

The Challenge of the Alien

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THE members of the human family have never been content to stay at home. Since the confusion of the Tower of Babel, if not before, the children of men have been scattered abroad over the face of the earth. The wanderlust has forever dominated humanity. How the world has been checked, and how the nations have been influenced by these various Semitic migrations, Aryan migrations, Mongol migrations; conquests of Romans, Saracens, Goths, Tartars, Saxons; colonizers by English, French, Spaniards, and others—history would appear to be the record, for a large part, of these great, unsettling, intermixing movements. Whether for good or evil, our restless human spirit has been stung by the love of wandering, the desire for change, the ambition for betterment.

The continent of North America, in this twentieth century of Christianity, is the great magnet, attracting the people of divers races from every continent across the islands of the sea. Through the portals of the great Republic and of the great Dominion they come in great multitudes. And too many of our people seem heedless of the multitudinous problems they thrust upon us. There is hope, however, in the awakened interest recently revealed by the increased activity of governments, Churches, communities and cities to obtain information, that they may be better know, and if possible the better solve, their problem.

To grip our subject, "The Challenge of the Alien," we must know something of the countries and peoples which supply them, even though it include great hardships in difficult and dangerous journeys, does not change the character nor the ideals of the wanderer. The religion, the customs, the ideals of these people travel with them over mountains, through strange lands, across tempestuous seas, to their new home. The returns for the recent years of the Republic and the Dominion reveal that a line drawn across Europe from the north-east corner to the south-west corner will, in a general sense, divide the two main sources of European emigration—one of which is termed the old emigration from Teutonic countries, and the other the new emigration, from the Slavic and the Latin countries. The people of north-western Europe brought with them religious and political ideals which made their assimilation, comparatively speaking, an easy matter; but the peoples of south-western Europe, in these respects, are much farther removed from our American and Canadian standards, and the work of assimilation is a much more serious task. There is a difference between these two sorts of immigrants. Those living south and west of the line we have drawn are directed more, socially (or in one word, economically), than those people living north and east of that line.

The government reports reveal that during the past decade a little more than 80 per cent of North American immigration has been received from those European countries which are more backward in learning and the industries, and slower in social advance. Add to these the numbers who have come from Asia, increasing the perplexity of our problems and multiply-



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ing the difficulties of building the nation on the plans of its own people.

A further analysis is necessary. Of those immigrants coming to our continent during the past decade, less than 25 per cent are females. Many of the men come alone to the new country. Their families are left behind them, hoping either to earn and save sufficient money to bring them later to their new home, or to return to them with savings sufficient for comfortable maintenance in the old home. This places upon these male immigrants the necessity not only to support themselves, but also to support their family in the homeland. They must save the money to enable them to bring the family, or to return with a competence. Under this economic pressure, these people who dwell as strangers in a foreign land are constantly being crowded down, often misjudged, and frequently ill-treated.

But why are these hundreds of thousands of aliens attracted to these North American countries? The outstanding influence is economic. The poverty and wretchedness of the people in some Southern countries in Europe is to us almost unthinkable. A few days ago, crossing the Bay of Fundy, we fell into conversation with a very intelligent young man recently from Bulgaria. We asked him why he had come to Canada, and he replied, "to get food, clothes, a home." He stated that more than half the people of his country suffer the want of food in winter. He declared, "I do not want an empty stomach and a shivering body when I can earn wages in Canada to buy food and clothe me. Good country, Canada, to poor Bulgarian." The peoples of those lands, impoverished through war, through ignorance, and through climatic conditions, hear the call of North America to construct railroads, erect skyscrapers, and develop many extensive industries for which much unskilled labor is in great demand. They discover that wages paid far exceed their possible earnings at home, and are attracted by hundreds and by thousands to our shores. They seek a better country, where the struggle for subsistence is not so desperate, and the rewards for one's toil is more secure.

Another influence is the desire for freedom—for democracy. Many thousands coming to this new world are not attracted by a larger piece of bread and butter than they were wont to receive in their fatherland. They earnestly desire to breathe the glorious air of freedom and liberty; they are anxious to enjoy the privileges of the democratic institutions of these great North American nations; they are ambitious to secure the advantages of our colleges and universities whose doors are thrown so freely open to them, while the east and social status of their home universities are almost prohibitive. We find multitudes of young immigrants pressing towards the setting sun so that they may embrace these larger opportunities, profit by these privileges, and experience the gladness of life under the beneficent rule of these democratic countries where the government of the people is by the people, and for the people. But the desire for freedom and democracy is not always to gratify a personal ambition. Too often the immigrant finds his way to North America to escape persecution. In one of our Western Canadian cities a class of non-Anglo-Saxons was organized to teach English to coming Canadians. In conversation with two of the members we were told of two Russians in that class, who came to America to escape Siberia; while an intelligent Pole, a lawyer in Warsaw, whose activity and success in his work in his native city had aroused the suspicion of the authorities, had come to our continent so that he might practice his chosen profession without molestation. Who can tell how many have come to our continent for higher reasons than the desire to have better food and better clothing? Finland and Estonia, Lithuania and Poland, Dalmatia and Bosnia, Slavokland and Croatia are ruled by foreign sovereigns, and patriots feel keenly the heel of oppression. It is not a cause for wonder that the people of these lands discover their peace, prosperity, and happiness lies in fleeing to another land where freedom of speech and freedom of the press is the common heritage of all its people.

Another incentive to immigration is the wonderful industrial expansion of this continent. The United States and Canada throbb with industrial development. Railways push their ribbons of steel mile after mile over the ever developing country. Foundries and factories, farms, forests and fisheries, mines and mills, are forever calling for more and still more toilers. Besides, the mails are laden with letters from the people who have come to the friends in their native lands, urging the benefits and advantages of immigration. Another incentive—and I could wish it were abandoned by the companies, or discontinued by law—is the artificial stimulus to immigration by the steamship and transportation companies.

Coming by the tens of thousands, the aliens to our great North American nations, constitute a challenge to us which we cannot evade.

We must meet their Challenge to supply their Economic Necessities. Here are serious difficulties. Multitudes of the immigrants come from rural communities. They are agriculturalists. They are unaccustomed to urban society and urban employment. Yet on reaching the shores of North America they congregate in our