

ENRICO CARUSO WRITES TO MEPHISTO

He Corrects Some Misapprehension with Regard to His Personal Affairs as Well as with Regard to Present Conditions in Italy

JUST before his departure from New York for Mexico, where he is to fulfill an engagement under the distinguished protection as well as patronage of Carranza, the President of the Republic, Enrico Caruso sent me a letter in which he controverts a number of statements that I, and for that matter others, have made with regard to some of his personal affairs, and also with regard to conditions in Italy. And here is what our good friend Caruso says:

"Dear Mephisto:

"In the last issue of MUSICAL AMERICA in your MUSINGS you state that my sudden and unexpected return to America was principally due to the troublous conditions in Florence.

"I must deny this statement as it is quite untrue.

"Almost everybody here knew that I was going to be back in New York on or about the middle of August. I stated so before my sailing on account of my engagement in Mexico.

"You see that the offer of Mexico City did not meet me immediately on my landing here, but it was settled long before my departure for Italy. Really I do not understand how all these untrue informations about my trips spring out.

"These misstatements, you may easily understand, harm me terribly in every way and therefore I would like you to say in the next issue of MUSICAL AMERICA that:

"(a) My contract with Mexico has been arranged and duly signed in February, 1919, and not at the pier of Hoboken on my arrival.

"(b) I always intended to go to Mexico as the fulfillment of a contract is religion to me. In fact I

am leaving for Mexico the day after to-morrow.

"(c) I spent two most enjoyable months of complete peace in my house at Signa, studying and attending to my own business in which nobody has ever the right to interfere or to comment upon.

"(d) I enjoyed my stay in Italy: charming, interesting and tranquil as ever.

"(e) The general conditions of my country are a great deal better than those of the other countries that suffered the strains of the great war. You might have known that the Italian people know how to suffer nobly and silently even in the darkest moments. And above all they never take advantage of their misfortunes for advertising purposes. I think that all the informations are purposely twisted by those interested to put my person in bad light before my own Country and to defame Italy.

"Evidently they are jealous of Italy's union and progress but we will fight desperately until our supreme rights and our ideals will agree with and satisfy entirely our expectations.

"(f) Permit me to tell you that you have been grossly misinformed about prices in Rome or Milan. A decent sized meal for one DOES NOT COST from 8 to 15 dollars!! My own experience is that in one of the most fashionable restaurants there we had a Lucullian dinner served for five at the price of 150 lire, which at the exchange of today, represents less than 15 dollars!!

"I do not think that you can get anywhere a dinner for five people at that price.

"Tout le Monde Est Pays.

Right here in New York City the other day, in one of the hotels I PAID five dollars for a broiled chicken, 50 cents for two raw eggs and 25 cents for two rolls!!!

"Pardon me for the trouble I am giving you and believe me with kindest wishes and regards, and many thanks,

"Sincerely yours,
"ENRICO CARUSO"

* * *

With regard to item "a" in the indictment, let me say that the statement concerning his contract with Mexico appeared in all the press as "news" and, consequently, "everybody" did not know it beforehand.

With regard to item "b," we all know that Caruso is very faithful in regard to his contracts, but it was not known that he had made a contract to go to Mexico, as far back as February.

With respect to item "c," permit me to say that I cannot understand how our good friend can assert that he "spent two most enjoyable months of complete peace at Signa," seeing that the first thing he did, according to all the reporters he met on his arrival in New York the other day, was to bewail and bemoan the manner in which he had been treated at home, how the people had come to him and in spite of his having sung to them, had taken all his wine, his ton of olive oil and, indeed, had also walked off with all the American hams which he had imported.

And if my memory serves me, the great tenor had permitted accounts to come to this country of the suffering he was enduring owing to having been deprived of his automobile and, as his home was on a hill, he had been compelled to walk.

With regard to Italy being as tranquil as ever, evidently he has not read the recent reports with regard to Fiume, where d'Annunzio has entered with a large army, forced the English and American troops to withdraw and haul down their flags, all of which may result in international complications, in the fall of the Nitti Ministry and, possibly, in revolution. This scarcely agrees

with Caruso's statement that things are so peaceful and satisfactory in Italy.

With regard to what Signor Caruso says concerning the disposition of some people to defame Italy, I think that is the outcome of absolute misapprehension. The Italians may feel a certain resentment to us on account of President Wilson's known stand on the question of Fiume—and it must not be forgotten in this connection that Italy signed a contract with the Allies when she entered the war that Fiume was to remain independent. However, be that as it may, while the Italians may have a certain feeling towards Americans, it is very certain that Americans have none but the kindest feeling towards the Italians. In fact, I would say that at the present moment, after the French and Belgians, the Italians are the most popular people in this country of all the foreign nations.

With regard to what the eminent tenor says concerning the prices in Rome and Milan, I can only say that the statements that I referred to appeared in the most reliable and prominent New York daily papers, particularly the New York Times, which as we know prides itself that it only prints "the news that's fit to print," even about the prices of food, here or abroad.

However, when our dear Caruso asks us to sympathize with him because the other day in New York, at one of our hotels, he paid \$5 for a broiled chicken, 50 cents for two raw eggs and 25 cents for two rolls, I am afraid that we are not inclined to shed any salt tears. And I think that I am not alone in saying that if I were a world renowned tenor, could get \$2500 every time I sang in New York, \$7000 a night for ten performances when I sang in Mexico City, from \$5000 to \$6000 whenever I sang in Buenos Aires, and had an income of \$150,000 a year from my talking machine records, I think that I would not kick very hard if I had to pay even \$5 for a broiled chicken, 50 cents for two raw eggs and 25 cents for two rolls.

While in justice to Signor Caruso I have printed his letter, I am a little sorry he wrote it, for the reason that I am afraid that the roseate view he has given of conditions in Italy which, by the bye, does not seem to be shared by any of the well meaning Americans who have been in that country of late, may have a strong influence on the funds that are being raised in this country to assist the Italian sick and the wounded, and notably to secure shipments of milk for the poor children of the Italian peasants who have suffered so terribly.

It might not be amiss for Signor Caruso on his return to refer to the interview with Mme. Alda, who has just returned from Europe, and which interview appeared in the New York Times of recent date. In this the distinguished soprano of the Metropolitan, and wife of Gatti-Casazza, says that no one would believe the state of the devastated cities, towns and villages, or the awful desolation lest they saw it with their own eyes. She advises Americans to go and see for themselves what war has meant for these countries and the condition it has left the people in. She states that food is almost impossible, except for those who have considerable means, that in Paris, for instance, a chicken costs 6 francs and other articles in proportion. A tailor-made suit to-day costs \$500.

As regards Italy, she says the food conditions are a little better but there is still serious shortage in some sections of the country, especially of coal, so that industry has not yet started up.

And before I forget it, let me add the testimony of Mme. Alda something that was said by Giuseppe Bamboshe, Assistant Director of the Metropolitan and the musical secretary of Gatti. He has, as you know, just returned from two months' visit to Italy and France "Europe," says Bamboshe, "is a good place to stay away from just now. Living is cheap even in New York compared with the cost of ordinary things in Italy and France."

This agrees with my own idea, namely that Italy needs every bit of help that she can get. Every dollar that can be raised should be quickly and generously given. And I may be pardoned if I say that those who tell us the truth of her condition and arouse us to sympathize with her and her brave and suffering people, are far more her true friends than those who would camouflage the situation and virtually say that she needs no help.

Evidently Signor Caruso does not read the New York daily papers, but does read MUSICAL AMERICA, which evidence of his judgment as well as his good taste, says

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