

# from our archives: italians in queensland

BETWEEN 1919 AND 1926, FILIPPO SACCHI WAS FIRST WAR AND THEN OVERSEAS CORRESPONDENT FOR THE MILAN-BASED NEWSPAPER 'CORRIERE DELLA SERA'. THE THREE ARTICLES REPRODUCED BELOW WERE WRITTEN FOR THE PAPER DURING SACCHI'S 1925 AUSTRALIAN SOJOURN. AS SUCH, THEY PROVIDE A RARE GLIMPSE INTO THE LIVES OF ITALIAN MIGRANTS ON THE NORTH QUEENSLAND CANEFIELDS DURING THE MID-1920S, AND CHART GROWING HOSTILITY AGAINST THIS COMMUNITY. A PROLIFIC WRITER, SACCHI IS REMEMBERED TODAY PRINCIPALLY AS A FILM CRITIC AND AS THE AUTHOR OF 'LA CASA IN OCEANIA' (MONDADORI, 1932), A NOVEL DEALING WITH THE EXPERIENCES OF ITALIAN MIGRANTS IN AUSTRALIA.

TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT COMPLETE TRANSLATIONS OF SACCHI'S ARTICLES HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED IN AUSTRALIA. THE TRANSLATOR, THE LATE JACQUELINE TEMPLETON, WAS SENIOR FELLOW IN THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE. SHE DREW ON THE MATERIAL FOR HER POSTHUMOUSLY PUBLISHED, 'FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE BUSH: ITALIAN MIGRANTS WRITE HOME FROM AUSTRALIA, 1860-1962' (UWAP, 2003). BOTH THE ORIGINAL AND TRANSLATED TEXTS FORM PART OF A COLLECTION OF MISS TEMPLETON'S PAPERS DONATED TO THE SOCIETY BY HER COLLEAGUE, JOHN LACK.

*Corriere della Sera*, 10 July 1925

## PART 1: THE OLIVE PERIL

Townsville June 1925

I regret to have to sound the alarm but the matter is so serious that I should be failing the most basic duties of my office if I did not do so immediately: Italy is preparing to invade Australia. None of us ever had wind of it, I know, and yet it is a fact, by now proclaimed and incontestable. It makes one shudder to think that millions of Italians get up every morning, have a shave, drink their morning coffee and go out on their business without the faintest idea that their country is on the point of occupying a continent, nothing less.

*Italian invasion*. It is one of their favourite

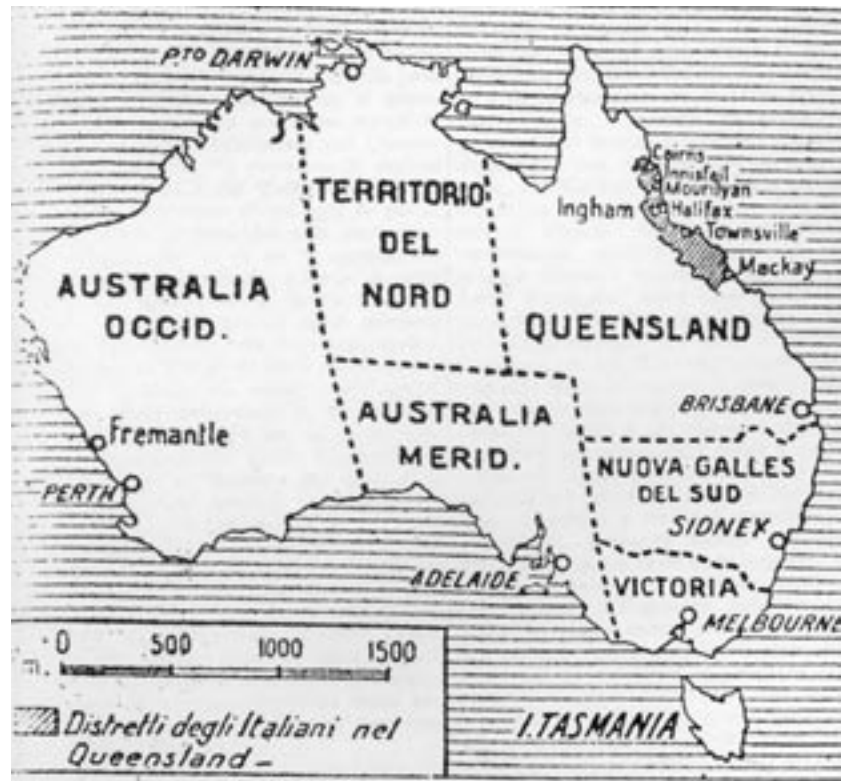
refrains, one of the commonplaces that one hears chanted over and over in what is by now a daily polemic against Italian immigration. Metaphors of journalists over endowed with imagination? No. Here, at the recent congress of the *Australian Native Association*, one of the major Australian political associations which has gained a following of fifty-thousand members from every social class, especially the industrial, commercial and professional classes of Australia, and has at its disposal a capital of 100 million lire for its propaganda, what did the president, Mr Ginn (no, it isn't spelt with just one 'n') come out with in a high point of his opening speech? 'What is the meaning of this sudden intensification of the stream of migrants? Is there perhaps some hidden force at work? Some organised plan for peaceful penetration? Australians, on your guard. Watch out that your apathy does not leave the way for a terrible awakening for your children. We don't want the social and economic conditions of Australia to be undermined by the inevitable inter-breeding with foreigners who are incapable of understanding our traditions, of respecting our flag, of living as those traditions demand and as British subjects do'. The congress closed with a resolution calling for the prohibition of immigration to Australia of races 'not like us and not suitable'. The race 'not like us and not suitable' is the Italian race.

Nationalist exaggeration? Not at all. In Brisbane a congress of socialist trade unions is hammering away and spelling out the accusation of a calculated plan of occupation. 'There exists in Italy,' says the delegate presenting the agenda on the question, 'a combination of capitalists, industrial financier ship-owners, who control an organisation for assisting Italian workers to Australia. One of the conditions for their recruitment is that the industries in which they invest their money should be controlled solely by Italians, that the workforce should be Italian and that the children should retain their Italian nationality. It is a plan to snatch the sugar industry from the hands of the English to give it to the new immigrants, most of whom are but instruments of Italian capitalists'. Poor Italian capitalists—so intelligent—despite themselves! What else? A fleet of steamships, an entire fleet is about to be fitted out with the object of bringing Italians to Australia on the cheap. The genius who made this astonishing revelation is just an Australian who came from Italy. And they say that travel instructs.

You will be flabbergasted. But why all this fury against Italians? I shall explain it to you: to keep Australia 'white'. *Keep Australia*

white is the real catchcry of this crusade. In fact, we are not white, we are 'olive'. *Olive-skinned influx*, it is said. 'The invasion of the Olive Skins' was the headline of a great Melbourne daily evening paper to the announcement of an inquiry on Italian immigration in the northern districts ordered by the Queensland government. And at the congress (another congress) of Australian women, an authoritative speaker, exhorting Australian housewives not to buy fruit from Italian shops even if their prices were more moderate, bemoaned the fact that after having done so much to defend 'white' Australia from the menace of Asiatics 'olive migrants continue to establish themselves in the country'. We are such a degraded race that Australian women are exhorted not to marry our emigrants (we hope they don't, poor boys, for their own domestic happiness). This was said for example at the assembly of the Victorian RSSILA [Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia], which is the association of Australia veterans: 'Marriage of our women with these strangers makes us feel disgust'. Brave comrades! Our blood soils, stains, adulterates their Australian blood. *Pollute, polluted* is the most concise and most brutal expression of this concept. But even those who speak more euphemistically, explain themselves equally as clearly. And what else does it mean, to say, for example, that Australia 'is diluting its pure British blood with blood of foreigners which is unsuited to us?' That is Sir John McWhae speaking, Agent General, that is, official representative in London, for three years, of one of the most important states of Australia [Victoria]; I say this just so you won't think that we don't have any big shots to quote.

On the other hand, they don't even do us the honour of special treatment. As an olive race we are only a sub-section of that great mush of people which here share in the generic term of southern Europeans, *Italians and other southern Europeans*, and it is nice to see how, not to mortify us, they do us the courtesy of putting us in good company: 'emigrants from Greece, from Italy, from Yugoslavia', or 'Maltese, Albanian, and Italians', or this one which is even finer, 'Italians, Greeks, Albanians, Yugoslavs and others'. The argument is that since this group of southern Europeans represent, through tradition, culture and *standard* of living, levels much lower than that of Anglo-Saxon and Nordic peoples, Australia must favour immigration from these and prevent immigration from the former. 'We have,' writes a rich Melbourne businessman, who in his idle moments amuses himself with southern European anthology, 'a



vague contempt for these foreigners with a dark skin, often beneath normal in stature, gesticulating and impetuous'. And a newspaper explains, in the manner of Hamlet, 'Do we want to populate our territory with Nordic or with Latin people?' Rhetorical question. With Nordics, by Bacchus!

This history of the superiority of the north against the south went so far beyond the limit that the Catholic Archbishop, Mannix, now in Rome on a pilgrimage, intervened in a discussion held at a large catholic congress to warn his compatriots that after all, some of these southern European beggars, had made Rome, the Papacy, the Renaissance, and a few other trifles. They don't know. They don't know anything. This

Map showing the distribution of Italian migrants through the cane districts of north Queensland. The plate accompanied Filippo Sacchi's article, 'Italians in Queensland: Bottom of the class', which appeared on the front page of the *Corriere della Sera*, 14 July 1925.

Manlio Sardi's Australian Workers' Union (AWU) card. Cowley, Queensland, 1937-1938.

is the reassuring side of the whole business. They have ideas of Italy that make one despair of the future of humanity. A few months ago, the commanding officer of a cargo ship which was to leave Fremantle for Italy with frozen meat, turned up before one of our consular representatives to ask if the ports of Venice, Trieste and Naples were really capable of being entered by his steamship. It fell to a friend of mine in Sydney to feel prompted to say that after all, Italy didn't come out of the war so badly since she annexed Trento, Trieste and Sicily. In Sydney, a friend of mine heard someone say to him that after all, Italy hadn't come out of the war so badly since she annexed Trento, Trieste and Sicily. I found one or two cases of people who, seeing one of our books or newspapers, expressed their pleasant surprise at finding that we have the same letters of the alphabet and the same characters as they do.

A few days ago at Ingham, a migrant from the Veneto told me indignantly that an English workmate had asked him whether in Italy they had railways as in Australia. The fellow from the Veneto replied: 'We have better ones than yours, sons of bitches'. Oh well, patience, they are not even informed on the specific field in question, emigration. They are really convinced that Italy is pouring out all the surplus of her over prolific population onto Australia. Do they in fact know how many Italian migrants, cause of all the stir, landed in Australia for the whole of 1924? There were 4,286. They are staggered when told that in 1923 we sent 93,000 emigrants to Argentina for example or 183,000 to France. And it is for these 4,286, this infinitesimal percentage of Italians, healthy people, model workmen, who come offering two solid arms and a willing heart, that commissions are stirred, congresses get agitated, newspapers work themselves into a sweat, because here in Australia, where 99% are of British blood, where even the very latest statistics of January show that 73% of immigration continues to be British, with ugly words the door is slammed shut in the face of a kind of second yellow peril (the olive peril), of the ally of yesterday, the friend of today, the third great European power, Italy.

I speak bitterly, and feel sorry for those Australians, and they are many, who don't share those ideas at all, and who deplore that campaign of denigration, who wish fervidly to see Italians settle in their country. But this hullabaloo has to end, and there is only one way to make sure that it does: to speak plainly. All the protests of our consular

authorities, all the efforts of the Federal Government—it is only right to recognise that it does not miss an opportunity to try to bring to an end or put a brake on that rash language—get nowhere. Only a reaction of our public opinion can restore a sense of international responsibility to that section of the press and Australian politics who have lost it. These things *should not be said*. We have the sacrosanct right to expect that before talking about us they should know us; that before insulting us they should at least learn to distinguish us by name. There are books, if they will buy them. There are statistics, if they will get hold of them. And above all, let them come and see us as we are at home. The demagoguery over Italians has gone on for a year now and there has not yet been a newspaper in Melbourne or Sydney capable of sending a correspondent here to study the problem in depth. If the Italian papers spend hundreds of pounds to send journalists to Australia, the Australian papers could spend nine-and-a-half to send one as far as Cairns.

The problem of foreign immigration, for a country like Australia, is enormously complex, and no one contests the right of Australians to take those precautions and those necessary adjustments to avoid sudden changes and crises which are damaging to everyone. But I maintain that a well considered examination of the facts would clear the ground of an infinity of absurdity and prejudice and would, in the interests of Australians themselves, put the question on a much more serious plane. One of the allegations that gets the Australian working masses worked up for example is that our people work, as they say, at cut rates, that it is at much lower pay rates than those fixed by the unions. Well. I have come here, I have spoken with labour organisers, I have asked them to give me names, to cite facts. They admitted that there could have been, all told, three or four cases. On the contrary, I have found, if anything, that Italians get themselves paid better than Australians. I have before me today a letter from a mining proprietor requesting three Italian miners: the pay offered is 21/- a day, that is two-and-a-half shillings more than the established rate. So the Italians aren't depressing the labour market, they are lifting it. Another complaint is that our labourers sometimes accept pay settlements at the end of the season, or even annually instead of weekly, as exacted by the English. Here too, the unions, confronted with this example, do not consider these as formal contracts within union guidelines, but consider them, in most cases, a rudimentary form of savings deposit. Moreover, how many poisonous insinuations do we hear against the supposed low moral and social level

of our migrants? And just yesterday an ill-mannered and vulgar attack by a protestant pastor, a certain Reverend Whittle, provoked indeed a violent retort from our consul-general Grossardi. That gentleman went to a meeting of the New Settlers League, another extremely extensive association with about 800 branches and which among other things—let it be noted—was created and subsidised by the Federal Government, to say that the level of morality of the southern Europeans is inferior to that accepted in Australia, and that there were districts in north Queensland which were becoming centres of corruption, caused by the introduction of Italians. I don't know what morality the Reverend Whittle is alluding to. I have spoken to priests, bankers, lawyers, English businessmen, and all of them had nothing but words of praise for the honesty and punctuality which the Italians, who enjoy the widest trust, carry on their business. I have found that at Ingham, at Innisfail, at Halifax there are hundreds of our labourers out of work (and so Queensland is not a mecca as many at home in Italy believe), who pay their own living for months, and have a very tough life, and quite a few are even camping in the woods as they travel around, so as not to use up their small savings straight away; and yet, although we are in towns where no one closes the door of the house, you never hear of a theft. I know that in one town in which Italians are at least a third of the population, the police registered 650 cases of British drunkenness in three months, while they registered only 22 Italian cases. The Reverend Whittle would do well to think rather about his own parishioners if it is true what one of his colleagues high up in the hierarchy, the Anglican Archbishop Lees, said 15 days ago in a congress of protestant churches: 'There is too much juvenile criminality in the Melbourne community. Unhealthy dwellings, too little life in the open air, drunken parents are the predominant factors'.

And now we can even change the subject.

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*Corriere della Sera*, 14 July 1925

## PART 2: BOTTOM OF THE CLASS

Innisfail June 1925

It is incredible the way that the bolting of doors against us in America has created prejudice against our migrants in Australia. Even the well-disposed can't manage to get away from the idea that if after half a century of experience the United States has

come to a particular conclusion there must be good reason for diffidence. 'Remember the USA', they say it and they print it in the papers—remember the United States. Not long ago that famous inquiry carried out by some commission or other of American university professors, into soldiers of the American army of diverse national origins, with the object of classifying them according to their mental capacity, had huge circulation. As you know, in the final ranking, the Italians turned out to be the people with the lowest intelligence (inferior by 63.4%), only just overtaken by the Poles. Getting angry is pointless—here they believe in this nonsense. An Australian friend of mine, with whom I spoke of all this business told me that years ago he had read the result of an inquiry of that sort, by those very same professors. Its object was to measure the predisposition to criminality of the various nations. The Irish had the highest percentage, and do you know who had the lowest? The negroes. I'd just like to ask: now that the American university professors have measured everyone else's intelligence, who will measure the intelligence of the university professors?

In any case, let's consider the 63.4%. But it seems that those who are at the bottom of the class are trouncing even those promoted without examination. We are bound to think so, when every day one hears patriotic Australians making great lamentations about the invasion of these Italians who are replacing the English in the plantations. 'The Italian migrants', wrote one of the patriots yesterday, 'are buying up all the plantations, and the Australian planters are getting out'. Since Australia is a civil country in which no one can ever push anyone out of his house without legal permission, the procedure has to be a little less simple. And so the Queensland Minister for Agriculture, McCormack, spelt out to me the reasons that the flow of our people causes concern to the government of which he is a member, although it is favourably disposed in principle to their coming: 'Five years ago barely 20% of proprietors were Italian, now in certain districts 60% of them are. We are moving towards an entire control of the sugar market by the Italians. Since naturally the Italian employer prefers the Italian labourer, you can see how this situation presents serious dangers for the British workers in a not far distant future. Furthermore, this intrusion into the market is no chance conquest, and if such displacement is taking place, there has to be some deeper reason'.



One of the earliest surviving photographs of an Italian cane-cutting gang. Back row, from left: G Nizza, Federico and Giuseppe Pallanza, Severino Ferraris and M Poggio. Front row, from left: Dando Bianco, Pietro Tibaldi, Camillo Zavattaro and Pietro Cantamessa. Halifax, Queensland, c.1909.

Nothing opened my eyes so much as the first day that I went through the district. I had taken a goods train because before the Monday there were no other trains going direct, and there I met up with an Englishman, a railway technician, who was employed on various works along the line. We crossed Ingham in the early morning. Speaking English he told me he too had a little sugar plantation.

*Here in Ingham?*

*Here in Ingham. I actually came from London 14 years ago as a railway employee, you know. Then I put aside a small sum and I felt like buying myself a farm. But I only held on to it for a few months. The life didn't suit me. An Italian came and paid £600 more than I had paid so I gave it to him. It was worth 3,100 then. Can you believe it? He threw himself into it and improved it so much that twelve months later he sold it for 9,000. They are all doing that. I know one man who bought land for 10,000 and who sold it off in lots a few years later for 36,000. And they are buying, my word, how they are buying! Look over here, on this part of this stretch there were once six English farmers. Now there is only one, all the others are Italians. On this side too, they are Italians. Here it was empty land. No one would look at it. Too difficult to work. Look. Beautiful cane. Never been cane before. But it's a life that I don't like. I've still got 42 acres at Mackay that I bought as a bargain, you see. There they are and I don't know what to do with them. As soon as I have the chance I'll give them away, and that's all.*

I don't mean to say that there are not English people who make magnificent planters but it's certain that in general they don't have

the feeling for the land that our people do. They don't have a comparable agricultural tradition. To understand the English one has to bear in mind that they are the ones who made the great industrial revolution of the modern world. Put them in front of a loom, and they exceed the superfluous. Put them in front of a furrow and they barely achieve the necessary. They don't have the tenacity, the patience, the passion of our people. For that reason, they lose out (you always lose when you love less). At Cairns they showed me the 'English' fields in which by December they had already finished the planting. For an Italian who scratches and turns and digs his field right up to April, and doesn't put in an inch of new cane if he isn't first sure of every clod, that is a crime worse than killing someone. And I saw the effects of these two different systems. I was at the farm of a big Italian planter in Victoria [probably the Victoria Mill area near Ingham] and I was observing two cane fields, one of an Italian, the other of an elderly Englishman who had the adjoining farm. The fields were barely divided by a road, and the Englishman's had two-year-old cane, and yet it was the same effect as looking at two figures of that picture: 'I sold on credit' and 'I sell for cash'. There is one particular spot where the Englishman's property projects into the Italian's. This year my man had already nibbled at 20 acres. I am sure that within a couple of years he will have gobbled the rest too.

And this is beyond dispute: that the name and the work of the Italian is by now indissolubly linked to the history of the colonisation and development of these lands. The cultivation of sugar in Queensland is one of the most extraordinary experiences of acclimatization and adaptation that the white race has ever carried out. The sugar growing districts are low alluvial lands extending over a considerable proportion of the coast, between Mackay and Cairns, approximately between 17 and 21 degrees of southern latitude. It is tropical, with a tropical climate. High temperatures, extreme humidity; periods of torrential rain alternated with days of scorching summer heat. Certain points in the north have been compared to Calcutta. When after the very first attempts in 1828, introduction into the country of sugar cultivation on a grand scale began, it was never for a moment thought that one might employ any but a coloured workforce, especially for the fatiguing operations of cutting and transporting from the field. *Coolies*, Aborigines and *kanakas*, natives of the Pacific islands that is, were imported *en masse*, and introduced on the plantations.

But this importation soon clashed with other exigencies of a political nature which by degrees were coming to impose themselves on Australian public opinion. Isolated in the middle of an ocean, in direct contact with a world of diverse races which were spreading enormously and prolific, this handful of whites, which then didn't touch 4 million, scattered over more than 750 million hectares, soon felt that if the door of the house remained open to the infiltration of coloured people, they would inevitably find themselves exposed to the danger of losing their numerical superiority. The White Australia policy became popular, and is still the immovable cornerstone of their system now. The Act of 1888 against the Chinese was the opening shot in this inexorable movement. In 1900 there followed the *Pacific Islanders Act* which closed Australia to the *kanakas* too.

It was a terrible blow for the Queensland planters. The industry was thought lost. Chambers of Commerce, farmers' associations, committees were convened urgently in all the centres of the district to protest against this prohibition and to call for it to be revoked. The opinion of a royal commission was made known: sent to study the problem, it had solemnly declared that 'there was absolute unanimity among all the technicians and the experts interviewed, that *the white man cannot cultivate cane*'. That same year a competent and impartial observer, Leroy Beaulieu, wrote that he couldn't see how it was possible to make Queensland profitable without a coloured workforce. The *kanakas* were considered so indispensable to the plantations that although the law was laid down it was reckoned wise to close an eye for a certain time and let them enter clandestinely, so much so that in 1905 for example, 8,450 were still on the land. That notwithstanding, production immediately came to a standstill.

Let us take as an index the area under cultivation, since production is influenced by too many complex facts, while the area is solid fact; it is land that is alive, wrested from Nature, won for Man and for the marrow. In 1905, the sugar-growing area is 134,107 acres (about 60,000 hectares): in 1907, it is 126,810. When did it start to pick up again? After 1910, that is, after the regular upward movement of our immigration to Australia, and consequently to Queensland, began (naturally, there have always been Italians in Queensland, and the leader of our community, Regazzoli of Halifax, originally from Lodi [Lombardy] came here for example in 1873). Here are the figures of this increase: in 1910, there were 883 immigrants; in 1912, 1,632 immigrants and



Eugenio and Felice Regazzoli pose with friends in front of one of several businesses owned by the brothers. Halifax, Queensland, c.1885.

in 1913, 1,963 immigrants. The next year the war [World War 1] stopped them at 1,642. The sharp decrease was in 1915, with 643. So already that first wave is enough to bring, in five years, the 141,779 acres of cultivated land of 1910 to the 167,221 acres of 1916. But the astounding leap came only after the war, when immigration became invasion. In 1918, there are 160,534 acres of cultivation, in 1923 there are 219,965. These 24,000 hectares of increase are almost exclusively the product of Italian work. Today *kanakas* no longer exist in Queensland; whites cut down the forests, whites break up the earth, whites sow the cane, whites cut it. But the Queensland which in 1901, with the coloured workforce, was producing 90,000 tons of sugar, today with the white workforce produces 400,000!

I maintain that Australians would never have been able to achieve this magnificent redemption of one of the richest and most beautiful parts of their land from the fatal invasion of the coloured races without the cooperation of the Italians. However, this collaboration could not have been the same held with the *kanakas*. The Italians came to Queensland as free men, with all the rights of free men, including that of winning with their own hands their own economic independence. What they have done, and which the Australians seem sometimes to look upon as little less than an illegitimate invasion, is nothing other than the exercise of this right. If the Australians want a white force in Queensland, they will have to resign themselves to the likelihood of seeing the wage-earner of today becoming the master of tomorrow. That is exactly what has happened with the Italians. Their contribution is no longer just assistance with the hard manual labour;



Canecutters R Cavallaro, P Zaia, Alfio D'Urso, M Bonanno, L D'Urso, Guiseppe Lizzio and Salvatore Zappala. Innisfail, Queensland, 1923.

it is organisation, technical improvement, intelligence about the land. Pass through all these districts, and you will find phalanxes who are by now the trustees of the agricultural traditions of the region. Names like Zavattaro, Bellerio, Comba, Cattaneo, Olivero, Ferraris, Russo, Capra, Cattana, Vedasto, Gandossi at Ingham; like Regazzoli, Francantoni, Fracchia, Plebani, Vignolio, Capisano, Venturi at Halifax; like Cataldo, Zampatti, Dalla Vecchia, Maccarone, Martinuzzi, Cantamessa, Celidone, Pasquali, Bullini, Signorini, Stella, Biletta, Calí, Pagano, Cao, Bianchi, Rizzo, Croato, Bombardieri, Valmadre, Moraschi, Cataldo at Innisfail-Mourilyan; like De Martini, Gaspare, Tenni, Omodei, Vanini, Rossetti, Costantino, Saraceni at Babinda; like Prandolini, Ghirardelli, Ravizza, Ciodalla at Cairns; like the hundred others, big and small, who I am sorry not to remember and to have to leave out; they are for the banks, for the refineries, for the English businessmen synonymous with solid savings, capacity for hard work, for solvency and competence. And this is the people, these are the exemplars of the race that the sportsmen of the University of Columbia or of Atlanta failed for mental deficiency.

Yet to compensate, history will record them, and forget the professors.

*Corriere della Sera*, 17 July 1925

### PART 3: A BIT OF A DESCRIPTION

Ingham June 1925

It is hard to say how many there are. I have heard it calculated as 10,000 and it would be a third of all our emigration to Australia. Here in the Ingham district they did a kind of private census and the result was 1,930. With subsequent arrivals, one could reasonably say that this year they have climbed to 2,500. The total population of the district is about 7,000. You can see more or less the proportion.

These 10,000 Italians are for the most part concentrated in the districts of Ingham, Innisfail and Cairns, that is, over an area of eight thousand square kilometres - a total population of twenty-six thousand (according to the 1921 Census). They are therefore still strongly concentrated but one is speaking of a population that is not urban but rural, and clustering does not mean crowding. There are no cities. Cairns, end of the line of the Great North Coast Railway and gateway to the islands, is first. The other centres are nothing. Two or three larger stores, a few shops, a few branch offices of banks, a couple of cinemas, of Greek cafes, of Chinese fruit sellers, is the obligatory equipment of these skeletal habitats. The most conspicuous part are the hotels; at Halifax there are four of them, I think, for about 20 houses. But the hotel is the bar, the place you meet, where business is done, etc. and then the cutters go there to stay in the intervals between one job and the next. When this nomadic population takes off, there are no Italians in town. Always bear this in mind, that the Italian of Queensland is ever a man of the land, and lives on the land.

Even after he has become rich, he stays. The kind of migrant who having made his fortune on the land moves to the city and becomes bourgeois and commercial, is practically unknown here. Nor is there any tendency to repatriate. This explains the relatively modest proportions of their remittances home. The banks, for example, annually deposit about £75,000 generated in the Ingham district, of which however, the greater part is destined as passage money for new migrants. The director of one of the banks which works most with Italians tells me that he knows only one client who makes regular remittances with the intention of capitalising in Italy. The reasons are complex: exchanges, markets, but also to some extent the technology and organisation of the sugar plantation industry



here in Queensland, which requires liquid reserves, leaving the sugarcane farmer without big margins of disposable funds.

The typical form of agricultural contract in the Queensland plantations is called *lien on crop* or *crop-lien* or in short, mortgage on the harvest. It works like this: the buyer of the property pays to the seller only a deposit in cash, generally for a minimum amount (it is said that £300 is enough for a farm of £10,000-12,000) as soon as he takes possession. The remainder is divided into a certain number of annual instalments, payable together with the interest, on the cane crop. The *crop-lien* concluded, this is registered in the Supreme Court as an ordinary mortgage, by which the vendor of the property automatically remains, until the debt is totally discharged, the effective owner of the harvest. The *crop-lien* is communicated to the refinery that gets the cane of the farm that has been sold, and it [the refinery] is obliged and directly responsible for withholding, from time to time, until the debt is totally discharged by the new proprietor, the instalment amount owed to the old proprietor and to pay it directly to him. Close to this and now becoming more widespread under the influence of the Italians who prefer it, is the other, simpler form of agreement which is called *order*: a simple letter in which the buyer undertakes to pay the vendor a predetermined percentage (usually 40%) of the proceeds of the annual crop. This agreement which falls not on the cane as with the *crop-lien* but on the by-product of the harvest is stipulated personally between the buyer and vendor without the intervention of the refinery, naturally gives much less security to the vendor than the other arrangement. This is a noteworthy indication that the presence of the Italians in the market place has been influential in creating a greater trust. However, even with these various forms of agreement, the fact remains that the planter finds himself caught in a long and often complicated chain of commitments to be fulfilled, which even if they have the advantage of setting him up on his own more quickly, bind him for quite a few years to the land and contribute to keeping him there.

On the plantations only cane is cultivated. It could be that the present crisis may lead to some fundamental experimentation in different varieties of farming; until now, where there is land, there is sugar cane. It is a kind of cultivation that keeps the farmer tied up for the entire year. Every year there is generally a part of the farm in which new cane has to be planted. The Italian method is always to do



three ploughings, one in September-October, one in December, the third in February-March. At the end of March-April, they plant. As soon as the cane is at a certain height, a series of auxiliary operations begin—hoeing, weeding of the furrows, etc.—some of which have to be repeated as many as eight or ten times. In June-July the cutting starts. The government inspector who controls the refinery in a particular area (every refinery has its own inspector) fixes with the tributary farms owners, the distribution of teams of canecutters and the order of the work so as to assure the quantity of the cane that will flow through to the factory each day. The cutting goes on until January. The settling up begins in February and ends with the complete realisation of the stocks. It seems this year that the refineries are guaranteeing 43/- a ton on 60% of the harvest (domestic consumption) and 20/- for the rest (excess of production which has to be exported). It is not a very high price, especially if compared with those of the past years, and the new arrivals, who have paid dearly for their land, don't have a brilliant start.

Generally, the Italian farmer prospers. The wealth of the Italians in the Ingham district is valued at £1 million, that is, more than 150 thousand lire, based on the average value of £3,000 per farm; for Innisfail, at £1.5 million which is too much. They are risky estimates and there is always that blessed complication of mortgages, but they are offered as indicators. Put between one and five million the fortunes of the most prosperous, naturally a minority; between 300 and 500 thousand lire the average. Taxes are high. Here there are two, state and federal, and they hit income and business [alike]. I shall quote this example: seventy hectares, two thousand

Antonio Ficarra stands in front of the bridge built by farm owners Dominic Rotondo, Francesco Antoni and FG Buffa. Horsedrawn rail trucks were used to haul sugar cane across the bridge to the mill. Stone River, Ingham, Queensland. 1901.





TOP: Transporting sugar cane. Queensland, c.1920.



Farmers transporting harvested cane by rail trucks to the refinery mills. Queensland, c.1925.

tons of cane, average production £4,000, profit calculated £1,600. Annual pay £191.11.6 that is, about 12% of pure profit. In Australia it is the sugar plantations which yield more in taxes to the state than any other category, except stock-raising.

They are almost all fortunes built on nothing. And it is only in the last few years that the emigrant who brings capital has become frequent: farmers who sell land in Italy to come and buy it here. The great nucleus are all ex-labourers. For three or four years they work in the open, clearing land, planting and squeezing money out of their every muscle. Having accumulated their £300 or £400 of savings which are enough to make a deposit immediately, they cast their eyes on a little farm and install themselves. If luck helps them a little, the way to wealth is open to them. But they remain attached to their origins. They say, 'I began with a pound', or, 'I began with one field'. They wear tie pins made of gold and in the shape of a canecutters scythe, like a badge, their badge of the *self-made man*. They feel the

moral value of their money, that little bit of power they have won by themselves and which gives them, strangers in a strange land, the right to speak and to exercise authority. Among themselves they give each other high-sounding titles such as 'King of Innisfail', 'Emperor of Mourilyan', as a bit of a joke, a bit also because it tickles them. They don't lose their balance. They keep those solid fundamental qualities of our rural populations: tenacity, spirit of sacrifice, economy, tempered, however, by a certain breadth and understanding which has come from contact with a wider world, and which often saves them from the other side of these qualities such as selfishness, mistrust and narrow-mindedness. And like their life, simple but decorous and in whom the traditions and customs of their *paesi* mingle with more modern and less proletarian forms of Anglo-Saxon life. They punish themselves the whole day in the field, driving the tractor up and down, but when they go home in the evening they have a shower and after supper they come down to town in their car to go to the cinema. At table, the main dishes are always the great dishes of our indigenous cuisine, but among the smoking mountains of macheroni, the tons of salad groaning with oil, of the abundance of vegetables, cups of tea and slices of buttered bread are passed around. And the children are called Toni or Mariolin and play 'schiavi' [slaves] on the threshing floor, but in the morning they go to school on horseback and always say *please*. They live in comfortable houses built on top of a kind of palisade of thick beams which keep them off the ground, all of timber, with verandas sheltered by lattice work and roofs of galvanized sheet metal. Paw-paw, banana, orange and mango trees provide a little shade around the house.

It is a healthy colony. We have other healthy colonies, but this is the youngest and has the health of the young: that full and irresistible youthful health which is like the morning smile of Nature. There are no blemishes. The rogue, the ruffian, the libeller, the usual chronic phylloxera of colonial life has not yet made an appearance. They have no political divisions because their opinions are the same. They have no bitter personal divisions of the type that create havoc elsewhere. They have no Capulets or Montagues. Their relative regional homogeneity contributes to the maintenance of cohesion. It is still a colony at the aristocratic stage, the colonial child of a certain city [words missing] almost like the colonies of ancient Greece. An old man said to me: 'Ten years ago Halifax was all Conzano [the Italian town], Ripple Creek was Rovato, Macknade was Ostiglia. Now

Conzano is at Ingham, Brescia and Mantua are at Halifax'. This gives a bit of an inkling of the life here.

Naturally, the increase in migration has brought a greater mixture. A contingent which has been notably reinforced is the Sicilian. The Sicilians are at Mourilyan mainly. There is a road that at first they called Telephone Line and that now the Italians call San Alfio because they are all from that town. I asked a Sicilian about this town that was so prolific. 'On my honour,' the good lad replied, 'On my honour, which more than that of my wife's I revere, I have never heard of it. I think it is near Catania. One of them came here, made his fortune, wrote home. Now they are all here, so I think that not even the mayor is left in town'. The Sicilians are a little bit of a nightmare for the Australians, more than anything because of their extrovert exuberance, farthest from the Anglo-Saxon spirit, like gesticulating too much or shouting too much. Observations of a man from Comasco [in Lombardy]: 'They yell, oh Lord how they yell!' But they are excellent farmers and quite a few have done magnificently, like those Russo brothers who represent one of the most powerful families in the colony.

Aside from the Sicilians, other southerners are scarce: a few from the Abruzzi, the rare Neapolitan, you don't hear anything about the others. There's Gaspare from Rome, one of the lords of Babinda who still rolls a Trastevere accent and apostrophises to the great dome from a distance of 12,000 miles, as if he could see it before him. There are Tuscans especially from the island of Elba; emiliani, sardi, genovesi like the gigantic Rossetti—he too, one of the elders who began as a miner in the west, at Mt Isa, where he was famous for his tremendous boxing ability which he would employ single-handedly against entire gangs, every time he heard someone say something negative about Italians. Italians from the Veneto region are at Innisfail in particular, with people from Vicenza the most prominent. Heading the list, Charlie Dalla Vecchia, another of the old guard, the man who owns the only brick building in the district after the station and the post office, as popular in the bars and on the plantations of the Johnson River as the beer and the jokes he



Transporting harvested cane to the refinery mills. Queensland, c.1925.

tells. There are trevisani, veneziani, friulani and those from Mantua and Brescia are too numerous to count. However, the most formidable group are still the piemontesi. They are the backbone of the Italian colonisation of Queensland. Look at the district of Ingham. All the older people, the pioneers, the masters, are piemontesi. From Piedmont is Frank Castrastellero (32 years in Queensland) made Justice of the Peace for his profound knowledge of the country and his prestige with the English and his co-nationals. From Piedmont is Vignolio (35 years in Queensland) who has retired from the plantation and lives in Halifax with his orchard, his trained parrot and the fine table he keeps where he welcomes you with a broad smile on his honest Canavesian face against a background of mysterious barrels—oh dear—of Barbera wine. From Piedmont is the slow and serious Zavattaro (18 years in Queensland), head of a dynasty as solid as his build. From Piedmont is Fracchia (20 years in Queensland), one of the most characteristic figures, I think, of the Australian sugarcane plantations who has the last farm in Macknade, right in the middle of the sands and the scrub of the Herbert River where wild horses graze and crocodiles wander. He lives there amongst many others from Casalmoferrato exactly as if he had come out of a farmhouse on the main road of Alessandria.

This is the profile, more or less, of the Italian of Queensland. Now put him into shirtsleeves, on horseback riding the endless and rustling expanse of this sea of intense green cane, the same colour green as the green the new world must have been on the day of Creation, under a torrid sky, and search there for the likeness.