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ARTICLE VIII.

THE RESTRICTION OF IMMIGRATION.

BY EDWARD W. BEMIS.

READERS of the BIBLIOTHECA SACRA are aware of the agitation in Congress in favor of the bill, that has already passed the House by a large majority, that would keep out all immigrants between sixteen and sixty years of age who cannot read and write in the English or some other language. This McCall bill may not become a law at this session. A senator has written a friend that, in view of the coming elections, Congress will pass no bill that has two sides to it! Yet the interest in such proposed legislation is growing not only among the members of the A. P. A., but among economists, publicists, and even leaders of organized labor, and may ere long lead to positive enactment.

The secretary of the Immigration Restriction League, with its headquarters in Boston, finds in an article of the writer's in the *Andover Review* of March, 1888, the first advocacy of such a bill, and he therefore feels an especial interest in a brief consideration of it here.

The first national legislation was an act of July, 1864, entitled "An Act to Encourage Immigration," and providing not only for the protection of new arrivals from imposition, but exempting them from military service, and allowing them before coming to make a contract for any term, not exceeding one year, to repay the expenses of coming. This law was repealed in 1868, and there was no further national legislation on immigration till 1882, but many Western States kept immigration agents in Europe to secure settlers. In

these and previous years, our immigration was almost entirely of Germanic stock, such as Germans, Norwegians, Swedes, and British. The chief exception—the Irish—had long been under Anglo-Saxon training. These kinsmen of ours not only helped to fill our armies in the Civil War (and in case of the Irish our police and aldermanic bodies since then!), but they came when there was a greater apparent need of unskilled labor than now, and they brought with them some familiarity with local self-government, even though unacquainted with democratic control in national affairs.

In the years following 1830, however, the American birth-rate declined faster than immigration increased, and it is the at least very plausible theory of General Francis A. Walker, our eminent economist, that one great factor in this rapid decline of the American birth-rate was the unwillingness to bring children into competition with the unkempt children of the immigrant, who, through no fault of their own, could not quickly escape the results of heredity and early environment. The words of General Walker, in the August, 1891, *Forum*, are worth quoting :—

"Throughout the Northeastern and the Northern Middle States, into which, during the period under consideration (1830–60) the new-comers poured in in such numbers, the standard of material living, of general intelligence, of social decency, had been singularly high. Life, even at its hardest, had always had its luxuries; the babe had been a thing of beauty, to be delicately nurtured and proudly exhibited; the growing child had been decently dressed, at least for school and church; the house had been kept in order, at whatever cost, the gate hung, the shutters in place, while the front yard had been made to bloom with simple flowers; the village church, the public school-house, had been the best which the community, with great exertions and sacrifices, could erect and maintain. Then came the foreigner, making his way into the little village, bringing —small blame to him!—not only a vastly lower standard of living, but too often an actual present incapacity even to understand the refinements of life and thought in the community in which he sought a home. Our people had to look upon houses that were mere shells for human habitations, the gate unhung, the shutters flapping or falling, green pools in the yard, babes and young children rolling about half naked or worse, neglected, dirty, unkempt. Was there not in this [a] sentimental reason

strong enough to give a shock to the principle of population? But there was, besides, an economic reason for a check to the native increase. The American shrank from the industrial competition thus thrust upon him. He was unwilling himself to engage in the lowest kind of day labor with these new elements of the population; he was even more unwilling to bring sons and daughters into the world to enter into that competition."

It is by no means proven, that, as held by some eminent writers and many flippant paragraphers, the Irish immigrant merely forced the Yankee mill-worker upward, and that the French Canadian in turn did the same favor to the Irish, and is now being similarly elevated by the pressure of the still cheaper Italian and Hungarian. Neither is it true, as commonly supposed, that no one would do our rough work of mining, sewer digging, railroad construction, etc., were it not for the new arrivals from Europe. Perhaps the American would demand higher pay, and thus stimulate more use of labor-saving machinery, but this every lover of humanity should desire. Rather, the conception that it takes a mean man to do mean work probably arises from the class of immigrants that come to us fitted for little else save rough work.

It is also a great popular fallacy that we need immigration to sustain our physical vigor. The refutation of this appears in Justin Winsor's "Narrative and Critical History of America," vol. iv., where Professor Shaler, of Harvard, shows statistically, from our army records, that in the Civil War, those of native American stock, running back two centuries, such as the Maine and Wisconsin woodsman, the Western Reserve farmers, the Kentuckian, Tennessean, and Virginian, in both Northern and Southern armies, were far more rugged on the march or in camp and hospital than the more brawny looking immigrants.

Yet far be it from the purpose of the writer to minimize the excellent characteristics and great benefits to us of our German, Scandinavian, and British immigrants. For example, the common charge that the foreign-born furnish an undue

proportion of the inmates of our prisons is most unfair, for it ignores the fact that a greater proportion of our foreign-born than of our native population are males between sixteen and forty years of age, when most crime is committed. Of the males over eighteen in 1890, the foreign-born were 26.38 per cent, while of the male prisoners only 26.22 per cent were born abroad.

Neither is it correct to ascribe most of the misgovernment of our cities to the immigrant, since educational qualifications for the suffrage have largely met this difficulty in Massachusetts, and should be adopted elsewhere, as also more stringent methods of naturalization. In Massachusetts no one can register, unless he can readily read a paragraph in English of the State Constitution, drawn by lot from a box. At the national conferences of civic reform organizations, it is quite common to hear mayors and prominent citizens of cities having a particularly large proportion of native Americans describe the political abuses of their municipalities as equal to those of most other places of the same size that have a much larger foreign-born population. Our most dangerous class by far, politically, is a few of our native American and often church-supporting millionaires in each of our large cities who bribe aldermen, assessors, and legislators, or otherwise corrupt our institutions, in order to preserve or increase monopolistic gains. Yet the presence among us of a large class ignorant of our institutions, and easily controlled by the saloon keeper and the pot-house politician, renders reform somewhat difficult. "Is dat de man what gives de beer? 'Cause I votes for de man what gives de beer and de two dollar," said a Tonawanda, N. Y., lumbershover to a friend of mine as she passed near the polling booth. Professor McCook, of Yale, indeed, finds the same political degradation among many native American farmers in old Connecticut. And do not many of us vote for what we

think will improve our own business, without regard to the welfare of the country as a whole?

Realizing, however, that the city is the largely unsolved problem of America, we may well pause when we note that the native-born in our one hundred and twenty-four largest cities during 1880–90, increased 18.6 per cent, while the foreign-born increased 44 per cent. Only 31 per cent of the men over twenty-one in our seventy largest cities in 1890 were of native white parents. Of the population of Chicago, of all ages and both sexes, 78.9 per cent were of foreign parentage, in New York City 80.6 per cent, and in cultured Boston 68 per cent, and in Cincinnati 69 per cent. In other words, in our largest cities from three to four out of every five men to be met on the streets were born abroad. In the North Atlantic States in 1890 the men over twenty-one of foreign parentage were 49.5 per cent of all the men, and in Illinois, 53 per cent, Wisconsin 77.4 per cent, Minnesota 76.5 per cent, and Iowa 47.4 per cent, and in the South about ten per cent.

Whatever may be thought of the character of our immigration, and its results prior to 1876 or 1880, all must agree on two points:—First, that there is now a lessened need for the immigrant or opportunity for him, because of the depressed condition of our farmers, the exhaustion of our public lands, and the congestion of the unemployed in our large cities, whither the immigrant comes.

In the second place, and perhaps more important, is the great deterioration in the character of our immigration in recent years. Reference is, of course, made to the fact that, whereas the immigration to us from Austria-Hungary, Russia, Poland, and Italy never exceeded one per cent of our total immigration prior to 1870, and was only 6.4 per cent from June 30, 1870, to June 30, 1880, it rose to 17.6 per cent from 1880 to 1890, and to 39.7 per cent from June 30, 1890, to June 30, 1894. During the calendar year 1895, the percent-

age from this section of Europe was 43.5, or nearly equal to the immigration (47.8 per cent of the total) from Great Britain and Ireland, Germany, Norway, and Sweden. From 1880 to 1890 the native-born in this country increased 22.7 per cent, and the foreign-born as a whole 38.47; but the Poles increased 203.6 per cent, the Austrians 218.8 per cent, the Italians 312.8 per cent, the Russians 411.3 per cent, and the Hungarians 441.7 per cent.

The trouble with this immigration is:—First, these people of Eastern and Southern Europe, not being of Teutonic or Celtic blood which for a thousand years has been under Teutonic training, have none of those traditions of local self-government, race kinship, etc., which so largely unite the people of Western Europe.

Second, and in the writer's view more important, most of these immigrants have, through no fault of their own, it may be, a very much lower standard of living than our kinsfolk from Germany, Great Britain, or Scandinavia. Accustomed to live in one-room dwellings and on a few cents a day, these people, coming to us, in many cases, without families and even as "birds of passage" for a few years or parts of years, till they can save a few hundred dollars and return, are able and willing to live on what would not support in decency a native American with a family. Thus this new class of our immigration prevents the rise of wages, and even causes their fall in the mines, sweat-shops, and some other crowded employments, where they especially congregate. Some time ago, the writer noticed Italians working on the waterworks at Portland, Me., for sixty cents a day and their expenses of thirteen cents, while a considerable number of American workmen were idle, because they could not earn the small wages of $1.25 per day rightly considered necessary to maintain their families.

The French Canadians who fill the Lawrence and other New England cotton mills are too incapable or disinclined to

form good, wisely managed labor organizations, after the English model, to have much effect in that way in maintaining wages, while the violence attending the strikes of our coal miners is well known. The intelligent Germans, however, develop strong labor unions.

There is such a thing as carrying too far the New England virtue of thrift, when it involves the filthy, crowded tenements and wretched diet of such immigrants as the Italians in Chicago, some of whom feed their children for one meal of the day on vinegar and hard bread, till rickets and kindred diseases permanently sap their strength and destroy their bones.

In Chicago the people above considered from Eastern and Southern Europe are 6.4 per cent of the total population, but 44.4 per cent of the population of the slum districts, while in New York City the corresponding percentages are 9.45 and 51.1, according to a recent investigation of Carroll D. Wright, while the immigrants from the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Scandinavia, who constitute 30.7 per cent of the total population of Chicago and New York, number only 10.6 per cent of the slum population in the former city and 8.6 per cent in the latter.

Now it happens that over one-half of our forty per cent of immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe, and scarcely two per cent of the Germans, English, and Scandinavians, would be kept out by the test proposed in the McCall bill, that none should be admitted between sixteen and sixty who cannot read and write in some language. Those of a very low standard of living to-day, and those that in general we least want, are illiterate, barring a few well-educated criminals, who must be kept out by other tests. At present the United States Immigration authorities take the word of each immigrant as to whether he can read and write, yet two-thirds of the Italians over fifteen landing on our shores in nine months in 1892, and nearly as many since

then, admitted illiteracy. Foreign census and army records prove the great difference between the illiteracy of Eastern and Western Europe. The test is an easy one to apply, and almost entirely concerns the North Atlantic States; for outside of Chicago not ten per cent of the immigration of Eastern and Southern Europe, which General Walker, with some exaggeration, calls the beaten men of beaten races, appears to locate west of Pennsylvania.

In 1882 we excluded convicts, save for political offenses, Chinese laborers, idiots, lunatics, and of late those becoming a public charge within a year of landing. In 1885 we shut out the immigration of contract labor, except actors, artists, lecturers (and later clergymen), singers, domestic servants, and workmen skilled in new industries. In 1891 we excluded polygamists, and those suffering from a loathsome or dangerous disease, or assisted in coming by other than relatives, and in 1893 we provided for more rigid enforcement of the above. Every year we return from one-half to one per cent of those who come, and indirectly deter many more from starting. The steamship companies do not wish to have to return, at their own expense, immigrants whom we do not allow to land, yet the manager of a very powerful philanthropic body informs the writer that many immigrants are allowed to land in Philadelphia who have merely enough money to pay their way to New York.

The law against contract labor is apparently violated on a large scale with reference to French and other Canadians, about fifty thousand of whom come and go every season, but is sufficiently enforced with respect to Europeans, and prevents considerable importation of such labor, or of threats to do so in case of strikes.

The report of the experts who carried on the national immigration investigation in 1895 states, with reference to the fifty thousand Canadians that come and go every season for

work in the building trades, teaming, the fisheries, and as longshoremen and farm laborers:—

"Workmen leaving the States in the winter are empowered by employers to bring other workmen with them the next season. It is safe to say, therefore, that a large proportion of those who come into the States (about one hundred thousand a year, including those who remain) come virtually under contract, and in these circumstances it is very hard, of course, to prove the contract. Immediately on their arrival, they seek out the contractors, who make a specialty of employing provincials, and go to work for them at low wages—if they are carpenters, for $1.50 to $1.75 per day, when the regular rate of wages for carpenters is $2.50 to $3 per day. The testimony taken before the Commission shows that there is a very bitter feeling against this class of alien laborers, not only because they work for low wages, but because they earn their money in one place and spend it in another. It also shows that where the Canadian workman does not work for less wages than his American competitor, he is hired in preference because of his submitting to conditions which the American regards as degrading—a subserviency which the employer naturally enough appreciates. This willingness on the part of the Canadian to degrade the conditions of labor has greatly intensified the bitterness of the feeling against him."

To meet this situation the House of Representatives, May 20, passed, by a large majority, amendments to the McCall bill that virtually prohibit aliens from entering the country to do manual or mechanical labor, while holding a residence or retaining a home in a foreign country. The practicability of so drastic a measure remains to be seen.

Contractors or padrones in New York assist thousands of Italians to come over, and then hold them in a sort of vassalage, and contract for their use in gangs at low rates, until the passage money is thus refunded and profits are made.

To prevent this, a national immigration investigation commission, after an able investigation in 1895, recommended that our States should legislate so that "all persons, contracting for the services of any immigrant within one year of his arrival in this country, should pay the wages or salary directly to such immigrant, who alone shall receipt for the same, and payment to any middleman, boss, or other person, shall not be recognized as a liquidation of the debt,"

and should be prohibited, except in case of his sickness or death, when his agent or legal representative could receipt therefor. "All advances made to such immigrant for board, lodging, food, raiment, money, or other articles" should be made "directly by the contractor to the immigrant, and not by or through any middleman, boss, or other person" and "at prices at which the same articles can be procured in open market."

The wholesale restriction of Chinese labor was due to the great danger to the American standard of life, if these people, with their abominably low mode of life, were allowed to come in the great numbers that seemed likely. Sir Henry Parkes, for a long time the chief statesman of Australia, justified the stoppage, by a heavy head tax, of almost all Chinese immigration to Australia, by the assertion that these Orientals, if given an equal chance with the Anglo-Saxon, would prove stronger in competition for employment. Mr. Parkes held that he, as an Englishman, preferred English to Chinese civilization. Men are more important than cheap goods.

Our anti-Chinese law may have been needlessly severe, though sustained by our Supreme Court; but the subsequent requirement that all Chinese in America must be photographed was necessary if we would enforce the restriction upon new arrivals. Why so many of our citizens should have considered this an indignity is not clear. No one objected to the requirement that all holding passes to the World's Fair in Chicago should be photographed. Surely residence in America is as great a privilege as was a pass to the White City.

The argument seems to the writer conclusive that there is likely to be injury to the American worker in the free immigration of people of the low standard of life of those who wish to come to us from Asia or Eastern and Southern Europe and who are able to come in larger and larger numbers,

with the constant fall in transportation rates, increased knowledge of the country, and aid from business agencies or from friends on this side.

On the other hand must be placed the undoubted benefits of immigration for most of those who come to us. Although many are disappointed in not finding an El Dorado here, yet the great majority are sufficiently pleased to send for their relatives and friends at the earliest opportunity. It has been noticed in Europe that the great waves of immigration arise not when conditions in Europe are the worst, save in exceptional instances, such as Jewish persecutions in Russia, or the recent Italian army conscription for Abyssinia, but when times are the best in North and South America, and these usually coincide with prosperous years in Europe.

It is also a matter of common observation that the energy and intelligence of the immigrant is usually stimulated by new surroundings.

It is not so clear that Europe, as a political and social entity, is benefited by the yearly emigration of over half a million of her citizens. Her statesmen object to the loss of army recruits. This need not concern us. Others try to estimate the cost of educating a child, and consider this cost of $500 to $1000 as lost to his native country if he emigrates in young manhood. It might be better for the Germans, economically and in most ways, if their birth-rate were lower, but under conditions that make emigration desirable for the emigrant, there might seem to be left by his departure a freer field for those that are left. It is also possible for the emigrant to be a loss to the country he leaves and no gain to the country of his adoption, if his coming increases the severity of competition in his new home.

Whether the immigration from Europe has stimulated the birth-rate of those left behind, or permitted the rearing of more who would otherwise have died in childhood, certain it

is that some investigators doubt whether immigration has materially lessened the poverty of Europe. Immigration from Europe is chiefly from the agricultural districts, which have especially suffered from falling prices both there and here. It may well be that, if Italy and Austria-Hungary could not yearly unload upon us their army of the discontented, they would be forced to lessen military burdens and otherwise improve the condition of the toiler. So far as this is true, immigration is of no help to Europe, but a positive hindrance to reform. We arrive, then, at the conclusion that we cannot determine whether, on the whole, immigration is a benefit to Europe or not.

The ethics of restriction of immigration by any test such as the ability to read and write in one's own language must rest upon the relative importance we attach to the benefit accruing to the immigrant, as compared with the economic and social injuries that we must suffer from the coming among us of people of a low standard of life.

Of course there can be but one answer on the part of those who favor protective tariffs or any other legislation that is primarily intended to benefit one's own country, even though incidentally injuring another.

Many others will be satisfied with the conclusion, which the writer accepts, that we will do more good to the world by holding up the best example of highly paid labor, the eight-hour day, successfully secured and wisely used, an effective, honest treatment of monopoly and taxation problems, etc., than by receiving a larger number of immigrants, whose coming is likely, as above described, to hinder our success in gaining the above reforms. In this light there is no apparent violation of ethics in striving for what will in the long run best advance civilization.

Another common objection to restriction of immigration is the feeling that this would be a violation of American traditions. Yet even Thomas Jefferson in his Notes on Vir-

ginia, written during the American Revolution, opposed any encouragement of immigration from France to Virginia, which then needed more population. This is the more significant because Jefferson was much influenced by French philosophy and, of course, pleased with French assistance in the war, and he did not foresee the inferior class of immigrants now coming to us, but he wrote:—

"Every species of government has its specific principles. Ours, perhaps, are more peculiar than those of any other in the universe. It is a composition of the freest principles of the English constitution, with others derived from natural right and natural reason. To these nothing can be more opposed than the maxims of absolute monarchies. Yet from such we are to expect the greatest number of emigrants [immigrants]. They will bring with them the principles of the governments they leave, imbibed in their early youth; or, if able to throw them off, it will be in exchange for an unbounded licentiousness [license], passing, as is usual, from one extreme to another. It would be a miracle were they to stop precisely at the point of temperate liberty. These principles, with their language, they will transmit to their children. In proportion to their numbers, they will share with us the legislation. They will infuse into it their spirit, warp and bias its directions, and render it a heterogeneous, incoherent, distracted mass. . . . If they [these conjectures] be not certain in event, are they not possible, are they not probable? Is it not safer to wait with patience . . . for the attainment of any degree of population desired or expected? May not our government be more homogeneous, more peaceable, more durable?"[1]

But whatever the views of our fathers, changed conditions often require changed legislation. We have abolished slavery, passed an interstate commerce law, deprived the electoral college by unwritten law of its free choice of a president, and done many other things that would have startled our fathers.

Yet we must acknowledge something grand and inspiring in the free admission we have granted to all classes and peoples. We can well afford to continue to admit, except where it can be clearly shown that evident injury results. That such injury was resulting from the Chinese, and is now suffered from the immigration of those whose low standard of

[1] Writings, Vol. viii. p. 331.

life means a fierce competition on a low plane. To point to our great area of land as reason why we need not fear any number of new arrivals is to ignore the fact that the class we are considering as objectionable flock to the cities and mines and actually do handicap labor in its struggle.

Likewise to claim, as many do, that there would be room for more, if we had a different land system or some other reform, does not meet the fact that great industrial changes, such as these reformers wish, even where practicable, will take much time; and meanwhile all true reforms are surely somewhat hindered by the ignorance resulting from the kind of immigration it is proposed to restrict. A high standard of life for all, rather than large numbers, should be our ideal. If we would continue to be conservatively progressive, and attain to more and more of real democracy in both politics and industry, it is very important for us that we should not overload ourselves with a larger yearly increase of people of alien races and inferior modes of life than we can easily and quickly assimilate. The time has come for some such educational test as the McCall bill proposes.