

## THE EARTHQUAKE IN ITALY.

The news of what may turn out to be the most terrible single calamity Europe and America have ever known failed to make at first a sufficiently deep impression on the minds of men. We of the modern world are spoiled for high emotion. We are so accustomed to have the little events of the day trumpeted that the great shock finds our senses dulled. The adventures of Harry Thaw are spread over three pages, and the Mediterranean catastrophe takes no more space. The lie manufactured in the newspaper office is proclaimed as loudly as the tragic destruction of San Francisco or St. Pierre. It is not that we have lost the sense of wonder, but that we are called upon twice and thrice a day to wonder at the petty ignominies and events of the market-place, the saloon, and the gutter. Add to this the fact that in this country, especially, our sense of the value of human life has become cheapened. Where Europe thrills at the loss of a dozen lives, we have grown accustomed to a yearly toll of thousands in mine and on railway. But if the newspapers have taken the edge off our emotions, they have immeasurably widened the range of our interest. In China, in Africa, in South America, men can no longer suffer or perish without the world's knowledge. And in such a disaster as has befallen the Italian people, the brotherhood of man becomes something more than a phrase.

Yet here again our country occupies a position apart. Other nations can give devastated South Italy food and money. In these measures of temporary relief we, too, can join, as Russia, China, Japan, and Martinique will testify. But for the means of permanent recuperation it is to the New World that Europe's unfortunates look. Europe can help in the crisis, but she cannot absorb the beggared Calabrians and Sicilians, who are sure to seek a new livelihood across the seas. Thousands will go to Argentina and Brazil, many to Tripoli, but the greater number of refugees will come to this country. Trade unions and champions of Anglo-Saxon dominance may cry out in horror, yet it is at times like these that America rises truest to her historic mission. This country has been peopled and nourished by the famines, the massacres, and the oppressions of the Old World. It

is still the natural asylum for the victims of Kishenev and Calabria.

In so far as Italy herself is concerned, the vast calamity is made worse by the fact that it has stricken the region which could least bear it. It will tend to emphasize the line of separation between the northern and southern parts of the Kingdom, which constitutes one of the greatest impediments to Italy's progress, remarkable though that has been. In their economic condition, in education, in nearly every form of advancement, the people of the old kingdom of the Two Sicilies are far behind their northern neighbors. Now there must come years of poverty and disorganization. Sicily loses its second largest city. In Sicily and Calabria a population of nearly 5,000,000 is brought to the verge of destitution. The effect must be felt in turn throughout Italy. When the government must lend its aid, instead of collecting taxes, the burden on other parts of the kingdom will grow appreciably heavier. But it must be added that admirable courage and resourcefulness have marked Italy's history since unification.

The enormous loss of life was due in part to the congestion of the population. Italy as a whole supports 305 inhabitants to its every square mile. In Sicily the ratio is 375; and about unhappy Messina the ratio rose to 456. We think of Sicily as so exclusively an agricultural country—the land of wheat, oil, and citron—that it is surprising to find over one-fourth of its population of some 3,800,000 congregated in cities having more than 25,000 inhabitants. The soil is parcelled out among great landowners, holders of the ancient *latifundia*, who, with their tenants and sub-tenants, crowd together in the cities, when the week's or the season's cultivation is done. That a tremendous earthquake coming upon such human congestion should work immense loss of life, was inevitable.

With the dreadful fate of Messina, of Reggio di Calabria, of numerous smaller towns that have gone the way of earthquake, fire, and flood, doom them as sites for future human habitation? Not if the example of other similar disasters may be taken into account. Man's capacity for getting used to living on a volcano's edge, actually as well as metaphorically, is an illustration both of the potency of habit

and of the optimism inherent in human nature. Or, if we wish, we can call it a sublimated pessimism, a disenchantment which recognizes that death lurks as well on prairie and sandy ocean beach as on volcanic formations; so why take the trouble? It would seem that Messina has had ample warning and foretaste of what has befallen her, yet for twenty-seven hundred years people have gone on believing that the blow would not come in their time, or would fall on their neighbors, never on them. Great cities are founded on sites offering some natural advantage or other, and it seems likely that the value of Messina's harbor, like that of San Francisco's, will continue to outweigh the danger of earthquake. And, after all, nature, which works havoc, can also be kind. She has untold riches. The wealth of the world increases rapidly, and within two decades a devastated San Francisco or Messina may rise complete again from its ashes.

## SICILY.

After the common compassion of human nature, the Sicilian disaster must have brought to many minds a sense of tragic incongruity. The very name of Sicily is a forgetfulness of the present and an evocation of long romance; and suddenly into this charmed memory there breaks the outrageous reality that is always waiting at the heart of the world. Travellers in that island, looking down on the columns of great temples that have lain for ages among the flowers, muse sentimentally on the beauty of decay; and in a moment the actual forces of ruin are at work, cruel and hideous and not at all considerate of sentiment. Even the dryasdust historian has been beguiled of his dulness by the Sicilian legend, and we have heard that Freeman, bearded pedant as he was, would wander over the hills in a kind of childlike trance. And well he might, for he walked in fairyland.

On that island, in the gray dawn of romance and history, Odysseus, blown into the Western seas far from his Ithacan home, landed with his men, and by a cunning stratagem outwitted the Cyclops. Through the Strait of Messina also he sailed between the two rocks whose monstrous rage reads like the reminiscence of some volcanic catastro-

phe of the far past or the vague proph-  
ecy of some disaster to come:

We groaning sailed the strait. Here Scylla  
lay,  
And there divine Charybdis, with huge  
throat  
Gorging salt waves, which when she cast  
away  
She spumed with hisses (as when fire  
makes hot  
Some cauldron) and the steamy froth up-  
shot  
Wide o'er both rocks. But when she  
gorged again,  
Drunk with abysmal gurglings, one might  
note  
The dark sands of the immeasurable main  
Gleam iron-blue. The rocks loud bellowing  
roared amain.

There, too, Æneas landed, fleeing from  
Troy to Italy. There his aged father  
died and was buried. On that strand  
the games were celebrated, and from  
this beach the women of the band look-  
ed out over the deep sea, sighing over  
the toils still before them, and plot-  
ting to surrender the promise of an  
eternal city for present ease. Their  
words, it is said, were often on the lips  
of Littré, the lexicographer, as without  
rest he finished one task and prepared  
for another:

Heu tot vada fessis  
Et tantum superesse maris!

From legend Sicily emerges for a  
while into history that is almost as  
romantic: Phalaris and his brazen bull,  
whose terrors the great Bentley renewed  
in England when he smote the pre-  
tenders to learning; the battle of Hi-  
mera—fought, as was popularly believ-  
ed, on the same day as Salamis—when  
the Carthaginians, losing a hundred and  
fifty thousand men dead on the field,  
left the western sea to Greece as the  
Persians left the eastern; the ruthless  
destruction of the Athenian army at  
Syracuse, which ended forever the su-  
premacy of Athens.

And then from the clash of armies we  
pass, not again to adventurous romance,  
but to a literature that weaves a con-  
scious, voluntary spell. Some of Pin-  
dar's greatest odes were written for the  
Sicilian lords victorious in the games,  
and in his lines we still see the young  
men of Greece, as we see them in the  
sculpture of Phidias, moving in proces-  
sion with the gods, themselves divinely  
fair and proud. In the court of Hieron  
at Syracuse might be seen, perhaps at  
one table, Epicharmus, Æschylus, Si-  
monides, Bacchylides, and Pindar; and  
in the same city Plato undertook to  
bring down to earth the laws of his

ideal republic—and lost his pains. But  
if Plato failed philosophically to make  
Sicily the wedding-place of the real and  
the ideal, another visitor from the East  
succeeded. Since Theocritus, a scholar  
from Cos, wrote his idyls of the Sicilian  
goatherds and fishermen, Sicily, like Ar-  
cadia, has been the magic pastoral land  
of the poets. In this secret valley the  
sorceress sang her midnight impreca-  
tions to the moon:

Turn, magic wheel, draw homeward him I  
love.  
'Hushed are the voices of the winds and  
seas;  
But O not hushed the voice of my despair.

In that wattled hut the two fishermen  
dreamed of catching golden fish. On  
this strip of windy beach sat the Cy-  
clops Polypheme, piping his songs of  
love to the ocean nymph Galatea, while  
she leaped in the foam and pelted his  
dog with apples. So completely was the  
island identified with these pastoral  
tales, that Virgil mingles the names of  
Sicily and Arcadia together as if they  
were one land—or no land:

There forests murmur aye, and pines dis-  
course;  
And lovelorn swains, and Pan, who first re-  
claimed  
From idleness the reed, hath audience  
there.  
Begin, my flute, a song of Arcady.

In that no-man's land Virgil places the  
one incident that seems to be reminis-  
cent of his own youth in northern Italy:

Within our orchard-walls I saw thee first,  
A wee child with her mother—(I was sent  
To guide you)—gathering apples wet with  
dew.  
Ten years and one I scarce had numbered  
then;  
Could scarce on tiptoe reach the brittle  
boughs.  
I saw, I fell, I was myself no more.

By an odd coincidence, these lines with  
their close of almost mystical passion—  
Ut vidi, ut perii! ut me malus abstulit  
error!—

were picked out by both Voltaire and  
Macaulay as the best in all Virgil's  
works.

Modern poets, writers of epic and pas-  
toral and drama, have carried on the  
tradition to the present day. Milton,  
wishing to find a symbol for Paradise,  
could not do better than compare his  
garden with

... that fair field  
Of Enna, where Proserpin gathering flowers,  
Herself a fairer flower, by gloomy Dis  
Was gathered—

as indeed Paradise is but an Arcadian  
dream among the Jews. Matthew Ar-

nold's most romantic scene is from the  
summit of Ætna, looking over

... that other fainter sea, far down,  
O'er whose lit floor a road of moonbeams  
leads  
To Ætna's Liparean sister-fires  
And the long dusky line of Italy.

And so again we meet with romance  
playing above these forces of ruin, and  
the mind returns to the actual devasta-  
tion of the land. Who shall read the  
lesson of this incongruity of fancy and  
reality? Who shall tell the moral of  
the present event? In a moment a  
whole people is obliterated, "as a wet  
sponge obliterates a painting," our trust  
in evolution and some far-off divine  
event seems, in the sight of such things,  
like another idle vision of the poets.

#### A EUROPEAN CONFERENCE.

The movement of events within Tur-  
key has diverted attention from gener-  
al international politics in the Near  
East, which only a few weeks ago  
threatened a serious crisis. We, who  
watch European affairs from a distance,  
content to make broad estimates for  
comparatively long stretches of time,  
cannot see the problem in the same way  
that Europe does. To her, the minute  
shifting and balancing of diplomatic  
business carry serious meaning from  
day to day. As we look upon it here,  
there is no reason why Austria's annex-  
ation of Bosnia-Herzegovina should pro-  
voke war. The deed is done, and Eu-  
rope, including Turkey, is prepared to  
recognize the accomplished fact, pro-  
vided certain concessions and rectifica-  
tions are made. Such readjustment can  
be arranged either through a European  
conference or through separate negotia-  
tion among the various states. But the  
latter procedure is, on the face of it, so  
cumbrous, so adapted to intrigue and  
counter-intrigue, and so likely to excite  
irritation, that from the first the call-  
ing of a conference has seemed inevita-  
ble. All this aside from the fact that  
Austria's undoing of the work of one  
European congress naturally calls for  
another congress to lend its sanction to  
what has been done.

Austrian diplomats have, it is true,  
been fencing and delaying. Thus the  
Turkish boycott on Austrian goods serv-  
ed as an excuse for protracting negotia-  
tions. Austria would not discuss the  
question of a settlement with Turkey  
until the boycott was suspended. Then,  
when in that matter the Turkish gov-