

Out of the Beaten Track.

The Life of the Italian Peasant at Home. Hidden Far Enough Inland to Laugh at the Speeding Motor Car.

A fertile, undulating country rich in corn, wine and oil, with fields of wheat, of maize, red clover, flax and beans, covering valley and hillside...

Up among the crags one meets many goat-herds—rude enough looking in sheepskin trousers and far caps. The traveller stopped for a branch of the yellow ginepro, growing close by, and dark-eyed Antonio, patting his sheep in the fold, paused to see what was desired.

"I have been to that country, Signor," he added with naive frankness, "to New York, and Pittsburgh, and St. Louis. Ah!" He shook his curly black head. "Bread in Italy is better than meat in America."

And truly our land must seem cold and chill to the dweller in the Italian village—the remote Italian village, out of the run of the tourist and hidden far enough inland to laugh at the speeding motor car. Where life goes down in a blaze of sunset glory to a fragrant, dewy, starlit night, and rises again in a haze of color behind the eastern hills.

Many of the Italian villages date their origin to remotest antiquity. Attracted by the kindness of its outer aspect, one will pass through the archway which is always erected over the principal street, and one inside it will not need much stretching of the imagination to feel that the scene belongs to an age that is passed. It is very likely to be a festa, and the people are flocking in and out of the open church door.

There is something about life here. It is unthought of, unimagined, unlooked for, unexpected. White oxen draw the wooden wagons along the road; women spin clothes from flax themselves. Money is little used as a medium of exchange.

Most great proprietors have a country casino to which is attached the casa colonica, or peasant's home. Curious examples of decayed nobility are still to be found in these villages—people of grand names and with great pride in their ancient lineage, who are now in extreme poverty.

An Ancient Foe

To health and happiness is Scrofula—so ugly as ever since time immemorial. It causes blemishes in the neck, disfigures the skin, inflames the mucous membrane, wastes the muscles, weakens the bones, reduces the power of resistance to disease and the capacity for recovery, and develops into consumption.

"Two of my children had scrofula sores which kept growing deeper and kept them from going to school for three months. Ointments and medicines did no good until I began giving them Hood's Sarsaparilla. This medicine caused the sores to heal, and the children have shown no signs of scrofula since." J. W. McGurn, Woodstock, Ont.

Hood's Sarsaparilla will rid you of it, radically and permanently, as it has rid thousands.

the village is very charitable to the poor. One day in the week bread is distributed to all who apply for it, and at Easter ciambelli, cakes made in a peculiar form, are also provided. The pay of the medico condotto varies from five hundred to two thousand francs a year. His drugs are few and simple, but the peasants are a healthy lot, and provided he gives them a large enough quantity of medicine for their money they have confidence in him. The poet-man is a person quite highly rated. Not because of the correspondence—the postbag is received with little interest—but the carrier comes laden with a number of small articles which he has been commissioned to buy.

But far and above all others in honorable esteem ranks the sindaco; every village, though it may not contain a thousand inhabitants, has its local government by sindaco and municipal council, who hold their deliberations in the town hall.

It would seem, indeed, as if the well-to-do Italian peasant must think that the world—or at least the world he sees—was made purposely for him. The soil is peculiarly his own. The fairs supply all his wants in the way of clothes, ornaments and utensils; the priest, in all probability the one who has baptized him—is there to settle all spiritual and often temporal difficulties, and the processions and festas which are so numerous amuse him more than the most elaborate entertainment. However rich he becomes, his habits, manners and customs undergo no change. The houses are often large, for many branches of a family will dwell together, forming a sort of a clan—and in one instance, seven brothers, all with wives and families, dwell under the one roof.

One of the brothers, not always the eldest, is called the vergaro, and his wife the vergara, and these two are in authority. Every season has its harvest, the cultivation of the soil being the chief occupation. The corn is cut in June, the Indian corn in August. Early in October is the vintage, and the olives are gathered and pressed at the end of the year. After this, and when the sowing is finished, comes a time of repose for agricultural laborers, and then the women are hard at work, manufacturing the clothes for the family.

These they literally grow themselves, spinning, weaving, and dyeing their own flax. The men, if industriously disposed, weave blankets and straw hats. The children are sent to guard the pigs and the sheep at a very early age. From the low raftered ceiling hangs a goodly array of hams, and the wooden ledge along the wall is ornamented with rows of cheese made of swine's milk, and loaves of Indian corn bread. A happy family of dogs, cats, hens, chickens, and perhaps a pig or two of domestic habits make themselves at home on the stone floor. At the loom by the window one of the women may be seen weaving, and the grandmother will be knitting or spinning by the open hearth, in which an oak branch, leaves and all, crackles and blazes under the large iron stowpan where the erba or polenta is cooking. A watchdog lies stretched his lazy length at the nonna's feet, and with him one of the children will be sharing a yellow loaf.

At harvest-time there is great rejoicing, and ham, eggs, white oxen draw the wooden wagons along the road; women spin clothes from flax themselves. Money is little used as a medium of exchange. So much wool bartered against so much oil, so much wine against so much flax, etc. These given to the study of political economy may consider this a waste of time. "But what a time, Signor? Tomorrow there will be another day!"

The Italian peasants are, of course, intensely religious, with a fervor and excitement that we of colder blood do not share and scarcely understand. The simple Latin nature shows its love and reverence more extravagantly than we do, and all about them is conducive to this devotion. In the fields various little wooden crosses are scattered everywhere, that God's

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bleeding may rest upon all that is planted therein. Nor can one walk a mile of the road without coming upon a shrine in honor of our blessed Lady.

The kindness and tenderness of the Italian peasant is a beautiful trait of his character. He is civil-spoken, too, and one is greeted pleasantly, in fact, exuberantly, if one is at all known, politeness to the stranger being almost exaggerated. In addition to the kindly word for the grown-up the greeting for the child is always augmented by ogni noia, equivalent to "may it escape all harm!" A man will work all day for seventy-five centesimi and a woman for forty-five. Their dinner consists of a loaf of cornbread and whatever fruit may be in season. Wine and more luxuriant fare are only to be had during the great festivals. The men will reap all day under a blazing sun, and yet plunge with energy into whatever amusement offers for the evening—Italians never tire of amusement.

The procession which takes place in every village are many and frequent, and seldom a week goes by without a festa. But perhaps one procession has seldom been described—that which takes place on Good Friday in some of the remotest towns once in every three years.

After the reading of the Passion in the morning, the life-sized figure of Our Lord on the cross is exposed and is taken down, while the priest gives an eloquent sermon on the Crucifixion. After the all-day veneration the streets are illuminated, and the procession forms. The first figures are draped in long gray cloaks with hoods to conceal their faces. Some of these drag long, heavy chains, which are attached to the feet; others openly discipline themselves across their left shoulder. These are hooded and concealed, thus expiating, unknown, some sin for which they desire to make amends. The boys in white cassocks follow, and the children in spangled gowns surrounding a hearse draped in black velvet. It is purely a procession of penitence—one that no villager would think of missing.

Out beyond the valley the shriek of the locomotive, the press of visiting curious sight-seers, the hurry and the bustle, mix in with ordinary Italian life. The simplicity of the people who come in contact with these is marked. The true peasant is hidden in one of those old gray towns, upon that giant rock, rising fortress-like from the plain, with houses crowded upon its flank. There may be seen the baronial castle or the more modern palazzo, and there are frequent bits of—something heavy in architecture—a casement of stone, a column, a fine stairway.

In the valley the high road runs between the lines of stately poplars, in which the grasshoppers sing loudly and shrilly the livelong day. On either side are rich pastures radiant with flowers. Now and then a house stands by the roadside. It has an arcade along its lower story, where the peasant women sit and sing while they plait their straw in the cool shade of the massive arches, but the upper story is gaily painted and decorated with figures of saints or by a quaint sun dial, while the broad balcony on the first story is full of corn from the golden spikes of Indian corn on the striped gourds which are piled upon the sunny platform. Here and there a campanile soars up in a knot of dark cypresses, and a bell swings between its open arches at the Ave Marie against the opal sunset. In the distance the pastures become gray and misty at the foot of a chain of mountains, which are covered with vineyards at their base, and then with dense chestnut forests. Deep blue shadows sleep in the great rifts, and the peaks catch each delicate and tender hue of the rainbow in the evening light and then stand out black and solemn against the radiance of the after glow. Everywhere earth and people are rejoicing and singing in the light and air and sunshine. And in the quiet towns, where carriage wheels are seldom heard, there is a faint sound of church music and a whiff of incense from behind Gothic archways. In the evening grass, each ear of corn is in the field, so green is the glory of the field.

Strangers are welcomed and kindly treated and allowed to sketch and loiter at will. They will show you all there is to be seen. Perhaps that may befall you which happened to a Roman student on his travels only a few short years ago. He was led aside confidently by one old peasant who had something to show—yes, something grand! One of the greatest marvels of the century! It consisted of a cold water faucet. Pipes had been laid, and the water brought up into the Palazzo. To the old fellow's simplicity this was one of the wonders of the world!

After all, Italy is Italy. As an entirely it can never be spoiled or changed. It is fraught with interest to all of our Faith. But no one can understand Italy and the Itali who approaches it in any but the right spirit. And what that spirit is he must learn from experience.—Ben-ziger's Magazine.

'He is an awful bore, isn't he?' 'I should say so.' 'But he has one estimable trait.' 'What is that?' 'He is easily offended.'

A Nation of Emigrants.

It has been lately maintained by some persons of humane proclivities that America is no longer needed as a refuge for people of other lands who think themselves politically or industrially unfortunate at home.

If this were really the case, the present extraordinary migrations of European races would come to a natural end. People who exile themselves and encounter all the risks of a new start in life in a strange land must have some strong motive for such extraordinary conduct. At any rate, the decision of the question whether America is still needed as a refuge may best be left to the decision of the people most interested, to the people who, being poor or hopeless at home, think they see brighter prospects and an animating hope in the new world. The people now occupying the United States know that those prospects are brighter, and they are themselves animated by a great hope, the hope that freed from necessities. The American people, if they get a chance to express themselves, will not be found in favor of shutting the door on any honest and healthy persons who believe they can better themselves by coming to America, and are enterprising enough to assume the inevitable risks.

An educational test to restrict immigration is both misdirected and untimely. It is misdirected, because ability to read is no proof of either health or character. Many entirely illiterate persons are vigorous, honest, and sound of judgment in affairs and in the conduct of life. It is untimely, because the right moment to apply an educational test is on admission to the suffrage, and not on admission to the country. In all races the most dangerous criminals come from classes that can read and write, and not from the illiterate. A test founded on the ability to read will not keep out the worst criminals, and will furnish no safe guide in action to the officers charged with the execution of the existing restrictive laws.

All attempts to exclude healthy and honest immigrants are inconsistent with the rightful generosity of freedom toward people who wish to be free, and of working people whose conditions of labor are favorable toward people in other lands whose conditions of labor are less favorable and who are ambitious to improve their environment by going to free America. The present people of the United States have themselves been immigrants into the fresh continent within generations little recent; and they ought to shrink, and do shrink, from imposing hard conditions of admission to the country on the newer immigrants who are ambitious to follow their example.

CHARLES W. ELLIOT.

Quoting the assertion of Frederick Townsend Martin that charity will never solve the problem of poverty, the Brooklyn Tablet very properly draws a distinction, and says it all depends on what is meant by "charity," which ought to, and does, include in its meaning more than financial relief. They knew things in the destroyed monasteries of England, three hundred and fifty years or so ago, which "modern progress" is just commencing to learn all over again.—Casket.

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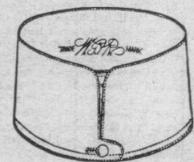


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