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Elena Purgatorio
The Complete Works of Elena Purgatorio

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The Complete Works of Elena Purgatorio

Elena Purgatorio

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the masters, the law, authority, the rich, the poor, are God's will, and by rebelling against it all, one rebels against God, and by rebelling against God, one ceased to be a good religious person. Observing the infamous things that happen in this world, wanting to destroy them, we cannot do so until God wants it, who with a finger props up the earth, and a sign of all those who are rebels is whether they're convinced that the injustices of this earth are not the work of God, but of those with names.

Furthermore, you stated that in your fifty days of wandering from country to country, everywhere you found anarchists who didn't contradict any of yours words. Either you didn't utter the nonsense you spoke here, or they must have taken pity on you, I don't know, I would like to hear you say something about where this Vincenzo Vacirca arrived from.

In any case, if you like the satisfaction you've had here, your tour will not be enjoyable, since you'll have noticed that for a squalid village, as you called it, you have found seven or eight deluded, exalted people, none as balanced as you, those who would say, damn it, you're right, we sure need a leader! Just as a herd of goats can do without an owner, you too will have to understand what individuals we are, we think of ourselves as goats, and we also told you plainly that if tomorrow a priest comes to speak, he too would have the same motives. How about that?

Only anarchists never agree; the word anarchist scares them, and in their head they've formed a concept of anarchy where, if you have a hundred bucks, I want fifty, and then I want to go to bed with your wife too. Poor world!

Let's scheme for a while now that Don Vincenzo's arrived…

ELENA PURGATORIO

From Cronaca Sovversiva (September 10, 1910)

Cle Elum, Wash.—On the 8th of last August, after much anticipation, we hosted comrade Galleani among us. We were all anxious and impatient to meet him because of what we'd heard about him from our comrades in other localities who, before us, had the pleasure of attending his conferences and appreciating his uncommon value.

It would be a difficult thing for me to summarize, even briefly, what Galleani said in an elegant and persuasive way during the five conferences held between us.

Against Capitalism, the State, and the Church, he precisely aimed the arrows of his terrible dialectic, demonstrating to the point of evidence how humanity, in order to breath freely and advance towards its redemption, must get rid of these three monsters that oppress and keep it enslaved.

And he lingered especially to talk to us about religion and the Church, to show us all the disastrous consequences that have always resulted from them to the detriment of society, and all to the confusion of one scoundrel of a priest who for some time has taken up residence in this colony with the pretense to "improve and make good Italians" and… skin them, I know, of a little money.

But so that the lash could hit this sad cow more directly, someone thought to organize a cross-examination between them and our Galleani, who willingly agreed to the proposal.

Only there were difficulties to overcome. The reverend "pig priest" (I don't remember his name, strange like his person) would not have accepted a cross-examination discussion so easily if the invitation came from people with ideas opposed to him. We therefore resorted to cunning.

We introduced ourselves to him by pretending to be bigots. Naturally we were received with exaggerated affability and courtesy, which we took advantage of for the trap he would fall into.

We began by complaining that Italians, in general, are ignorant, without faith or respect for religion, who are easily fooled by the first crook who shows up to exploit their good faith. One of these swindlers—we added—has come here and everyone flocks to listen to his heresies.

—He must be "one of the usual ones"—the priest jumped to say (tumbling)—I had to deal with those people several times and I was also friends with several of them.

—Not everyone thinks as you do—we insinuated—if that were the case, thank goodness…

—Yes, it's true, my dears, many times I find those who have tried to contradict me, but I find them easily defeated, humiliated; once even the anarchists applauded me.

He had argued victoriously against Morgari, Costa, Enrico Ferri, and with many others in Italy and America.

The impudence of his pretension was astonishing; his chatter fell thick like hail without giving us time to object to anything.

Finally, after several "pleases" and "excuse me," we managed to blurt out our idea of having him in a cross-examination discussion with that "thing" (our Galleani), that adventurer who had come to fish in the turbidity of this sacred shop.

There were some difficulties, but he ended up accepting, won by our thoughtful insistence.

Comrade Bianchi promised to take care of everything by establishing the time and place of the cross-examination and the conditions of the duels that were to take place. And so the cross-examination took place on Sunday, August 21. The room was packed with people and there were, unusually, a lot of women.

Galleani, amid the general attention, began to speak by making a tight and vigorous criticism of all religions, demonstrating, on the basis of solid and convincing scientific arguments, the absur-

the living example of Amilcar Cipriani, an old fashioned socialist. He replied: Amilcar Cipriani, an old fashioned socialist, as you call him, is in complete agreement with out methods of struggle, that of a well-organized arm, it doesn't forsake any weapon that can contribute to giving it victory and that, not excluding revolution, we hope to establish socialism by conquering public powers.

We also asked him how he could say that anarchists are just four cats, as statistics speak of them, whereas he knows that, since anarchists cannot be recognized by their buttons and are members of no party, therefore the number of anarchists can only be seen at barricades, for just as he has faith in the conquest of public powers, we have faith in these, not because we're violent, bloodthirsty people who love carnage and blood, but for the simple reason that we are convinced nothing can be achieved without force, given everything is defended by force. Perhaps no one recognizes the sacred right of life more than us anarchists, but when our life is taken into such little account, we also must not put the likes of your gentleman into great account, so therefor I repeat to you again, dear Vincenzo, that neither you nor anyone else can know how many anarchists there are, and if a few of you infer it from the press that in just Italy there are only three weekly newspapers, while there are many socialist weeklies and several daily newspapers, I can answer you, according to my modest criterion, that anarchists don't have banker friends to afford so much luxury, and your chatter doesn't do the trick; much better if there were fewer like you, who chatted so much, and those who knew little about socialism now know less, since you didn't explain at all how we would live with your socialism or how we would get there, all you did was to call the anarchists exalted while admitting Kropotkine, Reclus, Malatesta, etc. were great men, no less exalted, but deluded.

I'll finish with one more thing, and I candidly confess that, after your chattering, I didn't think I'd have another one this long. You also stated that one can be religious believers and revolutionary rebels, but I don't agree with this for the simple reason that

want to work, because everyone will be convinced that if you don't work, you won't eat, for work will no longer be abject and humiliating, nor will your reward be to go hungry, as it is now with a salary.

But it certainly won't be the ballot boxes that will take you away from this miserable state, as the esteemed Vincenzo Vacirca wants you to understand. It certainly won't be your representative, who Vincenzo himself urges you to raise into power, who will care more than you once they are at the top. We've had many, many examples, and you also have them with your Union representatives, they're all of the same type, its not your interests that push them high, but their interest, their ambition, and it's not even true, as the lauded Vincenzo wants you to believe, that once in power you can and must supervise them, not out of distrust, but to make them do their duty. It's not true, you can't do anything once you yourselves have elevated them, otherwise they'll just point you out to a policeman and have you arrested, and then you'll no longer be able to elect them once your time is up, it's true, I know this, so do you think this other one is better?

For me, this is called the "passing the buck" game, and your conditions will always be the same, while what are the anarchists asking of you? Nothing, they offer you everything, life, thought, and action, what they want from you is solidarity, and instead they receive insults and mockery while they fight for your own interests, for the betterment of everyone, and their disinterested propaganda proves to you that they ask nothing for themselves, but what they want they want for everyone. The same cannot be said for the socialists, however offended Vincenzo was when, as to his question why we fought intellectual socialists who understood that the correct theories are anarchist ones, I replied that these intellectual socialists did so out of interest, out of thirst for power.

Since, if they were in good faith, they wouldn't bother to climb, given they well-know that with the best will in the world they'd never be able to do anything for those who elevated them, I cited

dity of the idea of a god who created everything in existence, an invisible spring which animates the universe, synthesis of all perfection. And so the great tyrant of the heavens, the god of biblical legend, the fearful and terrible ghost created by human ignorance, melted and disappeared at the touch of that inexorable criticism.

Galleani's word rang loud, clear, and evocative over the crowd of listeners who finally burst into thunderous, insistent, enthusiastic applause.

The priest, pale with dismay (he realized, too late, that he was not dealing with "one of the usual ones"), began his peroration with broad gestures and halting words. To ingratiate himself with his audience, who saw him won over to our cause by Galleani's fascinating words, he expressed himself in terms that made people believe he wanted to declare himself an anarchist. Then he continued to wander through a labyrinth of contradictions without ever reaching a plausible conclusion; big words and nothing else. He spoke badly of socialists and socialism, and in support of his gratuitous statements, he declared that for twenty years he had been studying the social question "without ever having found a single truth" (perhaps he meant that he had understood nothing, which we cannot doubt given the poverty and inconclusiveness of his speech). He still repeated having closely known Ferri and Costa and having been at a banquet with them; and, as an ULTIMA RATIO, to justify his inability to discuss with serious arguments the affirmative thesis on the existence of God and the goodness of religion, he cited the "vastness of the topic" which would have forced him to dwell too long.

Of his god, about who, to tell the truth, he explained little or nothing, limiting himself to saying that he felt it within himself and saw it in the celestial spaces, among the innumerable stars.

And while the priest ended his useless chat with such melancholy, the bystanders sang the workers' anthem.

Poor priest! He hoped to be carried in triumph to the rectory and instead had to leave mortified and confused between smiles of

mockery and commiseration, alone, his tail between his legs like a whipped dog. The sole sacristan, an Austrian, comforted and accompanied him in that sad moment.

Our affectionate and grateful salutations to our indefatigable comrade Galleani, who left for Seattle, and we hope that he can carry out good propaganda everywhere and increase the rebel army with ever new proselytes.

ELENA PURGATORIO

AND THE FLAGS?

From Cronaca Sovversiva (April 22, 1911)

What a pity! The Italian workers of America didn't think of solemnizing the so-called "glorious fiftieth anniversary" of the unification of Italy with Rome as its capital.

Oh the ingratitude from these rude children of the beautiful country!

Yet the vampires of primordial Italy scattered throughout the United States, the masters, the owners of the patriotic and popular newspapers, they didn't fail to warn in due time "that on March 27," after fifty years, was the long-awaited unity of the distant homeland; and those good people siultaneously recommended fulfilling an Italian duty by waving the Italian flag together with the American flag outside homes and shops on the 27th "as a sign of great joy."

So why didn't you do it, Italians?

Why hasn't the example of the Irish, the French, the Germans been followed by which, in similar circumstances, love of country manifests itself solemnly and noisily?

Don't we love the land that saw us born?

All Italian workers should have had two flags, maybe small ones, outside their hovels; one to greet and thank the land that saw us born and grow by driving us away—oh the affectionate

I soon had to convince myself I was mistaken, and the few present with me who weren't ignorant of these politician's aims also had to change their minds, since if we were in perfect accord in pointing out the evils that afflict this suffering humanity, we couldn't agree with his way of treating people.

All his trust was placed in universal suffrage, and he talked about those places where people have fought, even gone to the barricades to obtain it, to obtain this thing so despised and degraded by the anarchists, but which the bourgeoisie also doesn't want to give up, except by force, therefore it's a clear sign that it's not such a vile thing. He spoke enthusiastically about the immense forces of socialism that manifest themselves through the ballot boxes and the numbers of those registered in the party, while the anarchists—he said—he was distant from their theories because he saw them as absurd, senseless, unachievable for many, many reasons of which, now, wouldn't you be interested to know (?), there were four these cats fifty years ago, but there are four, if not three, today, and the United States has just a thousand of them, while there are millions of socialists.

He continued for a long time from once piece of nonsense to another, even contradicting himself sometimes with collectivism and communism, as anyone who's heard something of it can affirm, but those present, despite not being at all interested in his chatter, enjoyed hearing him continue in that tone only to hear him counter against us, who were six or seven. In everything else he was indifferent, even recognizing our good points, but only out of a spirit of contradiction, for he didn't want to agree with us, always citing the same reasons, namely that if what we desired came about, no one would work anymore, we would kill each other, everyone would live in the city, etc., etc.. In short, he judged the future society against the present society, in which we're forced to snatch bread from each other's mouths, and perhaps he thinks no one would work if they weren't forced, while I think all individuals, especially the next generations after the great revolution, will

From Cronaca Sovversiva (February 10, 1912)

The comrades, friends and supporters from Alderson and Haileyville have been awaiting some hint regarding the subscriptions made in favor of our dead and heroic Masetti.

The first subscription, made among friends at an intimate gathering in Alderson, brought in $4.00 which was sent along with the $8.70 raised from those attending the conference held at No. 4 Haileyville on the topic of "The Italian-Turkish War."

The total of $12.70 was sent to the lawyer Saverio Merlino through international money order No. 788. Anyone wishing for better clarification and explanation can contact the undersigned. A heartfelt thanks to those who quickly aided Masetti and his family with a highly civil and revolutionary sense of solidarity.

ELENA PURGATORIO

From Cronaca Sovversiva (July 27, 1912)

Sellytown, Ill.—The sad, desolate, and continuous monotony of this insignificant mining camp has been interrupted by the arrival of a socialist orator who appeared in these lands two months ago (was the bread getting hard in Italy?) and who is here to form sections and incite the workers to vote for the socialists.

Nothing bad so far, he was well received, and the Italians of this camp gave him a grateful surprise as they all flocked to listen to him. It also began well when he said that among the Italian workers of America he found an apathy, which surprised and pained him, a disregard for everything that closely concerned him, the impetus to look after their own interests, to seek the causes of their ills and try to eliminate them; he urged them to study, to think, and so from the beginning I began to think that he wasn't one of the usual storytellers out there trying to put people to sleep, and he himself said he didn't want to put them to sleep, but to wake them up, only

mother!—without even knowing where we'd bring out misery and pain; the other as a sign of affection for this land, which always generously welcomes all the sheep to be sheered with open arms.

Come on, a sign is needed, some sacrifice, a day without eating to purchase the two flags to place outside the house; but if you can't really achieve all this, you could at least take any pole, a broomstick for example, attach some rags to it, dirty or clean, it doesn't matter, and thus affirm the patriotic feeling. Who doesn't still have some Italian rags to show off in a foreign land to let everyone know that we are children of the "beautiful peninsula" whose glories we remember, but that we had to escape so as not to die of hunger?

WE also preferred to keep our shame and sadness hidden from her.

And while the Camorra scoundrels, the ravenous horde of rapacious wolves in these colonies, the thieves, the blood-suckers of several million workers, merrily frolicked under the pretext of the "glorious anniversary," we withdrew with dignity, contemptuous and disgusted by so much false and lying enthusiasm.

Italian workers have nothing to celebrate, brutalized as they are by poverty and ignorance. However, wretched and ignorant as the "mother country" wanted and wants them to be, they know a beautiful Italy, united or divided, has been and is prey to a handful of thieves and politicians; they know that the tyrants of the past have been replaced by other, more ferocious tyrants in the guise of a hypocritical democracy, under the shelter of which they commit all sorts of crimes.

The Italian workers who emigrated to this land of pain can hear, carried by the stormy waves of the ocean, the laments of their comrades who die of hardship and poverty in their homeland.—And they will send a curse to their stepmother country on the day she celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of her unity.

And let the thieves in yellow gloves waiting for honors, the political crooks, the exploiters of patriotic sentiment, and all the filthy

bunch of miserable ruffians of capitalism and the State, let them wave their flags; the workers, certainly

not moved by these obscene histrionics, patiently await the day in which they will be able to celebrate a great and singular festival, that of their own redemption, and then they will exultantly hoist their flags and dance happily and satisfied in front of the gallows from which they will hang the executioners who today celebrate the glories of their homeland.

ELENA PURGATORIO Frontenac, Kansas

THE SPRING

From Cronaca Sovversiva (April 29, 1911)

The sweet season, the season of flowers has returned.

Everything invites you to love, to enjoy. But how many will remain indifferent before this grandiose spectacle of nature!

Those who are hungry, those who suffer, have only eyes to see their own miseries.

Yet we should hope that in the sweet warmth of spring the ice of our usual sadness and inertia would melt, and that our dormant revolutionary activities would awaken.

Let's not forget that we are the exploited and mistreated people; the longer we endure the yoke, the heavier it will become, and the greater the effort we'll have to make to free ourselves from it.

And it's disheartening that many of those who would have an interest in sharing out aspiration and helping us in the fight are instead against us and hinder our path.

If I didn't think about the long centuries of servitude in which the working class has lived, and are therefore still full of prejudices, unaware of their own rights, I would almost say that we want to suffer, and I would consider it impossible to achieve our ends among so much ignorance, so much moral and material misery.

Yet it would be enough for a momentary act of WILL and everything could be ours. No more masters, no more priests, no friars, no parasites to support; no more an- guished uncertainty about tomorrow, no more mothers suffering from lack of bread, no more young girls forced to bargain gain with their beauties, no more of everything that afflicts humanity today, but well-being for everyone and a free field to all one's aspirations.

But for the realization of this magnificent dream, we must wake up and act.

We must not say:—unfortunately many say this—"All that's beautiful, but it's still too far away; I could never enjoy it."

This is a foolishly egotistical thought. The measuring cup is already full and a drop is enough for the hatred accumulated over the centuries to overflow with terrible and destructive force: today's utopia could be a tangible reality tomorrow. It's also indisputable that the struggles for the complete conquest of one's rights, even when they don't result in complete victory, always serve to make us take steps forward on the path of freedom, and are excellent training in tempering our consciences for the great daring to which we could be called at a time that no one can specify.

And while waiting for the great social drama to come to an end and the moment of definitive catastrophe to approach, let's do something; let's free ourselves from the obstacles that most obstruct the path through which we must achieve victory.

We are many and we have a lot of strength at our disposal; courage, therefore, and good will; thus we will hasten, perhaps for ourselves too, the spring that will smile eternally on the world of humans. ELENA PURGATORIO Frontenac, Kansas