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Canada's Immigration Problem

1906-1916

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"I was a stranger and ye took me in."

MRS. H. A. LAVELL

WITH the expansion and development of every nation, new and perplexing problems are bound to arise which need for their solution not only the wise policy of the far-seeing statesman, but the sympathy and co-operation of every true patriot. It is not demanded of everyone that he fight and die for the land he loves, but to no one is denied the privilege of *living* for the land he loves, a life of heroic devotion, and service.

As a general rule, new conditions are not the result of revolutionary changes, but come so gradually, so unobtrusively, that they awaken in the normal observer no feeling

of surprise. It is only when one compares present conditions with those of a decade earlier that one is startled into realization that changes have come, requiring statesmen and patriots to change their ideas and methods, in order to meet the new needs.

“New occasions teach new duties;
Time makes ancient good uncouth;
They must upward still, and onward,
Who would keep abreast of Truth.”

For the last ten years, foreigners by the thousand have been flocking to our Canadian shores looking for more room, higher wages, better opportunities for advancement and greater liberty than was possible in the different countries of the old land.

They are to be found scattered over the whole Dominion, but especially have the Western provinces with their immense areas of unoccupied territory attracted them, so that in many parts of Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Manitoba are settlements entirely composed of Russians, of Ruthenians, of Galicians, of Poles, of Finns, of Austrians, of Scandinavians and others.

The thousands of Italians are mostly to be found in the cities, as are the Chinese

and Japanese. According to Government statistics, the total immigration to Canada since the beginning of the century has been 3,099,348. Of these, 1,168,292 have come from Great Britain, 1,095,375 from the United States, leaving 835,681 from continental Europe and Asia. A small percentage of these have been rejected on landing and crossing the border or subsequently deported on account of disease, vagrancy, lack of funds and many other causes, which leaves us with a foreign born element numbering over 2,950,000 in a population of about 8,000,000. It is true that the financial depression just before the war and then the war itself has caused an arrest in the tide of immigration, so that from 402,432 in 1913 we dropped to 384,878 in 1914 and to 144,789 in 1915; but we must be prepared when the war is over to open our doors to the needy ones of Europe who will be homeless and destitute and eager to escape the awful results of this devastating scourge.

Are we prepared to meet this situation? Have we been able to assimilate the immigrants we already have? How have the policies of Church and State kept pace with the new

and ever-increasing demands? These are questions we must honestly face.

As mentioned before, regulations have been in force since 1900 by which immigrants physically, mentally or morally unfit may be rejected on landing by the proper immigration authorities or afterwards deported as undesirables. This protects us against disease, immorality, and criminality as well as against those unfit to work who would become public charges.

As Canada advertises in the foreign press and through its foreign agents only for agriculturists and domestic servants, the agencies at work here have to do only with these two classes of immigrants with the aim in view of placing them in suitable situations. Once placed, as far as the immigration authorities are concerned they are left to get along as best they can, free if foreigners to adopt or reject as they please the language, and customs of the people of Canada. But what of the immigrants who do not belong to these two classes—the ruiners, tradesmen, clerks, mechanics, general laborers and others who have no provision made for them? They find themselves in a strange country, numbers

of them, unfamiliar with the language, customs, climate, with no assured work, generally with very little money beyond the amount required, and with absolutely no idea at all of the great distances between the sea coast and the different points in Western Canada. Many of them can neither read nor write in their own languages. They are ignorant and helpless, and we cannot wonder that they oftener than not become the prey of unscrupulous money-makers.

In the United States, the immigration problem has now become a difficult one to handle because of what one writer calls the "general stupidity of a previous generation" which neglected to care for the strangers. Now, almost every large city has its "Little Italy" its "Russian Jew quarter" its Hungarian Greek, or Armenian section and some have their "Chinatown."

What does this segregating of different elements mean but a failure to assimilate these nations who have come across the sea? And what is there to prevent Canada from finding within her borders similar conditions?

Nothing: unless we decide to learn a lesson of prevention from our Southern neighbors. Like them, though to a less extent, we have encouraged immigration. The foreigner is a

valuable asset to Canada. He has proved an important factor in industrial life, he has seemed almost a necessity in the development of our country. For the building of railroads we call in his help, for the lumbering industry, for working in mines, making bricks, cultivating the vast farm lands of the West, and for many other kinds of occupation. We need his help, we depend on him, we say. He needs *our* help. Can *he* depend on *us*?

The most thoughtful students of this subject are agreed that the urgent necessity at the outset is to teach the foreign peoples English. No unity is possible where there is a barrier of language. If the foreigner understands his fellow workmen, and can communicate with those around him, accidents and mistakes are prevented, he can, through the newspapers, become acquainted with the aims of our great statesmen, understand the political trend of affairs, and become familiar with current events. To grasp the meaning of our national life and ideals is not possible without a knowledge of the language, therefore the teaching of English to our foreign immigrants should be our first concern.

What special provision has our Canadian Government made for the education and assimilation of this foreign element in our population

which will ere long be a prominent factor in Canadian politics?

Very little. That is left to municipalities, to the churches or to public spirited, philanthropic individuals.

But generally speaking, what is everybody's business, is nobody's business, and as a matter of fact no effort is being made outside a few of our largest cities to reach our foreign population except the mission work that is being done by our churches and missionary societies.

It is scarcely possible to do much through our established public school system except with the very young children, and in the scattered settlements on the Western prairies, even that is not possible. And what of the foreign young men and women as well as the older men and women whose lives are bound to affect the national life of the near future?

Most of them work all day, so they must be taught in the evenings—first our language, in classes, clubs, or night schools, then the care of the home, simple cookery, the treatment of mild forms of disease and the first principles of integrity, justice and co-operative service underlying the high ideals of national and civic life.

In the cities, the plan of the night school or civic club may be carried out with the minimum amount of organization and machinery, and no doubt the city or municipality in each case, could easily be persuaded to help finance such an undertaking, and find able assistance in reaching the foreign young men and women through the classes and workers in our Y.M. and Y.W.C.A.'s and through the public libraries and reading rooms. But this does not touch the problem of the prairies which, up to now, has depended on the educational and evangelizing efforts of the churches. To a few missionaries and teachers has been assigned the prodigious task of reaching out hands of fellowship and brotherhood, of teaching and preaching to this vast host of foreigners many of whom cling to their own customs, language, religion and traditions, who must be lovingly sought out and helped before we can expect them to have feelings of patriotism for the land of their adoption. Certainly if the conditions in Saskatchewan as outlined by Dr. Oliver recently in an address before the Saskatchewan Public Education League obtain in the other Western provinces, we will before long waken up to find not a united Canada, but a nation formed in part of a conglomerate of little foreign states, each speaking its own language.

There are 60,000 Ruthenians in Saskatchewan. There are 200 schools in which the majority of the pupils are Ruthenians and of these between 75 and 80 have Ruthenian teachers. Five of these teachers are from Manitoba College, 2 from the University of Saskatchewan and 60 from the Normal School at Regina. It will be seen from these facts that the Ruthenians are ambitious and appreciate education and their lives show that they are more or less self-reliant and have learned to accommodate themselves to western conditions, but (and here the trouble lies) they are wedded to their language and they will not cease teaching it in the schools if they can help, while their national hopes of greatness and ambitious achievement are by no means dead.

In Saskatchewan, Ruthenians are now serving as school trustees and they have special supervisors and organizers for their own schools. They have become a force not only in this province but throughout the prairies. They have control of school districts and dictate the policy in more than one rural municipality, and one of their number has recently entered the Manitoba Legislature. This surely shows the necessity of thoroughly educating our foreigners as Canadians, of placing before them ideals of citizenship and of surrounding

them with influences which shall gradually change their social customs and permeate their home life.

It has been said that "To be great, a nation does not need to be of one blood, but it does need to be of one mind." This is what we covet for Canada, and this is one of the ideals our missionary teachers have before them as they go among our foreign population with their inspiring message. This is indeed a patriotic work, not of the effervescent type, bubbling and foaming one minute, then dying down, till not a fizz remains, but a steady effort to bring Christ to the stranger, to avert the dangers following the trail of immigration and to weld the peoples who come here, often with hatred in their hearts for each other into the very fibre of the nation, each bringing an added strength and special gifts to enrich our national life.

When we come to the last analysis of this work of assimilation it is traceable to personality, to individual service. It is the consistent life, the personal interest and the helpful teaching of our missionaries and Christian workers that are breaking down the barrier between the different races in Canada, and showing them in an unmistakable way that we count them as brethren and expect them to become loyal citizens of this country.

Too much stress cannot be laid upon the influence of our lives upon those around us.

The story is told of a Canadian and a Galician meeting in a little Western village, and, during the course of conversation, the Canadian, not sure of the nationality of his acquaintance innocently asked: "Are you a Doukhobor?" Indignantly the Galician replied "Me a Doukhobor? No siree. Me curse; me swear; me smoke; me play cards, me gamble. Me a Canadian!" Does not this bring home to us the fact that, as someone has said "our conduct and actions in daily life are affecting very intensely, either for better or for worse, the character and lives of the strangers within our gates?" Each of us owes Canada this patriotic duty, to worthily represent Canadian citizenship. Each of us, when opportunity offers, can help and befriend some stranger, and interpret to him the spirit of Christ; for it is the consistent lives and kindly acts of the Canadian people that will prove an irresistible force in the process of assimilation worthily supporting the heroic efforts of our missionaries and eventually crowning them with success.

"And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you and thou shalt love him as thyself."

"There is no use sending our missionaries to the ends of the earth if we neglect the ends of the earth when they come to us."