CUOCOLO TRIAL MAY BE DEATH BLOW OF THE CAMORRA

Men Who Have Been Put on Trial for Murder at Viterbo.

Corrado Sortino, Alias Sannicola. | Antonio Cerrato. | Nicola Morra, Alias Puzzulaniello. | Ferdinando di Matteo, Alias Piscione. | Giuseppe Salvi, Alias Peppe o' Curto. | Mariano Di Gennaro, Alias Diciasette.

Italian Government Hopes That the Great Murder Case at Viterbo Will End in the Extermination of the Powerful Criminal Organization.

By Walter Littlefield.

ERMETE ZACCONI, Ermete Novelli, Eleonora Duse, Gemma Farina, and other Italian actors and actresses are preparing to give a series of dramatic performances for the edification of foreigners who will visit the expositions at Rome and Turin this Spring and Summer to help the Italians celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of Rome as the capital of United Italy. But the greatest drama will be played in the little town of Viterbo, just forty-two miles northwest of Rome, where the Italian Government hopes to deal the death blow to the greatest criminal organization that the world has ever seen—the Honorable Society of the Camorra of Naples.

In the thirteenth century, with memories of which Viterbo is full, things would have been done differently and the conflict between the Government and the Camorra would have been fought out after the fashion of the Bianchi and Neri, and the Honorable Society would doubtless have been annihilated, the innocent perishing with the guilty.

But these are the days of law and order in the Third Italy, and so it became necessary for the Government to find a weak joint in the armor of the Camorra that might be legally penetrated. This weak joint is the murder of the Cuocolo couple in Naples in the early Summer of 1906. The joint presents infinite possibilities, for, although the crime was actually perpetrated by only six men, there are those who ordered the crime, who planned it, and who assisted the actual murderers; there are others who had a guilty knowledge of the crime and who still preserve that knowledge according to the Code of Silence—omertà; others have disregarded this code, and to them the Government looks for its most vital evidence. Altogether, there are about fifty prisoners and nearly one thousand witnesses. In the years that have passed since the Neapolitan murder, many of those concerned have been tried and convicted for other crimes, so that, whichever way you look at it, the Duca di Noia, Count Enzo Ravaschieri, the Archbishop of Naples, and other respectable witnesses will find themselves in strange company at Viterbo.

It was originally the intention of the Government to open the trial last August and to hasten its proceedings so that it would not interfere with the Diamond Jubilee of United Italy. But the cholera intervened, and the judiciary originally appointed to try the case did not give satisfaction to the Ministry of Justice. In the meantime, the case of the Government has grown stronger by many of those originally held as prisoners breaking the code of omertà. Last Summer, it was officially reported that there were 800 prisoners and nearly 500 witnesses. The change of status of a Camorrista from prisoner to witness can be accounted for in no other way, as no liberations have taken place.

Viterbo was selected for the trial for two reasons: its smallness and its isolation. Its inhabitants number about 15,000, and, although it lies on the highway between Florence and Rome, it is only connected with the Eternal City by a small branch railway which has been in operation scarcely fifteen years. Still, it is difficult to imagine how a more dramatic stage for the great drama could have been selected. Viterbo, known in the past as "the city of handsome fountains and beautiful women," at least lives up to part of this tradition, for, right opposite the Gothic church of San Francesco, in the Piazza della Rocco, is Vignola's famous fountain. San Francesco contains the tomb of two Popes and a Cardinal, but now the transepts are filled with seats and the tombs boarded over, and a huge sounding board covers the chancel, while on this chancel a tribune has been erected, and on the right a huge steel cage has been built for the prisoners of the Camorra. San Francesco is the stage that the Government has prepared for its great drama.

The guide books will tell you a great deal about Viterbo, with its ancient Longobard walls and towers, for in the thirteenth century it was a favorite residence of the Papal Court, and Popes were not only buried there, but made there. Thus, in the Palazzo Vescovile, successive conclaves elected Gregory X. in 1271, John XXI. in 1276, and Martin IV. 1281. It was at the election of Gregory that Guy de Montfort, then Vicar General of Tuscany, murdered the nephew of Henry III. of England in revenge for his father's death at the battle of Evesham six years before.

The conclave which met to elect Gregory was the longest in history, lasting nearly three years. At length the patience of the natives was worn out. As the doors and windows were sealed they could not get at the Cardinals in that way. So they tore parts of the roof away and shouted down to them in the Roman dialect: "Lo volemo Romano, lo volemo!" (We want a Roman, we want one!) English influence was strong in the Sacred College in those days, and the Romans evidently remembered that a century before, in front of the Viterbo Cathedral of San Lorenzo, an English Pope, Hadrian IV., had compelled the Emperor Frederick I. to hold his stirrup. In short, the tourist will find plenty to interest him in the town, although he may not be so fortunate as to gain access to the trial.

Meanwhile, the prisoners are confined in the cells that were once used for refractory monks in the old Dominican monastery of Santa Maria in Gradi, while those of the witnesses who are in detention are lodged in the Santa Maria Capua Vetere. The inns of the town are filled to overflowing with the friends of the prisoners who have been arriving for months past, and who, on the appearance of the first convoy of thirty-two, on Jan. 7, attempted a rescue. The Government, however, was prepared for the emergency. There is not a great display of military at Viterbo, but it will be no exaggeration to state that the number of Neapolitans called thither out of sympathy for the Honorable Society is probably not equal to the number of Carabinieri doing duty around them in citizens' clothes.

It has been stated in the cable dispatches that the trial will begin next Saturday, that is to say, the Cavaliere Santero, Procuratore del Re, who has charge of the prosecution, has announced that the case will be ready on that date. The presiding Judge, Cavaliere Bianchi, is also ready to proceed. In the meantime, the Camorristi have not been idle. The Italian papers in their pay not only in Italy but elsewhere, are charging that the whole procedure is a conspiracy on the part of the Carabinieri against the police and judiciary of Naples. I have it on the authority of Antonio Scarfoglio, who distinguished himself in THE TIMES-Matin New York-Paris automobile contest of three years ago, that a large subscription fund for the benefit of the prisoners has been opened in Naples and New York, with the result that 50,000 lire, or $10,000, has already been subscribed, two-thirds of it among the Neapolitans of New York.

The treasurer of the fund in New York is Andrea Attanasio, who, although he is ardently desired by the Italian police for complicity in the Cuocolo murder, goes about here under his own name, and, in restaurants in the downtown Italian quarter, vociferously denounces the alleged injustice that is being done his fellow Camorristi in Viterbo. Another well-known Camorrista in New York, equally persuasive and equally vituperative, is 'o Maestro Cifariello. He has no connection with the tragedy of 1906, but is an equally undesirable citizen.

In an article published in THE NEW YORK TIMES of Sunday, Sept. 11, 1910, a detailed account of the Cuocolo murder was given and the manner in which the crime was brought home to the Camorra was described.

On June 6, 1906, the body of Maria Cuocolo (née Cutinelli) was discovered in her flat in the Via Nardones, a fashionable quarter of Naples. Almost simultaneously, her husband, Gennaro Cuocolo, was found murdered in a "cupa," or lane, called Calastro, at Torres del Greco, a suburb of Naples.

About two hundred yards from the cupa Calastro is the "trattoria" or inn of Mimì a Mare. During the evening of June 5, a supper party of well-known members of the Alta, or Higher Camorra, had been held at the "trattoria." It consisted of Enrico Alfano, or "Erricone," the head of the Camorra, who later, on April 17, 1907, was to be arrested by Giuseppe Petrosino in New York and sent back to Italy, swearing a vendetta against the New York detective, which was carried out in the Piazza Marina of Palermo on March 12, 1909; his brother, Ciro, who has since died in prison; Gennaro Ibelli, and 'o Professore Rapi, alias Don Giovanni 'o Maestro, the treasurer of the Camorra. These men, as was related in THE TIMES, were arrested on suspicion and interrogated by the examining magistrate, Enrico Romano.

They were kept in jail exactly fifty days and then released, principally through the intervention of a Neapolitan priest, Don Ciro Vitozzi. Their release was welcomed with glee by the Neapolitan crowd that awaited in front of the prison of Sant' Efremo. I have also related how the Minister of Justice in Rome, acting through the Minister of War, then took up the case, and has since pursued it with so much vigor that the principal members of the Honorable Society are now behind the bars at Viterbo. I showed how three tireless members of the Carabinieri, Capt. Fabroni and the Marescialli Farris and Capizzuti—the first in the guise of a law clerk, the second as a gentleman of fashion, and the third as a Camorrista—had for four years pursued an investigation unequaled in the annals of criminal detection.

The result of this investigation showed that the Cuocolo couple had been affiliated with the Camorra, the husband as a "basista," or planner of crimes, and the wife as an "adescatrice," or stool-pigeon, and that they had been condemned by the court of the Camorra, the husband for misuse of the society's funds and for using the society for his private ends, and the wife lest the death of her husband might cause her to reveal Camorra secrets to the authorities. The double murder was declared to have been authorized by Alfano, the head of the Camorra, planned by Rapi at the "trattoria" of Mimì a Mare, and executed by Mariano de Gennaro, Corrado Sortino, Nicolo Morra, Ferdinando Matteo, Giuseppe Salvi, and Antonio Cerrato.

Most of the information implicating these men was gathered by Marescialio Capizzuti through a confession made to him by Gennaro Abbatemaggio and confirmed by numerous convincing circumstances. For example, Abbatemaggio declared that a ring marked "G. C." had been taken from the body of Cuocolo and sent to another "basista," Luigi Arena, as a sign that Cuocolo had been done away with. Arena was arrested and the ring found on his person.

It was also learned that the court of the Camorra which condemned to death the Cuocolo couple met on May 24, 1906, in a room in a Bagnoli restaurant, and consisted of two Camorristi from every quarter of Naples. They were Enrico Alfano, Nicola Morra, Giuseppe Salvi, Antonio Cerrato, Mariano di Gennaro, Salvatore di Sarno, Giovanni Bertilozzi, Eugenio Scannapieco, Salvatore de Lucia, Vincenzo Fusco, Angelo Monti, Pasquale Esposito, Gaetano Esposito, Matteo Varcacci, Carmine de Vivo, Pasquale Perez de Vera, Pasquale Gargiulo, Giuseppe Chirico, Andrea Attanasio, Alberto Fraumeno, Vincenzo Lento Amato, Vincenzo Postiglione, Carlo di Mella, Francesco Esposito, Antonio di Domizio, Giuseppe Minichiello, Giovanni Morelli, Nicola Bracco, Ciro Abbatemaggio, Antonio Percuoco, Giovanni Artiano, Francesco Desiderio, Vittorio Aubry, and Luigi Fucci.

These and hundreds of others were placed under surveillance, arrested, interrogated, liberated, and rearrested, and other arrests made on their conscious or forced revelations. The other arrests included the "Picciotti," or recruits of the Honorable Society, and certain "Giovani Onorati," or persons who, although not regular Camorristi, are more or less affiliated with the organization.

As has already been stated, the low criminal operations of the society have been learned by Marescialio Capizzuti. Capt. Fabroni has established incriminating evidence showing the connection between the Camorra and the local authorities, police, and judiciary. Marescialio Farris has learned from the members of the Unione del Mazzogiorno, a club established by Rapi, and other places where the aristocracy of Naples congregate, the ramifications of the Camorra among the élite of the city, and he has secured evidence from such men as the Archbishop of Naples, the Duca di Noia, Count Enzo Ravaschieri, and other aristocrats, who will testify at the trial.

It may be a cause of wonderment for foreigners how such a widespread condition of crime (records show that from 1901 to 1905 there were 200 murders, 500 robberies and extortions, and nearly 1,000 assaults, and only ten convictions on capital charges) could exist in Naples, and how the Reali Carabinieri, or national military police, could succeed where the local authorities so lamentably failed. Three points, therefore, must clearly be emphasized. The meaning of the Camorra, the mental attitude of its environment, and the status of the Carabinieri.

Aside from the organization of the Honorable Society, the details of which were given in my article of Sept. 11 last, there is the moral feeling of the Camorristi themselves that they have a right to exist, make laws for themselves and punish offenders. In this capacity they protect the weak, curb the ambition of the strong, and rob the rich, and when an attempt is made to deny their mandates they kill. Moreover, Neapolitans, whatever they may say to the contrary, recognize the power of the Honorable Society, and their public attitude toward it is shown in various ways.

If a shot is heard in a street of Naples, a purse snatched from a shopper, or blows exchanged in a thoroughfare, that thoroughfare, no matter how densely crowded, would be vacant a few moments later. A Neapolitan would do anything rather than be called as a witness. It is the same in Palermo, where the Mafia holds sway, for there, in the Piazza Marina, although at least fifty persons must have seen Petrosino shot, there was no one in sight when the police arrived.

And it is the same in the Italian quarters of New York. A long experience among Italians has brought me to this conclusion: That the Italo-American who denies the existence of the Black Hand, the Sicilian who denies the existence of the Mafia, or the Neapolitan who denies the existence of the Camorra as a criminal organization is either affiliated with the society he repudiates or is its victim.

Now, as to the success of the Carabinieri in the present instance. The "Questura," or local police, is under the authority of the Ministry of Interior and is identified with political conditions. The same is true of the local judiciary, which, while nominally under the Ministry of Justice, is really subservient to politicians. In other words, the local deputies are all-powerful with the Questura and the judiciary. The Carabinieri, on the contrary, is under the Ministry of War, and absolutely independent of political conditions. While this is the secret of the success of the Carabinieri, it is also the cause of their denunciation by the local authorities, the friends of the Camorra, and their sympathizers in politics and the press.

The furious cry uttered by Alfano as he descended from the train at Viterbo sums up the whole case of the Camorra:

"What you, in your jealousy of us, began, the Carabinieri have carried out. You have assassinated us because we are innocent gentlemen. But the hour of justice is at hand; the wise people of Viterbo will revenge us (faranno la nostra vendetta), and Italy will be covered with shame before the world."

This is the attitude that has been shown by other Camorristi during the interrogations that have taken place in the Gradi prison, by the papers which sympathize with the prisoners, and by what is probably the most distinguished body of criminal lawyers that has ever been assembled to try a case.

'O Professore Rapi has openly declared that his aristocratic friends in Naples, Rome, and Paris, his numerous friends in the political and journalistic world will not allow him to become the victim of the Carabinieri and a martyr of honesty and respectability. Don Ciro Vitozzi, the "guardian angel" of the Camorra, declares that he originally intervened on behalf of Alfano and his brother, of Ibelli and Rapi, because he knew them to be innocent and respectable, worthy members of society, while he himself has pointed out to the authorities the real criminals in the Cuocolo murder.

All the principal prisoners, according to a curious Latin custom, have been confronted by Abbatemaggio in the Gradi prison. Each and all not only denied knowing him, but in the majority of cases denied acquaintance with each other. He was, therefore, forced to remind them of crimes in which they had participated. His charges have been confirmed by Capt. Fabroni, who, as has been stated, investigated the court records of Naples.

Since the first revelation of Gennaro Abbatemaggio, over eighteen months ago, which drew Rapi fearlessly from Paris in order to defend himself, the informer has been a doomed man, although every precaution has been taken by the authorities to protect him. At the trial in San Francesco he will not only be surrounded by a cordon of Carabinieri, but, while giving his testimony, he will be protected by a steel cage similar to that containing the prisoners, but much smaller.

Although his confession and the revelations his skillful questions brought from his fellow Camorristi form the basis of the case for the prosecution, the confirmatory, convicting evidence will come from other mouths, principally from the witnesses for the State and the immense amount of oral and documentary proof which Capt. Fabroni and the Marescialli Farris and Capizzuti have been accumulating for over four years with so much tireless diligence and amid so many dangers in the "mala vita," or criminal world of Naples.

Arrival at Viterbo of Erricone and His Companions Accused of Murder.

Curious Crowds at the Train Bearing the Accused Prisoners.

Don Ciro Vitozzi, Known as the Guardian Angel of the Camorra.
The Informer, Gennaro Abbatemaggio. (In Circle Above.)

The Tavern of Mimì a Mare, Where Erricone's Supper Party Was Held on the Night of the Murder.

TO MAKE BEER WITHOUT ANY ALCOHOL

THE announcement was made recently in London that a new process had been discovered for the artificial production of alcohol, and, incidentally, for the brewing of beer wholly free of alcohol. The brewing and distilling interests of England have expressed much concern over it. In discussing the new process, a London newspaper says:

"Otto Overbeck, at the Criterion Restaurant, recently, read a paper before the Institute of Brewing on some experiments in dealcoholizing beer and reproducing alcohol.

"Mr. Overbeck said that last year he discovered that he could drive carbonic acid gas produced from soda and sulphuric acid—therefore not fermentation gas with either ethers or alcohol—through beer when he raised the temperature to above 70 degrees Fahrenheit, and that the gas contained traces of alcohol as it escaped after having been driven through the beer in such conditions that the latter was converted into froth. When the temperature of the beer was raised to 120 degrees Fahrenheit, and carbonic acid gas was driven through it, the percentage of alcoholic content becomes constantly less, until the liquid might be made absolutely alcohol free.

"Before these experiments were made it was considered absolutely impossible to abstract alcohol from beer without placing that liquid under such conditions that it could not reasonably be hoped to continue the fermentation afterward on account of the heat required to separate the noxious excreta or alcohol. By the above-mentioned process he dealcoholized absolutely brilliant beer free from all except ultra-microscopical traces of yeast, and he continued the process by carbonic acid gas at 120 degrees Fahrenheit until the percentage of alcohol in the beer had been lowered from above 4 per cent to .2 absolute.

"When this beer had been dealcoholized to .2 per cent. it was his intention to present a brewer with a sample of his own now dealcoholized beer in the same sparkling condition in which it generally was sold in bottle. He therefore froze all the beer and proceeded to do the best he could to carbonate it in the laboratory without pressure. He started to pass a slow current of carbonic acid gas through the chilled beer. When the beer was at freezing point, he analyzed it and found to his intense annoyance and astonishment that he had made a grave mistake and that his estimate of the spirit had now risen to 1.15 absolute. He threw the stuff away and then went through the whole experiment over again, but the result remained the same—the artificial production of alcohol in a brilliantly clear, yeast-free, dealcoholized beer (at a temperature of 120 degrees Fahrenheit) subsequently frozen at a temperature at which no English yeast cells or cell juice could produce a trace of alcohol.

"Such a thing as an artificial production of alcohol had never entered his head, and since he had offered that paper to them he had heard the opinion expressed that the matter was absolutely impossible. He was skeptical himself, but after repeating the experiment with two or three other beers under exactly similar conditions, and in each case obtaining as a final result a greater percentage of alcohol than he had before he started to freeze the liquid, he came to the inevitable and incontrovertible conclusion that he had, instead of carbonating dealcoholized frozen beer, really been doing exactly the contrary, and had been gradually reproducing some alcohol by chemical means in a liquid from which it was his most earnest desire to keep it out. He had repeated the experiment twenty or thirty times, generally, but not always, with the same result. The maximum increase was from .2 to 2.2 absolute alcohol. This was not perhaps a very large quantity, and it took some time, and he admitted that only one beer gave such a generous result.

"What appeared to him to be most curious in this production of alcohol was that the entirely neglected waste product, carbonic acid gas, had by this discovery been raised from insignificance to a pinnacle of the greatest importance. The discovery lent itself to such an enormous amount of fascinating original research of the most practical kind that he suggested that six of them should unite and co-ordinate the results they might obtain by experimenting upon this basis with a view of publishing the whole series of researches under their joint names."

The New York Times
Published: March 5, 1911
Copyright © The New York Times