

# TO ANNIHILATE THE MAFIA

## Italian Troops Arrest Sixty-four Citizens of Palermo, Charging Them with Murder.

### THEY MAY BE TRIED IN ROME

Determination of di Rudini to Wipe Out the Sicilian Society—Fifteen Assassinations in Four Months

—What Is Meant by the Term Mafia.

From August until the end of December, 1897, no less than fifteen assassinations have been committed in and around Palermo, in Italy, each one of which has been laid to the door of the Society of Mafia. Suspected persons have been arrested and discharged immediately after the preliminary examination, so strong had been the evidence they could call up to show that they had nothing whatever to do with the crime of which they were accused. The civil tribunals had become paralyzed with a consciousness of their impotency, and an appeal was made to Rome.

The military authorities of Palermo, acting under direction of Premier di Rudini, who is also Minister of the Interior, have now begun what in reality is a war of extermination against the famous secret society. Recently the carabinieri arrested sixty-four members of the Mafia in Palermo, each on the specific charge of murder or complicity in murder. They will be tried in a military court, and if any attempt is made to rescue them they will be transported to Rome for trial. This is the first time that the Government has proceeded openly against the Mafia, except when its members took refuge, after being outlawed, in the ranks of banditti which, prior to 1895, infested the hill country to the south of the city.

#### Sicilian Papers Non-Committal.

It is a significant fact that, while the journals of Florence, Milan, and Rome are teeming with stories of the crimes committed under the auspices of the society, *Il Corriere del' Isola* and other Sicilian newspapers are silent on the subject or guardedly refer to the arrests as miscarriages of justice which the authorities must soon set right. But, notwithstanding the wholesale arrests, six of the principal members of the proscribed society are supposed by some to have made good their escape to the mountains. The military fear that an attempt will be made by the banditti to enter the city and, with the aid of their citizen confederates, attack the prisons where the members of the Mafia are confined.

Signor Gianelli, the Roman politician and litterateur, has addressed an open letter to the Government through the columns of *La Tribuna di Roma* in which he calls upon those in authority to make a great effort that shall admit of no defeat and not pause until it has swept from the Island of Sicily the pest which has made life and property insecure there for centuries.

"The Mafia," he writes, "is an insatiable and multiform union of persons of all classes, who in the face of all law and order commit assassinations, robberies, sequester estates, control the markets, falsify wills, influence civil or criminal procedure, and even secure their partisans positions in the functions of the State itself. In their ranks are the banditti, Mayors, Judges, thieves, 'crooks,' and deputies!"

The inner circle of the Mafia in Palermo, according to the Roman papers, is composed of seventy members, sixty-four of whom, as has been stated, are now under arrest. It is also asserted in some quarters that the six missing members have escaped arrest simply because they are "victims of the black chair." This is a sinister explanation. When a member of the society is discovered to be a traitor he is captured by the others and taken to their place of meeting. He is made to sit upon a raised chair and his eyes are bandaged. He is then wrapped in long sheets of black cloth, and a member chosen for the deed plunges a stiletto into his heart. The black cloth becomes the victim's shroud; he is buried in it.

#### The Chief a Respected Merchant.

Among the sixty-four prisoners is the supposed chief of the society, Signor di Dongoli, one of the best known and heretofore most respected merchants of the city. He is well born, as his name signifies, finely educated, and has a fortune estimated at over 1,000,000 lire. From letters seized it has been discovered that the band had been in the habit of kidnapping the children of wealthy parents and had also been engaged in counterfeiting. The authorities have discovered proof that on one occasion 100,000 lire was paid to the Mafia by a Roman Prince in order to regain possession of his son, a boy of twelve years. The name of the Prince is not revealed, but he is said to be one of the Colonna. The Prince has never, it is supposed, talked of the affair. The officers of the carabinieri learned of it through the letters that came into their possession.

#### The Society's Long Arms.

In June, 1897, a large box labeled "Pane" was opened by mistake at an express station in Palermo. It was found to contain 500,000 lire in counterfeit banknotes. The police were called, but were afraid to touch it, so the cover was carefully replaced and it was sent to its destination, which happened to be the shop of Signor di Dongoli.

So completely in the hands of the Mafia are the affairs of the city, says *La Tribuna*, that well-known citizens who are not of the society are afraid to testify in the courts until a hint has been given them as to what the Mafia expects them to say. Even Princes, officers, Prefects, and the higher magistrates are more or less within the meshes of the society, and they find it more profitable to become members and reap the benefits of the tremendous power under its dominion than to injure its most humble subject, even in the cause of justice.

The Mafia never forgives, never excuses, never accepts explanations; a transgression is always punished; the punishment is always death.

#### The Origin of the Mafia.

The origin of the Mafia dates back to the time of the Princes of the Swabian line and the catastrophe which ended the reign of Charles, Duke of Anjou, on the island; in other words, to the date of Sicilian Vespers, Easter Monday, March 30, 1282. While the French, who were masters of the island, were holding festivities a Sicilian bridal train passed by. A French officer named Drochet, under pretense of searching for arms, used the bride rudely, and was stabbed to the heart with his own sword in the hands of the bridegroom. The Sicilians at once drew their stilettos and murdered the 200 Frenchmen present. The populace ran through the city crying "Death to the French!" Even the churches proved no sanctuary, and all the French on the island were slaughtered, without distinction of rank, age, or sex. The number that perished is estimated in all at about 800. These words then became the motto of the islanders: "Morte alle Francese Italia anello." (Death to the French is Italy's cry.) The initial letter of each word, M. A. F. I. A., spells the modern and common name of the dreaded island society.

#### What the Mafia Really Is.

In spite of what the Roman papers say, it is doubtful if the actual Mafia, per se, exists to-day except as the word may be applied to all secret Italian societies that have for their objects mutual benefit through the evasion of the laws, robbery, and assassination. Sicilian smugglers were first called Mafia about a century ago, and since then writers of romance have been responsible for the belief that the word Mafia represents a definite society, whose members are banded together for the commission of crime. Italians use the term symbolically, but with so much force as frequently to deceive foreigners into believing in its definite and romantic attributes.

What *La Tribuna* means in speaking of the "inner circle" in reality is probably an exclusive class of Sicilians who have banded themselves together to commit the deeds alleged. They are the Mafia par excellence; but in the same way, although in a lesser degree, nearly every Sicilian is a *Mafioso*, for the simple reason that the islanders find it convenient to be banded together when they wish to defy the law.

In this country the same principle of unity exists among the Italians. But often what is called Mafia consists, in truth, of very harmless secret benefit societies. Occasionally, however, the Sicilian principle is introduced, and an injury to a member is revenged by the machinations of the whole body, which at the cry of "vendetta" passes from a mere beneficiary group to one of defense, and finally to offense and crime.