

**UNITED STATES BUREAU OF
EDUCATION. CHAPTERS FROM THE
REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER OF
EDUCATION, FOR 1893-94: EDUCATION
IN ITALY AND RUSSIA; PP. 325-422**

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EDUCATION

IX

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CHAPTER VIII.

PUBLIC INSTRUCTION IN ITALY.

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PREFACE.

The last twenty or thirty years have seen extraordinary progress in popular education all over the civilized world, and notably so in England, France, and Italy. With what has been accomplished in the first two countries the American public is measurably familiar. But even scholars and educators generally have little knowledge of the educational work that has been going on in Italy at the same time. This fact is the reason for the preparation of the present monograph.

As the reader will see, the writer treats the subject quantitatively rather than qualitatively. A critical estimate of Italian education would require a more intimate knowledge of the subject than he can lay claim to. His main object has been to present in outline the system of public instruction that has been evolved in Italy since the establishment of the Kingdom.

The writer expresses his obligations to His Excellency Count Pullet, under secretary of state for public instruction of the Kingdom of Italy; to Prof. O. F. Restagno, the Count's secretary, and to Signor Lucigi Cippitelli, inspector of schools of Rome, for documents and other valuable information. His thanks are especially due, however, to Dr. Egisto Rossi, of the Italian statistical bureau, author of a monograph on education in the United States, for documents and other substantial assistance.

CONTENTS.—*Unification of Italy.—The Educational State of Italy in 1861.—The Dawn of the New Era.—General Political Facts.—The Casati Law.—The Administration of Public Instruction.—The Asilo.—Day Elementary Schools.—Evening and Holiday Elementary Schools.—The Teachers of Elementary Schools.—School Supply and Compulsory Education.—Normal Schools.—Secondary Classical Schools.—Secondary Technical Schools.—The Universities.—The Superior Institutes.—The Superior Special Schools.—Miscellaneous Schools: Institutes of Mercantile Marine; Special Schools and Practical Schools of Agriculture; Schools of Music; Industrial and Commercial Schools; Academies and Institutes of Fine Arts; Musical Institutes and Conservatories; Military Institutes and Schools of Marine.—Government Libraries.—Twenty Years of Public Schools in Rome.—Finance: Teachers' Pensions.—The Warfare upon Ignorance.—Summary and Conclusion.—Authorities.*

THE UNIFICATION OF ITALY.

The eloquent words with which Sismondi closes his History of the Italian Republics have often been quoted as a fitting characterization of the State of Italy in the period following the Treaty of Vienna and preceding the first events of the series that led immediately to Italian freedom and union. "Italy is crushed, but her heart still beats with a love of liberty, virtue, and glory; she is chained and covered with blood, but she still knows her strength and her future destiny; she is insulted by those for whom she has opened the way to every improvement; but she feels that she is formed to take the lead again; and Europe will know no repose till the nation which in the dark ages lighted the torch of civilization with that of liberty shall be enabled to enjoy the light which she created." Politically, however, the period was more tersely characterized by Prince Metternich, when he said so cynically, "Italy is a mere geographical designation."

Not to go further back, Italy had been trampled under the feet of foreigners from the close of the fifteenth century to the close of the eighteenth—the French, the Spaniards, the Germans, and the Austrians. It was divided into numerous States, all weak, all small, all despotisms; only two, Sardinia and the Papedom, having Italian rulers, and most of them more or less dependent upon foreign powers. Italian patriots could find no language too strong to describe the hopeless degradation of their country. When Napoleon came he overthrew nearly all of the existing States and made the major part of Italy immediately dependent upon France, or rather upon himself; still, by sweeping away ancient abuses and confusion, and introducing many much needed reforms in legislation, in administration, in judicial practice, in the fiscal system, in education, in means of communication, he strengthened the sentiment of union, and contributed to the development of a real national life. But with his downfall the new régime came, at least seemingly, to an abrupt end.

It was the aim of the diplomatists who at Vienna rearranged the map of Europe practically to restore the state of things existing in the peninsula before the French Revolution; but they did not reckon with the progress of thought, of which the revolution was in part a cause and in part an effect.¹ In the years intervening between 1815 and 1859 powerful causes were silently undermining the numerous potentates who ruled in Italy, with the sole exception of the King of Sardinia. The country below the Alps is a geographical unit. The

¹"Since the fall of the Roman Empire (if not even before it) there had never been a time when Italy could be called a nation any more than a stack of lumber can be called a ship."—Forsyth, quoted by Marriott, *The Makers of Modern Italy*.

²"The Italy of 1815 differed but little from the Italy of 1748; but in 1815 there were hopes which had no being in 1748. Italy was divided on the map, but she had made up her mind to be one."—Dr. E. A. Freeman: *The Geographical History of Europe*.

people of the twelve or fifteen States all stood in a similar relation to the great name of Rome. Mentally and morally, they constituted one people—the Italians. They all used the language in which Dante wrote his immortal poems; they all participated in that marvelous growth of democratic ideas and shared in that ardent desire for national life, which are such powerful elements in recent history. Accordingly, nothing but favorable external conditions, such as actually existed in 1859–1870, were necessary to enable the Italians to achieve the substance of the dreams of their prophets and patriots for many hundreds of years.¹ A recent writer has well said that Italian unification is the most romantic if not the most important exemplification of “the consolidation of kindred and contiguous States, or rather bundles of States, on the basis of the vital principle of nationality.”² And still another: “The rapid creation of the present Kingdom of Italy, after her long and bitter oppression, is one of the marvels of modern history, and evidences how much may be done by the courage and wisdom of a comparatively few master minds, and how true is the motto of the patriot, ‘never to despair of the Republic.’”³

THE EDUCATIONAL STATE OF ITALY IN 1861.

But the political unification of Italy, necessary as it was to that end, by no means realized the Italian ideal. Of itself alone, it could not even permanently endure. While physical force may overthrow and wholly destroy those ideas and sentiments that assume the form of objective political and social facts, it can not, save indirectly and in the long run, alter men's convictions or change their modes of thinking and tones of feeling. Force put an end to English rule in the Thirteen States, and crushed slavery in our civil war; but some other and higher form of power was needed to blend those States together in a vital federal union and to make the emancipated slaves fit for the rights and duties of freemen. Garibaldi's sword could overthrow the Bourbon dynasty in the Two Sicilies, but it was a powerless weapon against the ignorance and superstition that had so long been startling social facts in that Kingdom. It was essential that the mental and moral life of the people should be cleaved at its fountain. This fact the best of

¹ Napoleon said at St. Helena: “Italy is one sole nation. The unity of customs, of language, of literature, in some future more or less distant, will unite all its inhabitants under one sole government. * * * Rome is undoubtedly the capital which one day the Italians will select. * * * It is necessary to the happiness of Europe that Italy should form one sole State, which will maintain the equilibrium on the continent between France and Austria, and on the sea between France and England.”

Count Cavour said in Parliament but a few months before his untimely death: “The choice of a capital is determined by high moral considerations. It is the sentiment of the people that decides. Rome unites all the conditions, historical, intellectual, moral, which form the capital of a great state.”

² Marriott: *The Makers of Modern Italy*.

³ Sir R. Phillimore: *International Law*.

the Italian leaders understood perfectly well. Mazzini, the republican idealist, who defined democracy as "the progress of all through all under the leadership of the best and wisest," placed equal stress upon education and instruction as means for accomplishing his purposes. Massimo d'Azeglio, who was a man of a much more practical mind, although an artist and man of letters, used to say, "Before forming Italy we must first form the Italians." D'Azeglio "endeavored to educate the youth of Italy in a higher political creed than the assassination of tyrants,"¹ including in the programme that he laid down in 1848, the promotion of education and the establishment of schools. It is no disparagement of Cavour, of Victor Emmanuel, and of Garibaldi to say that the value and permanency of their work waited upon the school-teacher with his primer.

"In the matter of education, the Kingdom of Italy at the time of its formation might almost be described as a desert, broken here and there by an oasis of matchless fertility and luxuriance. The learning of the learned was high, and the ignorance of the ignorant profound."² The writer might have added that the learned were few, the ignorant many. This conjunction of high learning and profound ignorance was due to two conspicuous causes. From early times the Italian universities had maintained high standards of culture; the public authorities had most grievously neglected popular education. Touching the second of these facts, the ordinary tests are decisive.

By the end of 1861 the Kingdom of Italy, as it now exists, had been formed with two important exceptions: Venetia continued subject to the Austrian Emperor until 1866, and Rome to the Pope until 1870. The census of 1861, back of which the Italian authorities do not commonly go in presenting educational statistics, accordingly does not embrace those important provinces. It may be added that in 1871 they contained 3,647,000 of the 28,801,000 people of Italy.

Proportion, per 100 inhabitants, of the Italian population able to read in 1861.

	Males.	Females.	Total.
I. Without distinction of age.....	27.80	18.27	21.68
II. From 6 to 12 years of age.....	20.91	14.67	17.74
III. From 12 to 20 years of age.....	32.89	24.38	28.63

To state the totals from the opposite point of view, 78.06, 82.21, and 71.45 per cent of the several descriptions of persons were unable to read, or were, as the Italians say, *analfabeta*.

To a person accustomed to study such statistics, this table is full of interest. The relative number of illiterate persons is very large. The difference between the number of illiterate men and women is much too great, while the per cents of illiteracy in the several periods are

¹ Marriott: *The Makers of Modern Italy*.

² *The Encyclopædia Britannica*: Article "Italy."

comparatively uniform. In well-educated countries the years from 6 to 12 and from 12 to 20 are school-going years, and the relative number of persons of such ages able to read, especially of those from 12 to 20, is larger than the relative number of such persons of all ages.

Of the men who married in 1866, 59.96 per cent, and of the women 78.97 per cent, or 69.465 per cent of both sexes, signed their marriage papers with a cross. Of the total number of conscripts drawn for the army the same year, 64.01 per cent were illiterate.

The statistics showing the educational backwardness of the Kingdom at its formation become still more impressive when considered with reference to geographical distribution. Any person having a general familiarity with Italian history and current life may find matter of serious instruction in the following table. It shows most conclusively that those parts of the Kingdom were best educated where government had been best, and the people freest where industrial, commercial, and moral life were most active, where national sentiment was strongest—in a word, where modern progressive ideas had taken deepest root.

Proportion, per 100 inhabitants, of the Italian population able to read and write, or at least to read, in 1861, according to compartments.

Compartments.	Males.	Females.	Both sexes.
Piedmont.....	59.25	39.29	49.23
Liguria.....	42.76	24.86	33.60
Lombardy.....	51.50	41.03	46.34
Venice.....
Emilia.....	27.81	18.71	22.43
Tuscany.....	31.69	28.08	25.99
Marches.....	22.52	11.73	17.04
Umbria.....	21.41	10.62	16.17
Rome.....
Naples.....	20.52	7.17	18.74
Sicily.....	15.77	6.18	11.40
Sardinia.....	14.83	5.60	10.28
The Kingdom.....	31.91	18.73	25.32

a Not covered by the census of 1861.

Once more, 68.19 persons in every 100 of the male population 6 years of age and upward, and 81.27 of the females, were illiterate. From 20 years of age and upward the corresponding ratios were 65.47 and 81.52 to the 100. Such was the educational condition of Italy in 1861—the country in which the Renaissance was born and in which it attained its fullest development! Plainly, the Italians stood in need of a mental and moral regeneration. Besides, although powerful forces had been working in the direction of unity for a half century, there were also particularistic or divisive influences at work. The people of the old states needed to be welded together and be made to respond still more strongly to the national spirit. Nor could any other cause contribute so powerfully to both these ends as a really national system of education that should reach all classes and conditions of men.

THE DAWN OF THE NEW ERA.

Fortunately a new educational era was already dawning. It is an interesting fact that the Casati law, with which the new era opened, was enacted by the Sardinian parliament the very year that saw the first practical step taken in the direction of political unity. It bears the date Turin, November 13, 1859. The battles of Magenta and Solferino, which freed Lombardy from the Austrians and secured her union with Piedmont, were fought June 4 and June 24 of the same year. In 1860 Tuscany, Parma, Modena, the Roman legations, the Marches, and the two Sicilies were united with the northern provinces, and in 1861 Victor Emmanuel was proclaimed King of Italy. Venetia took her place in the new Kingdom in 1868 and Rome hers in 1870. In the meantime the system of education inaugurated in 1859, with modifications, was applied to the several provinces immediately on their becoming free and taking their places in the national system.

The fact is, however, that the law of 1859 was not an abrupt beginning of the new order of things. The following summary, prepared by another hand, reveals a long series of steps leading up to it:

MEMORABLE DATES.

1729 and 1772. Establishment of famous royal constitutions by princes of the house of Savoy, through which the control of secondary education was taken away from the religious orders, and the Collegio delle Province, with one hundred free scholarships, was established with the aim of preparing, in connection with the university, teachers qualified to give this instruction. Schools of methods were established to prepare teachers for primary schools, and with the title of *Magistrato della Riforma*, the germ of a well-organized council of public instruction appeared.

1786. Reorganization of rural schools in Lombardy, the decree stipulating for the schools of the poor.

1802. Sub-Alpine republics decreed that all communes should establish elementary schools.

1808. Schools reorganized in parts of Italy under French domination. Academies established at Turin, Genoa, and Pisa as integral parts of the University of France.

1813. Reorganization of public instruction in Rome.

1818. New school law promulgated in the Lombardian-Venetian kingdom, which in 1822 became the code of education for that part of Italy.

1844. Establishment of "Asili d' Infancia," infant schools, in Piedmont, which were the beginning of the well-organized school system.

1847. (Decree of November 30.) Office of minister of public instruction created.

1849. Establishment of "Società d' Istruzione e d' Educazione" in Lombardy-Venetia, which has been of great assistance in the organization of the present public school system.

1859. Promulgation of the "Legge Casati," or school law, named from the minister of public instruction at that date, which forms the basis of the present school system, as it provided that each commune should maintain an elementary school, that teachers should have certificates of capacity, that there should be great strictness in university examinations, etc.

1867. Religious corporations abolished and their schools classed as private. Other modifications of law of 1859 made.

1877. Instruction made obligatory for children between 6 and 9 years of age.