

# PEASANT LIFE IN ITALY

## MEN AND WOMEN LABOR IN FIELDS FROM DAWN TILL DARK.

Sunday Not a Day of Rest—A Little Meat on Holidays—No Schooling for Children—The Houses of the Peasantry—Food of a Family.

From sunny Italy came the anarchist who slew the Empress Elizabeth, President Carnot, Prime Minister Canovas and finally Humbert himself. In sunny Italy is probably the rankiest growth of anarchy and socialism in all Europe. And in the sunny plains and valleys of northern Italy is what perhaps is the worst condition of serfdom that exists in Europe today. Here in the provinces that border on the river Po—Lombardy, Venetia and Emilia—the peasantry stagger under burdens so depressing and unbending that it is no wonder that the extract from this human press is anarchy and socialism. It is in these provinces that the ferment of socialism has worked the most. Here the peasants are organized more or less completely into socialistic groups. Whatever of worth there was in the old system of labor in these provinces disappeared twenty years ago when many of the old nobles were forced to give up their landed estates because of the fall in price of wheat and cattle, due largely to American competition. With the ruin of the nobles came that of many of the tenant farmers and small proprietors, who were compelled to leave the fertile and smiling country and go into the towns for work, or else emigrate to America, there to begin life anew.

The field laborers of Italy are divided into two classes, the obbligati, who are hired by the year, and the disoblighati, who are employed by the day. The former class, of course, are a little better off than the latter, for their contract runs longer, and they can look further ahead. But in either class the outlook is miserably enough. For not only does the peasant bind himself to work for his owner, but he binds his whole family, with the possible exception of babes, who would be included, except that they can produce nothing, and therefore are left in the corners of the fields. For this reason, that an employer can get the services of an entire family for the price of one man, an unmarried man, or the man with a wife and no children, is at a great disadvantage, for work for him is not to be had as long as there are unemployed families at hand. Yet another hard feature of this system is that the head of the family must stipulate, if he has unmarried daughters, that they shall not marry for the period of time which the contract has to run.

A day's work in this part of sunny Italy is from 4 in the morning to 9 at night—that is, from the first flush of dawn to the last light to be had from the setting sun. There is no Sunday in the calendar of the Italian peasant. On the day of the week which all Christendom observes, as on other days, he is in the field at 4 o'clock in the morning, and between 7 and 8 has his breakfast; he gets an hour at midday and half an hour at 5 or 6 o'clock, and then he works on until he no longer can see.

The women go into the fields with the men. They hoe in the maize fields, feed the cattle and cultivate the flax. If the children are babes they can do nothing—to the great sorrow of the employer, for they eat, if ever so little, but do not produce. But when they get to be a few years old they are useful in looking after the pigs, etc., and as soon as possible they are sent to work with their parents. The situation in the green fields of Italy is about as complete a refutation of the Malthusian theory as its most ardent opponent could desire, for it is the man with many children who gets the most out of life as it is lived in sunny Italy.

The wages of the peasant's family are partly in money and partly in kind, and he has the privilege of rent free. In cash he gets from \$15 to \$20 a year; in kind he gets fourteen bushels of maize, seven bushels of wheat and from 200 to 250 bundles of firewood. If he is in a vineyard section he receives in addition 800 to 900 pounds of grapes, while in other sections he gets six to nine bushels of rye. He may get some rice, which he mixes with the millet to produce the indigestible bread which is responsible for the disease called pellagra.

Then he may have the privilege of a little patch of ground on which he may raise maize, two-thirds of which goes to the employer, and he may raise silk worms, too.

So the average peasant's family of six persons may earn altogether from \$120 to \$125 a year. The house of the Italian peasant usually contains several other families. A lodging consists of a kitchen, a bed room and two other small rooms. In the older houses oiled paper answers for a window, and the houses are damp, moldy and smoky.

Of course the food of a family whose income is about six cents a day is bound to be rather meager. Potenta, which is flour of maize cooked in water, is the main dish. Breakfast consists of potentia and a little cheese. For dinner there is potentia and bacon soup, with perhaps fish from the brook, or eggs. At 5 o'clock potentia and cheese is the meal, and at supper potentia and a salad of the cheapest vegetables. On Christmas and on Easter meat is set on the table sparingly.

The firewood which the peasants get rarely sufficient to cook with in the summer, and in the winter the family makes refuge in the cow shed, where the employer, under pretense that he

provides a light in the stables, lays claim to a portion of the flax spun by the women in the barns.

Of schooling for the children there is none, except in the winter in the villages. Consequently, many of these Italians who come to America in the hopes of bettering their condition can neither read nor write their own language. Great wonder it is if anything good can come out of modern Italy.—New York Press.

### Making a Tunnel End Meet.

It is quite apparent that to dig a tunnel from two sides and make both ends meet is a delicate problem, says Eugene P. Lyle in Everybody's Magazine. Should they happen not to meet, it would be an expensive wandering in the mountain to find them and get them together. But fortunately there is a guide as true and unobtainable as mathematics. This is an imaginary straight line between two points. One point is a little observatory on the bank of the Rhone, with a spy-glass pointing horizontally toward Italy. The other point is a similar little observatory on the bank of the Doveria in Italy, with a glass towards Switzerland. Between the two points rises in Simplon mountain mass. But the straight line goes through just the same, for it is only an imaginary straight line. It is, however, steadily turning into a reality—that is, the tunnel. And if it were not for the grade of the tunnel, then some day the observatory in Switzerland could look through the mountain at the observatory in Italy. It will be objected, however, that we went around a curve in the tunnel. In fact, there are two curves, but they do not affect the straight-line proposition.

There is a small tunnel which joins the main tunnel some hundred metres or 100 yards inside. It is called the locating tunnel, and faithfully follows the imaginary straight line. The main tunnel finishes its curve at this hundred-metre point, and thence continues along the straight line to the corresponding curve at the other end, where again, the straight line is completed by a second locating tunnel.

### Our Biggest Gun.

Some spectacular particulars are given of the United States gun, which will preserve America's inalienable right to possess the "biggest thing on earth." It will weigh 126 tons, will have a length of forty-nine feet three inches, and a diameter—fine by degrees and beautifully less—varying from sixty inches to twenty-eight inches. It will be able to fire its five-foot-four-inch projectile an extreme distance of nearly twenty-one miles—20,978 miles is the exact figure—and a projectile fired at the elevation required for this distance will attain a height of 30,516 feet, "higher," says the picturesque recorder, "than the combined elevations of Pike's Peak and Mount Blanc." Thus the record distance fired by a Krupp 9.2-inch gun on April 28, 1892, when twelve and a half miles were covered and a height of 21,450 feet was attained, will be completely surpassed.—London Post.

### Unfortunate For the Lady.

A curious instance of absence of mind is, according to the Liverpool Post, furnished by a certain Oxford don, whose "scholarly abstraction" frequently lands him in difficulties. Dining out one night he suddenly became versed in thought, and for a time sat gazing at his plate, evidently deeply engrossed in some mighty problem. Now it happened that his left-hand neighbor, a portly dame, had the habit of resting her hand on the table, palm down and fingers closed. Suddenly the professor awoke from his brown study, seized his fork, plunged it into the plump paw resting to the left of his plate, and, beaming genially through his glasses, remarked, "My bread, I think!"

### Sedentary Athletes.

An Englishman who has spent much time in Paris has whimsically observed that the French make excellent athletes, where they can sit down to it. The statement is worthy of notice, says the Paris Messenger. It is generally acknowledged that Frenchmen cannot play cricket, and few of them care for football; but it is a fact that they are skillful horsemen, as may be seen at the polo matches in the Bois de Boulogne. They also row well, as may be seen every day on the Seine; and, above all, they cycle well, as may be observed all over Paris. And the bottom of all this is "sitting down."

### To Protect Wild Flowers.

Persons interested in wild flowers are endeavoring to create—and to organize—a sentiment for the protection of our native plants, especially near large cities, says the Youth's Companion. The pond lily, trailing arbutus, native orchids, fringed gentian and many of the evergreens have been gathered in Massachusetts for sale in such quantities and so steadily sought by frequenters of suburban woods, that their extinction is threatened. The remedy suggested is that care be used to cut rather than pull the flowers, so that the roots need not be disturbed, and that those who gather rare plants for the market should be discouraged by lack of patronage.

### A Compass in a Guano Bed.

A curious find is reported from one of the Chincha Islands, off the coast of Peru. In a bed of guano an old ship's compass was lately dug up, which, when cleaned, was found to be in working order. The case of the instrument is of brass, and it bears the engraved inscription: "Jno. Warren, Chesapeake, City of London, Maker, 10<sup>th</sup>." The compass has been sent to a museum in Lima.—London News.

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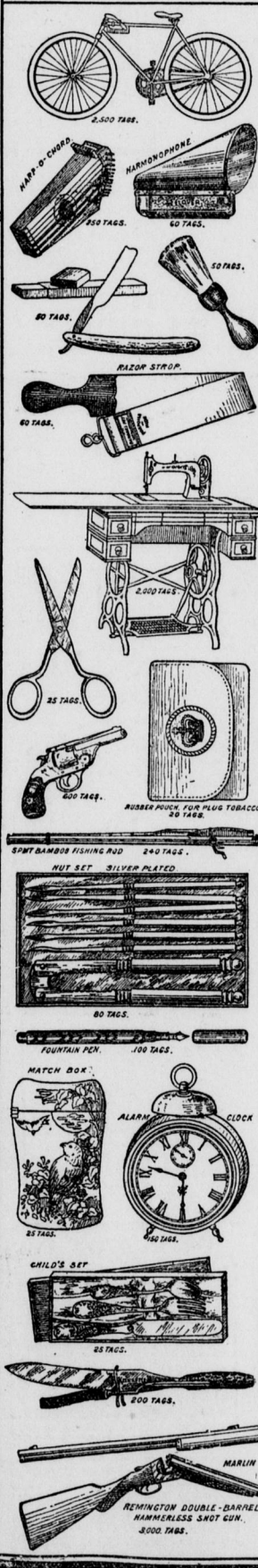
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