

The Italian Invasion of the Ghetto

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There are four hundred thousand Italians in Greater New York—approximately four-fifths of the total number in the United States. There is a "Little Italy" in Harlem, besides several scattered Italian colonies in and around Brooklyn, but the largest and oldest Italian quarter is in the lower East Side. A general boundary might be drawn, south of Houston street, north of Canal street, east of Broadway and west of the Bowery.

The largest Jewish quarter, commonly called the Ghetto, lies in a parallel section of the city, east of the Bowery. At the present time the number of Jews in Greater New York approaches seven hundred and fifty thousand—four hundred and fifty thousand of whom live in the Ghetto, between the Bowery and the East River.

The last report of the Commissioner General of Immigration shows that the present Italian immigration far exceeds the Jewish, for in the last year the Italian immigrants numbered 195,000, whereas the total Jewish immigration was 106,000.

There is this surface, or geographical, difference between the Italian quarter and the Jewish quarter; the principal thoroughfares of the Italian section run north and south—Elizabeth Street, Mulberry Street, Mott Street, whereas the main arteries of the Ghetto run east and west—Canal Street and East Broadway, Hester Street, Grand Street and Rivington Street. There is no significance in this. It is merely a natural phenomenon which happens to characterize and distinguish these two important quarters of immigrant New York.

The Bowery, which is the dividing line between these two sections, is nondescript, neither Italian nor Jewish, a class, rather than a national, thoroughfare. Cheap shops, fifteen and twenty-five cent lodging houses, garish fakir shows and bar rooms of ugly reputation, frequented by sea-faring men, tramps and the fallen and outcast, the flotsam and jetsam of a great city.

Recent years have found the Italians crossing the Bowery and slowly establishing themselves round the edges of the Ghetto. In some instances they have penetrated the very heart of the Jewish quarter. Incidentally, there has been no corresponding drift of the Jews westward into the Italian quarter.

First Street, which is the first street beyond the northern boundary of the Jewish community, is now almost entirely occupied by Italians, and Extra Place, off First Street near the Bowery, is entirely Italian.

Stanton Street, the first street within the Jewish section at its western end, is now noticeably mixed with Italians. Mangin Street and Goerck Street, near the river front, have received a considerable Italian population, and there are suggestions of an Italian invasion from the south. As a people the Italians are a more transitory element in our population than the Jews. Very many of them look forward to returning to their native country in the afternoon of life, whereas all of the Jews come to these shores to stay, bringing with them their families and transplanting as far as they may, their traditions and their customs, the very roots of their race, and look forward to generations of livelihood in the new world.

The Italian comes to America to make and save money. Where there is work, there he goes. He is little trammelled by the encumbrances which accompany more complicated standards of life. He moves easily and lightly from place to place. Life to the Italian is reduced to simple forms. Thus it is common to find that houses occupied by one set of Italians two years ago are occupied by an entirely different set of Italians to-day. But so long as certain houses or certain blocks are looked upon as Italian properties, shops and places of business will flourish, and some indication of the number of Italians in this section may be gained from the number of stores along the streets.

On the Bowery there are but few Italian places of business. Near the corner of Broome Street is a barber shop, and between Broome and Delancey streets there is a new fake show, called "Hell As It Is," run by Italians. No. 217 Bowery, two or three

doors from Rivington Street, is also largely Italian. Near the corner of Rivington Street is another barber shop. Numbers 96 and 98 Houston Street, near to the Bowery, is a large double tenement house, more than half Italian. The Tenement House Department notices that the walls of this building are posted in Yiddish and Italian. Near Extra Place on First Street, where so many tenements are occupied by Italians, there is an Italian hand organ factory, an Italian saloon, a butcher shop and a grocery store.

Stanton Street, between the Bowery and Chrystie Street, is marked by two Italian grocery stores, two macaroni factories, three saloons, one real estate office, one baker, one barber, one butcher and one bank. Between Chrystie and Forsythe Streets, there are two butcher shops and two grocery stores. East of Forsythe Street there are no more Italian stores, but there are Italian families in some of the tenements.

On the south side of Rivington Street, between Chrystie and Forsythe streets, there are two Italian stores and several Italian families in the tenements. On Chrystie Street, in almost every house from Houston to Stanton, are Italians. Near the corner of Houston Street, on the east side, is a grocery store and a macaroni factory. A little further along is a pasticceria or café. Between there and Stanton Street are four grocery stores, four saloons, one bank and two drug stores. Beyond Stanton Street there are only occasional Italian spots, but between Stanton and Eldridge streets are three shops and one saloon.

It should be noted, however, that Italian barber shops are by no means an accurate indication of Italian families in the neighborhood, for barbering is looked upon as a legitimate trade of the Italians, and an Italian barber will frequently set up his pole in the midst of a Jewish population. The barber shops are noted here, however, because in almost each instance there are Italian families living in the adjoining tenements. People usually precede the shops. It is noticeable to a casual passerby that there are many Italian faces in the doorways and many Italian children at play in the streets.

Between Rivington and Delancey Streets there is one grocery shop and one saloon. At the corner of Delancey Street is a drug-store with an Italian department. Nos. 132 and 136 Chrystie Street (between Delancey and Broome) are tenement houses leased by Italians to be rented to Italians. As yet the only shop that has moved in on this block is a barber's, but on Broome Street around the corner from Chrystie Street, toward Forsythe, is yet another barber shop.

It is now eight years since these shops began to enter the Ghetto, so that the "invasion" cannot be called rapid. Yet the number of shops here enumerated probably supply the wants of several thousand Italian dwellers. The Stanton-Chrystie Street colony may easily number between two and three thousand.

Throughout this district the houses occupied by Italians are nearly always leased by Italian landlords, for a Jewish landlord will rarely rent to an Italian family. Another indication that the Italian invasion is but spasmodic is found in the fact that the Jews are still the eager buyers of every piece of property that appears on the market in this district. The older properties are sometimes leased by Italians, but rarely bought.

On Forsythe Street, between Stanton and Houston, is one grocery store. Between Eldridge and Stanton, there are no shops. Eldridge Street has no Italian stores save for one barber shop.

Traversing Houston Street toward the east, one leaves the Italians behind immediately upon crossing Allen Street, and it is not until one approaches Lewis and Goerck Streets that any Italian faces are seen. Goerck Street, from Houston to Grand, is largely Italian, especially the block between Rivington and Delancey Streets, which is almost solidly Italian. Here there are an Italian bank, a café, three grocery stores, a fruit store, a drug store, a saloon and a candy store.

On Broome Street, near the corner of Lewis, is an Italian shoemaker shop, but this is on the outskirts of the Italian colony. The news stands on Goerck, Rivington and Lewis Streets carry Italian as well as German and Yiddish newspapers. Rivington Street, between Lewis and Goerck, has one Italian grocery shop, a macaroni factory and a drug store.

A true indication of the number of Italians in the community should be found in a canvass of the school population, were it not for the fact that Italian children are great truants. In this respect the Italians are fundamentally different from the Jews. The Jewish parent nearly always hopes that his sons may become doctors, lawyers, teachers or merchants, and he knows that a thorough grounding in schooling must come during the early years if he is to be successful along any of these lines.

The Italian parent, on the other hand, is quite satisfied if the child can read or write his name, and he is anxious that the child should become a wage-earner at the earliest possible moment. The Italian child is rarely a keen scholar. It is the experience of kindergartners that Italian parents frequently try to take their children away from school as soon as they are graduated from the kindergarten in order that they may become small wage-earners. Italian mothers who spend their days at some sweating industry like button-holing or finishing or putting linings in garments, keep the children at home to help them with this work, simple work, meanly paid, demanding many hours of constant toil. The Italian child, too, is called upon at an early age to assume the care of the babies and younger children.

An Italian laborer will make \$1.00 or \$1.25 a day. His wife, by constant industry outside of her household duties at home sewing, can perhaps make \$5.00 or \$6.00 each month. If she has a large family, she feels the necessity of keeping one of the older girls at home to care for the children; if not that, to help in the work. In order to obtain the release of the children from their school duties as early as possible, they will risk perjury and resort to the most absurd forms of deception. They will swear that the children are younger than they really are, and sometimes when passports are asked for and the age of the child is ascertained according to the date of it, the parents will declare that they lied when the passports were made out in order to secure cheaper passage for the children from Europe. Thus is the temptation to gain two or three dollars a week through the children over great. Mothers will even dress their girls in their own clothes in order to make them appear older than their real age.

Most of the Italians now living east of the Bowery are from the south of Italy. Sicilians are in the majority. The streets near the water front, particularly Mangin and Goerck Streets, are occupied by Sicilians, and there are some families from Amalfi. At home these are a water people, a fisher and a sailor folk. Naturally these people do not have the same appreciation of education that we find among city-bred people. Consequently the truant officers and school authorities are troubled not a little to keep the children of these people in school. To them money earning is the important thing. Children are reared to look forward to the time when they shall become workers and contributors to the family support. It is in no way surprising, therefore, to find that it is the testimony of church and social workers in this district that Italian boys are sometimes found ten, eleven and twelve years of age, who have never been to school. The Southern Italian parent looks forward to the time when his son shall be a wage-earner—a laborer, a stone mason or a tailor. These are all trades that require but little schooling, and the time spent in study is looked upon as little better than wasted.

Of the total number of Italian immigrants coming to these shores each year, fully two-thirds are unskilled laborers, and about one-half of them are illiterate and extremely poor. Most of this class go at once to manual labor, to work in the mines or on the railroads or in the quarries, or doing the rough work of the mills. The other portion take to various city occupations. They become dealers in rags and junk. They are willing to take the more menial work and to perform it faithfully. More than 1,200 Italians are now sweeping the streets of New York; a portion, however, an increasing proportion, are taking to the tailoring trades, and the artificial flower industry is an Italian monopoly.

The Industrial Commission reported that the future clothing workers in this country in all probability would be Italian rather than Jewish. Inasmuch as the lower East Side is the centre of the clothing trade of the city, it is but natural that the Italians as they come more and more to take up these various trades,

should want to be near their work. This would be a strong reason for coming into the Ghetto in large numbers were there not other and stronger reasons to check the influx at a certain point.

Turning to the schools of the Ghetto, we find a surprisingly small number of Italian children on the rolls. In February, 1901, P. S. 110, on Cannon Street, near Delancey, had twelve classes. Nearly all of these children were American born. In four years this school had increased so rapidly that in May, 1905, there were fifty-seven classes, largely made up of children of foreign parentage. It is an immigrant locality. In a way, a first landing stage. After a little the families move to other sections of the city, and other arrivals from Europe move into the houses. 70 per cent of these children are Jews, 20 per cent of English-speaking nativity, chiefly Irish, and 10 per cent are Italian. There are more Italian children in this school than in any other in the Ghetto.

The tremendous growth of this school during the last four years is accounted for entirely by the fact that a very large proportion of immigrants coming into the port of New York are taken directly to this section of the city, for here rents are very low and the cost of living is less than elsewhere. Sometimes as many as 125 children are admitted to this school in a single day, usually the day following the arrival of the steamer, Jewish or Italian, according to the port of sailing of the steamer or steamers. At the outset all the children thus entered exhibit a great ambition to acquire knowledge. They are put at once into English classes with American teachers. In a few weeks they gather a working knowledge of English and show extraordinary eagerness to acquire a school standing equal to that of the American born children of their own ages as soon as possible.

Public School No. 88, on Rivington Street, near Lewis, is close to the Goerck Street Italian colony, and yet this school with its registry of nearly 2,400, has not more than two scores of Italians. Public School No. 188, on Houston and Lewis Streets, in the girls' department with a registry of 2,500, has not more than twenty Italian children. Public School 22, on Stanton and Sheriff Streets, with a registry in the grammar department of 1,200

children, has about twelve Italian children in attendance, these mostly from Lewis and Goerck Streets. The primary department with a registry of 1,800 children, has but two Italians. Public School No. 4, on Rivington Street near Pitt, with a registry of approximately 2,000, has about twenty Italians. Six of these live on Attorney Street, near Stanton; the others on Goerck and Mangin Streets. Public School No. 170, on Attorney Street, between Rivington and Stanton, with a registry of 1,400, has about a dozen Italians, these mostly from Attorney Street, between Stanton and Houston.

There is a parochial school in connection with St. Mary's Church (Roman Catholic) on Grand Street, but only twenty or twenty-five of these are Italians.

At the corner of Stanton and Pitt Streets is another old Catholic Church with a parochial school attached. It is a singularly tranquil spot in the midst of a rushing, work-a-day world. The surrounding streets teem with noisy children, while the curbs are lined with push-cart men, petty traders in all department store wares. Instruction in this parochial school is given by Capuchin monks, ancient friars, seeming so oddly out of place in this busy section that they might have come out of a German story book—portly, jovial men, dressed in the coarse brown garb of their order, their heavy cowls thrown back over their shoulders, their bare feet slipped into their sandals, secured by leather thongs.

The Father Guardian spoke sadly of the transition of the past few years. Years back when he came to this station from his German home, there was a large and prosperous community of German and Irish Catholics in the immediate vicinity. In the school were 900 children. Year by year as the German and Irish population has drifted away, the school has dwindled. At the opening of the present year there were 420 odd children on the rolls, but so fast have the remnants of this Catholic population moved away during the past winter that there are but 300 left to-day. Of these, however, about ninety are Italian children.

He complained bitterly of the poverty of the Italians. "They are a pleasure loving people. On their fete days they like fire-

works. In the summer time they like excursions to Coney Island, Staten Island and Little Italy, and it comes hard for them to give generously to the church." In Italy the state supports the church, so that the people do not feel the necessity for giving liberally as they do in this country. Then, too, the Italian children are not well received by Jewish children. An Italian child may not play in the Hamilton-Fish Park on Stanton Street. The Jewish children will pounce upon him and drive him off. This good monk despairs of a Christian population ever returning to these streets—at least within his lifetime.

Fifteen years ago this district between the Bowery and the East River was practically given over to the Germans. At that time the Jews began to come in, and little by little they have taken possession of the entire district. If this section of New York had remained as it was fifteen years ago, the Italian colony would probably be located in the heart of the section to-day. As it is, the entire character of the district has undergone a transformation. The famous old Barracks of Mangin Street, Bone Alley of Willett Street and Murderers' Row, have disappeared. Two small parks are now occupying the grounds of former pest spots. Many of the ramshackle tenements have given place to new buildings, and nearly all of the old-fashioned houses, two stories and two stories and a half high, which the Germans occupied, are gone. In their stead, great tenement houses have gone up.

But these were the places that the Italians sought. So long as any houses with "rock bottom" rentals exist, the Italians will continue to invade the Ghetto. But the moment they disappear they will seek other localities. Here we have the key to the Italian invasion—cheap rentals.

There are but few instances of an Italian family moving into a new or comparatively new or modern tenement house east of the Bowery. Their houses are usually old and dilapidated. On Goerck Street, for example, there is a tenement house where the small room tenements formerly rented for about six dollars a month. Some months ago the landlord made a few alterations

and put in an elaborate vestibule. The tenements themselves were not improved, but the rents were raised to \$8.00 and \$8.50 a month. The Italian families shortly moved away and the Jews have now returned.

It is not from choice that the Italian goes into shabbier tenements, but from necessity. His ambition is different from the ambition of the Jew. Many times he has home ties—a family perhaps to whom he sends comparatively large sums of money, at least a large proportion of what he earns. The Italian, as a rule, looks upon his stay in America as a thing of but a few years. Some day he will return to his native country. According to Signor Conti, the American agent of the Bank of Naples, the estimated amount of money which the Italians of the United States sends home reaches an annual total of between \$15,000,000 and \$16,000,000, which means a per capita remittance of about \$50 for each man, woman and child in this country. The Jewish immigrant, having brought his family with him, is making his permanent home here. Consequently, his standard of living may be somewhat higher, and he can afford to pay a higher rent to his landlord.

There are, therefore, two reasons for the Italian invasion of the Ghetto. First, a few families are crowded out of the Italian colony west of the Bowery by the strong stream of immigration; secondly, there are still enough old houses left east of the Bowery with cheap rentals to induce a proportion of this overflow to settle here and to tempt some of the other families. The rents for old tenements east of the Bowery are frequently \$1.00 or \$1.50 lower than the rentals of old houses in a similar condition west of the Bowery. Consequently, if the Jewish people living in the down-town Ghetto continue to move to the so-called Harlem Ghetto, to the Bronx and to East New York, faster than the Jewish immigrants come in to take their places, the Italians will take possession of the cheaper tenements whenever they can get them. At the present time there are more oldtime tenements in the Italian quarter than in the Ghetto. If an Italian moves into a new or higher priced house, it is usually because he means to put more people into it.

The average tenement on Elizabeth Street, between Houston and Spring, or in fact on Mulberry Street, Mott or Baxter Streets, rents for \$12.50 per month. This is for a small tenement of two or three rooms. Houses on Stanton Street immediately east of the Bowery, corresponding nearly in size and conditions of repair, are \$10.50 and \$11.00 per month. These figures are taken directly from the rent books of rent collectors in these districts. The rooms in the older houses are also likely to be a little larger than in the more modern houses, and this is an added inducement where there are large families. Italians are very prone to over-crowding. Sometimes they will rent a new tenement, paying an average Jewish quarter rental, but through sub-lettings and lodgers they reduce the per capita rent materially.

It is noticeable that in the heart of the Jewish community where there are many newer tenement house buildings and practically none of the real old buildings, there are few if any Italian invaders; but around the outskirts, where the old houses still exist, the houses are in bad repair, and cheap of rent, here they will continue to be found.

The indications of an Italian encroachment upon the Ghetto are, therefore, little more than casual. Here and there the Italians have a foothold. But there are no signs of a Jewish evacuation. Some day the Jewish people may move elsewhere, perhaps so rapidly as to seem as it were en masse. If that day comes, the Italians will most naturally seize the opportunity to possess themselves of this quarter. There are enough of them there now to raise the standard of Italy, but at the present state of transition, not until the houses which are now new and modern have become old and dilapidated, will they encroach to any material extent upon the Jewish community. They certainly will not drive the Jews away. If the Jews go, they go of their own accord to a more attractive quarter. It must be ever remembered that for centuries they have been a wandering people. Some streets like Goerck, Mangin, Forsythe, Chrystie and Stanton, will continue to be largely Italian so long as present housing conditions remain and so long as the Italian landlords control the properties.

Stanton and Chrystie Streets probably always will remain Italian because of their nearness to the principal Italian quarter, but beyond this there is no likelihood of an Italian tidal wave sweeping over the Ghetto. The influx of Italians into this section probably reached its zenith in the autumn of 1904, for this past winter has witnessed a decrease in the Italian population; there are not so many here to-day as there were six months ago, nor one year ago.

Thus we find that the Jews who have completely taken possession of this district during the last few years may continue to lodge here for years to come without fear of substantial invasion from the Italian quarter. No other people than the Italians have appeared to threaten them at any point as yet, and the results of this investigation would tend to prove that the danger from them is scarcely likely to be realized during the present decade or the next.

