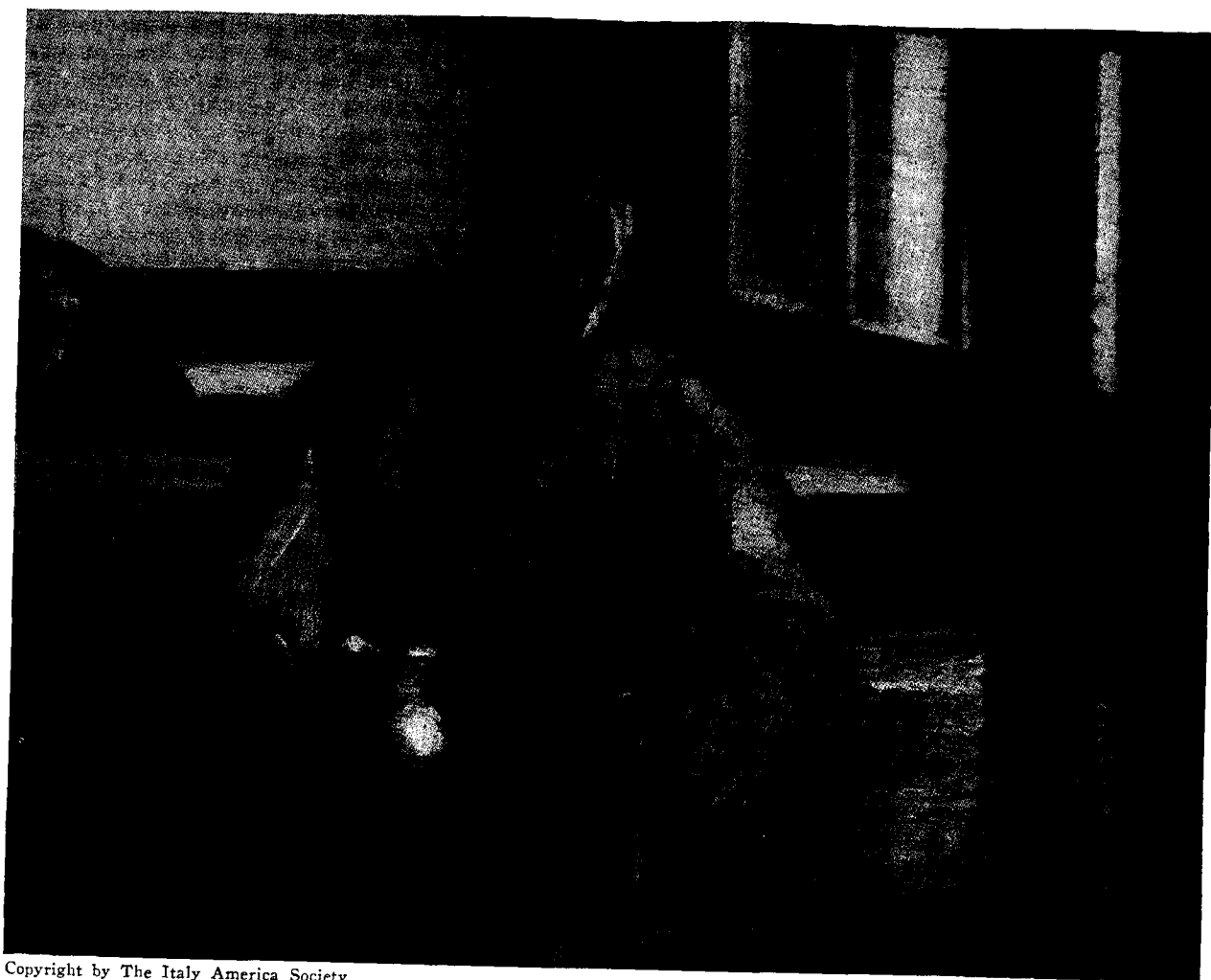


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THE TRAGIC JOURNEY
a painting by Ferruccio Ferrazzi



A Child
by Alberto Gerardi



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Venetian Fisherman, a painting by Arturo Nocci



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Square in Venice, a painting by Guido Cadorin

Italy's Economic and Social Progress Since 1922

By THOMAS W. LAMONT

POLITICAL questions are outside my province. I have no intention of discussing fascism as a political system. Italian economic conditions, however, and the financial policies of the Italian Government have had my attention in recent years, and I shall deal with the progress which has been made in these fields since 1922. The government and the people of the United States have aided in this progress; the government by its sympathetic handling of the Italian debt, and our investors by furnishing a portion of the capital needed for the stabilization of Italian finance. The people of this country may well be glad of the friendly assistance which they have given to help improve the welfare of the 40,000,000 people of Italy.

What has been the nature of this noteworthy change which has taken place in Italy? Ask any traveller who was in Italy four years ago and who has been there again during the last year. When the present regime came into power towards the end of 1922, Italy seemed to be tottering on the brink below which lay communism and bolshevism. The industrial situation had become badly disorganized through an epidemic of strikes, with workers seizing control of the factories, and with widespread unemployment. There had been a virtual breakdown of railway and other government services, and of civil and judicial procedure. Municipal administration, as well, was burdened with incompetence and extravagance. The finances of the central government were unsound; government debt was piling up and the deficits in the government's budget were increasing to such an extent that an ex-minister of finance, one of the leaders of the party in power, declared at that time that a budget deficit was inevitable for an indefinite number of years.

Such in brief was the state of affairs, economic and financial, when the present administration assumed the responsibility of government in November, 1922. Within a few months a vital change became manifest. Hopes revived, the Italian people began to have faith in themselves once more. A new spirit of enterprise and of thrift spread throughout the nation. Ardor and enthusiasm grew and were translated into work which produced tangible results in the improvement of the economic and financial life of the nation. To the present-day observer, that improvement stands out clear cut, in both its character and extent.

Suppose we first consider agricultural and industrial conditions: In 1920 the records declare that agricultural strikes caused the loss of 14,000,000 working days, and that no less than 1,267,000 industrial strikers took part in 1,880 strikes involving the loss of about 16,500,000 working days. It is not difficult to realize what a serious economic loss this meant to the Italian people. In the first year under the present government, that is in 1923, the loss of working days due to strikes was reduced to some 265,000 days.

Today (whether or not our social scientists can approve the *modus vivendi* between labor and capital) strikes are practically non-existent. The Italian farmer is hard at work producing large crops. The 1925 wheat crop was a record one and wheat is the most important agricultural product.

Italian industries during the last two years have been, in the main, well occupied and have made good profits. Unemployment has fallen to normal proportions, as low as or lower than in pre-war years when economic conditions were generally satisfactory. The number of unemployed according to official registration figures, was 541,000 on January 1, 1922. In July, 1926, the number of unemployed was only 78,000. This number has increased somewhat since the summer, and it may be subject to further increase owing to the deflation measures recently taken. Yet if political conditions remain stable, Italian industry, after the period of readjustment is over, ought to be on a sounder basis than ever before. On the average no nation can boast of a more industrious or competent working population than that of Italy.

Italian manufacturing industries have made great strides in the last four years. To the student, one of the most surprising developments in the post-war rehabilitation of Europe has been that Italy, with her relative scarcity of natural resources, has been able to develop her steel, textile, chemical, rubber, shipbuilding, machinery and automobile industries to their present high level of efficiency and productivity, and to re-adapt to peace-time uses the plant capacity which was so enlarged during the war. Italy, for instance, now stands second among the countries manufacturing artificial silk.

Italian engineering technique, always in the forefront, has even surpassed itself. The recent victory of Major de Bernardi, flying a Fiat-motored Macchi plane in the Schneider Cup air races, shows what has been done in one highly technical field. Besides skilled engineers, the Italians have been fortunate in having industrial leaders of vision and driving force, such men as Agnelli of Fiat, Pirelli of the Pirelli Company, to mention only two of many, the story of whose accomplishments is almost a romance.

Worthy of note, also, has been the hydro-electric development, a development which has not been confined to the last four years but which has been practically continuous for over a decade. Not possessing coal, Italy has had every incentive to develop its large water power reserves, one of the country's most important natural resources. The results achieved are attested by the fact that hydro-electric plants supplied Italian industry with 6,900,000 kilowatt hours of electric energy in 1925, as compared with only 1,700,000,000 kilowatt hours in 1913. Those Americans who have aided in the financing of these developments, can see the tangible results of their investments. It is estimated that the increase