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New Light on Immigration Peril

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French Strother

THE human aspect of the American scene resembles nothing so much as an international mining camp at the height of a new gold rush. San Francisco in 1849 presented just such a gathering of the ends of the earth. And it has, as its heritage, its separate Chinese telephone exchange, its joss houses, its Buddhist temples, its two pages in the telephone book listing only Japanese window cleaners, its Mexican tamales, its Italian vote, its Jewish vote, and its heterogeneous population, whose conflicting ideals have made the government of San Francisco one of the most difficult political problems in the world.

What happened in San Francisco has been happening on a gigantic, on an incredible scale, in the rest of the country. The hopeless mongrelization of New York has become a commonplace. But Boston, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, all the centers of industry, have been flooded with successive waves of Italians, Greeks, Lithuanians, Poles, Jews, and Tartars. True, after 30 years of agitation, we put one prohibition on them—they must not have trachoma. They might come with hearts aflame with bitterness against all laws and all governments, with loathsome physical standards, with ancient and ineradicable racial hatreds, with legal conceptions utterly unlike ours. They might be—and are—of every breed, of every tradition, of every purpose; but they must not have an infectious granulation of the eye-lids, called trachoma.

In fairness to the aliens, be it said that some of them have brought rich gifts to our civilization. But what shall it profit a nation if it gain the whole world, and lose its own soul? For, make no mistake about it, every nation has a soul; and except that soul be nourished, that nation shall die. We are trying to operate a social order which grew with infinite pains out of the social experience of the English race, and a government equally born of a common experience of life, and trying to operate them with not one, but a dozen, racial elements whose ideas, ideals, experience, faith, are as different from those of the native stock as garlic is different from cabbage.

OldMagazineArticles.com

*U.S. Rep. French Strother*

Trial by jury is one of our most jealously guarded institutions. But the essence of trial by jury is that the jury shall be men whose ideas of right and wrong were got from the same sources as your own ideas of right and wrong. An American charged with violation of the Volstead Act would not get what we mean by "trial by jury" if the jurors were 12 fanatical Mohammedans who believed literally in Mohammed's injunction against the use of wine. An American sued for damages for killing a cow with his automobile would not get a "trial by jury" from 12 East Indians, who regard cows as sacred animals. These are extreme illustrations, but innumerable lesser examples could be cited, much more likely to occur and equally important in their effects, of differences in racial viewpoint that profoundly affect the attitude of men of different inheritances toward the same set of facts. It is absurd to suppose that a jury of Smiths and Robinsons, trying defendant Brown, would see the evidence in the same light as a jury composed of one highly educated native apiece of Poland, Syria, Italy, Croatia, Greece, Lithuania, Spain, Latvia, Czecho-Slovakia, Russia, and Hungary.

"But," you may say, "the second generation is as American as the Smiths and Robinsons."

Are they? The "Courrier des Etas-Unis" is a New York newspaper, printed in French. It has been published in New York for nearly 100 years. Its recent editorials refer to "our occupation of the Ruhr," "our policy regarding reparations," "our position." These editorials do not mean the American occupation of the Ruhr, the American policy regarding reparations, etc.

New Mexico has been under American rule for 77 years. But the last session of the legislature of New Mexico appropriated nearly \$2,000 to pay for translators and interpreters

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to enable "native" members of the Lower House to read the bills and debate the measures in Spanish.

When the Versailles Treaty erected the Republic of Latvia, it developed that more than half of the Letts of the world live in the United States, chiefly in Pennsylvania, where they work in the coal mines and the steel mills. So helpful had the American Letts been in propaganda for the independence of Latvia and so ardent was their patriotism for this creation of the Peace Treaty, that the Letts of Latvia invited the Letts of America to vote for the officers of their first republican government. The result being that a prominent American lawyer of Pittsburgh—prominent at least in the Lettish colony—and himself of Lettish origin, was elected President of Latvia! He promptly foreswore his American allegiance, and left for the land of his heart's desire, Latvia.

In New England, a million French-Canadians (transferred to us after a century of life in British Canada) still speak French, maintain French parishes and parochial schools, and support French nationalistic societies and a French nationalistic press.

The largest Polish church in America (in Chicago) officially describes one of its parochial institutions as a society whose members are expected "to be the guardians of everything that is divine and Polish in order to grow up to be real Polish patriots and defenders of the Christian faith." There are three million Polish voters in the United States.

The foregoing are important, not as evidences of the size of our immigration problem, but of its nature . . . In the opinion of many observers (and the World's Work shares that opinion) the number of immigrants allowed to Italy, Poland, Russia, and the Balkan States is still much too high. The percentage of immigrants allowed to countries of "Nordic" stock is still too low. Furthermore, the selection of which individuals shall migrate to this country still rests almost wholly with the countries who send the immigrants, and practically not at all with us. To correct these grave defects in the present law, several things are necessary:

1. Change the basis of the quotas from the census of 1910 to the census of 1890 or of 1880. (This would largely eliminate immigration from regions whose peoples are most unlike ours, and would encourage immigration from Northwestern Europe.)

2. Apply our tests of admission in the immigrant's native land and not after he has reached an American port. (In every Continental country, all the sub-

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stantial facts bearing upon every resident's life—his age, birthplace, true occupation, physical condition, and moral character in detail—are official police records.)

3. Adopt a positive, instead of a negative policy of selection. (Organize a Governmental department to obtain the facts about our needs for new blood. Maintain abroad, in Northwestern European countries agencies to find men of these descriptions, and arrange for their emigration to the United States, and to that part of the country where their particular abilities are needed.)