

"Americanization is Neighborization"

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IN THE writer's opinion, the whole scheme of the Americanization of immigrants is still very much in the making, from the definition of the term itself to the methods advocated to bring about the desired consummation. This proves that this cause is a living, not a cut and dried, dead subject; it is a hopeful sign, as are also the many indications that progress is being made in the right direction in several phases of the work. The realization that only teachers, specially trained in the "direct method," should be employed for English classes of adults foreign-born seems to be well nigh universal in educational circles. And the methods taught these teachers are not so standardized as to hamper the individuality of the "born" teachers, while tending more and more to help them to short cuts as well as to give the uninspired but conscientious ones the necessary technique for imparting at least a working knowledge of the English language. The improving of textbooks, as well as methods, goes on apace; the machinery for preparing trained teachers is better oiled every year; the requirements and standards are being raised, and the teaching of English and of the facts required by examiners of petitioners for naturalization is improving in both quantity and quality.

But is not the problem of awakening genuine loyalty to our institutions, both governmental and social, still largely a matter of the individual teacher's personality and temperament, as it likewise is with the day school teachers of future American citizens, whether native or foreign-born? In other words, are the pupils, in either day or night schools, being really Americanized? Go into their homes for the answer!

Granted that different ways are not necessarily less desirable and that we might well adopt some of the, to us, strange customs in use for centuries in other lands, the difference in climate, as well as environment, is reason enough for many of the differences in ways of living which should be adopted by the newcomers. The constant wearing of caps indoors, even in bed, by babies of foreign-born mothers, certainly does not seem to result in loss of hair and may account for the scarcity of earache among them. Perhaps all babies would better be capped! But the ancient custom of swaddling the limbs, including the arms sometimes, to keep them straight or the baby quiet, is as shocking to the visiting nurse as to the conventional American mother. And too much clothing in summer is just as cruel as too little in winter, besides being both unthrifty and insanitary.

Any serious differences in the customs of dressing, eating, or lodging which effect the health, however, may be dealt with authoritatively by the local health officials, though still legitimate subject matter for lessons in English. Equally important to true Americanization, but unreachable by governmental agencies, is the inculcating of the best American ideals, and of the higher standards of living of which the visible material possessions are only the symbol. Too many of our would-be American citizens are like that one recently reported as putting a sign "Furnished

Rooms" in her window, not because she wished to rent any, but to let people know that her next door neighbor was not the only one who had her rooms furnished. Too many ambitious and thrifty house owners of foreign birth, who keep their grounds and homes immaculate and spend their savings in furnishing the two or three largest rooms with far from cheap rugs, curtains, parlor and dining-room furniture, are still unable to speak, much less read, the language of our country, and habitually use their kitchens for general living-rooms, while the children sleep three and four in a bed in small rooms, unheated in winter and stifling in summer, with practically no conveniences for dressing or privacy.

Daniels' "America via the Neighborhood" and Bogardus' "Americanization" both give many illustrations of the misinterpretations of American standards as well as the prevalent causes for same: viz. the aloofness and indifference to the newcomers of the native born residents who might so greatly aid them by just being neighborly. Doubtless many another town or city might be appalled at the results of listing the purely non-commercial organizations within its boundaries, as was a New England town of some 13,000 inhabitants, of whom almost 10,000 lived in the principal industrial section, to find that, without counting the many societies functioning within each of the eleven churches, there were over eighty separate organizations. Approximately 20% of these were composed of foreign-born residents, practicing the supposedly American virtue of coöperation among themselves, with no help from the native-born. A step in the right direction will be taken, if half or more of these form a central union, composed of delegates from all the others, for the purpose of initiating and developing various forms of community work; but the social structure as a whole will require deeper digging and broader foundations before a really American edifice will rise.

What we, as Americanization workers, need particularly to strive for (in addition to forwarding all the good work already started) is to arouse the native-born to their responsibilities as interpreters of Americanism and to realization of the fact that, quite unconsciously and unintentionally, they already are influencing, for better or worse, the foreign-born, who emulate what they see of their dress on the street, their home furnishings in the shop windows, their manners as they come in contact with them industrially and otherwise, and their characters as they understand them from their actions in public.

In rural districts or small communities, the right influences can best be exerted by the natural neighboring of the older residents with the newer. But in the industrial towns and cities, where the foreign-born are already more or less segregated in sections no longer considered desirable by Americans, such cannot be done incidentally, and would better not be attempted at all if there is likelihood of its even seeming to be offered in a patronizing spirit. It can be done, however, by any would-be helpers sincere and independent enough to go