

WHY ITALIANS COME OVER

DEEP-SEATED CAUSES AND INEVITABLE EFFECTS.

OVERTAXATION AND THE CONSEQUENCES TO THE PEASANT — DISARMAMENT THE REMEDY AND WAR NEEDED.

NAPLES, Oct. 5.—Echoes of the great question of Italian emigration in North America, just now before the American public, have long since fallen upon the ears of Italians in their mother country in unmistakable accents of warning. During the discussion before the Congressional committee followed here with deepest interest, none save the most immediate causes and effects of Italian emigration have been considered. No speaker or writer among those self-exiled peoples, which, nevertheless, count among their number men of the analytical perspicacity of Vincenzo Botta, seems to have arisen to point out hidden first causes to the American legislator, unrolling before him the vivid panorama of Italian struggles, Italian heroism, and Italian misery. Yet herein lies the kernel of the whole question, the explanation, if not the solution, of the problem. To explain the reasons which induce the Italian laborer, and especially the Italian peasant, to abandon the soft air of his native land for the rigors of the North American climate and the fibrous tenacity of home and village ties for the obaritable cold shoulder of the stranger one must recount the course of history to find in the tremendous drain of an emigration of over 150,000 souls yearly the logical sequence and completion of Italy's sacrifice to the great Italian idea. The humble exiles pushed away from the mother land by changed and inexorable conditions illustrate how the blood is still flowing from unhealed wounds, and are the extreme offering of the nation to its one persistent aim of liberty and unity.

It must be borne in mind that Italy, whose resources are mainly agricultural, with over 20,000,000 of hectares (nearly 72,000,000 English acres) of land, one-third of which is uncultivated, and the remainder lacking development, can only look upon emigration as an unmitigated evil. But, with the worm of Papal temporal power stirring uneasily at her heart, the Austrian double-headed eagle perching in the Trentino with one of his rapacious beaks constantly turned, despite of alliances, toward lost domains, and, above all, with the petulant French cock pecking at her fair borders, Italy must continue to spend annually 317,000,000f. on her army and 118,000,000f. on her navy. She must continue to purchase alliances with her standing army of 881,000 soldiers and her 150 superb ships of war. She must continue to oppress the groaning earth with taxes and to draft the reluctant peasant. She must continue to monopolize the sale of salt and the manufacture of tobacco. She must continue to run her demoralizing lotto, and put the screws on internal revenue. Nothing but disarmament can save her from the "body of this death." But, given the seething condition and the manifest hostility of France, war is considered inevitable. Therefore, the public yearnings of Kings, and statesmen for the preservation of peace are to be read, as in a mirror, backward. Both Italy and Germany want war, the final settlement of vexed European questions, and subsequent disarmament to save them from financial ruin.

Let us now see how these questions, vital to the nation, become personal to the peasant. Contrary to the general belief, Italy, issuing from feudalism, was one of the European nations which entered most boldly on the way of progress, following the rules of fractional agriculture laid down by English economists. In fact, in few countries of Europe is landed property so largely subdivided. Even where large estates exist, save in some few known cases, they are mainly in the hands of beneficent institutions, and therefore, to a certain extent, held in trust for the poor. The overwhelming but unavoidable taxes of the State, the increasing importation at cheap rates from Australia, America, and the Indies, and the consequent deprecia-

tion in the value of home products involuntarily form the triple alliance that crushes the small holders. In numberless instances, these, unable to pay a tax of 24 per cent. on the gross income of their lands, abandon their property to the Government and themselves to the westward wave of emigration. Their small farms becoming ipse facto Crown lands, fall into immediate non-cultivation. I might describe in pages of eloquent narration the struggles of the Italian peasant under this subtraction of area and the grinding advance of living rates; the gradual and patent restriction of his domestic life to mere necessities; the elimination of meat from his daily fare, followed by the sterner suppression of condiments and of bread; the substitution thereof of *polenta* or cornmeal porridge, even, as in many parts of Calabria, of acorn and barley oakes, hardened by time, which constitute the sole food of the poorer classes. Add to this the interminable *giornata* or day's work of the Italian laborer, beginning at early day-break and ending with the "twenty-fourth hour" night-fall, the poetic Angelus of mediæval times. Mark the miserable hovel where his nights are passed without ventilation and almost without repose; the dreadful *pellagra*, vindictive and incurable disease, whose first cause is insufficient and unvaried food and which reduces whom it attacks to madness or idiocy! Beyond this leaden horizon with the impossibility of betterment, invert the order of things, and over the gates where his children enter life write the fateful sentence of Dante:

"Abandon all hope, oh ye, who enter here!"

Then, in this hotbed of ignorance, privation, and misery, sow the seeds of emigration; letters of the successful emigrant, (for here as elsewhere success is garrulous while failure is taciturn;) money sent to the home family; the improved condition of the returned wanderer; the exaggerated descriptions of the distant Eden whereby he enlarges and adorns his own importance. Let these fruitful germs quicken under the sun of the Southern imagination, and never did Persian fakir or Hindoo adept, bending over his mangos, evoke a speedier harvest—a harvest which the numerous societies of navigation press forward to reap. Let it, however, also be borne in mind that the Italian emigrant as we will consider him, one of the 13,000,000 of his compatriots who do not know the alphabet, is, in the words of the distinguished political economist, Alberto Errera, "the animal most refractory to persuasion on the face of the earth." It would be easier to persuade a mule or a dog than an Italian peasant. The very attempt is fatal, arousing his natural or acquired distrust and closing the door to subsequent influence. The agents of navigation companies are careful not to fall into this error, reserving their efforts to directing the self-moving stream, each one seeking by concessions and promises to turn it to his own ends.

Here their responsibility, which is morally a grave one, begins. The majority of emigrants are bona fide paying passengers. It is inexact to say that they are in any large degree carried gratis on promises of payment on arrival. The sale of their lowly cabin, of the domestic furniture, the gold ornaments of the wife and her meagre savings, all these go to make up the small sum of their passage money. In the recent collision and wreck of the *Matteo Bruzzo* the principal reason which deterred the terrified survivors from accepting the Government offer of free transportation to their homes was the fact that they no longer had any, having sold everything to embark. In former times, attracted by favorable conditions offered in South America (among which, I remember, a manifesto of the Emperor of Brazil offering free passage, remunerative employment and a bonus of public lands to the Italian emigrant)—in former times, I repeat, this emigration set mainly in the direction of Central and South America, and fortune nearly always favored the venture. The climate, propitious to the Italian; the language easily mastered, nay, both languages reciprocally intelligible from the very first; the religion and customs a connecting link, all served to foster and protect the growth of Italian prosperity, until now it may fairly be called the grain of mustardseed that grew and filled the land, overtopping in wealth, position, and influence the native development. But a new element of emigration then entered. English and French companies, invading the Italian ports, began to rival each other in the transportation of emigrants to New-York and other ports of the United States. The great Italian company, (*Navigazione Generale*), found itself obliged to enter the

tempt to teach the written and printed language. The spoken tongue and its use, in the common ways of life are what the unlettered peasant needs and would readily acquire. A profounder remedy and one which time may eventually develop would lie in inducing Italian emigrants to renounce the beloved country that can no longer supply their needs and become citizens of the hospitable land that offers them not only subsistence, but also free manhood. The tenacity with

lists and, at a heavy loss, run vessels regularly between New-York, Naples, and Genoa.

All the conditions which favored and favor emigration to South America diametrically oppose that to the north. The climate, with its wintery rigors and exhaustive summer heats, is insupportable to the Italian used to the warm evenness of his own. Religion and customs of trade are in every sense diverse, and most important of all, the language is a sealed book. In the way of private advice I cannot say how many capable and enterprising operatives I have dissuaded from going to New-York by simply giving them in English a series of orders such as they would be required to receive and understand in the exercise of their trade in America. The geographical ideas of the major part of Italian emigrants are but vague. Once in the seaport they become the defenseless prey of agents and manipulators, whose object is to fill the stercoraceous quarters of the departing ship regardless of destination. As the peasant is apt to conclude that if you live in America you are bound to know whatever relative he may have there, so he is fain to believe that Buenos Ayres and New-York are sister cities to be indifferently chosen. The Italian Government, owing to the military surveillance it keeps, might add perhaps with benefit to the eminent, the moral influence of enlightened advice. But we all know the market value of that article to the receiver. The American cultured traveler who has suddenly had his linguistic ignorance assailed by the Babel of some French, German, or Italian Custom House, knows by experience the lawless dizziness the bewildered exasperation of that moment. Let him make it permanent, dividing furthermore his own intelligence by that of the unlettered peasant; let him subtract the sustaining sense of money in one's pocket and add the misery of narrow or no means at all. He will then have some idea of the immense negative force contained in that one phrase—"I don't understand!" It is the snuffers clapped on the flame of intelligence; the straitjacket applied to human endeavor. I know of but one word—a French one—that expresses it, *ahurissement*, complete dumfoundedness, so to speak; and of but one figure in material things that illustrates it—the limp helplessness of a tree in process of transplantation. I once met in New-York an Italian street sweeper who had a schoolmaster's diploma and certificate in his pocket. Nor can I say how many poor organ grinders have poured their wretched delight into my ear their tale of insupportable displacement. Tillers of soil yearning with the peasant's homesickness for the wretched life of the fields and condemned to explore the filthy rag barrels of the city; able mechanics metamorphosed into petty peddlers; designers, workers in brass and iron, engravers, into common porters, keepers of fruit stalls, or hawkers of lemonade at 5 cents the glass.

Wherever the necessity of an intermediary arises, abuses follow in his train. Witness our own Indian Agency affairs. Thus we see explained and in a certain sense justified the existence of contractors or padroni. These, despite abuses, are a mouthpiece, the medium by which the dumb speak, the blind are led, and the naked clothed. They are a union of the rascally European guide whom Mark Twain flagellates, deceiving his prey into unheard-of shops and impossible bargains, and the wily American Indian agent, persuading the red man to sell his rifle for a drink of "firewater."

Still, "half a loaf is better than no bread," and even the bitter expedient of fattening one's natural enemy is preferable to being starved one's self. The Italian Government has announced its intention of proposing a new law on emigration at the opening of Parliament. An effort will be made to regulate the rivalry of agents, and even—so far as the country under Italian jurisdiction—of the padroni, by exacting solid guarantees in protection of the emigrant. But so long as the causes I have here set down exist, the flow of reaction, of adventure, and of reawakened hope will continue to sweep the Italian emigrant hence until such time as the ebb of disappointment and absolute failure may bring him back again and turn the tide.

There would seem to be a remedy, however, within the reach of American legislation, palliative if not radical, and worthy of America's great heart. The establishment of free evening schools in all Italian quarters or encampments for simple and exclusive instruction in the English language. Object and oral teaching—the application of the Froebel system to the adult, the roady Italian eye and ear aiding—would be of far more practical value than any at-

then become what the occult designs of fate may have perhaps already destined him to be, a factor in American progress, infusing into restless and exacting American labor something of his native spirit of large abnegation and accurate patience, as well as much of the splendid heritage of art which has come down to him in the uninterrupted traditions of his ancestors.