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*REMARKS UPON THE ITALIAN COLONY
IN CHICAGO.*

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ITALIANS do not come to America to find a home, as do the British, Teutons, Slavs, and Scandinavians, but to repair the exhausted financial conditions in which they were living in Italy, or to make more money if they were well-to-do. They leave the mother-country with the firm intention of going back to it as soon as their *scarsellas* shall sound with plenty of *quibus*. And if they remain here, they do so as a result of unforeseen circumstances which surprise even themselves, and which they finally accept.

At their embarkation for America they might be classified as temporary immigrants; but when they are here, in the majority of cases they become permanent ones. The sons of Italy in emigrating do not sell the home, but mortgage it for money to pay for the passage, because they dream of a return home with plenty of money. They plan the improvements they will make, and that they will spend the remainder of the happy life there. How different from the people of other nationalities, who sell everything before emigrating! Italians leave the members of the family behind, with the promise that they will send money to them to live on, to pay debts, to raise the mortgage. But after some years they send for the family, and settle in America permanently, sometimes becoming American citizens, but always re-

maining Italians. Their children, though American-born, will always be "incurable" Italians because of their distinct individuality, and of their sonorous and difficult Italian names.

On arriving in this country they swear to impose upon themselves all sorts of sacrifices, by limiting their personal expenses to the minimum, in order to hasten the realization of the dream of a happy and moneyed return. Therefore, if their way of living in the crowded tenement houses of the American cities has been found objectionable, it is to be ascribed to this proposed economy, which is carried to the extreme limit of the possible or the imaginable. I must state, before going farther, that I am writing of the Italians of the peasant class, and particularly of the provinces of Southern Italy, which furnish the bulk of the Italian immigration; also that I make honorable exceptions, and that I do not wish to offend against the Italian name, since there is not in America an Italian more incurable than I, and a Southern Italian too. The Italian immigrants, in the majority of instances, are regarded as unskilled laborers, and are employed, accordingly, in building railroads, and in earthwork, such as excavation, bedding, etc.; and as carriers. For this reason they find work during only a portion of the year, when the clemency of the weather allows such work to be done. The rest of the year they remain idle in the American towns whither they have floated, and where they sometimes find work, incidentally, as snow and street sweepers. During these winter months they sometimes experience hardship, and particularly when work begins very late; so much so that a great many of them leave for Italy in time to be there

for Christmas, and return in March or April, ready to work as before. This last year, owing to the financial conditions which afflicted this country, the exodus of Italians has been great. It is also partly due to the fact that the price of passage on the half-dozen steamship lines which carry Italian immigrants has been very low, owing to competition.

Here I beg to be allowed to defend the Italian immigrants from the classification to which they are condemned; viz., of unskilled laborers. In America they might be very good farmers, vine-growers, gardeners, olive and fruit growers, and stock-farmers, just as they were in Italy, in their own home, which comprised a field for grain and a vineyard, a fruit orchard, and a little stockyard. Or they may have been employed in the same capacity by large farmers, as vine-growers, fruit-raisers, olive-growers, and stock-farmers. In certain parts of Southern Italy, owing to the large emigration of peasants, these farmers find it at present difficult to carry on their industries. But the Italian immigrants, unfortunately, when they arrive in America do not continue the work to which they were used in Italy. They do not apply themselves to tilling the soil, in which they would not only prove skilful laborers, but examples to other nationalities (Frenchmen excepted), as those who have happily followed this practice have fully demonstrated. It would be a fortunate movement, that of inducing the Italian immigrants to leave American towns for farming pieces of land in a climate congenial to them and like that of their native country, and where the land would yield a variety of crops all the year round. Then their instinct of picking

would have full sway in a more decent manner than now, when many of them, finding in the American towns nothing comely to pick, pick rags, cigar-stumps, bones, and other filthy things from alleys and ash and garbage boxes.

It must be added that such filthy trades are practised with ingenuousness and nonchalant persistence worthy of a better cause. The Italian instinct for picking is notable. In Italy they are used to pick wood from the forest, weeds from the fields, wheat and grain after the mowers, fruit from the trees, insects from the bark of the trees and vines, for which they are paid so much per hundred; herbs, beans, pease, and other truck-farm products from the plants; the seeds of weeds from wheat, oats, rye, etc.; herbs from the woods, and many other things which the average American would never think of using in any way.

In my opinion the only means for the regeneration of the Italian immigrants from the state in which they nowadays find themselves in the crowded districts of the American cities, is to send them to farming. All other means are mere palliatives. Then they will begin to belong to the same class of citizens to which they did at home, the first producers; that class which is the backbone of the country, and most worthy of respect. The result of the present combination of circumstances of the Italian peasant is in Chicago the same as in any other American town, except on the Pacific coast.

The Italians of Chicago number 25,000, mostly belonging to the peasant class. Those who have grown with the town are in prosperous circumstances; and, with few exceptions, they came from the north of Italy,

and particularly from the Riviera. They do not, for the most part, form an intelligent class. They are neither *entrepreneurs* nor producers. They have not been identified with the wonderful, intelligent progress of the city; but they have grown rich with it from the increase in value of real estate, or from their business of selling fruit. The children are no better than their parents. A case was discovered recently of a young Italian worth \$100,000 who was contented to be simply a policeman. Behind bar-room counters, there are young Italians who are worth even more money. Some of the present generation deserve praise because they have entered the liberal professions or legitimate manufacturing enterprises. The Italian colony consists of professional men, — newspaper-men, bankers, publicans, employment agents, lawyers, interpreters, midwives, musicians, artisans, laborers, sweaters' victims, grocers, bakers, butchers, barbers, merchants, etc., all of which are necessary one to another, and cannot bear separation without disorganization. It is a town within a town, a stream, a rivulet in the sea, of such intense force of cohesion that it cannot be broken, as the mighty ocean cannot break the Gulf Stream.

The immigrant Italians are lodged by Italian innkeepers, and fed by Italian *restaurateurs*. Italian publicans quench their thirst. Italian employment agents or "bosses" find them work, and group them and take them to the country, where, in the majority of cases, they board them, and act as interpreters between the contractor and them. Italian agents or bankers send their money to their families in Italy, and sell them tickets for the latter when they come to join them in

America. Italian doctors are called in case of sickness, and Italian druggists furnish the curative drugs, which must bear Italian names in order to be trusted. Italians manufacture macaroni as nearly as possible like that of Italy; and Italian grocers furnish cheese, oil, olives, bologna, bread, and many other Italian delicacies or necessities. Their priests must be Italians; also their lawyers and their undertakers. These streams and rivulets run into the midst of the *mare magnum* of Chicago about South Clark Street, and Third, Fourth, Pacific and Sherman Avenues, and Dearborn Street between Harrison and the Twelfth Street viaduct; about Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, and La Salle Streets, where the Italian Church of the Assumption is located; about West Indiana, Ohio, Huron, Sangamon, and North Halsted Streets, and Milwaukee and Austin Avenues; about South Halsted, Ewing, Forquer, DeKoven, and Twelfth Streets and the river. Smaller streams run in other directions. Each is well marked, and bears, more or less, a reputation of its own.

The charge of filthiness, so often made against Italians of this class, is to be attributed partly to their special condition of life in the crowded tenement houses of our American towns, which are the reverse of hygienic in their construction, both in regard to the material used, which is poor and easily impregnable, and as to the disposition of space, which does not conduce to healthful living. The accusers ought to consider that those Italian immigrants come from the open country, or from villages where the houses are built of stonemasonry less easily heated and cooled, and having wide corridors differently disposed with doors and

windows, which give room for plenty of light and air. The promiscuity of sex and of strange people force sighs from the hearts of Italian women, mothers of girls, on first setting foot into the "infernol bolges" of South Clark Street and Fourth Avenue. "*Madonna mia, qui debbo vivere?*" I have heard sigh an Italian woman on one of these occasions, looking at her girls, while her heart was full of dismay. It is the custom of my part of Italy to whitewash the houses with lime in September, and before Easter, or in May, at the time of moving. It is also the custom that, on the Saturday before Easter, the priest goes *in pompa magna* to bless the houses of the district assigned to him, one by one. For such an occasion the houses of even the poorest people are made clean from roof to cellar in honor of the sanctity of the visitor who comes to bless the buildings, the persons, and the animals in the stable, in the name of God; therefore he is received with marked and religious reverence. Presents of eggs and money are made to him; the eggs are taken care of by the priest's servant maid, who attends in her picturesque peasant's costume, and puts them in a straw basket. A boy responds to the Latin prayers, and puts the money into a silver bucket containing the blessed water and the sprinkler. When a boy, I often attended to act in this capacity, and I remember with pleasure the neat appearance of the poorest houses. When I found myself in an American tenement house, inhabited by Italians, at the sight of the filth that appeared before me I could not help thinking with a sense of *ripianto amarissimo* of the houses of the same people as I have seen them on those good Saturdays. Most certainly the same condi-

tions would not exist among these people on a farm in the country.

The greed of gain which has developed among the Italians causes most of the women to employ all their spare time in sewing clothing, in order to add their little share to the earnings of the husband and sons. This is a serious detriment to them, and is one cause of their filthy homes, which they have no time to care for. By reason of the same greed, boys and girls are sent to sell newspapers in the streets, and sometimes to beg. The skilled Italian in Chicago gets as much money as the American skilled laborer. The unskilled Italian laborer gets from \$1.00 to \$1.75 a day. As I have stated before, they economize in every way they can; but when the occasion arises which pleases them, they spend their money like water. They are hard workers, and not inclined to be vicious. Their women are notably virtuous.

L'Italia, the leading Italian newspaper of Chicago, inaugurated with its first number a veritable crusade against the two offences of ragpicking and sending boys and girls in the streets, and was instrumental in holding a mass-meeting for compulsory education in Chicago, which was part of a movement in the course of which the principle of compulsory education was adopted by the Board of Education, led by the late Charles Komin-sky. The mass-meeting ended in the appointment of a committee of prominent Italians to call upon Mayor Cregier and upon the council, requesting the interference of the police in the ragpicking of the Italians. Briefly speaking, an ordinance was passed and enforced; but the ragpickers formed a sort of political association,

and let the party in power understand that they were voters who would vote against that party at the next election if the interference of the police in their occupation was not stopped. Immediately the police, by secret orders, let the ragpickers alone. No lobbyists at Washington could have worked the scheme more effectually. This will answer the question whether Italians have Americanized themselves, and to what extent.