

Conserving the Immigrant Resources

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The financial resources which the immigrant from Europe brings to this country are not as a rule very large. Oftentimes the greater part of his material possessions are stored in the shapeless bundle or the battered imitation leather suitcase which he carries with him down the gang-plank or patiently shoulders as he leaves the train at his destination. But he does bring with him the capacity for hard work, the kind of work that we stand in need of in this country.

He almost immediately begins to earn and handle money; more money than he has ever had at his disposal in the Old Country. If he has escaped exploitation at the time of his arrival, he now often becomes the victim of the various sharks who live largely at his expense. The Bureau of Industries and Immigration of the New York State Department has published a chart, "The Route of the Immigrant," on which are indicated some one hundred and fifty obstacles which the immigrant may encounter. Unscrupulous saloon and lodging-house keepers, the managers of doubtful places of amusement, employment agents, real estate agents, machine agents, all stand ready to make as much as possible out of the ignorance of the new arrival. Special provision should undoubtedly be made to guard the immigrant against novel temptations and the wiles of exploiters.

The health and the morals of the immigrants should be more carefully guarded. Many of the men go to work in construction camps in which sanitary conditions are far from being ideal; when they come to town they are surrounded by anything but a wholesome environment. In the winter time there are often long seasons of unemployment. Under these conditions it can hardly be wondered at that many of them degenerate.

In the cities, the districts in which the immigrants live are usually the least desirable. Peasants, accustomed to the free open life of the country, are suddenly thrown into tenement house life with all its attendant evils. Little wonder that infant mortality, infectious diseases, vice and crime are often prevalent. The fault lies, not primarily with the immigrant, but in our lack of adequate facilities for dealing with him.

From an industrial standpoint the immigrant's resources are almost incalculable. Unfortunately, our labor markets are almost entirely unorganized, our system of technical training is largely undeveloped and in most places no special provision has been made for meeting the peculiar needs of those who come to us with a very limited knowledge of our language and institutions. "In a special investigation which was made some time ago in Winnipeg, statistics were obtained in regard to two hundred and fifty-five families who were in receipt of relief. In 70.02% of the cases the head of the family was, in the Old Country, an owner of land which he cultivated; in 16.08 he was an agricultural laborer and in 7% a tenant farmer. In 6% only had he earned a livelihood from any source other than the land. Here then is an example of the lack of proper direction by which, out of 255 immigrants, 240 who had been on the land and should be on the land as pro-

ducers in this country, were herded in the cities without work, without money, and supported by public charity."

With our long winter seasons and the seasonal employment which ensues, thousands of immigrants, many of them skilled producers are idle for from three to five months every year. Further, through a lack of the knowledge of English and of Canadian methods, many are forced to do a much lower type of work than that which they are capable of. A foreman in a large industrial plant states that a considerable number of men are employed as assistants or unskilled laborers who, with a few weeks training, would be able to do highly skilled work at high wages. We think of the graduate of a European University and of a school of technology who, for some time in this country was doing ordinary tin-smithing; of another University graduate who is now holding a very responsible position, who did laborer's work on the grade; of a skilled cane-worker, whose family were supported by charity simply because he had not the small capital that was necessary to start a shop in this country. We think of the thousands of immigrant women who have been accustomed to doing beautiful handicraft work in the Old Country, who are sitting idle simply because there is no organized effort to help them produce or afterwards dispose of their work. Again we think of the doctors' assistants, and others who have received more or less professional training in the Old Country that would enable them to do excellent work among their own people here, who are forced to perform the most menial and uncongenial tasks simply because their qualifications do not precisely conform to Canadian standards.

Surely there is need of more elasticity in our arrangements and some special adaptation of our institutions that will enable us to overcome these difficulties and utilize more fully the abilities of those who have cast in their lot with us.

We would emphasize more particularly the great cultural resources which the immigrants bring and which have been so largely unrecognized. We have been accustomed to thinking of the immigrant as an illiterate peasant who is little more than a beast of burden. We forget that Europe is the home of the music, art and literature which we treasure on this continent. Paderewski, Modjeska, Chopin, Sienkiewicz, Munkaski, are a few of the Polish names that have become familiar even in the English-speaking world. How few of us associate these with our Polish immigrants!

In one of the mining towns in British Columbia there is a very fine band, every member of which is an Italian. The presence of this despised group of "dagos" is making life in the Canadian mining town much richer than it would be if the population consisted of Canadians only.

In connection with the Winnipeg People's Forum as many as seventeen foreign choirs and dramatic societies have assisted in the musical programs during a single season. In Montreal the Y.M.C.A. has established a branch for Italians. The favorite amusement is not billiards or baseball, but participation in vocal and orchestral entertainment. We can