

# WHERE AND HOW THE BLACK HAND BEGINS

## In Naples the Poverty and Pain of Homeless Boys Have Developed the Amazing Camorra,

## which now Casts the Shadow of Crime in Many Lands

WHILE one is perhaps amazed at the terrible deeds of the mala vita Neapolitana (Neapolitan criminal life), while the organs for social protection labor with unflagging energy to unearth the secrets of the camorra, to reveal the compactness of this famous threatening sect, vigorously, under every one's eyes, in full sunlight, in the slums of Naples other germs bloom which will renew Chlorome, Paranze, Sette (societies, gatherings, sects). We agree that when public opinion is shaken by some overt act nets are cast with a healthy enthusiasm to catch some of the biggest fish of the low camorra; but it is also true that with unpardonable negligence the small fry, the very hothed of the camorra, is overlooked. This spawn of today will hatch the full grown camorrist of tomorrow, perhaps more refined, but not less dangerous and wicked, who, in their turn, will terrorize and take advantage of the weaker ones. These are the ones who will go to fill the prisons of San Francisco, of Chicago, of Pittsburg, giving work to the courts, to the tribunals, and dishonoring the name of the most enchanting city of Italy.

If the camorra is thus spread in Naples it is because, unfortunately, under the beautiful blue sky, on the banks of the fascinating gulf, germinates in spite of itself, a dense, antlike mass, a poor and lazy populace, who live a life of toil, a life of wretchedness—the mala vita.

People such as this, improvident and prolific, abandon their numerous progeny, when not able to support them, to a destiny which has a quick epilogue, often in the hospitals, in prisons or in the cemetery. Beautiful children, intelligent and good, often knowing neither father or mother, drag out their existence begging in the streets, obliged sometimes to rummage in piles of filthy offal like vagrant dogs.

Some know their parents only by the cuffs, curses and kicks showered upon them, when, after having scurried around all day, they return at night to the lurid shelter without bringing a few cents gained by begging, selling matches, playing in the squares, or stealing, according to chance and the seasons.

At night on the steps of churches or of shops, under the benches of peripatetic vendors, are found, huddled together to keep warm, groups of scraggly (urchins), boys and girls, scarcely covered by dirty rags, some of their little legs full of bruises, bare-footed, hair matted, the empty match box hung around their necks, which during the day contains their supply of wax matches.

Whence do they come, where go, who feeds them, who caresses them, what will be the future of any one of them?

What will become of those girls who live such a promiscuous life day and night with boys precociously vicious? Abandoned in the streets to the difficult fight for a crust of bread, they soon lose the sweet childish character and sooner or later fall into the hands of some witch to swell the number of fallen women.

The boys become smart, shrewd pickpockets; the more bitter the struggle the more savage they become.

Side by side with "high livers," in the ostentatious life of luxury, where rich coupages, sumptuous shops and civilizations luxuriously simulate refined civilization, live these atoms of misery, microbes of criminality, about whom no hygienist bothers himself. The scraggly, exploited by their parents, by users, knocked about and tyrannized over in a thousand ways by older companions, in their turn successively

become tyrannical. They cling together for common protection, aspiring to the camorra, spontaneous outcome necessary to that life, in which it is the survival of only the fittest—the strong, the brassy, the violent.

This camorra society, according to the definition of its own affiliated members, is but a gathering of chums full of courage, with the aim, in special circumstances, to give each other moral and material aid.

The so called bellas societa riformata (reformed society), of which every day is told terrible deeds in the slums, and whose protagonists are honored as heroes, exercises a great fascination on the coarse minds of those boys, just as the brute force of their chief does on the minds of savages.

To be himself feared and respected, for one who has always been maltreated, slapped, becomes the aim, the ideal of the paladins.

The servant who is flogged thirsts for the whip, to be able to shower upon others the bitterness repressed for long years.

One should see those groups of boys listening with enchantment to the deeds of the paladins told on the wharves by strolling singers and which have been gathered together by the well known dialect poet, Ferdinando Russo, in a form full of verve.

Comes on the field now Lharido! The paladin  
He of France the most powerful paladin.  
Vigilante was the name of his horse,  
Who fed on men, and not on grass!

Stirred by the deeds of Rinaldo, hordes of boys rush down to the beach, and, dividing in two ranks near the wharf, make war with stones, a petriata, from which many escape only with broken heads. Others draw with chalk on the sidewalks either Rinaldo or other warriors armed with lances or with scimitars, gathering around them crowds of the curious.

Ready with the lance. Perhaps he is a Mussulman, but no, a cross glitters on his helmet.

It is Lharido! The sire of Mancanza says, trembling and full of terror, flings himself on his horse and escapes.

All! the carrion!  
(Russo-Sunettiata.)

Since to reach the highest grade of the sect it is necessary to show courage and that he fears not the sight of blood, the boys of the mala vita become aggressive, challenging, in order to give terrible proof of their daring. At times in unnecessary criminal competitions they throw away life or liberty and endure for long years prison life, with no other comfort, with the single hope of deserving the bloody prize, the grade of giovinotti onorati (honorable youth), when they shall again regain their liberty.

Most of them tattoo their legs, arms and breasts with serpents and with poniards, with dates, with names of sweethearts; to adorn themselves, to show strength, courage, to remember revenge or violence committed.

As the chivalrous insignia of a more refined civilization they substitute black and blue marks on the skin, each one of which indicates different grades of the camorra.

Other marks allude to persons who have left profound impressions on their minds, or who persecute the camorra, and from whom it is necessary constantly to defend themselves.

The day on which a boy of the mala vita presents himself as a candidate of the societa minore dell'umirta (the lower grade of the camorra) he is subjected to an impressive and characteristic ceremonial.

In some secluded den of the camorra seven chiefs gathered for the occasion, who, judges of his merits, are seated around a table.

The boy, cap in hand, with words of

the ritual, humbly begs that he may be admitted to the beautiful society.

### The Ritual of Admission

The chiefs, to prove his courage, ask him questions, to which the aspirant must respond, with pride and dare devilry, yet at the same time with respect and humility. And if he shows that he can stomach it he is admitted into the societa onorata e riformata, and in sign of gratitude and obedience must kiss the hand of the caposocieta, of all the members, of the two contauioli, who act as accountant and collector.

The head of the society, who presides at the council, explains to the giovinotto onorata the frieno (rules and regulations) of the camorra—he must love his companions, respect his superiors, smooth over quarrels, collect honestly the camorra, in favor of the members, above all keep the secrets of the society, under pain of death, which would be pronounced by the tribunal of the society, called in their jargon mamme.

The giovinotto onorato will in time win the grade of picciotto by stronger proofs of courage, and, still more, by showing knowledge, by cunning and impudence in extorting money in favor of the more prudent older ones, who exploit the criminal work of the neophytes.

The ceremonial for raising the boy to camorrista e duvere (member in full standing) is daring, and the capintesta of the camorra in person presides over and directs the tirata (duel with knives), in which the candidate must prove that the sight of blood does not affect him.

Several members gather far from police centers, near some solitary inn in the country.

To the duellists are given knives, a contauiolo clasps his hands: "Ready—go!" he cries, while the two, looking scornfully at each other, seize the knives. In solemn silence, surrounded by companions, they jump, stoop, draw dexterous cuts, withdraw, renew the attack, cursing each other.

Only when the candidate succeeds in wounding the older one in the arm does the chief cry "Enough!"

The victor carries the dripping blade to his mouth and draws it through his lips.

Then those present kiss and embrace the camorrista e duvere (the one promoted to active duty), a title which gives the right to exact freely the camorra, that is, the fruit of the extortions, of thievery, of robbery. The new camorrista must feast his chums and the chiefs that same evening to celebrate the event.

The camorrista imposes upon those who work the payment in his favor, and of the society's, a quota called camorra or tangenda. Wherever there is a possibility of extorting money there he is on hand—in the markets, among the boatmen, the coachmen, the prostitutes, even in the prisons. He who pays is protected and who does not wish to pay sooner or later repents of his hardihood, because the camorrista reports to the society, which has its cliorome and paranze (the sections) to present sooner or later his claim.

The proceeds of the tangendo (graft) goes to the treasurer of the society, to be there divided between the companions bound by crime and danger. In fact, the wounded, the imprisoned, those being tried, are aided by the company in every possible way. And the consolidation is felt to such an extent that the camorrista, rather than denounce a companion, will let himself be condemned to years and years of imprisonment.

Powerful and rebellious, culpable and generous, with all his vices and with all his other qualities, the camorrista is not a born delinquent but the product of an atmosphere morally and economically degenerate. Where the usurer fattens on the tears of mankind the camorrista speculates and profits on vice, on crime, on the lowest passions, the contempt of life, acquired day by day since infancy in the ferocious, savage fight of the lower strata, where the weak are trampled upon and crushed by the stronger.

The camorrista is aggressive with the weak but also rebellious with the more powerful, and for those whom he is protecting executes acts of true courage and would throw away his life as though it were a rag, with a smile on his lips for effect.

The camorra, refined and domestic outlawry, born at the time when Naples was dominated by foreign tyrants, considered as an official channel for oppression and blood sucking of public and private riches, has continued to despise the public authority and raised for itself freni (statutes) and mamme (tribunals) of its own.

The members of the umirta are obedient and faithful to their solemn oaths and would prefer to die in prison rather than disclose their secrets.



**BREEDING PLACE OF THE ITALIAN SECRET SOCIETY**

**JUDGE OF JUDICE**

**POLICE INSPECTOR ISPEKTORS DI F. S.**

**DISTRICT ATTORNEY PROCURATORE DEL RE.**

**EMBRYO DISCIPLES OF THE BLACK HAND.**

**SYMBOLS DENOTING OFFICIALS OF THE HATE OR FEAR.**

CHIEF 2<sup>ND</sup> IN COMMAND CAMORIST ACCOUNTANT 2<sup>ND</sup> DEGREE 1<sup>ST</sup> DEGREE  
CAPINTESTA CAPINTRITO CAMORISTA CONTALULO PICCIOTTO GIOVINOTTO  
SKIN MARKS WHICH DENOTE THE RANK OF THE CAMORRA

to escape the fulfillment of the state's penal laws than those of the camorra. The sect will flourish as long as the ignorant and wretched people consider it chivalrous to undertake the zumpate (duel with knives), the sparate (with firearms), the sfragi (slashing the face with razors), as long as in the souls of thousands of unfortunates the adoration of brute force exists, as long as the assassin finds not only united companions, but respect and piety in the corrupted atmosphere.

The low people know too well what brings one to the camorra, so easily pardon. Sad, indeed, that the most beautiful energies are diverted into criminality. Like green branches of young pine trees bent downward instead of rising to heaven—the result of deforming power.

Power Grows Daily

Power, daredevil deeds, highway and domestic robberies, scars inflicted in camorristic style give the aspirant the right of way to higher grades, namely that of caposocieta or capintrito with jurisdiction over entire wards (mandamenti), even to the office of capintesta, who has supreme power over all the camorra of the city.

To him, sovereign of the mala vita, have recourse often, members of parliament, senators and other big wigs soliciting his favor in the electoral fight or in other intrigues.

The silk hatted grafters of the low camorra, often honored and decorated, favor and nourish like rich fertilizers the bad weed of wickedness, with impunity.

They swap favor for favor, give and take, prepare for and are obsequious to clients, procure immunity for the most vulgar delinquent, recommend the most notorious criminal, obtain permits for carrying arms, persuade or impose upon honest or zealous functionaries to shut their eyes in favor of their proteges and not to follow up threatened transfers, reports and revenge. These are high rascals, shrewd, audacious, powerful, who often use their loud voices in public meetings in favor of the regeneration of southern Italy, while by their daily secret methods, useful only to them, they poison the very vitality of the country.

Around the ingenuous functionaries, who delude themselves in the belief of their power to enforce repressive laws even against organized and shielded delinquents, they wind a web,

weave filmy nets, entangling them in threads from which it is impossible to extricate themselves. These are the invisible camorristi, more powerful and dangerous than the capintesta, the contauioli. They despise slang and hieroglyphics, tattooing and separate; they know the soul of the camorra to the quick, and, in the background, are the true masters, the dominators of corrupted consciences.

Where energetic and rigorous acts of justice are necessary those functions are manifested in a poor, bureaucratic dryness; not from the fault of the functionary, but by the multiplicity of factors which tend to embarrass their work.

The weak organs of the social defense are impotent to resist the insidious snares. Witnesses are bribed, corrupted, threats are employed, documents suppressed, and those who know well the intricacies of the bureaucratic cogs snap their fingers at the law's decree, as did the outlaws of the middle ages.

To extirpate the camorra, which is poisoning the life of southern Italy, and bringing to a standstill civilization, serious and assiduous care is demanded; a constant apostleship. Until the causes of poverty and crime are done away with or ameliorated, every hope of civil reform will be in vain; alphabetism and ignorance will bar the flight to a more human life.

The energetic outburst from degenerate people assumes the form of graft, of mafia, of caporra. The exuberant strength which is wasted in crime, if well directed, might become a fount of riches, of good deeds, of civilization.

To elevate the public conscience the school should be like a powerful light-house to light darkness, to enlighten the minds of judicial officials; education only as a moral agent, can impose inexorable respect for the law.

In this magnificent work of moral redemption in southern Italy it will be necessary, above all, that from these high stations should come an energetic, loving, encouraging and sincere good example.

### YUKON COAL LEASES

THE Canadian government has adopted stringent regulations to prevent coal lands in the Yukon from being held for speculative purposes. Leases for coal mining will be granted for 21 years, at an annual rental of \$1 an acre, payable in advance. No applicant will be allowed to lease more than 150 acres. The tract must be contiguous and the area must not exceed four miles in its greatest dimensions. Applications are to be made through the dominion lands agent or a subagent of the district.

In unsurveyed territory the application must be made within 30 days after its being located. Where a dispute as to a location occurs the right to the lease will be decided by the minister of the interior upon hearing evidence. The lease shall include coal mining rights only, but the lessee, upon application, may be permitted to purchase at the rate of \$10 an acre whatever area of the available surface rights the minister may consider necessary for the efficient and economical working of the coal mining rights granted in the lease. The lessee must begin operations within one year from the date of his being notified to do so, and shall produce the quantity of coal specified in such order.

The order will not be given until the expiration of one year. In no case will the maximum quantity required to be mined during each year be more than 10 tons an acre leased. If this order is not complied with then the lease will be subject to cancellation. The lessee cannot assign his rights without leave of the minister.

Actual settlers shall be entitled to buy at the pit's mouth what coal they may require for their own use, but not for barter or sale, at a price not to exceed \$1.75 per ton. A fee of \$5 is charged for each lease. In addition to the rent a royalty of five cents a ton of 2,000 pounds will be levied on the output of the mine. In default of this the lease may be canceled. In case of disputes provision is made for arbitration.