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The Foreigner in America

One of America's Religious Problems, and what she is doing to meet it.

IT is a truism to affirm that England and America have a common heritage and a common life. This is inevitably so since it was Englishmen who laid the foundations of our national life, and who, in the early years of our history, formed the dominant group. It is not unnatural, therefore, that we love to think of ourselves as forming a vital part of the people who call themselves Anglo-Saxons. But there are those among us who are already raising the question as to whether we may, any longer, legitimately aspire to bear that designation. They point to our great city populations, which now for the first time in our history comprehend more than one half of our people, and which are made up so largely of a heterogeneous conglomeration of people from the ends of the earth—and they say America is no longer what she was fifty years ago, when the majority of her inhabitants traced their origin to the so-called Anglo-Saxon countries.

There are a dozen or more of our most densely settled states which have a population of foreign-born, or children of foreign-born ranging anywhere from thirty to sixty per cent. This is especially true of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pensylvania, Ohio, and California. There are scores of cities in our Atlantic border States which have a foreign contingent of twenty-five to eighty-five per cent. of the total population. New Haven, that once classic town of New England, with Yale University in its midst, has 50,000 Italians, which is one-third of its total inhabitants, not to mention the thousands belonging to other racial groups. Providence, Rhode Island, the city of Roger Williams, and the seat of our oldest Baptist institution of learning, Brown University, is made up of thousands of French Canadians, Portuguese, Greeks, Poles, and Jews, and 45,000 Italians. Lawrence, Mass., the greatest cotton mill centre on the continent, has a foreign population of eighty per cent. New York City, with its 6,000,000 people, representing almost every nation in the world, can boast of having over 830,000 Russians, 800,000 Italians, not to mention the very large

groups—small cities within the city—of Hungarians, Poles, Greeks, Spaniards, Chinese, French, Japanese, *ad infinitum*.

In view of these facts there seems to be some ground for raising the question as to whether we still have the right to call ourselves an Anglo-Saxon country. And yet my contention is that we are and that we shall continue to be an Anglo-Saxon people. The Anglo-Saxon stock may pass away, but our Anglo-Saxon institutions and ideals still live; and it is these institutions and ideals that are going to transform in due season these various peoples into the heterogeneous American people of the future. The Americans of five hundred years hence are not going to be the descendants of those who came over in the glorious *Mayflower*, but of those who have come from the four corners of the earth, and have caught the spirit and absorbed the ideals of the early settlers. For they, too, have in them the capacity for the appreciation of religious liberty, freedom of conscience, and real democracy, which means the recognition of the worth of the individual human soul. The Anglo-Saxon spirit is not something static, I take it, but rather like religion, it is dynamic—something living, that is constantly enlarging and developing. This is due to its fundamental religious character. It must have been with this thought in mind that Dr. John Clifford, on a recent visit to America, in addressing 1,200 ministers of various denominations, said, "You Americans have taken the best we had and have made it better."

But neither religion nor the Anglo-Saxon spirit will take root in human life without effort, toil, and sacrifice on the part of those who would see these vital elements take possession of men and women. In other words, if America is to continue to have a common life with England, and is to succeed in moulding and fashioning the mind and temper of the rapidly increasing foreign populations within her own domains, she must set herself to the task with renewed energy, and with a holy passion and devotion, of educating and evangelizing, this great mass of humanity that is not only foreign in speech and customs, but in religion and ideals of life.

But to those who are familiar with religious and social work, it is not necessary to point out the superhuman, and what seem to be the insurmountable difficulties, that America has before her, in her endeavour to meet the exigency of her task. According to the last religious census we have in America about 24,000,000 people who are members of the various Protestant religious bodies, 17,000,000 Roman Catholics, and about 4,000,000 Jews. This means that there are over 50,000,000 people in the United States who have little or nothing to do with any of the religious organisations. The majority of these 50,000,000 are of Roman Catholic origin, who have been lost to the Church through con-

tact with life in America. It has been pointed out by Roman Catholic writers that if the Roman Church were able to hold all the people that really belong to her, she would now have a membership of 45,000,000, instead of 17,000,000. Of the million and a quarter of Jews in New York City only 400,000 are allied with synagogues. In the midst of this teeming mass of humanity of the great city, we can count only 400,000 Protestant Church members. There are scores of churches in certain parts of the city that conduct services in the English language, where the constituency to which they can appeal is a very limited one. For the city as a whole, only fifteen per cent. of its population is really accessible to the Protestant English-speaking Church.

This situation has long since been recognized by our missionary statesmen, and as a result the various missionary societies are stressing the work among foreign-speaking people. All denominations—especially the Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Baptists, the Congregationalists, and the Episcopalians—have their foreign work department. Our own denomination has, if I am not mistaken, the largest number of foreign-speaking church members of any religious body in the United States. Whereas twenty-five years ago our own American Baptist Home Mission Society was spending most of its funds in connection with the work in our frontier States, to-day it is spending half its income in the support of foreign-speaking churches—missions and Christian centres in foreign communities. But even this is far from adequate in our endeavour to meet the religious needs of our foreign-born populations.

The beginning of our work among the so-called newer immigrants goes back to about thirty years ago. By that time the Scandinavian and German groups had flourishing churches established in the various parts of our country. These people were not so difficult to reach because of their Protestant origin. The newer immigrants, with few exceptions from Hungary, are of Roman Catholic origin, so that in addition to meeting their religious indifference, we have the added difficulty of bitter prejudice towards anything Protestant to overcome. It is not an uncommon thing for us to be spat upon by boys and girls as we pass through the streets; there are those who will not walk on the same side of the street, if they see us passing by, for fear of being damned by coming near us. Frequently our services are disturbed by gangs of rowdies throwing stones into our meeting places and shouting at the top of their voices. For any one to attempt to build up a Protestant Church in such communities and out of such material is almost like seeking to do the impossible. *And yet we are doing it. The fact is, we must do it if Protestant Christianity is to persist in America.* It has been well said by Mr. Stainer, himself a converted Jew

and one of our foremost experts in social and religious problems, "That Protestant Christianity in America stands or falls with the foreigner."

From a religious point of view the American city is becoming a serious problem in most of our Eastern States. Wherever the foreigner settles in large number the American moves away and takes his church with him. The consequence is that we have large areas in many of our cities that are completely abandoned by the Protestant Church. In the one region of Brooklyn, where it has been the writer's privilege to work for the past nineteen years, I have seen twenty-five Protestant Churches move away. The fact that Jewish synagogues and stately Roman Catholic edifices take the places of the departed evangelical churches does not meet the situation. Whenever any district is bereft of Protestant Churches the moral tone of that community is inevitably lowered.

It is not the function of the foreign-speaking church to perpetuate a foreign institution on American soil—in what we should like to call our "American cities"; but rather, through the only medium of approach—the foreigner's own native tongue and persons of their own nationality—to lay the foundations anew for the future English-speaking Protestant Churches in those foreign quarters from which the English-speaking Church has recently retreated.

But when the various evangelical bodies of America were led to see their duty towards the foreigner and towards the cause of Christ in America, they saw that, although funds might be available for the work they desired to do, the most important element was lacking—i.e. workers: men and women who could cope with the problem of evangelizing the non-English-speaking peoples of our land. For a time, any one who knew the language of a particular foreign group and could use a few pious phrases, was pressed into the service, with the result that very little was accomplished, while in many cases the Protestant faith was discredited because of scandals which arose in connection with such workers. After many unfavourable experiences it became evident that if we hoped to accomplish anything worth while in the field of foreign evangelization, we must establish special educational institutions where the choicest of our young men from our churches and missions among our foreign populations, could be trained and adequately equipped for this most important work. We have now reached a stage where no one will be accepted on any of our foreign fields, no matter how pious he may appear to be, if he has not availed himself of the educational advantages which the various denominations have provided.

Very frequently we are asked by well meaning, but badly informed people, whether we are doing a worthy thing in

proselytising from the Roman Catholic Churches. The fact is, we are not compelled to proselytize; there are millions of our foreign-speaking people among us who have not only no attachment with the Church of their fathers, but who have become hostile to any and every form of religion. It is a well-known fact that not over one-third of any of our foreign groups, with the exception of the French Canadians, are really loyal to the faith of their fathers. This being the case, what else can the Protestant Church do but adapt its methods so as to minister to the religious needs of these people? It should be noted here that the great bulk of our so-called Atheists and rabid antagonists come, generally speaking, from the Jewish and Roman Catholic origin.

It can readily be understood how necessary it is that those who are to attempt the difficult and delicate task of mediating to these people a faith which will satisfy both mind and heart, should be adequately prepared, both spiritually and intellectually.

It should here be stated that our own denomination stands in the front rank of those who are seeking to create a worthy and efficient body of workers to proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ to these prejudiced and in many instances keen minded foreign-speaking groups. Fifteen years ago the first of our departments —the Italian—for the training of our foreign workers, was opened under the auspices of Colgate University—one of our oldest and most honoured Baptist Educational Institutions. The work of this department was conducted in the city of Brooklyn, in conjunction with the work of a very active Italian Church, where it was possible for the young men in training to obtain practical experience while persuing their studies. Later, under the auspices of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, the Hungarian, the Polish, the Russian, the Czecho-Slovak, the Mexican, and the Roumanian Departments were organized, and splendid men were put at the head of each. In the beginning these departments were located in different cities, but in 1921 they were all brought together under one organization, known as the International Baptist Seminary, and housed in two beautiful private residences purchased by the Home Mission Society, in the city of East Orange, New Jersey. Rev. F. L. Anderson, D.D., of Chicago, Ill., was called to become the President of the Institution. The Mexican Department, because of the density of the Mexican population on the Pacific Coast, was located at Los Angeles College; while the Italian Department, which the writer has the honour to represent, is still a branch of the Theological Seminary of Colgate University and affiliated with the International Seminary.

The task before the International Seminary is neither small nor an easy one. The seminary must be more than a place of

study—it must be a real Christian home, in which the highest standards for daily living are taught and exemplified, and where the closest and most intimate relationships are established between teacher and student. Only by so doing can the lives of the young men be moulded and fashioned into efficient servants of Jesus Christ.

Our foreign-speaking churches and missions in the various parts of our country are the sources from which our student body is drawn. The larger part of those coming to us have had very limited educational advantages, and as a consequence our courses have to be adapted to their differing needs. We can set up no absolute standard for admission, for among our foreign-speaking churches, thus far, "Not many noble have been called." Among them, as of old, it is the common people who receive Him gladly. But while our students come to us with many limitations, they do bring with them a sincere devotion to Jesus Christ—a real spiritual experience, and a hunger and passion for knowledge. It is up to us to do the rest.

Naturally the seminary has an intellectual ideal. No student who does not give evidence of a desire and capacity for learning can long remain in our fellowship. The five-year course offered is arranged especially for the needs of foreign-speaking workers. Among the numerous subjects presented, we aim to realize at least the following objectives: 1. The development of Christian Character; 2. The mastery of the contents of the Old and New Testaments; 3. A thorough knowledge of English and native tongue; 4. A practical knowledge of missionary service.

The annual outlay for the conduct of the various departments amounts to no less than $50,000, not to mention the sum of $200,000 which is invested in the properties. The number of students enrolled in all departments reaches almost the 100 figure, while the number of teachers is fifteen. The American Baptist Home Mission Society, however, is doing work in twenty-five different languages. The work among our foreign people is under the direction and supervision of Dr. Chas. A. Brooks, who believes that in the making of our plans for this most important phase of our denominational work we must look into the distant future. We must do many things now which will not bring immediate results, but which will make possible a glorious harvest in the years to come.

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Oxford, December 27th, 1922.