

**EPISCOPO
& COMPANY**

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Episcopo & Company by Gabriele D'Annunzio & Myrta Leonora Jones

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GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO & MYRTA LEONORA JONES

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& COMPANY**

BY
GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

TRANSLATED BY
MYRTA LEONORA JONES



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M. M. C. J. 1

Introduction

THE name of Gabriele d'Annunzio is known to but few of those who make up the reading public in this country, and so in presenting the first translation from the work of this young Italian that has been published on this side of the water, a few words of introduction to the man and his writings seem essential.

With the first translations of his work into French, now several years ago, his name became known at once in all the literary circles of Europe. He has found an incomparable translator in M. d'Herelle, and is, perhaps, to-day more widely known in France than in his own country. Henry James once said of him: "He speaks so loud that one hears him well only from a distance."

Appearing upon their horizon as he did, at a time when the French were beginning to tire of the Humanitarian and Socialist novelists of Russia, and of the Individualist Norwegian dramatists,

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this man, with his rare faculty of looking at life both from without and from within, won a more instant recognition than might otherwise have been his.

“The Romantic poet of the Italian Renaissance” — this is what Jules Lemaitre has called him — is a fresh blossoming of that genius whose bright smile has so often warmed our hearts. After the half-century of unusual sterility which lasted until the completion of Italian unity in 1870, the Italian brain began to work again, and the Peninsula became first the school of criminalologists and physiologists, and now scattered throughout the country are a number of writers of travel, of fiction, and of verse, whose work entitles them to recognition not only at home, but abroad. Edmondo de Amicis, D’Annunzio, Carducci, Fogazzaro, Rovetta, Mathilde Serao, Giovanni Verga, all have international reputations. Of these men, Gabriele d’Annunzio, the poet-novelist, is the writer of greatest prominence in Italy, and some think one of the most unique figures in contemporary literature. He is not yet thirty-three years old. In 1883 he published a volume of verse, the “Canto Nuovo, l’Intermezzo di Rime,” exquisite in art, but so daringly erotic as to cause the

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same sort of a scandal in Italy that was produced in England when Swinburne's "Poems and Ballads" first appeared. This was followed by other poems which have caused him to be ranked by so eminent a critic as M. Eugène Melchior de Vogüé as the foremost of modern Italian poets.

D'Annunzio has related with perfect frankness the effect upon himself of the sudden success which followed his early efforts. "Every one sought me, burned incense before me, made a god of me," he says. "I appealed especially to women. In this lay a great danger for me. Praise intoxicated me. Eager for its pleasures, I threw myself desperately into life with all my youthful ardor. I committed fault after fault. I skirted a thousand precipices. A sort of aphrodisiacal madness took hold of me. I published a little book of poems entitled 'Intermezzo di Rime,' where in plastic verse of faultless prosody I sang of all the pleasures of the flesh, with a shamelessness which I have never seen except in the freest poets of the XVI. and XVII. centuries. As was just, I began to pay for my mistakes, my dissipations, my excesses. I began to suffer with the same intensity with which I had enjoyed. Suffering made a new man of me. The works of Tolstoi and of Dostöievsky

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helped to develop new feelings within me. And now that my art was ripe, I succeeded at once in expressing my new conception of life in a complete and organic whole, — in my novel called L'Innocente."

It is evident that he himself considers the novel his chosen vehicle of expression, and his have thus far been the revealers of his own interesting if not always admirable personality. He admits that his heroes are largely portraits of himself. In his latest work, the "Vergine delle Rocce," may be found a passage which expresses in a few words his attitude toward life. "Praise be to my ancestors," he says, "who, from the remote centuries, have transmitted to me their rich and fervid blood. Praise be to them, now and forever, for the glorious wounds they opened, for the glorious conflagrations they kindled, for the fair goblets they drained, for the fair garments they wore, for the fair women they enjoyed, for all their slaughters and intoxications, their extravagances and excesses, since thus they formed in me these five senses in which thou, O Beauty of the World, canst vastly and profoundly mirror thyself as in five vast and profound seas." His worship of beauty, in nature, in art, in music, is a reli-

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gion with him so far as he can be said to have a religion. His is rather a beautiful paganism, which, to use his own words once more, "indissolubly reunites art to life, art the discoverer of truth, creator of beauty, purveyor of joy."

M. de Vogüé, who has written a masterly criticism of D'Annunzio and his writings, defends himself for praising so highly works which have but a distant relation to morals by pointing out that D'Annunzio is never vulgar, that the breath of art is over all, that his works are the result of spontaneous, irresistible temperament, and not of speculation; that a Rabelais or a Boccaccio, a Loti or a D'Annunzio give expression to their own natures, and that they have nothing in common with the literary tradesmen who write to satisfy a certain public.

The three novels upon which D'Annunzio's reputation mainly rests each bears upon its title-page the words "Romances of the Rose." These are "Piacere," which appeared in 1889, "L'Innocente," in 1892, and "Trionfo della Morte," in 1894. Of the latter M. de Vogüé says that it has a right to be known as one of the master-books of our time. They are all three accessible in French, but are hardly translatable into Eng-

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lish. He now promises as a sequel to these, and in contrast to them, a second series to be called "Romances of the Lily," — "Don Juan Converted," to quote M. René Doumic, — in which we may look for something upon a distinctly higher moral plane. The "Vergine delle Rocce," the first of the new series, has just been issued.

In the "Trionfo delle Morte," George Aurispa finally dies and drags Hippolyte to her death, because he "cannot make his life correspond to his dreams." In this book D'Annunzio succeeds where Tolstoi failed, in convincing us that sensuality leads to crime. The conclusion is as irresistible as the catastrophe in a Greek tragedy. We see as we follow the course of this story the verification of the law that a love which is purely earthly can find complete satisfaction only in death.

Of his hero D'Annunzio says, "No, his wretchedness was not caused by any human being, it came from the essence of life itself! He should have complained, not of the loved one, but of love itself. Love, toward which his whole being reached out with invincible impetuosity, love is of all the sorrows of this earth the most lamentable."

"I think you love me," says George to Hippo-