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FOREIGN CRIMINALS IN NEW YORK.

BY POLICE COMMISSIONER THEODORE A. BINGHAM.

WHEN the circumstance is taken into consideration that eighty-five per cent. of the population of New York City is either foreign-born or of foreign parentage, and that nearly half of the residents of the five boroughs do not speak the English language, it is only a logical condition that something like eighty-five out of one hundred of our criminals should be found to be of exotic origin. In no one police precinct on Manhattan Island does the percentage of native-born heads of families reach 50—the highest, 45.44 being in the West Side district lying between Forty-second and Eighty-sixth Streets and Eighth Avenue and the North River, and the lowest, 3.12, in the densely congested East Side quarter, largely peopled by Russian Hebrews, bounded by East Broadway, the Bowery and Houston and Norfolk Streets. Wherefore it is not astonishing that with a million Hebrews, mostly Russian, in the city (one-quarter of the population), perhaps half of the criminals should be of that race, when we consider that ignorance of the language, more particularly among men not physically fit for hard labor, is conducive to crime; nor is it strange that in the precinct where there are not four native-born heads of families in every hundred families, the percentage of criminality is high.

According to an estimate made by a Federal official, there are in New York to-day (besides the million Hebrews of several nationalities, but mostly Russian, already mentioned), 500,000 Italians; from 125,000 to 150,000 Hungarians; 100,000 Austrians; 150,000 Germans; 75,000 Bohemians; 60,000 non-Hebraic Poles; 40,000 Slovaks; 50,000 Greeks; 25,000 Armenians and Syrians; from 12,000 to 15,000 Swiss; 15,000 French and Belgians; from 10,000 to 12,000 Hollanders; 25,000 Irish; 10,000 Chinese;

4,000 natives of the Balkan states, and a few thousand non-Hebraic Russians, besides scattered representatives of nearly every other nationality on the globe. Not only does it bring among us the predatory criminals of all nations, as well as the feuds of the predatory criminals of all nations, as well as the feuds of the Armenian Hunchakist, the Neapolitan Camorra, the Sicilian Mafia, the Chinese Tong, and other quarrels of the scum of the earth, but aliens have introduced here the unspeakable "white slave" traffic, whereby our streets are overrun with foreign prostitutes, and foreign anarchists openly advocate murder and arson in our slums. Further, according to the newspapers, among other minor instances of lawlessness generated on the other side of the Atlantic, in March last Servian conspirators came to New York to organize a movement to overthrow the throne now occupied by Karageorgevitch, and last December, if we may believe cable despatches from Geneva, emissaries of the Russian Government were sent to New York to kill the editor of a revolutionary newspaper published there.

The crimes committed by the Russian Hebrews are generally those against property. They are burglars, firebugs, pickpockets and highway robbers—when they have the courage; but, though all crime is their province, pocket-picking is the one to which they seem to take most naturally. Indeed, pickpockets of other nationalities are beginning to recognize the superiority of the Russian Hebrew in that gentle art, and there have been several instances lately where a Hebrew and an Italian had formed a combination for theft in the streets, the former being always selected for the "tool," as the professionals term that one who does the actual reaching into the victim's pocket, while the others create a diversion to distract attention, or start a fight in case of the detection and pursuit of the thief. Central Office detectives recently arrested a Hebrew, a Greek and an Italian who were picking pockets together. Among the most expert of all the street thieves are Hebrew boys under sixteen, who are being brought up to lives of crime. Many of them are old offenders at the age of ten. The juvenile Hebrew emulates the adult in the matter of crime percentages, forty per cent. of the boys at the House of Refuge and twenty-seven per cent. of those arraigned in the Children's Court being of that race. The percentage of Hebrew children in the truant schools is also higher than that of any others.

Although, while the Italians are outnumbered in New York by the Hebrews by two to one, the crime percentage of the former is but 20 to the latter's 50, the Italian malefactor is by far the greater menace to law and order. Of the 500,000 Italians in New York to-day, 80 per cent. are from the south, from Naples, Sicily and Calabria; and, while the great bulk of these people are among our best citizens, there are fastened upon them a riff-raff of desperate scoundrels, ex-convicts and jailbirds of the Camorra and the Mafia, such as has never before afflicted a civilized country in time of peace. For more than ten years, not only in New York and most of the other large cities of the United States, but wherever a few Italian laborers have gathered together, whether it be at work on a railroad, or in a mine, or on a farm or an irrigation ditch, or in the vineyards of the Pacific slope, the desperadoes of the race have fastened themselves upon the honest and industrious. In New York, presumably the very centre of Western civilization, crimes of blackmailing, blowing up shops and houses and kidnapping of their fellow countrymen, have become prevalent among Italian residents of the city to an extent that cannot much longer be tolerated.

In order to understand the conditions existing among the Italian banditti in New York, and throughout the United States, the rigorous punitive supervision to which the criminal classes are subjected in Italy must be considered. On the oath of a prefect of police that he has reason to believe that a man is not honestly supporting himself, the latter is sentenced to the "*domicilio coatto*," or restricted residence, with compulsory labor, on one of the islands set apart for that purpose along the coast, for a term that—depending on his conduct—may extend to several years. Indeed, groups of fifty and a hundred men at a time are thus summarily disposed of, no opportunity being afforded them to prove themselves innocent of wrong-doing.

An Italian who has served a prison term is, on his release, placed under strict surveillance for a period corresponding to the length of that term. On returning to civil life, he is obliged to give his future address at the police bureau of the district in which that domicile is situated, and to report at the bureau morning and evening each day. Nor is he permitted to leave his place of residence except to go to work, or to look for work.

On his return to his home in the evening, he is compelled to remain indoors until it is time for him to go to his employment, or to seek for employment, the next day; and it is particularly enjoined upon him that he may not, in any circumstances, enter a hotel, a restaurant, a café, a theatre or any other place of amusement.

The police pay visits to the ex-convict's domicile at will, not less frequently than every other day, to ascertain whether he is living in accordance with the regulations laid down for him; and, should he be detected in their violation, he is put back to the beginning of his probation—that is, if he has been subjected to the police regulations for one year, and has lived up to them for 364 days, he is compelled in case of a relapse to begin his year over again. In the event of a public celebration or any occurrence likely to bring a crowd to the city, town or village where he is domiciled, he is jailed until the ceremonies are over. The ex-convict in Italy, moreover, is likely to be asked for information as to the antecedents of any property he may acquire at any time. Should he even be noticed wearing a bit of jewelry that seems to have value, any minion of the law may stop him on the street, or in any other place, and call him to account for its possession.

The lawbreaker's life outside of prison in Italy is, in fact, passed in continual fear of the police and the *carabinieri*, the latter forming a regular army corps that patrols the entire country; and it is not at all surprising that he should take advantage of the first opportunity to get to the United States, where he is unknown to the authorities and conditions are perfect for him to live upon the more helpless of his honest fellow countrymen. The *omerta*, or conspiracy of silence, is unwritten law among the Italians who are supporting the banditti of the race in this country, and gives added confidence and security to the spoilers. Even the newspapers unwittingly assist the Italian lawbreaker. To quote a writer in an American magazine:

“The circumstance that the newspapers attribute every crime committed by an Italian in America to the Black Hand Society gives these desperadoes an advantage never before possessed by scattered malefactors; for, although they are without organization, they are enabled to make their lawless demands upon their ignorant victims in the name of a powerful society—that does not exist. So thoroughly has the press advertised such an association, however, that the individual criminal

need only announce himself as an agent of the Black Hand to obtain the prestige of an organization whose membership is supposed to be in the tens of thousands."

It is impossible to exaggerate the enormity of the offences committed by these transplanted malefactors, by whatever name they may be called. Murder, arson, kidnapping, bomb-throwing, blackmail, robbery, are matters of frequent occurrence in the Italian colonies throughout the country. There have been several cold-blooded, premeditated murders among Italians in the five boroughs of New York since the first of the year. The audacity of these desperadoes is almost beyond belief. Arrested for crimes that, proved against them, might give them capital punishment or life terms of imprisonment, they will obtain bail and return to the scene of their depredations to jeer at and threaten their victims.

As a concrete instance of one phase of Italian criminality the experience of a victim who has had the courage to stand up against a gang of blackmailers may be cited. He stated his own case to a reporter of the *New York Times* in July, as follows:

"My name is Salvatore Spinella. My parents were of honest station in Italy. I came here 18 years ago, and went to work as a painter, like my father. I married. I raised a family. I am an American citizen 13 years. My children, as they are big enough, all go to school. I educate my oldest daughter to be a teacher. I make a little money. I became a contractor-painter. Last winter I think I am prosperous. My family are all very happy. I own houses at 314 and 316 East 11th-street. I lease a house at 326 East 11th-street, where I live.

"The 'Black Hand' come and demand \$7,000. I tell them to go to hell. They try to blow up my house. I go to the police and fight them as well as I can. They set off another bomb; two, three, four, five bombs. My business is ruined. My tenants leave, all but six of 32 families. I have \$1,000 interest coming due next month that I cannot pay. I am a ruined man. My family live in terror day and night. There is a policeman in front of my house, but what does he do? Only my brother Francisco and myself can watch with my wife and children, who dare not go out. How long must this endure?"

It is an extremely difficult thing to catch a Sicilian bomb-planter in the act. If he thinks that the place he wishes to demolish is watched, he will come again and again—if not to-day, then to-morrow; if not to-morrow, some day next week. His patience is inexhaustible, and when he sees his opportu-

nity he will quietly slip his bomb with a long fuse into a closet, under the stairs, or in some other out-of-the-way place, ignite the fuse and quietly slip away. Moreover, Petrosino and the members of his staff are the best-known men in New York to the Italian criminals, who naturally attempt to acquaint themselves with the person of every member of the squad before proceeding to the commission of crime. In this Spinella case, after the first bomb was thrown, Lieutenant Petrosino was assigned to the case. In spite of careful work another bomb was exploded in the house. The third time the Black Handers tried it, however, a young Italian was caught red-handed in the house with the bomb in his hand. The prisoner turned out to be a stupid boy of less than twenty, who had only arrived from Sicily a few weeks before, and who had been put up to attempting to explode the bomb by some criminal of higher intelligence.

Italian children come next after the youthful Russian Hebrews in the percentage of arraignments in the Children's Court and commitments to the truant schools and the House of Refuge—the lower rounds of the ladder of crime. They are 20 per cent. of the total brought into the court, and 10 per cent. of those at the House of Refuge. There are no figures available as to percentages of commitments to the truant schools.

After the Russian Hebrews and the Italians, the remaining 30 per cent. of adult criminals is pretty well divided up among the representatives of other alien races and the native Americans. The latter incline to commercial crimes, and the less cultured among them to the higher classes of burglary as well as minor offences. In many of the smaller foreign colonies there is petty blackmail going on, whereby the immigrants victimize one another, but on the whole no other races than those already mentioned have developed particularly dangerous criminal specialties.

The "white-slave" traffic, which, while not constituting any direct menace to life and property, is yet a crime of so detestable a nature as to excite even greater animosity against its perpetrators than is engendered by the most terrible misdeeds of the so-called "Black Hand," has recently been introduced into New York and other parts of the country by the lowest and most contemptible malefactors of France and Belgium. The term "slave" is no misnomer, for the victims of this crime are as

absolutely the property of their masters, in everything except the legal sense, as were the blacks in the South before the Emancipation Proclamation—and the condition of the white slaves to-day is infinitely more pitiable. This vile trade has its agents all over Europe, and its victims are young women of the peasant class from France, Belgium, Switzerland, Russia, Spain, the Austrian provinces, Roumania and southeastern Europe generally, with a few from Germany and Italy, who are decoyed away from their homes by promises of employment in another country as servants in respectable families, or in other capacities, and once out of their native land are relegated to lives of shame, with death as the only alternative in the majority of cases. In many instances, in which a young girl will not leave her home for the sake of employment, a good-looking young scoundrel in the slave-trade will make love to her and marry her, only to turn her over to a purchaser when she is beyond the reach of assistance. A regular business is carried on in the delivery of these unfortunates in foreign countries. London is the centre of the traffic, and the clearing-house from which the women are distributed to the Americas. South America gets sixty-five per cent. of these slaves, but there are hundreds of them already in New York, and more than 100,000 on the Pacific coast and in Mexico, who have entered through the port of New York. It will readily be understood how difficult it is to break up this traffic. The women arrive here as first and second class passengers, some with the men they have married, and are able to meet all the requirements of the immigration laws. Once in the city, those who remain are made actual prisoners in disreputable houses, and forced—more often than not by brutal corporal punishment—to do the will of their masters. Ignorant of the language and of the laws of the country, it is well-nigh impossible for them to appeal for assistance, and the lives of those who find it impossible to adapt themselves to the fearful conditions under which they are compelled to exist are dragged out in wretchedness and misery.

The story of one of these "white slaves," who was deported in July, when the man who was responsible for her misfortunes was sentenced to a long term in a Federal prison, illustrates the conditions that govern this infamous trade. The victim in this instance was a nineteen-year-old girl, born in Paris, and the man

who was convicted was an Egyptian, named Seliman Allys. He had induced her to come to America with him by promising to marry her on their arrival. They reached New York on the "Lusitania" last February, and he took her to a house which was called a club. After the girl had been there a month, Allys introduced her to a disreputable house kept by a Frenchwoman named Arturo, and there, after being frequently beaten and kept in imprisonment, she was forced to do the bidding of the other two. In an affidavit the girl says: "I was helpless. If I had been in my own country I could have refused. I could not get away because I had no money and could not speak English. I made ten dollars and sometimes more a day. I gave it all to him. . . . I was told not to go to the windows, and to stay in my room, because the detectives told Madame Arturo they were looking for a girl." The woman, Arturo, was held in \$5,000 bail for trial in the case. She was able to secure bail, however, and she forfeited it and fled from the country. Of course, the above is only an outline of a terrible story that may not be told in detail.

The men who are conducting the "white-slave" traffic here, as has been said, are mostly French and Belgian, who speak little or no English. Most of them are of an inferior physical type, as they are mentally and morally, and among them are a number of the Paris "apaches," absinthe-consumed perverts, who are to the French capital to-day what the crapulous "gangs" of a few years ago, murdering and robbing when drunk, were to New York. Italians and Hebrews, whose habitat is in the slums south and west of Washington Square, are also engaged in the slave-trade in New York.

A year ago, the sensational murder of Tavshanjian, a wealthy rug merchant in Union Square, who was shot from behind as he came out of the Everett House where he had been to lunch, brought to light the existence of half a dozen alleged patriotic Armenian societies, organized for the purpose of raising money to assist the movement for throwing off the Turkish yoke, but more than one of which has degenerated into a society for the practice of blackmail, pure and simple. Investigation revealed the fact that the killing of the rug merchant, the butchery of Father Kaplan, an Armenian priest, three months before, and several other hitherto unexplained murders in the United States and on the other side of the Atlantic,

might be traced to a common cause; that for years wealthy Armenians in this country had been living in continual terror by reason of the threats of these societies, one of which, with headquarters in Cyprus, struck deadly blows in London, New York, Constantinople, wherever it would. The sentence of the actual murderer—a mere tool in the hands of others, who had crossed the ocean for the purpose of assassinating Tavshanjian—to the electric chair, and of four local accessories to the crime to long terms in State's prison, has temporarily dampened the ardor of the Hunchakist, but there is no telling when the leaders may again incite ignorant enthusiasts to another tragic outbreak.

Chinatown has been quiet for many months, but murderous eruptions in that quarter of New York always come without warning, and no one save the Chinamen themselves ever know any more what the quarrel is about than that one Tong, or society, has a grievance against another. The Chinaman never includes his American neighbors in his feuds, however, and the only risk the latter runs when the former goes on the war-path is from a stray bullet, for the yellow men are poor marksmen. Nevertheless, Chinatown is a plague spot that ought not to be allowed to exist. It is a constant menace to the morals of the children of the neighborhood, and a cover for desperate criminals. The low-ceiled rooms of the squalid buildings in Doyers, Pell and Mott streets, and facing on the Bowery, many of them opening only into inside courts, are divided and subdivided into closetlike spaces that are rented for living and sleeping purposes, and in them are housed the very lees of humanity, black, yellow and white—Chinamen, honest and dishonest, but all the others—thieves, thugs and prostitutes, with their parasites. There are a few Chinamen with their wives, white and Chinese, who live respectable lives—from the Mongolian point of view—in these teeming warrens, but the character of human existence in them is beyond description.

Americans have never been brought to consider anarchism seriously, in spite of the outrage of nearly a quarter of a century ago in Chicago that cost several lives, although President McKinley was killed by an anarchist and the anarchist assassin of King Humbert of Italy sailed from New York on his murderous errand. The "reds" in New York do not probably number more than a thousand all told, comprising principally Ger-

mans, Italians, Russian Hebrews and Bulgarians, with a scattered few of other nationalities. There is always the possibility of some crack-brained fanatic being influenced by the anarchist who only talks to a desperate deed, like that of Silverstein in Union Square last March.

So much for the criminal element that the Police Department of New York is paid to keep within bounds, and now to consider the method of dealing with it. Take the most dangerous malefactors, the ex-convicts of Naples, Sicily and Calabria and their following. It is estimated that there are at least 3,000 of these desperadoes in New York, among them as many ferocious and desperate men as ever gathered in a modern city in time of peace—medieval criminals who must be dealt with under modern laws. In a spirited article in the number of this REVIEW for last April, in which he demonstrates that the "Black Hand Society" as a definite organization is a myth, Gaetano d'Amato quotes Robert Louis Stevenson's characterization of the gangs of thieves that preyed upon nocturnal Paris three and a half centuries ago to describe conditions existing among the Italian criminals in New York to-day—"independent malefactors, socially intimate, and occasionally joining together for some serious operation, just as modern stock-jobbers form a syndicate for an important loan." Admitting the accuracy of the parallel, what might happen if a mind capable of organizing these criminal units, as was done in the instances of the Camorra and the Mafia, were to accomplish that result? It is by no means outside the bounds of possibility. Newspapers and individuals inform the Police Commissioner that, the members of the force as at present constituted being at a disadvantage in coping with the Italian evil-doer by reason of ignorance of his language, a solution of the problem of control of Italian crime would come with the addition of a sufficient number of Italian policemen to the ranks to establish a proportion with those speaking only English. That there should be only thirty or forty Italian policemen and detectives in a city where there are 500,000 Italians, few of whom speak English, is a ridiculous state of things, we are told. The reply is that the Police Commissioner is compelled by law to select his men from lists furnished him by the Civil Service Board, and that Italian names are few on these lists because the young men of that nationality generally prefer business life

to the public service. Further, the Italian invasion of New York is so recent a matter that there are few of that race of the right age who would be able to pass the examination for probationary members of the police force.

Under the immigration law as it stands at present, a foreign criminal may be deported from the United States if he has been in the country less than three years and has committed before coming to the country a crime involving moral turpitude. After three years' residence here, he is exempt from arrest in so far as his previous record is concerned, the idea being, apparently, that three years of contact with American institutions will make him a desirable citizen, no matter how big a scoundrel he may have been on his arrival. In order to prove a foreign criminal record in the case of suspected Italians, the assistance of the Italian Consul-General was requested. The Consul-General expressed himself as ready to render the police the necessary assistance in ascertaining foreign records of Italians arrested for crime committed here, or of those now wanted for trial or punishment in Italy. He could not see his way clear, however, to assist the police by procuring any information as to the foreign record of an Italian in New York who may have committed crime before coming here, but is not now wanted on a charge here or in Italy.

The other essential to the deportation of a foreign criminal is to prove that he has been in the country less than three years. If the burden of proof could be put on the alien, the matter would be simple and no injustice would be done, since if he has been in the United States more than three years it is the easiest thing in the world for him to prove it. The present method, however, which practically places the burden of proof on the police and requires from them evidence that the former criminal has not been here three years, makes the deportation of these men extremely difficult. Owing to deficiencies in our laws, dangerous foreign criminals whom the police have sent to Ellis Island for deportation have been set at liberty there, and have of course returned to continue their depredations. And to add to the trials of the Italian squad, three Italian ex-convicts, who had been certified for deportation last July, escaped after having been given into the custody of the immigration authorities.

Although New York is thus overrun with the criminals of all nations, her Police Department is compelled to work at a dis-

advantage in the detection and punishment of crime by comparison with that of any other large city in the world, by reason of the fact that—owing to existing political conditions—the Police Commissioner is unable to employ a secret service. All of the members of the detective bureau, as it is at present constituted, are easily known to the criminals and the crooked politicians, who are to blame for the present lack of efficiency in the Police Department. The best-known men in all New York to the Italian criminals are Lieutenant Petrosino and the other members of the Italian squad. Indeed, the first thing an Italian criminal does on arriving here is to make himself acquainted with the appearance of the Italian detectives. Similarly, every pickpocket, every thief, every “white slave” master, every professional criminal in whatever line, familiarizes himself as far as possible with the appearance of the members of the police force, as they freely say themselves. With a civilian branch of the detective service, the members of which should be engaged and dismissed entirely at the will of the Police Commissioner, and who should be unknown except to two or three officials, wonderful results could be accomplished in the breaking up of criminal organizations. Such a secret service would be of particular use in hunting down the criminals among the Sicilians and Armenians, for instance, and in discovering the identity of the men engaged in the “white slave” traffic, as well as of inestimable value in the general detection of crime.

Again to quote a writer in an American magazine:

“The crowning absurdity of the entire tragic situation in New York lies in the circumstance that the Police Department is without a secret service. In the one city in the world where the police problem is complicated by an admixture of the criminals of all races, the Department is deprived of an indispensable arm of the service.”

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