

THE ITALIAN AS AN AGRICULTURAL LABORER

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It is a well-known fact that Italy is eminently an agricultural country. That she is bound to remain almost exclusively agricultural in the future no one can assert; in fact, the developments in Northern Italy in the last fifty years would rather demonstrate the contrary. It can, however, be safely asserted that Italy cannot expect to develop those industries in which large quantities of steel and coal are necessary, for she does not produce them. Her water power, if developed, will serve very well for traction purposes and the textile industries; aluminum may to some extent prove a substitute for iron, but it is difficult to imagine the great construction industries without steel. Even the water power is available chiefly in the sub-alpine region, so that in any event it would seem that more than one-half of the people of Italy may always have to rely on agriculture as their chief means of subsistence. In the year 1908, out of a total number of 25,386,507 persons above nine years of age in Italy, 9,611,003, of whom 6,411,001 were males and 3,200,002 females, were occupied in agricultural pursuits. Therefore, it has been expected that Italians in the United States would naturally turn to agriculture, and many observers not seeing them become agriculturists have proclaimed the Italian immigrant a failure. These persons forget that what an immigrant population will do in a new land depends not on what it has been doing at home, but on what it conceives to be the best thing to do in the country to which it migrates. So it happens that the Norwegian sailor makes eventually an excellent farmer in Kansas or in the Dakotas and the Italian peasant works in the mills of New York City or of New England.

The countries of northwestern Europe are far more advanced in their industrial transformation than the countries of southeastern Europe and yet it happened that the stream of immigration from northwestern Europe (England, Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Sweden, Germany) was a principal cause of the agricultural expan-

(380)

sion of the United States, while the stream of immigrants from southeastern Europe (Greece, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Russia) has been recently a cause of the great industrial expansion of this country.

Some observations on two typical decades will clearly demonstrate this assertion. During the decade from 1870 to 1880 the stream of immigration from northwestern Europe was at its height; during the decade from 1895 to 1905 the immigrants from southeastern Europe predominated. If the agricultural progress of the United States during these two decades is to be judged by three of the principal products we find:

Year.	Corn, Bu.	Wheat, Bu.	Oats, Bu.
1870	760,944,549	287,745,626	282,107,157
1880	1,754,861,535	459,479,503	407,858,900
1895	2,151,139,000	467,103,000	824,444,000
1905	2,707,993,540	692,979,489	953,216,197

If as a basis we take the exports from the United States during the same decades we find:

Year.	Agricultural.	Per Cent.	Manufactured.	Per Cent
1870	\$361,188,483	79	\$68,279,769	15
1880	685,961,091	83	102,856,015	12
1895	553,210,026	69	183,595,743	23
1905	820,865,405	55	543,607,975	36

If for the last twenty years during which the stream of immigration has been predominantly from southeastern Europe we compare the industrial progress of the United States with that of the chief industrial countries of Europe we find:

Countries.	Industrial Products.		Increase
	1888.	1908.	
United Kingdom	\$3,990,000,000	\$5,000,000,000	25%
Germany	2,837,000,000	4,600,000,000	62%
France	2,360,000,000	3,450,000,000	46%
United States	7,022,000,000	13,004,000,000	85%

The fact is then that the immigrants from southeastern Europe and especially from Italy may have been an agricultural failure but they certainly have been an industrial success.

Italian immigration was at its height just when the crying need

of this country was for mill workers and unskilled laborers of every kind for the building industries. No wonder that the Italians crowded into the large cities of the northeast and were chiefly employed in manufactures, just as forty years ago the crying need of the country being for more agricultural workers the immigrants from northwestern Europe went to the West and settled there.

The Italian working population of the United States is approximately 1,200,000. Of these the condition in Italy was as follows:¹

Engaged in agriculture	800,000
Engaged in trades and industries of all kinds, including mines....	400,000
Living in towns of less than 10,000 inhabitants.....	1,000,000
Living in towns of more than 10,000 inhabitants.....	200,000

Their condition in the United States is approximately as follows:

Engaged in agriculture	80,000
Engaged in the mines of all kinds.....	100,000
Working in industrial establishments of all kinds.....	500,000
Working in the building industries of all kinds, including the railroads	520,000
Living in centers with less than 10,000 population.....	200,000
Living in centers with more than 10,000 population.....	1,000,000

It then appears that while 67 per cent of all the laboring Italians of the United States were engaged in agriculture at home only 6.60 per cent are actually engaged in agriculture in this country. But there is a still more surprising fact. Of the 1,200,000 laboring Italians mentioned 80 per cent came from Southern Italy and Sicily, regions that are almost exclusively agricultural, and 20 per cent came from Northern Italy, a region where the industrial development in the last years has been most rapid; yet of the Italians engaged in agriculture in the United States more than 50 per cent are from Northern Italy.

This same phenomenon is also illustrated by the condition of the Italians in the South-American countries. The Italian working population of South America may be estimated at 1,200,000, of whom 45 per cent come from Southern Italy; yet 60 per cent of the whole number of Italians in those regions are engaged in

¹The following figures are approximate estimates, made upon official and private information taken from a very large number of sources.

agriculture. In Europe and Northern Africa the condition is reversed. Of the Italian emigrants to the various countries of central Europe 90 per cent belong to Northern Italy and almost all of them are engaged in the industries and mines while the emigration to Northern Africa is composed 95 per cent of Italians from Southern Italy and Sicily and of them fully 80 per cent are engaged in agriculture.

From all these facts it appears that the Italians whether from Southern or Northern Italy have in themselves the necessary qualities to "make good" both in agricultural and in industrial pursuits, and that their occupation in the country to which they migrate depends entirely upon the economic condition of that country and the opportunities it offers and not upon their particular preferences.

Before proceeding farther it seems appropriate to study a little in detail the Italian as an agricultural worker in the United States. In three distinct fields the Italian has developed himself as an agricultural worker in this country: truck farms, extensive agriculture and fruit raising. Let us consider these three departments of agriculture separately. That the Italian is immensely better adapted to intensive than to extensive agriculture cannot be disputed for a moment. It is true that he may lack the technical knowledge regarding fertilizers, but this knowledge is acquired much sooner than the knowledge necessary to handle complicated machinery used in extensive agriculture. On the other hand, the Italian has many of the qualities that go to make an excellent intensive farmer: he loves the land, he excels in those operations which can only be made by hand and require a great deal of patience, and he understands irrigation. He also prefers to live close to other persons rather than isolated and he ardently desires to own his little piece of land as soon as possible.

Many Italians living in the large cities of the eastern states have learned how much profit they could get out of the surrounding lands by raising vegetables and poultry, which products find a ready and excellent market in the city near at hand. Thus during the last ten years a considerable number of farms, abandoned by the Yankees who go west or enter business in the city, have been occupied by Italians in the western part of the State of New York, and in the Connecticut Valley. It has been impossible to ascertain with any degree of accuracy even the approximate number

of farms owned by Italians in the regions named; one of my informants claims that in the States of Massachusetts, Connecticut and New York over five hundred farms are occupied by Italians. That this is a continuous process seems to be well ascertained. The young son of a New England or a New York farmer who comes out of college does not know what to do with his father's farm; he wants to go into business or practice a profession in the city and is therefore ready to sell the farm for any little sum that may be sufficient to make his start.

Truck farming has been more developed by the Italian in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and the Carolinas than in the regions before mentioned. The southern part of New Jersey has a very large number of Italian farmers. The principal centers are at Vineland, Hammonton and the vicinity of Trenton and Newark. At Vineland and Hammonton the Italian farmers are fairly prosperous; they are mostly from Piedmont and a large majority of them own their land and have built comfortable brick houses besides. There are in those localities Italian farmers who make as much as \$5,000 a year out of a few acres of land. In Pennsylvania the Italian farmers are mostly in the vicinity of Philadelphia and Pittsburg; almost all the Italian farmers of Pennsylvania started as industrial workers in the mills and mines and decided afterwards that they could get their means of subsistence from the land with greater peace and less danger. In Ohio there are Italian truck farms in the vicinity of Cincinnati and Cleveland. Near Cincinnati fruits are raised in good quantities. The vicinity of Chicago has also quite a number of Italian farmers, many of whom manufacture sausage after the Italian fashion. This sausage is sold in the Italian quarters of all the large cities of the East and seriously menaces to drive out of the market the imported Italian kind. The Carolina Trucking Development Company of Wilmington, N. C., some years ago began extensive operations in the vicinity of Wilmington and Italians have been attracted in good numbers. The plan of the company is to make the Italians owners of the land by small payments. The enterprise seems thus far to be a success, largely because the great markets of Philadelphia, Washington and New York are relatively near and the products can be disposed of at good prices. More recently the Long Island Railroad Company has established an experimental station, where Italians have been employed in raising

vegetables. The first report, just issued under the title "The Lure of the Land," gives the results of the experiments of the first year, which have been very encouraging.

Long Island, like New Jersey, western New York and the lower part of the Connecticut Valley, will in the next few years see a large number of Italian farmers engaged in raising vegetables on lands neglected or abandoned by the native Americans. There are some who expect that in these localities the Italians will settle in larger numbers than in the Piedmont region, where the climate perhaps would be more favorable but the markets farther away. Whether from a social and religious point of view these farmers from sunny Italy will be preferable to the old Puritans is a question that cannot be discussed here but it cannot be doubted that so far as the economic development of the country is concerned they are vastly preferable to no Puritans at all. Nearness to great centers of population will not only facilitate the sale of farm products at good prices but will eventually make it possible for one or two young members of the family to go to work in the city during the dull times in the country and therefore help their fathers to become owners of their land sooner.

The second field in which the Italian has been tried out as an agricultural laborer may be termed extensive agriculture. The Italians are rather rare in the wheat and corn fields of the Dakotas and Kansas but they have gone in good numbers to the cotton, sugar cane and tobacco fields of the South and the Southwest. In the State of North Carolina is the Italian colony of Valdese. It was founded fifteen years ago by Piedmontese belonging to the old Waldensian Church. In their religion and mode of life these people have a very strong resemblance to the earliest settlers of Massachusetts; like them they have not been very fortunate with their land, which is not of the most fertile in the state. They were helped at first by Mr. John Wanamaker of Philadelphia, and now, with the assistance of the younger generation which came to the mills of the North, the land has been improved and the colony may be said to be fairly prosperous. There are at Valdese about 400 Italians, and the chief crops raised are wheat, corn and potatoes. Every family has about an acre planted with vines and produces about 600 gallons of wine for domestic use. Lately mulberry trees have been planted and the growing of the silk worm is to be undertaken if a variety

of worm can be produced adapted to the climate. This is not very different from that of Northern Italy but much more changeable.

Of the 30,000 Italians of Louisiana about one-half are working on sugar cane and cotton plantations. These are mostly Sicilians; they earn from 75 cents to \$1.00 a day and up to \$1.25 at the time when the crop is to be gathered in; lodging is usually provided free but they have to board themselves. Their frugality allows them to save in four or five years enough money to start for themselves. The principal places where the Italians are engaged in agriculture in the State of Louisiana are Kenner, La Place, Convent, Independence, Houma, Lafayette, Morgan City, Thibodeaux, Baton Rouge, Lake Charles, Patterson, Alexandria, Lake End, Lutchter, Shreveport. In all these places sugar cane and cotton are the principal products with the exception of Independence where 800 Italians are engaged in raising strawberries. They ship to the North every year 300 cars of berries of a total value of more than half a million dollars; more than one-third of the land they cultivate belongs to them and many have built very comfortable and attractive houses on their property. During the spring, when more hands are needed to handle the product, they call from Italy their friends and relatives, who afterwards settle there and engage in the same occupation. At Alexandria a few Italian families are occupied in the cultivation of rice. To this kind of cultivation the people from Northern Italy are better adapted than those of the South and this is the reason why the cultivation of rice in the southern states has been a partial failure where Italians from Southern Italy have been employed. At Lake End the Italians are all from Sicily and rent the land, on which they raise cotton almost exclusively; they pay all the expenses and give the owners of the land one-fourth of the crop as rent; they are increasing rapidly and many of the families established there live comfortably and save every year from \$500 to \$1,000.

In Arkansas is the famous colony of Sunny Side, founded by Mr. Corbin of New York. It was a failure from the start. The lands are fertile and well adapted to cotton raising but they are not properly drained and therefore fevers are quite common in the locality. The laborers are colonized by a company which practically compels them to buy from it all necessaries of life at high prices and to sell to it the cotton at a price a little below the market price.

(386)

With all this many families which are fortunate enough to have the best lands save as much as \$1,000 a year. The number of Italians in the colony is increasing, and perhaps conditions are now a little better than they were a few years ago. His excellency the Italian ambassador, Mayor Des Planches, who visited the colony in his southern tour last year, did not receive a very good impression and reports in general are conflicting. The great trouble is that the company administering the estate on account of the Corbin heirs does not sell the land to the Italians and these cannot therefore become settlers in the best sense of the word. Mr. Alfred Holt Stone, in a paper prepared for the American Economic Association, gives the following figures on the colony of Sunny Side, to demonstrate the relative efficiency of the Italians and the negroes as cotton growers: When the present administration took charge of the Corbin estate in 1898 Sunny Side had 38 squads of Italians with 200 working hands cultivating 1,200 acres of cotton. There were also 203 negro squads with 600 working hands cultivating 2,600 acres of cotton. At the end of the year 1905 conditions had completely changed. The cotton acreage had increased to 3,900 acres of which 900 were cultivated by 38 negro squads with 175 working hands and 3,000 by 107 Italian squads with 500 working hands. As to productive power an average of six years gives 2,584 pounds of lint cotton per working hand for the Italians and 1,174 pounds for the negroes. The average lint production per acre was 400 pounds for the Italians and 233 pounds for the negroes. Counting the value of cotton seed the Italian has an advantage of 115 per cent over the negro. The two races live quite separated at Sunny Side. In fact there seems to be less mixing of bloods now than when the white Americans were in larger numbers in the place.

Very few Italians have penetrated into Alabama. Two agricultural colonies exist at Daphnee and Lambert, the principal products being vegetables and tobacco. In the neighborhood of Birmingham a few Italian families have just established themselves.

Texas, on the contrary, is a wide open and inviting field for the Italian. Public attention in Italy has been directed to the agricultural possibilities of that large state, and while I am writing these lines a commission sent by a leading bank of Milan, Italy, is studying in Texas a project of Italian colonization on a large scale. The idea is to direct to the best localities families of Italian farmers,

providing them with proper assistance, protection and instruction for the first years and giving them opportunity to become owners of the land on easy payments. In general it may be said that any scheme on these lines ought to succeed, and success can reasonably be expected in Texas where the climate is very favorable. Texas has already about 15,000 Italians of whom two-thirds are occupied in agriculture. It is calculated that nearly one thousand Italians reside in the vicinity of Dickinson. They are raising vegetables and berries, and the majority are quite well off; the colony increases very rapidly. Near Houston there are one hundred Italian families engaged in growing vegetables and fruits; a good majority of them own the land they cultivate. At Bryan fully five hundred families are engaged in agriculture and one-half of them own the land they cultivate. Bryan is one of the most prosperous Italian agricultural colonies in the United States. The farms vary in extent from 100 to 400 acres. The Italians number 3,000 out of a total population of 5,000 and almost all are from Sicily. They are prosperous, happy and law-abiding. Not a single crime has been committed in that locality for years; the signature of the Italians is accepted as ready money and the newcomers find immediately land, implements and all that is necessary to start. Only for a period of two or three years do they remain tenants; then they buy their farms. At San Antonio about one hundred Italian families work on small farms near the city. They are mostly tenants and the locality does not seem to be particularly healthy. Several colonization experiments with the Italians in Northern Texas have failed on account of the hot climate and the lack of water, but the small colony of Montague composed of Italians from Northern Italy, has thus far succeeded. There are there about twenty-five families and almost all own the land they cultivate. Italian families are also to be found in the vicinity of Dallas and Austin all engaged in truck farming with good results. On the whole Texas seems to be the most inviting field for the Italian just at present. The great extent of the state, the quality of the land, the climate, the fact that it is somewhat nearer than California to the great markets of the East, seem to indicate that the Italians may settle there very advantageously.

The best results in agriculture seem to be obtained by the Italians only when they own the land they cultivate. This ought to be borne in mind by those who look to the Italian as the possible

competitor of the negro and as the one who ultimately may take his place. The Italian is in character just the opposite of the negro. The negro is unreliable; is shifting all the time; the Italian is steady, attached to the land and thrifty. Next to being a land owner the Italian likes to be a tenant farmer, but decidedly he is not adapted to be exploited as a day laborer under the peonage system. The failure of some of the enterprises in Arkansas and Mississippi is due to the fact that the Italians were treated by the land owners as negroes and those methods will never do with them.

The third field in which the Italians have been tried out in agriculture has been by far the most successful; it is fruit raising. Almost every Italian that owns a farm raises fruit to some extent; the Italians in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and North Carolina raise grapes and fruits in small quantities but the best fruit-bearing country is still California and it will be for some years until Texas will perhaps have taken over the supremacy. The successes of the Italian grape and fruit growers in California are too well known to be rehearsed here. California has about 60,000 Italians of whom fully one-half are engaged in agriculture. The first Italians were Genoese and Piedmontese who went with the rush that followed the discovery of the gold fields half a century ago. Then some began to understand that California had far greater wealth in its agricultural possibilities than in its gold mines, and they started the cultivation of fruits, to which the climate seemed to be wonderfully adapted. The success obtained in the cultivation of oranges is well known and quite a little headway has been made in the cultivation of lemons, although the Californian product is still very inferior to the Sicilian. Grapes are raised in large quantities, and the colonies of the Italian-Swiss Company, especially that of Asti, are well known for the excellence of their wines. Vines of all kinds have been imported from the best celebrated wine-producing districts of Europe and for the last few years the American tourist has been drinking in London the claret produced by the Italians in California and enjoying their oranges. At the colony of Asti is to be found the largest wine tank in the world; the day it was inaugurated several couples danced inside it without inconvenience. Plums and peaches are also raised in good quantities by the Italians of California, and a great many small truck farms exist in the vicinity of San Francisco and Los Angeles. Their great distance from the

most populated centers of the East is the only reason why the Italian agricultural colonies of California have not grown faster. At the Asti colony the land is owned by a company and the laborers are paid from twenty dollars to twenty-five dollars a month besides their board and lodging. Their condition on the whole is not so prosperous as that of the independent Italian farmers of Texas but is much preferable to that of the average Italian agricultural laborer of other southern states.

To sum up, the Italians as agricultural laborers have given remarkably good results in almost every locality, especially where the climate is mild and where they can soon become land owners. The Italian seems destined to become the truck farmer of the East and more and more to develop fruit raising in California and Texas. Excellent results will also be obtained with him in the sugar cane and cotton fields of the South, especially in healthy localities. If it is asked why then the Italians have not become agricultural laborers in larger proportions I answer that at the time of their coming agriculture is not so inviting a proposition as industrial work. They are practically penniless on landing and need to work not for the distant future but for the immediate present. Among those who already have their families here, who are relieved of the anxiety of the future, who have saved a little and have learned something of the laws and the spirit of the land there are undoubtedly many who would prefer the independent and healthy life of the country to the dependent and unhealthy life of the city. But in all cases the agricultural proposition must be laid before them fairly; they must not see exploitation where others speak of colonization, and in every way they must have fair play. Colonization companies and railroads which want to develop healthy and fertile regions in the South, Southwest and West should understand that in developing their lands it will pay them to extend to the Italians the greatest and most sympathetic assistance and give them an opportunity to become prosperous in the shortest possible time.