

The Necessity for Restricting Immigration

by Charles Arthur Barnett

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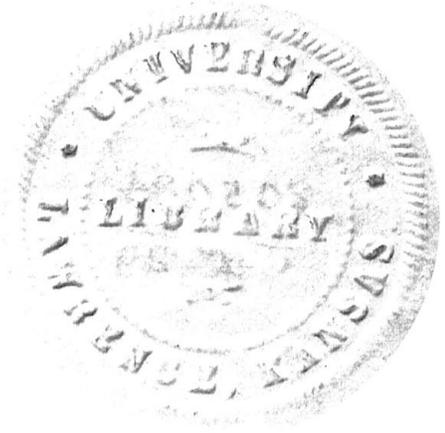
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"The necessity for restricting
immigration."



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FOR
RESTRICTING IMMIGRATION.

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THE NECESSITY FOR RESTRICTING IMMIGRATION.

INTRODUCTION.

HISTORY OF IMMIGRATION.

Early immigration.

Immigration of different races.

Character of population.

Recent immigration.

CAUSES OF IMMIGRATION.

Religious causes.

Economic causes.

Miscellaneous causes.

SOCIAL EFFECTS OF IMMIGRATION.

A homogeneous people.

Assimilation.

Standard of living.

POLITICS.

Ideals of the early immigrant.

Ideals of the present immigrant.

Dangers of democracy.

RACIAL EFFECTS

Hereditary influences.

Selection.

CONCLUSION.

THE NECESSITY FOR RESTRICTING IMMIGRATION.

Since the establishment of our first colony there has been but little done to prevent immigration. Immigrants from many countries have been landed on our shores with a hearty reception, and a cordial welcome. The foreigner has been a great factor in our industrial development, and our policy has been to deal kindly with him. The problems that have arisen from time to time have been adjusted with little difficulty, but the millions which have been landing at our ports during the past few years are causing the people to think afresh. Much agitation is the result.

HISTORY OF IMMIGRATION

We cannot consider the history of the new world independently of immigration. Professor Mayo-Smith says that "immigration is in itself the history of the new world."^I Immigrants of different race, or nationality, with different language, customs, or habits of thought have been coming to this country to enjoy with us freedom and prosperity. Most of these have been accustomed to different political institutions, and have not always been able to adjust themselves readily to the political life of a new country. In fact their limited means, and desire for "ready cash" have made them an easy prey for our professional politician. Economically they may

I Emigration and Immigration, p.33.

2.

be satisfied with a low standard of living, thereby causing a disturbance among the laboring population. Socially they may add to the burden of charity by contributing largely to pauperism, crime and vice. Mayo-Smith also says that "When immigration assumes large proportions questions of this nature are sure, sooner or later, to become very important." ² Since each year finds us with an additional million, or more, of these immigrants we are confronted with the question can we justly to our country's welfare allow this immigration to continue without further restriction?

As for mere numbers and certain races there is no need for worry, for modern civilized nations are formed, developed and become world powers regardless of their racial composition. The character of a people largely determines the extent of their progress for a better, and stronger government. Community of language, literature, and commercial interests have been said mainly to be the ties which keep nations together. The sentiment of race has had little or nothing to do with it. Dr. Maurice Fishberg, of New York, says that "People of two nationalities, living at two sides of an artificial or arbitrary border, love their own country intensely, and with the same intensity, may hate their neighbor across the border, notwithstanding the fact that both are of the same race stock." ³ We frequently find healthy, progressive cities made up of a conglomeration of elements living together under the same municipal charter; all of which are willing to take upon themselves something as to the responsibility for the cities greatness, and each equally enthusiastic for the outlook. A city without its French taxler, its honest Irish ditch digger, its "dago" with his banana

3.

stand, and the Jewish merchant, not to mention the boot-black, would certainly give an appearance of something lacking in its accommodations. In fact what race is it that has not contributed something to our population? Yet few will be so daring and foolish as to declare that our commercial and intellectual achievements have been stunted, or in any way badly affected by past immigration.

Outside of religious questions immigration was not a problem before the founding of our Federal Government. It was so necessary to our early development that people generally looked upon it with favor. We must not fail to note, however, that conditions of environment demanded of these people a unity of spirit, and cooperation of effort. The frontier life with its dangers, hardships and informal society early taught the colonists that toleration, the spirit of self-reliance and a common sentiment, regardless of race, should be cultivated in order to tide over the difficulties of a pioneer life. We cannot easily imagine that under such perilous conditions the matter of race prejudice would smoulder until a more prosperous time when political supremacy, or leadership would arise with a more violent outbreak due to long restraint.

Our country has experienced the inflow of three great sections of the human race, - European, African, Asiatic. In the first we have a case of voluntary immigration, in the second a case of forced immigration and in the third a case of exclusion.

As the result of forced immigration we have in this country about 10,000,000 negroes. The negro has failed to be assimilated,

and now presents to us an almost impossible problem of solution. The labor problem of the South has become very acute because of the presence of the black man in very large numbers. The negro wage earner has proved incompetent to the demand in the industrial evolution which is taking place in the South, and it seems that the South must look to regions outside for its skilled labor. But the negro is apparently in the South to stay, and to displace him would be certain to lower his already miserable condition. I doubt if we could be tempted under any consideration to again try the experiment of assimilating the black man.

The Chinese are the Asian immigrants with whom we are well acquainted, for they all have the appearance of being cast in the same mould, and each generation a weary repetition of the preceding. They may have some excellent qualities, but for racial, social, political and economic reasons we have found it advisable to exclude them.

So much for the immigrants from Asia and Africa, but what of the Europeans who throng our shores, and add thousands to our numbers daily? However, before we consider the character of the immigrant coming to us from Europe it might be well for us to consider the character of the immigrant during the past.

As we consider the character of the people in 1790, at the time of our first census, we find that there had been little interplay among the people of different nationalities. In New England was the Puritan; in Maryland the Catholics; in New York the Dutch;

in Delaware the Germans; along the Delaware river decedents of the Swedes; in the Carolinas many villages of Highlanders, and Huguenots, apparantly a population varied in race, nationality, speech and religion. The colonists had been accustomed to live largely within the defined boundaries of their own colony, and not until the Federal Government was thoroughly established did there arise a national spirit.

After all this 1790 population was mainly of English descent. The foreign element was a considerable portion in only a few of the colonies, while in New England, then comprising about one third of the total population, there was perhaps the purest representation of the English people in the world. But whether of English decent, or not, it is an important fact to note that this population was of Baltic origin. Furthur this population was in the main most excellent stock. It is true, as is frequently claimed, that many of these were adventurers who did not settle for any time in a place. The influence of these, along with the undesirable, was never dominant. The convicts which were sent over in considerable numbers were merely political offenders, and in many cases proved to be the best of colonist. An important section of the indentured class was composed of thrifty, ambitious and progressive people who served out an indenture to better their condition. These in most cases proved worthy colonist. The rest of the population were as though they had been carefully selected. The country was made up of people who had left their European homes

because their religious, social, political or economic ideas were too large for their surroundings. The men were sufficiently sturdy in mind and body to overcome the perils, and hardships of voyage and settlement. The evidence is strong that in mental capacity, physical qualities, and moral stamina these settlers were among the best of their race, and that the 1790 population was largely of excellent stock.

With the year 1820 the official history of immigration to the United States begins. It was then that the collectors of customs at our ports were first obliged to record the arrival of passengers by sea from foreign countries. In 1820 there came to us 8,385 aliens, and each decade has brought to us an increase over the preceding one, until immigration reached the net amount of 1,100,735 in 1906, and the press reports show that all previous records have been broken up to this time for 1907.

The immigration which came to us from northern Europe, and the British Isles previous to 1880 was largely what might be termed a natural immigration. It was the result of an impelling ambition in the minds of a freedom-loving people to avail themselves of what they regarded as the unlimited opportunities of a new and free country for that broad advancement, and development denied them by the limitations of their native lands. Many of these new migrating doubtless leave their homes from like motives, but the migration of many others is the result of the general unrest that exists among the laboring classes of southern, and eastern Europe,

which is encouraged, or even fomented by the agents of the transportation companies scouring the country for passengers.

Our laboring population is becoming stratified, and it is with difficulty that these foreigners are able to get into our unions even if they are skilled laborers. Then again there is not the demand for this low grade of labor in construction work that there has formerly been, for much of this work is being done by machinery. If this large influx of low grade labor continues to come to us there will be need for a much better system of distribution, or serious conditions may arise.

CAUSES OF IMMIGRATION

"The cause of immigration," says Prescott Hall, "though sometimes difficult to trace, is for the most part the overgrowth of population." This may be true at the present day to a large extent, but we cannot consider it historically correct concerning our own country, or nation. We believe the most successful immigrants were inspired by religious belief rather than any thing else to cause them to leave their native land, and seek religious liberty. We know that this country offered a refuge for the religiously oppressed. The Calvinists, the Catholics, the Friends and the Puritans found a home in this country where they could pray as their conscience directed. As for the gold hunters we know that they were far less successful, and their influence less

lasting. The fight that our early colonist had with nature could never have been conducted with success if there had not been a religious domination to keep them hopeful in their suffering, and contented in their misfortunes, with the idea that soon there would come a time when they could be happy in their new country, where they were the sole proprietors. The lust for gold brought only those who seemed certain to fail.

Limited opportunities drive the young and ambitious into new fields where uncultivated communities are bidding for greater forces. This has always appealed to the adventurous spirit, and many times we find the dissatisfied, restless ever a mighty force in the pioneer cause. We cannot say that such conditions are deplorable, for they draw from a community the dissatisfied who may find contentment in a new country, thereby reducing the friction in the community left behind.

Fortunate for the Puritan there was a wilderness on the American continent where they could disembark to perpetuate the ideals of that excellent stock, who were about to lose their identity in social intercourse with the sturdy Hollander. Fortunate, too, for the American Republic; we should not like to consider our country's progress without the influence of Puritan idealism. It would be speculation of the most radical nature to regard it other than a mighty force.

Much of our immigration has been due to prosperity. A mere glance at the record will show how sensitive immigration has been

to the periods of depressions, and good times. Knowledge of industrial conditions in this country is conveyed abroad through many channels. Professor Adams, of the University of Wisconsin, declares "that prosperity has been the greatest attraction in bringing foreigners to this country."⁵

Other than the Russian Jew, and the Armenians, oppression by the European countries has had little to do recently in influencing immigration. The presence here of relatives and friends; and the cheapness and ease of voyage; the poverty of the peasant classes of foreign nations, and the undesirable are conditions which have much to do in swelling the tide of immigration. Some years ago a common cause of immigration was the effort of European countries to get rid of their undesirable population, and charitable assistance was given to paupers and criminals to emigrate. Though this practice is now officially restricted, or prohibited, it is believed that, unofficially a considerable amount of assistance is still given. Another potent cause of immigration, and one which has brought a very undesirable class to this country, has been the solicitation, now somewhat ineffectually prohibited by law, of the agents of transportation companies. In the early days there was a process of natural selection in immigration which eliminated the less desirable elements, for it required energy, prudence, and courage to accomplish the transfer from one country to another. With the increasing activity of the transportation companies, and the comparative ease of immigration, it is now, as a

general rule the least prosperous classes that are attracted.

SOCIAL EFFECTS OF IMMIGRATION

"Social institutions depend for their existence upon the ability of men to exchange their ideas, and act together intelligently for common purposes." ⁶ If we accept this statement of Prescott Hall we must necessarily plead for a somewhat homogeneous people in regard to religion, civics and ideals. In affecting an organization of society individualism, and a unity of spirit should be well balanced. Individualism without an opposing force is destructive. Socrates was contemporary with twenty or more noble patriots who lived in Athens. Of this wonderful galaxy of statesmen, generals, artisans, poets, philosophers and orators possibly fourteen were living at the same time in that small city of thirty thousand citizens. The competition and rivalry between tribes, cities and citizens of the same locality which contributed so much to Grecian individualism, created a spirit of independence and jealousy that made impossible the political, and social organization which is essential to strength and permanency.

So far as mere commercial, and material progress is concerned a heterogeneous people may be as successful as any. But where depth, and not breadth is concerned there must be accepted standards, and ideals for all the people, otherwise that part of the population contending for justice may be lacking for numbers. Then this question is one of assimilation. But what must be the character

II.

of the immigrant? We are told by most of our writers on this subject that the immigrant of the past in intelligence, character and moral force was much superior to the foreigner that is coming to us now. That is in itself explanatory. The present demand is for the kind of aliens we are getting. The dignity of labor, and the standard of living among the laboring population is gradually rising. The laboring population is becoming stratified both socially and economically. Each class is striving for a higher position, and the vacancies left by the lowest are being filled by the low grade foreigner. These foreigners if not too numerous, and properly distributed, will eventually become assimilated. They, too, will rise in the scale of progress to be replaced by other aliens who are ready to work out their apprenticeship. There is little, if any, demand for a higher grade of immigration. There is a feeling among the native population that American labor should be favored with the better positions, and when there is a demand for men of exceptional skill, and training we find the American youth fitting himself for such work. This is as it should be, and it enables us to make our school system more attractive to the young men. Under such conditions we may expect our laboring population to rise still higher in the scale, and afford to us a more respectable citizenship. This wide spread feeling and intelligence among the laboring classes, along with the sentiment for labor unions, would arouse a vigorous protest against any immigration which would displace or threaten the chances of our better class of

laborers. While we are complaining against the undesirable alien, it is doubtful if the people would consent to better class.

The alien is proving to be somewhat of a dangerous character when we consider him in relation to crime, disease, insanity and pauperism. This has been due largely to improper selection, and congestion in cities. We have reason to believe that this will be remedied by our recent legislation in respect to distribution, and more careful inspection.

The immigrant that fails to become assimilated is our problem. "Those who fail to adopt the American standard of living for themselves and their children, who fail to demand a fair living wage, who do not learn English, who go back and forth as "birds of passage" and form no permanent ties in this country, who herd together in isolated communities taking no interest in their neighbors, or public matters- these classes are the instance of non-assimilation, and their elimination is necessary to the health of the body politic." - Prescott Hall.

In addition to the natural difficulties an artificial one is being added. Foreign countries, realizing that it is impossible to check emigration, have begun to establish and maintain little colonies in this country, that the allegiance of the immigrants may be maintained. In this way inducements are held out for them to return their savings, and to return ultimately. The Commissioner General of Immigration declares that political, social and even religious influences are used to prevent assimilation as far as

possible. That such solidarity is accomplished in many cases appears from the ease with which certain nationalities can be, and have been arrayed against immigration restriction, or action tending to break up the system. It is interesting to note that a New York judge refused to approve the incorporation of a club formed to inspire the love of Hungary; and our consul at Budapest states that immigrants are taught to retain their European citizenship, and to remit their savings to Europe, and it is expected of clergymen, newspaper men, and others that they shall keep watch over the immigrants in order to secure these results. Such attempts to hinder assimilation are not to be tolerated.

POLITICS

The population of this country on the whole has been very earnest in trying to live within constitutional rights. Reverence for law has been cultivated, and generally the people have been disposed to uphold the authorities constituted by the people. This should be said of our early colonists, although they were impatient of foreign control, and foreign government. Immigration up to the latter part of the past century was from States familiar with representative government, and the conditions of our government did not place them at any great disadvantage in being able to maintain a respectable citizenship. With the more recent immigration the case is quite otherwise. The countries affording the bulk of our

immigration at present have no features of democracy, and representative government is unknown. Law is represented to the people by soldiers, and tax collectors.

It is known that the political effects of the Teutonic immigration of the last century, which settled in the Middle, and Northwestern States, have been beneficial. The Germans, Scandinavians and the British immigrants have proved conservative and intelligent in public matters. In this conservatism they have contributed little to radical, and socialistic schemes. The city government of Milwaukee with a foreign population of 86 per cent. compares favorably with that of any of our large cities. It is interesting to note that socialistic, and populist doctrines have found favor largely in States where foreign population is smallest. This is not evidence that they are unwilling to favor reform movements, for we have instanced such as the election in Minnesota in the Fall of 1905. A "square deal" was the issue, and Johnson was supported by a large foreign population. Our hope is to continue in this fortunate condition, but the supremacy of our native boss with his knowledge of political machinery, and ability to control the foreign element is something to be regarded. The freedom sought by the present immigrant is economic, rather ^{J h a n} political. Since by inheritance he is unfit for political life in a democracy it is well that hitherto they have shown little disposition to become naturalized.

The Slavic and Iberic races have constituted nearly seven-

tenths of the total immigration in recent years. If the conditions in Massachusetts can be taken for a general estimate we can consider that three-fifths of the Swedes, and Norwegians, and more than one-half of the Germans, Russian Jews and Irish are voters; but of the Portugues and Italians only one-third are voters. Many who do become naturalized do so from selfish, and not from public spirit. The Slovak, and Italian "bird of passage" are accused of taking out their papers on the pretention of citizenship that it may facilitate their going and coming.

A grave danger lies in the liberality with which the ballot is given. It is a well known fact that many of our States permit aliens to take part in State, and Federal elections. The following is taken from Edward A. Steiner's recent book, "A nation like our own, ideally founded upon universal suffrage, is putting its destinies in the hands of men untrained in citizenship; the very name citizen being so new to them that they cannot easily grasp its meaning. The tutelage of Tammany Hall, and of its kind all over the United States has been a bad preparation for so momentous a task. It does not diminish the greatness of the problem in the least when I say the foreigner is usually the innocent tool, in a corrupting process which has been going on for years, and to the existence of which the nation is just awakening. I have been offered citizenship papers in New York for ten dollars, and have seen them peddled by Americans who had back of them the protection of political bosses of no less genuine American ancestry. I have

seen whole groups of Polanders marched to the ballot-box, when they were so ^{drunk} that they had to be kept erect by a stalwart American patriot who swore that they had the right to vote, when they had scarcely been a year in this country. I have seen men who are respected in their community, buy votes wherever they could get them, corrupting a mass of men who were as ignorant of the process of voting, and as unfitted for it, as little babes; and these very men I have heard loudly proclaiming the corrupting influence of the foreign element." ⁸

Who is the chief offender in this case? It is true that the immigrant will sell his ballot, but the American politician buys it. There is no question as to the real traitor. The native citizen who is the more responsible party is betraying the confidence of the American people, and at the same time teaching the untutored foreigner in the lowest form of citizenship. In fact his first conception of the ballot is of an economic, rather than a social character. Perhaps then the real danger lies in the ideal which the immigrant will have if he is not especially schooled in the principles of democracy. Special care should be taken to see that they are properly influenced in the ways of industry and citizenship. Naturalization should be withheld until they are thoroughly tested in their intentions and ideals of government.

There is no question but what the immigrant is a political problem, - even the American people are - and always will be. In a democracy the government will rise with the masses, and the immigrant

must be elevated along with the rest. It is to be feared that we are gathering inflammable material from the dissatisfied of all nations, who here at some future time of excitement may join the mob to wreak vengeance upon a class unfavorable to their existence. In order to maintain a government insuring justice to all, we must have a well balanced citizenship, in fact so much so, that they may not be easily inflamed by a demagogue.

RACIAL EFFECTS

The results of immigration to this country have been of the greatest importance, and has added greatly to our wealth and power. The early immigrant was a constructionist, and proved a worthy addition to our citizenship. While the new immigrant is more of an alien we hope, however, to find him capable in some ways.

Most of our authorities claim racial effects to be more far reaching than all others. Racial characteristics are claimed to withstand the influences of centuries. Biologists claim that in the long run heredity is far more important than environment, or education; for though the latter can develop, it cannot create. Professor Carver states "That we have to remember that man is subject to the universal law of inheritance, and that a dearth of capacity may arise if we recruit our society from the inferior, and not from the better stock. If any social opinion, or class prejudice tamper with the fertility of the better stocks then the national character will take but a few generations to be seriously

modified."

"You cannot change the leopards spots, and you cannot change bad stock to good steek; you may dilute it, possibly spread it over a wider area, spoiling good stock, but until it ceases to multiply it will not cease to be. A physically and mentally well ordered individual will arise as a variation in bad stock, or possibly may result from special nurture, but the old evil will in all probability reappear in a definite percentage of the offspring."⁹

We have recently learned that the African is an inferior race whose presence in this country has been an expensive experiment. The negro has learned our language, and has been our slave. We gave him freedom and suffrage. He has been encouraged in education and social affairs, but democracy has failed in helping him to better his condition.

Very true as has been said that the question of immigration is a problem of humanity, and not of merchandise, but the tremendous social consequences demands that all sentiment shall be disposed with, and the question settled along scientific lines. Some are disposed to refuse to our authorities the right to interfere in this matter, claiming that this country is not the heritage of the native born. It would be a sad condition if our officials were powerless to act to the best interests of society.

The immigration question is not to be settled by making laws excluding all races, or immigrants, it is a matter of wise and judicious selection. It is not to be vain when we claim that we

have bred more than sixty million of the finest people in the world. It would be un-American to believe otherwise. Therefore any race that we admit to the body social is certain not to be superior, and hardly equal. There are people and races that mingle with our people to an advantage; but if we are as careless in this matter of selection as we have been it is possible for us to have an immigration problem equal to that of the negro problem. Before concluding this subject of racial effects it might be fitting to give the opinion of Mr. Eliot Norton:

"If one considers the American people from 1775 to 1860, it is clear that a well defined national character was in process of formation. What variations there were, were all of the same type, and these variations would have slowly grown less and less marked. It needs little study to see of what great value to any body of men, women and children, a national or racial type is. It furnishes a standard of conduct by which any one can set his course. The world is a difficult place in which to live, and to establish moral standards has been one of the chief occupations of mankind. Without such standards, man feels as a mariner without a compass. Religions, rules, laws and customs are only the national character in the form of standards of conduct. Now national character can only be formed in a population which is stable. The repeated introduction into a body of men, of other men of different type or types, cannot but tend to prevent its formation. Thus the nineteen million of immigrants that have landed have tended to break up the

type which was forming, and to make the formation of any other type difficult. Every million more will only intensify this result, and the absence of a national character is a loss to every man, woman and child. It will show itself in our religions, rules of conduct, in our laws, in our customs."¹⁰

CONCLUSION.

All authorities agree that one of the main causes of the unprecedented progress of the United States within the short period of a century is the fact that we have attracted young men of energy, determination and perseverance from all countries, from all nations and races. We must conclude, then, that immigration is not bad if we do not get bad immigration.

Let us, then, continue the benefits of that selection which took place in the early days of the nation by sifting the immigration of to-day, so that no discordant element shall enter to imperil the ideals and institutions of our nation, and to the end that we may produce a still finer race to help the world in its progress.

Professor John R. Commons in writing on this subject of immigration says the following:

"If in America our boasted freedom from the evils of the social classes fails to be vindicated in the future, the reasons will be found in the immigration of races, and classes incompetent to share in our democratic opportunities. Already in the case of

21.

the negro this division has hardened and seems destined to become more rigid. Therein we must admit at least one exception to our claim of immunity from social classes. Whether with our public schools, our stern politics, our ubiquitous newspapers, our common language and our network of transportation, the children of the European immigrant shall be able to rise to the opportunities unreached by his parents is the largest and deepest problem now pressing upon us. It behooves us as a people to enter into the practical study of this problem, for upon its outcome depends the fate of government of the people, for the people, and by the people!"^{II}

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