



I DO not know what effect it has had upon you; but this frightful disaster in Sicily and Southern Italy has turned my eyes with a new sympathy upon the uncouthly clad, often dark-browed, olive-skinned strangers whom we see constantly upon our streets—frequently at work and at the hardest tasks—and whom we lump together carelessly as “Italian labourers.” In our scheme of things, living in our comfortable homes and working in our well-heated and neatly furnished offices, these poor devils seem to be human machines fortunately provided to do the roughest work in the national foundation digging we are at just now in this new country; and to do it for pay which no Canadian would touch. They are the point of the human plough we are driving into our stone-strewn soil. They get scarred and broken and ground to powder; but the ploughing goes on. We know that they are human, for we hold them accountable when they commit crimes, and we pay “workers” to “labour” amongst them, and we have discovered that whiskey intoxicates them and that love and jealousy stir their hearts.

But during these days of awful suspense, we must surely have come to appreciate them better. Many of them are from the very districts upon which death descended with so pitiless and far-circling a scythe. They are Sicilians and Calabrians; and they have left at home a mother, a father, sisters, brothers; possibly some bright-eyed vine-dresser with whom they hoped to establish in a little home with their earnings in the far-away and magically rich “America.” Have they escaped? Are they dead? Are they starving or wounded or driven mad? As I write, none of these questions can be answered for these poor “Italian labourers” who only learn from the papers the vague but terrible news that their village has been devastated and that many of the inhabitants are supposed to have perished. We have been working the cables to learn, if possible, if any single Canadian or American tourist went down in the awful catastrophe; but poverty cuts the wire relentlessly between these distant adventurers and their families, and they may never know the whole truth until they have piled up their little “fortunes,” and made their way back to the land they love—and love rightly, for it is one of the loveliest lands under the sun.

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LET us imagine a case:—Along the Marina at Messina walked a year ago young Pietro Ricco. He was poor, very poor; for his family had lost their vineyard on the southern hill-slope not far from the city, and he had no money to buy a fishing boat. Little work came to him; and yet he loved—but this is getting sentimental. He had, too, a mother and several brothers and sisters who must be fed. So he dreamed the dream of that wonderful land over the seas where men may get rich, rich; and he decided to make the venture if he could arrange for the living of his people while he was away. He did not want to go; you may be sure of that. The soft Southern Land of his birth coaxed him to stay; and he dreaded the cold, far-away country where snow lay on the ground half the year and the oranges never ripened. But he is brave—is Pietro; and he journeys up to Naples and takes his passage. The discomforts of the steerage did not trouble him much, for he is used to roughing it; but the discourtesy, the uncomprehending and supercilious tyranny of the officials—that amazed and enraged and then stupefied him. He had never seen it at home.

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IN Canada, he is treated like a part of a consignment of something. The medical examination he expects; but hardly the callous herding into gangs where he works harder than he ever dreamed work could be, under a “boss” more brutal than he ever imagined, for pay which he never feels sure of until he has it in his hands. At times, nature revolts; and this son of the careless and passionate South must taste a little of life. He cannot get wine, so he takes whiskey or whatever passes under that name; and it makes him wild, when he does things that he can only dimly remember afterward. In the cities, traps are laid for him—bad whiskey, bad women, fire to the tow of his Sicilian spirit. He loses thus some of his precious store of money. But always he dreams of the olive groves, the scent of

the oranges and the grapes, the gay life on the piazzas, his old mother munching her crust and waiting, perhaps another with dark eyes under midnight hair—

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THEN comes the news of the earthquake. Messina is ruined. Reggio is gone, everybody dead under the wreck; no, some are still living but hurt, hungry, cold and in danger. Where are they?—those for whom he made this venture into a new world. Are they dead? Or are they almost worse? He cannot know. He cannot hope to know. Only as others read to him out of the English papers in this cold, strange country can he know anything. These strangers are greatly excited to learn if, perchance, some stray tourist of their acquaintance has been in Sicily when the blow came; and they are cabling here and there at fabulous expense to ascertain. He flames with anger. It is his country—not theirs—and he knows that his best loved ones are there; and yet he must wait. He cannot cable, he cannot go; when will he know? They are not learned, his loved ones; they cannot write. And now the old public letter-writers who might have sent him a line are probably dead. So he must wait. And he must earn more money—much more money—before he can go back and find out for himself. Yes; he will take the stranger's job of digging in the frost-bound winter streets. And there he toils and sweats and chills with his heavy pick, digging down through the flinty ground in the icy air under a corporation “boss,” as you rush past him to-morrow in your heated car on your way to a heated office. He is only a “poor Dago;” but in his nostrils comes at times the scent of orange blossoms and in his heart is a great dread.

N'IMPORTE

#### A BUSHEL OF DYNAMITE.

ONE of the steam shovels engaged in work on the Panama Canal, in the operation of which more than 300 employees were engaged, recently lifted out a quantity of dynamite which is described in an official report as being “more than a bushel.” What would have happened if the shovel had struck the dynamite instead of the earth around it is easy to imagine. The explosive was in sticks three-quarters of an inch in diameter and five inches long, and the cartridges bore the trade-mark of a French manufacturer of dynamite and a date which appeared to be November 29, 1887. Unquestionably the dynamite was put in by the French and either failed to explode or was abandoned when the work ceased on that part of the French waterway. The dynamite appeared to be in perfect condition.

The British Liberals are trying to lash the British Public into a rage over the obstinacy of the House of Lords in refusing to pass the Licensing Bill, a temperance measure. Punch thus depicts John Bull's rage.



#### BOILING OVER WITH APATHY

Prime Minister. “Insult me six times more, and I won't be answerable for myself. And heaven knows what would happen if I appealed to my friend here, who already has great difficulty in controlling his indignation.”