

Immigration in Relation to the Public Health

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Reprinted from
THE CANADIAN JOURNAL OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY
Toronto, April, 1906

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Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Association.—When we consider that 1,000,000 immigrants were added during the last year to the 70,000,000 people of the United States, and that 150,000 were added to the 6,000,000 in Canada, or one person of foreign birth, education and ideas in every 70 in the one instance and one in every 40 in the other, it is apparent, when, as in the United States, 10,000,000 foreigners have been added to the population within twenty years and the rate of present increase in Canada is proportionately twice as great, that the words of Tennyson, in "Vastness," impel our attention:

"Spring and Summer and Autumn and Winter,
And all these old revolutions of Earth:
All new-old revolutions of Empire—change
Of the tide—what is all of it worth?"

If we are not prepared, as we are not, to answer this *cui bono* with another verse of the same poetic cry of whither drifting,

"Raving Politics never at rest as this poor Earth's pale history runs—
What is it all but a trouble of ants in the gleam of a million million of
suns?"

then it is plain that no good citizen of this continent can avoid the study of this the most serious of the political, social, economic and health problems of to-day. How shall we approach it? Shall we at once say, especially in the United States: "Raise an absolute Chinese wall and exclude all foreigners until the people have had time to digest this, to some, hydra-headed monster, like the serpent, which slimy glided up from the dark depths of ocean and crushed on Trojan shores Laocoon and his glorious sons"? Shall we, finding past efforts useless in stemming the tide of immigration which brought over a million alien people to American shores last year, give up the fight and open our gates wide, if not welcoming, at least permitting the good, indifferent and bad to enter and submit to the conditions which their intrusion has produced and must continue to create? Or shall we adopt the third possible position of recognizing the situation as we find it

*Prepared for American Public Health Association Meeting.

and deal with the problem in the same successful manner as national, state and municipal authorities have dealt with the contagions which everywhere, in former years and to-day, follow the march of commerce and transportation, whether by sea or land?

Remembering all the forces, political, commercial and social, which are ever and continually at work, the rapidly vanishing elements of distance and time, and the equally increasing approximation of the nations of the world and all human interests, it is apparent to everyone who thinks at all deeply on the subject that the latter is the only possible position. Assume the possibility of exclusion, and we behold whole fleets disappearing from the ocean almost as suddenly as that ill-fated Russian squadron in the Sea of Japan. Recently a but little susceptible people showed their power to hit back by a wholly defensible boycott, and railway magnates and other generals of commerce cry out against laws which this nation has made, and sea-board cities, which once cried "Exclude!" are now quaking as if a foreign enemy were threatening their commerce. Without further illustration, it must be apparent that the only possible position is to regulate.

Never before in the history of the world, unless when Attila's hordes poured down upon a helpless Europe, have more than a million people been transferred in a single year from one continent to another, and of all the marvels perhaps the greatest is that these have come from countries the most separated in distance, nationality, language and civilization, without the transmission of scarcely a case of any of those diseases which cause epidemics. At any rate, we can say, if such cases came, so quickly and thoroughly were they dealt with that no epidemics have resulted therefrom. We have only to compare this with the melancholy and repeated stories of the first seventy-five years of the last century, when immigration had not reached a quarter of its present proportion, in order that the members of this Association may justly take pride to themselves and say, "*Quorum sum magna pars.*" This Association, starting as it did in those now distant early days, thought then only of smallpox, cholera, typhus and yellow fever; now, with such problems solved, it naturally, and indeed is forced, to turn and deal with other problems created in the hundreds of civic centres, the outgrowth of a hundred years of immigration. Just as society has become more complex, so have its public health problems become more difficult. To England these have been present and pressing for fifty years; to the cities of this continent they are the outgrowth of twenty-five. Yet England has never had the problem of our great cities. During the past twenty years the immigration of foreigners to England has averaged probably 100,000 annually, but probably not more than half that remained. Thus an old, well-organized

society of 40,000,000 has had to absorb but 50,000 annually, whereas this continent must digest over one million. Yet we learn what there happens daily, that a shipload of continental immigrants has only to arrive at a London dock, be met by their fellows, and in ten minutes they are gone and indistinguishable from the hundreds of thousands of the same foreign-speaking people already there. A foreign city is within the greater city, and it is not absorbed. Yet these people are in a sense absorbed, for they have come under police, health and social surroundings which have reduced the London death rate to 17 per 1,000. It is apparent, then, that in an old city, with its machinery gradually and adequately evolved, it is possible to handle these crude masses of humanity with comparative success. Reverting to our own problems, it is apparent that they are enormously greater than those of England. I am not familiar with the various state and civic sanitary codes in the United States, but know fairly accurately what they are in Canada. Now judging the former by the latter, I venture to say that the housing problem is as yet of all civic problems the least dealt with as, indeed, it is the one most difficult to approach. It may be quite true that public health officers have hitherto on this continent been chiefly engaged in removing cases of disease from tenements; but I venture to anticipate that this Association, and all similar ones, if true to their mission, will, within the next twenty-five years find their chief occupation in improving if not removing the tenements themselves. We have in New York, Boston, and Chicago tenement house commissioners, and their annual reports indicate the extent and nature of the task; but in Canada and in, I imagine, most United States cities, whatever is done with overcrowded and insanitary houses is done under some clause in the sanitary code.

Hitherto there have been two phases of the problem: first, What ought to be done? and the second, How are we to get it done? Everyone knows how the problem arises. The houses of a generation ago or half that in New York or Montreal, of the residential sections, were adequate for their then purpose. Population, railways, extension of trade in a dozen directions within a few years have changed locally the whole face of things. The store-keeper prospers and moves up town; the houses on the street become a store or a tenement. Let a city's increase be 10,000, or, as in some cases 100,000, a year, and these changes become almost magical. It is now not a question alone of what is to be done, but how is it to be done? Rents rise, there is actually a famine in houses; even those persons of a fair income are forced to combine in many instances their housing, both from necessity and from expense. To say that such conditions are taken advantage of by the house-owner and house-agent is but to say what

under the law of supply and demand is natural and logical. To understand that the unscrupulous will conspire and organize to intensify these conditions is what, under the prevailing ideas of competition being the life of trade, is only to be expected. What the usurer, the agent of the usurer, and what even so-called philanthropists and religious corporations have permitted and may still be permitting, in this exploiting of the poor has been, since the days of the Chartists, the subject of scathing criticism and censure alike by poets, novelists and writers of every sort, and yet the evils continue, and very few are seriously expecting any amelioration of the conditions. A recent newspaper article, dealing with certain scandals in which the politicians were involved, said, whether it was with regard to trusts or insurance companies, that the people got about the kind of political representatives and legislation that they wished for or were worthy of. The statement may be true in a sense, but such can in no way remove from those who have a sense of responsibility the duty of exercising it wherever and whenever it becomes possible in relation to society. Naturally, such applies to us as members of this Association, no matter to what section of public health work we apply ourselves. As federal officers, in control of the inspection of immigrants, it is apparent that the responsibilities are enormous. Shipping companies, booking agencies, employers of contract labor, organized schemes for assisting immigrants and others for preying upon them, whether in transit or after landing on our shores, are all playing their parts in inducing immigrants to seek this Western Eldorado. Senor Mosso, in a recent article on Italian emigration, has stated that there were at one time more than ten thousand agents in Italy actively promoting emigration from that country. To these agencies must be added the yet far larger and more effective influence of the immigrant, who, having arrived, encourages and aids his relatives and friends to come to him. To oppose, therefore, to some extent the evil results which naturally arise from these multiplied influences, the United States Government has for years been enlarging the efficiency of her civil and medical immigration services, which in 1903-4 debarred 6,440 persons from landing in the United States out of a total of 941,315 aliens arriving at her ports, and deported 479 who had gained admission to the country within three years after landing. Under similar laws and action the immigration service of Canada during the same year deported 270 out of a total of 99,741 arriving at ocean ports and 85 others subsequent to their admission to Canada.

But it is apparent that the more than 1,000,000 admitted to the two countries during this year, thousands of whom had not as much as ten dollars on landing, must either have been directed in their movements or have drifted into those very cities and

those districts of our cities where the tenements exist and where the police, social and sanitary problems persistently call for our attention. To-day the immigration services of both countries are first asking themselves how they can prevent, if it be possible, the embarkation of more of those who through poverty, criminal instinct, or disease, must be deemed undesirable immigrants, and second, how they can distribute such immigrants as are given permission to land. To the Canadian Government, according to a recent United States authority, must be given the credit for the first serious attempt at distributing immigrants, after entrance to the country, through its having officers accompanying all parties from the sea-port to their destination in the very centre of the new territories, where free-land grants are, and to which they are even conducted by Government agents. But this, it is felt, is still dealing but imperfectly with the problem which includes the thousands who annually drift to the great cities. In the United States this problem overwhelms the officers of the service. When, as stated in a recent paper by Dr. Allan McLaughlin, of the Marine Hospital Service, over 65,000 Jewish immigrants located in New York in one year, it is apparent that the problem extends far beyond that of inspection at the ports of entry, and that it must include some system of internal jurisdiction and supervision originating in and remaining a part of the Acts relating to immigration. But with such a system in existence the problem would be still unsolved, since its factors essentially lie still within state and municipal powers and jurisdiction.

Dr. McLaughlin very aptly remarks: "The responsibility for the slum can be divided between money-grasping property-owners and an indifferent puerile administration. The immigrant finds the tenement and slums already established when he arrives, and is the victim and not the cause of them." In what direction, then, must we look yet further? Primarily, of course to our state and provincial governments. Upon them falls largely the cost of police and justice, to them the charge of institutions for the insane and feeble-minded belongs, and from them the municipalities obtain at least a part of the cost for the care of paupers and incurables. It is not without reason that our state legislatures demand relief from some of the burdens incident to this enormous immigration. For instance, the State of New York had, in 1904, 7,983 aliens or 20 per cent. in the whole 39,127 inmates of public, insane and charitable institutions in a population of 7,268,894, while the percentage of such to the total of aliens was even greater in Massachusetts. In Canada similar figures have not yet been collected, but the burden in such centres as Montreal and Winnipeg has begun to be seriously felt. To the legislatures of such states, therefore, must we look for first an

appreciation of what the situation demands, and thereafter for legislation requisite to limit these growing evils. It may be said that immigration primarily depends upon favorable industrial conditions, and that so long as such continue this influx will go on unceasingly.* This may be true, but it is also true that under favorable industrial conditions regulations especially dealing with the overcrowding of dwellings and tenements and their sanitary improvements can most readily be brought into operation.

In what direction, then, can such legislation be begun? In the Bill for the regulation of alien immigration, introduced in 1904 and passed in 1905 by the British Parliament, a provision exists whereby the Local Government Board can by order limit the number of any particular nationality or class within a certain specified urban district of any city in the United Kingdom. Here we have a general provision which any state legislature could enact, and one capable of wide application since it brings the state into immediate and necessary relations with the municipal authorities. What is the simple meaning of such provision? Just this, that any slum district occupied by a foreign colony would either be altogether prevented or at least limited in extent. What further could be done? A general enactment could be passed having a model by-law attached requiring that no cellar can be occupied as a dwelling, that tenements may be entered at all hours by special sanitary officers in order that the number of inmates may be known and that the lease-holder and landlord may be subject to a fine adequate to prevent overcrowding. Should we admit that such laws would be still insufficient yet another resource is possible, which would be to have assessments levied rather upon the revenues accruing from overcrowded tenements than from the value of land and buildings. The facts relating to the rent primarily received by the owner of the property, to the percentage received in addition thereto by his agent and to the amount extorted as key-money by the collector under the system of weekly rentals, have been made the subject of too many enquiries to longer doubt their truth. Is anything more yet possible? The power ought undoubtedly to exist, as it does in some health laws, whereby sanitary officers could have rent withheld and applied directly to the construction of necessary conveniences, and if further neglected that the lease might be broken.

So much and more might be placed in a general sanitary code of the state with powers enabling municipal councils to add special clauses dealing with particular matters.

Such legislation having been passed, are we then to expect the problem to be solved? To some slight extent yes, perhaps, but

* For instance immigration to the United States decreased from 590,319 in 1891 to 230,312 in the lean year of 1893.

only partially. The very intricacy of the problem, dealing as it necessarily must with the question of right, on the one hand, of an individual to live in 200 cubic feet instead of 1,000 of air space, and to work for 25 cents or 50 cents for sixteen hours a day if so disposed, and of the landlord to make such a condition possible for him, and, on the other hand, of the authorities to interfere with such presumably natural rights, cannot but make it appear evident that before success can be obtained some ethical standard of being and doing must be recognized which will be sufficient to prevent the grinding of the faces of the poor. Where shall we find it? Amongst the leaders of labor? Without questioning the value of labor organizations, I have yet to recall any more serious attempts on their part than those of increasing wages and shortening the working hours. But if they have not called loudly for sanitary reforms, as Frederick Harrison advised them twenty years ago in England, if they have not been the most advanced in advocating temperance in the drinking customs of the people, can we say, though suffering most, that they have been different in this from the wealthier classes?

"Our aspirations, our soul's genuine life,
Grow torpid in the din of earthly strife."—*Faust*.

Are we to expect that landlords, speaking generally, for there are good landlords, will be the first to move or that the employers of cheap labor will encourage conditions which would at once force up the wages to a living point, when yearly thousands upon thousands of new hands come to their doors asking only the privilege of working?

I know a Canadian city in which there is not a single by-law which prevents either residence in a cellar or the overcrowding of tenements by tier over tier of bunks, and another in which the city council refused to ask, and the provincial legislature, when urged by the health officer, neglected to provide a law to prevent residence in cellars, though an epidemic of smallpox was present. Surely of such the words of the Master are true, "Ye are yet in your sins." In what direction are we to look for assistance? I sometimes wonder, when I have seen in the daily newspaper the sports page, which used to be a column, now spreading over to the second page, and the report of an important Board of Health meeting, once a month, reduced to half a column, how the Saviour's words, "What went you out for to see? A reed shaken in the wind?" would be applied by these daily providers of public pabulum, who find their defence in supplying, as they say, what the public demand. Have they not, with their large opportunities, yet larger responsibilities, as educators of public opinion, to investigate conditions and to educate our people to first desire and

then obtain such legislative and municipal reforms as will lessen what, now bad, will become intolerable if allowed to go on unchecked. In the meantime we may very properly gird on our sanitary armor for yet more serious struggles. We have to oppose the agents of crime, of acute disease, of tuberculosis and its allied congeners of degeneration, of insanity, and of the multiplied neuroses the outcome of malnutrition, bad food, exhaustion, foul air, and dissipation. As we have dealt with the old-time pestilences which slew their thousands, so must we deal with the more secret, insidious, yet more far-reaching and fatal foes of urban life, where populations, once rural, have multiplied, since the era of the steamship, railway, and electricity, into cities, not once but twenty fold! The problem has been rapidly forced upon this continent. Allured by the golden prospects of material development we have not had time to realize or have forgotten, "That the life is more than meat and the body more than raiment." And yet the victories of the past are pleasant auguries for the future. New diseases demand new remedies, and new conditions will be met by new resources. We may comfort ourselves somewhat, perhaps, with the words of Rabbi Ben Ezra:

"Grow old along with me!
 The best is yet to be
 The last of life for which the first
 was made;
 Our times are in his hand
 Who saith, 'A whole I planned;
 Youth shows but half; trust God: see all
 nor be afraid.'" —*Browning.*