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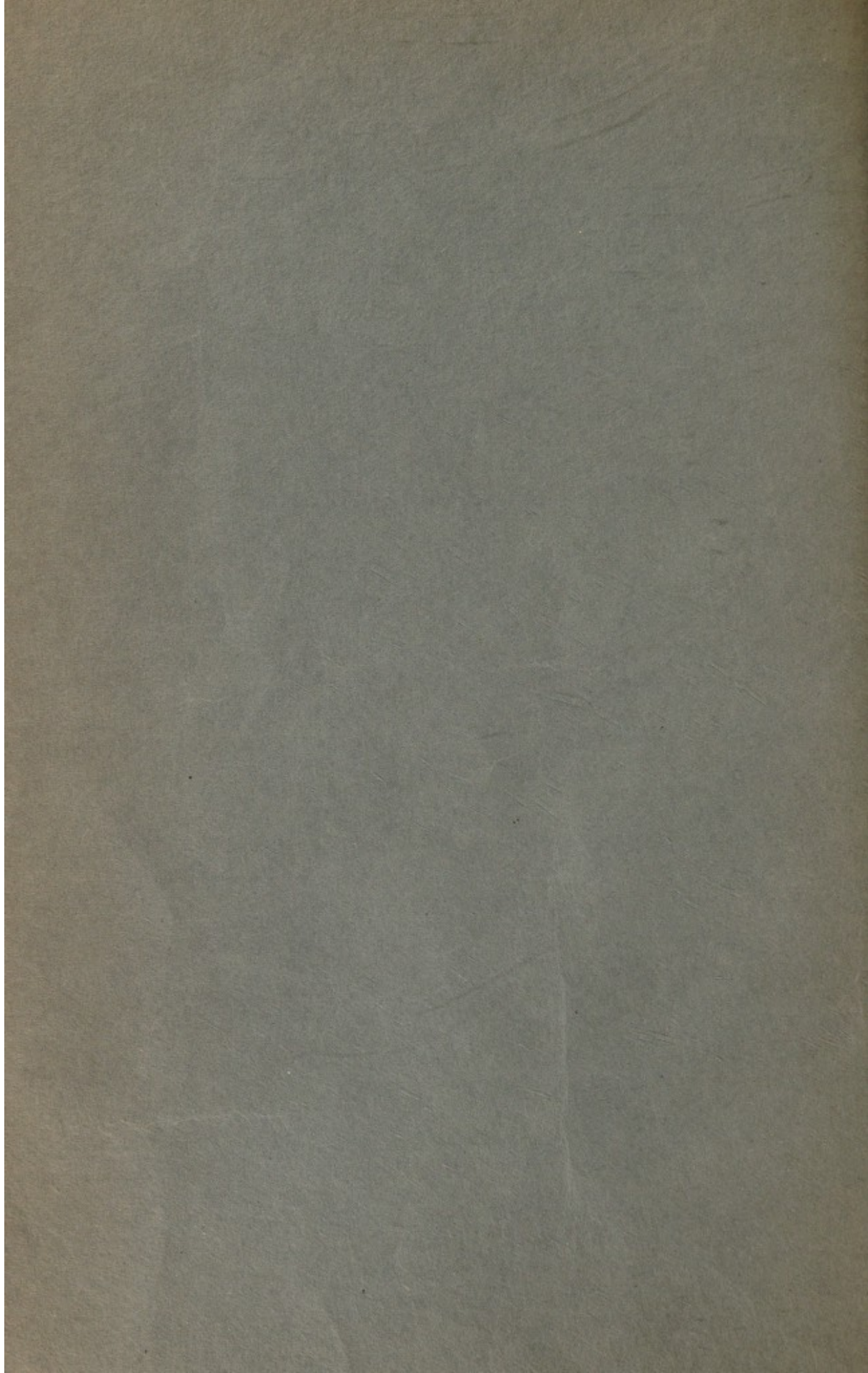
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Cesare Lombroso


by

Guglielmo Ferrero.









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*Century*  
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## LOMBROSO, PROPHET AND CRIMINOLOGIST

BY GUGLIELMO FERRERO

CESARE LOMBROSO belongs, like Spencer, Darwin, and Taine, to the class of naturalist philosophers who have applied the methods of natural science to the study of psychological and social phenomena. After studying medicine, he became a professor of psychiatry, and devoted himself to pathological anatomy, to anthropology, to morbid and normal psychology and to sociology; but if I were asked to say what Lombroso really is, I should neither call him a naturalist nor an anthropologist, nor a sociologist; I should call him a Jewish prophet in the garb of a modern philosopher. This is the most accurate and comprehensive definition of his personality.

### A MODERN PROPHET

LOMBROSO belongs to a Hebrew family of Verona, and among all the great Jews of the present century he is perhaps the one in whom are most intensely embodied the most original characteristics of his race, namely, the ethical spirit and the passion for social reform. Renan has already noted, that whereas the mission of Greece was esthetic and philosophic, that of the Jews is moral. While Greece was strong to realize the ideal of absolute beauty and perfect wisdom, the Jews of antiquity were tormented by a longing to found the kingdom of absolute justice. This longing was manifested in prophecy, that singular phenomenon of Hebrew history. The prophets from Isaiah to Jesus, who was the last and greatest prophet of all, were social reformers who strove to purify the morals of their nation; and the entire literature of prophecy, which forms the most profound part of Hebrew

literature, is one impassioned propaganda in favor of virtue and justice, conveyed to a world full of vice and violence. After the lapse of many centuries the gift of prophecy may once more be noted in the Hebrew men of genius of modern times, who are all more or less critics and moral reformers—Spinoza, the founder of the first great modern ethical theory; Heine, the implacable scoffer at the moral contradictions of his country; Marx and Lassalle, the two great leaders of German socialism, who strove to reform the commercial morality of our times; and Max Nordau, who has analyzed the "conventional lies of our civilization" in a profound and terrible book.

This spirit of ancient prophecy, which was above all a work of criticism and moral reform, is very powerful in Lombroso, and obviously distinguishes him from the other great naturalist philosophers of the present century, such as Spencer, Darwin, and Taine. The latter have studied and solved great problems, but they were always animated by the purely intellectual desire of solving a scientific question; thus, Darwin wrote the "Origin of Species" with the intention of expounding one of the most important problems of biology; Spencer formulated the theory of evolution for the sake of furnishing a new and general formula of life; Taine wrote "De l'intelligence" in order to establish the psychology of thought upon a new basis. Lombroso, on the contrary, is always urged on to scientific research by deep moral motives. In all his books he, on the one hand, proves himself a physiologist and psychologist who applies the methods of science to the study of certain questions; on the other,



an apostle of moral and social reforms, who, like the prophets of olden times, is endeavoring to amend existing morals and institutions. Thirty years ago he engaged in long clinical studies upon the origin of the *pellagra*, a terrible disease which makes havoc among the peasants of Lombardy; and he advanced a new theory which, although violently opposed at first, is now generally accepted. From the point of view of purely pathological and chemical research, it would seem as if no moral element could have any connection with the matter; yet the prophetic spirit is so strong in Lombroso that he made the conclusions of his researches conducive to an agitation for moral and social reform. According to his theory, the disease arose from the fact that the peasants were in the habit of eating bad maize, which the landowners preferred to give them instead of throwing it away; and this fact impelled him to enter upon a violent campaign against the selfishness of landed proprietors, demanding the interference of the Government on behalf of the peasants. For five years he traveled through the parts of the country which were the most afflicted with this disease, giving popular lectures on the measures to be adopted for its cure; he wrote pamphlets in the form of dialogues or short stories on the causes and cure of the *pellagra*, and distributed thousands of copies among the peasants; he tried to organize societies and hospitals in order to fight the disease; until at length the landowners, wearied of this prophet who went about preaching redemption from *pellagra*, succeeded by means of petty persecutions in rendering his life at Pavia, where he was then living as professor, so unbearable that he was forced to remove to Turin.

At Turin, Lombroso devoted himself to a zealous study of criminals. For the last twenty years he has been examining criminals with the patience of a Benedictine, measuring their faces, their skulls, their degree of sensitiveness, studying their diseases and their psychology, collecting an enormous mass of physiological, anthropological, and psychological data. But it would be wrong to credit him with a mind which is capable of undertaking this endless task for the sake of a purely intellectual pleasure in explain-

ing what a criminal really is. The problem he wishes to solve is one of a higher and more complex nature—that of finding a more vigorous method by which a juster proportion between crime and its punishment may be established. Lombroso has not drawn practical conclusions from his studies with the calm indifference of a philosopher giving advice to men more ignorant than himself, but rather with the impassioned ardor of an apostle who feels that he has a noble mission to fulfil upon earth, so much so that the most eloquent pages in his works are always those in which he attacks with violent and ironical criticism the fundamental injustice of our modern method of penal repression, which is more favorable to the evil-doer than to the honest man. He is actually so thoroughly penetrated and pained by the thought of all this injustice that he does not rest content with instituting an immense propaganda against it by means of books, articles, pamphlets, and speeches, but is continually talking of it in his family-circle and among his friends. He often mentions this subject to us; giving vent to a verve of bitter sarcasm against the men who thus neglect justice; and he often becomes so excited in the discussion that he falls into the most extravagant paradoxes. Then he affirms that men are by no means superior to animals, that civilization is a lie, that all things will end in ruin for want of that which is so dear to the Jew—justice. In short, he has solved a great scientific problem solely in order to attain the means of modifying certain social institutions, and the reform of these institutions means more to him than a simple desire: it is a mission to which he has dedicated his life. Scientific research serves to excite in him the prophetic instinct peculiar to his race, by which, if, on the one hand, he is closely related to Spallau, Zani, Lamarck, Darwin, and Spencer by the kinship of great minds, on the other, his ethical spirit renders him a direct descendant of Ezekiel and Isaiah.

#### A GREAT PESSIMIST

PESSIMISM is a transitory state of Aryan thought, but it is the normal condition of Hebrew thought. As Renan observed, in the whole of the Bible there are only two



bright and joyful books—the "Song of Solomon" and the "Book of Ecclesiastes." All the rest, especially the Prophets and the "Book of Job," form one sublime and colossal cry of pain. Even to-day, after the lapse of many centuries, every Jew of genius is almost destined to convey bad tidings to men, for all

In this, Lombroso shares the common fate of his race. Not only has he affirmed that civilization augments crime and that man is fundamentally inclined to evil, but he has formulated the theory which is perhaps the most pessimistic one of the whole century—the theory which was destined to destroy the hero-worship in-



Drawn by Albert Abendschein, from a photograph by G. Vanetti

CESARE LOMBROSO

the great Jewish thinkers have almost always brought to light some painful phenomenon of life. Thus Spinoza announced to mankind that good and evil do not exist; Marx, that society is the battle-field of a desperate struggle between the social classes; Lassalle, that, by the "brazen law," workmen, in spite of their most strenuous efforts, can never earn more than the minimum which is just sufficient to keep them from starvation.

roduced by Carlyle, and which has so many followers in England: I mean the theory that genius is a form of degeneracy. It is not that this theory is pessimistic in itself; for the truth is neither good nor bad, and all theories are equally capable of a pessimistic or of an optimistic interpretation. If the theory of the degeneracy of genius had been discovered by an optimist, he would have found a way of once more admiring the infinite wisdom and goodness of nature, which



knows how to make use even of disease to serve some great purpose. In the mind of Lombroso, on the contrary, this theory became so tragic as cruelly to wound many timid consciences by means of that species of bitter pleasure with which he set to work to destroy old-fashioned illusions with regard to great men and especially by proving that their intellectual greatness is obscured by serious moral defects, and that almost all of them are bad and often criminal. One is almost led to think that there exists in him an extravagant desire to appear as a blasphemer of hero-worship. I shall never forget the satisfaction that he once derived from certain unpublished documents which served to convince him that Galileo was a slanderer and a bad, hard-hearted man—an unscrupulous thief of discoveries made by his pupils. Thus for some time past Lombroso has been beset by the idea of proving that Dante was in reality a criminal. Dante was sent into exile by his political adversaries upon the accusation of extortion. This does not really prove anything, because that was a pretext by which, during the Middle Ages, political parties in power in Italy were wont to rid themselves of their enemies. In spite of this, Lombroso has investigated all manner of documents in order to persuade himself that the accusation was true. He did not find the proofs, and was much discontented, although such an accusation against Dante would create an enormous scandal in Italy, where Dante is venerated not only as the greatest of poets, but also as one of the grandest characters of our history and a hero of righteousness and justice.

#### THE MAN AND THE WRITER

MANY persons are in the habit of judging a writer's personal character from his works. This method, however, if applied to Lombroso, would lead to erroneous conclusions. One of the most curious traits which distinguish this man of genius is the incongruity which exists between his personal character and the scientific work he has undertaken—an incongruity so striking as to make one doubt whether the Lombroso who thinks and writes is the same person as the Lombroso who lives and speaks.

Lombroso will certainly be considered one of the greatest psychologists of the century; for, with a marvelous depth of thought, he has laid bare many of the most abstruse phenomena of the human soul, especially those relating to the psychology of the genius and the criminal. In spite of this, there is no one who has less penetration; for, while he is so great in theoretical psychology, he is as ingenuous as a child in practical psychology, and easily mistakes a fool for a great genius or a knave for an ingenuous enthusiast. He himself frankly admits that those whom he had originally believed his best and most trustworthy friends have proved his bitterest enemies, and we who are intimate with him are so thoroughly convinced of this want of penetration that when he expresses an opinion with regard to a person whom he has known only for a short time, we instinctively incline to believe that the truth is exactly the contrary. On the other hand, at a hospital, in his laboratory, in a prison, face to face with a madman or a criminal, or at his desk, before a heap of documents relating to the life of a man of genius, Lombroso is transformed into a psychologist, gifted with the greatest lucidity of thought and most extraordinary intuitive power. He understands—I might almost say he sees—the most complicated mechanism of thought and feeling, and is able to interpret it with wonderfully clear syntheses. This is due to the fact that, like almost all men of great genius, he possesses an intuitive insight into things, divining rather than observing. He has always boasted of being an experimentalist, of having introduced the experimental method into the study of morbid psychology; but this is one of the weaknesses which are so frequently observed in men of genius, who think themselves great in things in which they are not. Thus Frederick II boasted of being a very clever flute-player, and Goethe desired to be considered a great painter. As an experimentalist, Lombroso does not really surpass the average, because he possesses neither the patience nor the precision nor the nicety of analysis which are the essential attributes of the true experimentalist. He is a real poet, a truly creative genius, a man who possesses a lofty and vehement imagination, desirous of



expounding great syntheses, incapable of studying an isolated fact in all its details, but capable of divining the great laws of the human mind at a glance. I should say that the light which emanates from his mind is too diffusive and too intense to illuminate minor objects; it is rather fitted to enlighten the distant depths of gloom and ignorance by which we are surrounded.

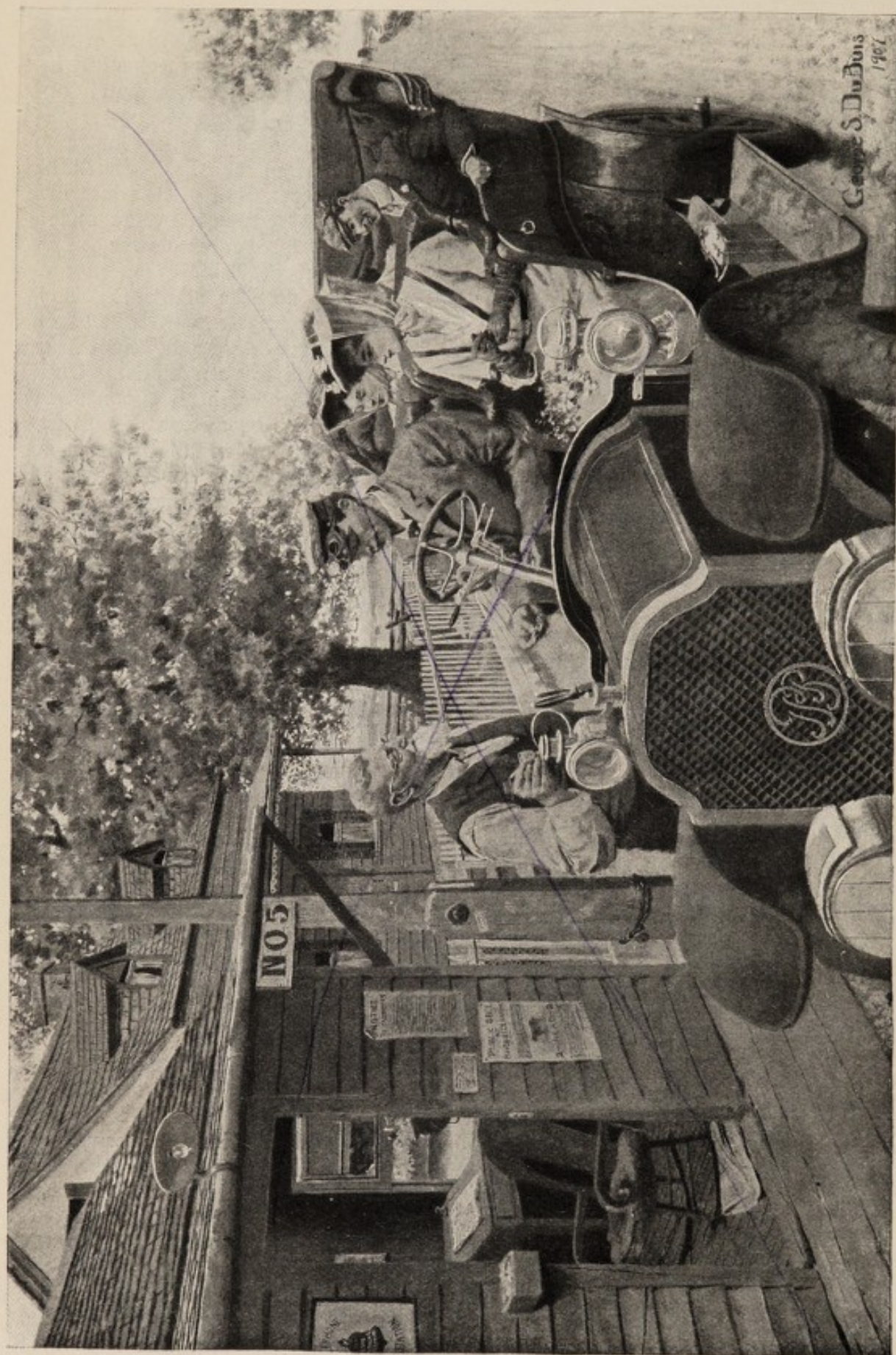
A still more curious fact is that his most profound psychological researches are those treating of the sentiments most foreign to his own character. He has analyzed all the evil and vicious passions of man, all the most monstrous perversities of moral feeling, with a surprising profundity, revealing the savage bestiality which still lies concealed in the criminal. Yet personally he is the mildest of men, and the basis of his character is a child-like ingenuousness. He is easily angered by things of slight importance, and, when vexed, stamps his foot in the manner peculiar to children; but he is easily pacified. He has many childish habits, one of which is that of holding a glass with the whole palm of his hand instead of with his fingers, as if he were almost afraid of letting it fall. Many of his tastes are essentially childish. For instance, he is fond of scampering through fields like a boy and of watching fireworks (the latter amusement is a favorite one with him); he is also given to continually playing with small Chinese *bibelots*. Any one seeing him at a time when these childish traits happened to be most evident would find it hard to believe himself in the presence of the terrible analyst of the most savage human passions, the man who for forty years has been living in contact with wild beasts in human form, who has studied their feline movements and passions, and measured the force of their teeth and the means of extracting them.

It was Lombroso who formulated the law of misoneism; namely, that man is by nature an enemy of innovations, and that the latter are to be looked upon as pathological and unnatural experiments. Yet he is perhaps one of those who are the fondest of novelty, for that quality in a thing suffices to inspire him immediately with a great liking for it. In

his eyes, whether in science, art, industry, or politics, novelty takes the place of reason and beauty. If a new mechanical invention is announced, he immediately applies it; if a new system of cure is discovered, he immediately has recourse to it; if a new literary school is founded, he immediately becomes one of its adherents. At fifty-five he became a cyclist and a follower of Kneipp's cure; he was at first a great admirer of Zola, Flaubert, and De Goncourt; now he admires Tolstoi, Ibsen, and Wagner. In politics he began by being a conservative and a monarchist; now he is almost a socialist. Until a few years ago he was an opponent of spiritualism; now he affirms that spiritualism will open up endless horizons to human thought. He is never afraid of confessing himself in the wrong and of changing his opinion. Yet while so fond of novelty, he has calmly affirmed that man is naturally conservative and has a right to oppose innovation, as if the discoveries of the thinkers were destined to contradict the man.

Lombroso is, in short, a man and a thinker of a most complex and interesting character. If he had lived in the days of Isaiah or Ezekiel his name would have been classed among those of the old Jewish prophets; but as he was born twenty-seven centuries too late, the pessimistic prophet has turned philosopher, for to-day philosophy and science are the two greatest instruments of moral and social reform. He entered the world with a mission of justice to accomplish, and for forty-five years he has been laboring toward its fulfilment with admirable zeal, never becoming wearied by opposition or illusions—as young at the age of 72 as at 25. He is irritable, violent, passionate. His character lacks the monumental solemnity of purely contemplative minds, like Spinoza, Kant, Goethe, and Spencer, just as his colossal work is wanting in harmony and proportion of outline. On the other hand, not only the thinker but the man himself stands revealed to us in his books, more than is the case with contemplative minds—the man of intense passions, who is pleased and saddened by the same things which please or sadden us, and who, in spite of all defects, is noble and generous.





Drawn by George S. DuBuis

# NEW LIFE AT THE OLD TURNPIKE TOLL-GATE

(SCENES FROM AMERICAN RURAL LIFE)

Half-tone plate engraved by C. W. Chadwick

George S. DuBuis  
1907





