

Fernando Pessoa

Álvaro de Campos' *Ultimatum* was published in the first...

Álvaro de Campos' *Ultimatum* was published in the first and (at least up to now) only number of «Portugal Futurista», a literary publication the nature of which is sufficiently expressed by its title, which needs no translation.

Having, through some inexplicable stroke of luck, passed the press-censors, the luck ceased when someone called the attention of the authorities to it, after the review was on the booksellers' windows. The «PF» was immediately seized by the police, and proceedings instituted against all the authors collaborating. This (it is well to explain) was under the Democratic ministry which was thrown out of power by Sidónio Pais, with the Revolution of the 5th Decr. 1917. Yet it is difficult to imagine how any ministry at all, when the country was at war, could allow the publication of the *Ultimatum*, which, original and magnificent as it is, and though not pro-German (being anti everything, Allied and German), contains scathing insults on the Allies, as also on Portugal and Brazil, the very countries for which the «PF» was certainly destined.

My reason for translating the *Ultimatum* is that it is quite the cleverest piece of literature called into being by the Great War. We may stare at its theories as unspeakably excentric, we may disagree with the excessive violence of the introductory invective, but no one, I believe, can but confess that the satiric part is magnificent in its studied preciseness of application, and that the theoretic part, whatever we think of the value of the theories, has at least the rare merits of originality and freshness.

These are good reasons why the *Ultimatum* should be translated, and the fact that, though it has been in print since Sept. 1917, I only now translate it, is due to the fact, which the perusal of the work will render evident, that no such publication could be printed while the war lasted.

It remains to say something to the English reader both concerning the nature of the work and of the author. The tendency of the work is quite clear — the dissatisfaction at the constructive incapacity which characterizes our age, where no great poet, no great statesman, or even, all things well considered, no great general even, has made his appearance. Álvaro de Campos, speaking about

the *Ultimatum*, said once to me: «This war is the war of the lesser pigmies against the greater pigmies. Time will show (this was said in January 1918) which are the greater, and which are the lesser, but they are pigmies one way and another.» «It matters little who wins the war, for a fool is sure to win it. It matters little what comes out of it all, for folly is sure to come. The age of physical engineering has already arrived (he characteristically added), but the age of mental engineering is yet far off. It shows how much we have receded from the Greek and Roman civilization and what a crime Christism has been against the substance of culture and progress.» «That low sophist, President Wilson», he once said to me, «is the type and symbol of our age. He has never said a concrete thing in his life. He could not say a concrete thing to save what I suppose he considers his soul.»

These are almost the exact words, which, as they were spoken in English, I am less likely to forget.

Álvaro de Campos was born in Lisbon on the 13th October 1890 and travelled extensively in the East and through Europe, staying chiefly in Scotland.

1919?

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