

Accomplishment for the Cause of Americanization in Astoria

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(Special for The United American)

ASTORIA, a little seaport city of fifteen thousand people, is unique among the cities of the West in that it is very largely populated by immigrants and their children, a very uncommon state of affairs in this part of the country. And like many of the large cosmopolitan cities of the East, its people are not from one or two countries but from many. In fact, the public school enrollment records for the school year, 1924 - 25 indicate that thirty four different nationalities are represented among the parents of the children. It has been estimated that about seventy percent of the entire population are either immigrants or their children. Of these, however, a great majority are Finns and Scandinavians, the remaining ten percent including small numbers of Japanese, Chinese, Italians, Greeks, French, Canadians, and the various British and Russian types.

Practically all of these, as those who know foreign-born citizens will testify, furnish the best of material out of which to build loyal, capable American citizens. Surely we have no better American citizens than we find in those prosperous commonwealths of the north middle West which were settled and built up by immigrants from the north of Europe.

And why do they become such excellent citizens?

Because in their native lands they have long enjoyed a large measure of self-government, because they are inherently interested in affairs of citizenship, and because they are naturally industrious and thrifty.

Few will deny that these statements are true of the Swedes, the Danes and the Norwegians, but many people do not know that they are equally true of the Finns. The character of that little country in the far north of Europe and its people is not so well known. While it is not always taken into consideration, it is nevertheless true that Finland is a wonderful little country, having many great prosperous industries, beautiful cities, excellent schools, art galleries and museums, a large commerce and a well established government modeled after that of the United States.

It is from these northern countries, with the intent to establish permanent homes, that most of Astoria's foreign-born people have come. They have no thought of eventually returning to Europe as do so many from the countries in southern Europe. They are here to live out their days and to give their children those golden opportunities denied to them in their youth which America so generously offers.

Where can one find better material out of which to build citizenship?

However, ambitious and capable as they are, they cannot acquire the needed lessons in citizenship by mere contact with the native-born citizens. They need schools; those who already are citizens must take interest enough in those who are not to give them the chance. America has too long neglected them, too long permitted them to drift into colonies where they remain foreign in thought, speech and habits, subject to exploitation by unscrupulous employers and mercenary countrymen. Largely due to such causes these people

become discouraged and finally embittered against everything American. If we are not willing to give them the chance to learn how to become Americans, we should never permit them to come here. Our very act of allowing them to come has placed upon us a sacred obligation which can be met only as Astoria is trying to meet it — through the adult school.

In dealing with the immigrant we must bear in mind that he usually brings with him certain ideas and certain mental attitudes which, to say the least, fit badly in America. His life abroad has tended to make him distrustful of other peoples with whom he has had little or no contact, to make him suspicious of his government and its officials who often are very arrogant in the exercise of their authority, and to give him strong clannish inclinations. Hence, he prefers, for purposes of self-preservation, to live in a colony of his own people. This tendency is natural enough, but the sad part of it is that there he is likely to remain the rest of his life, hearing no tongue but his own, retaining his own native characteristics and native mental attitudes.

Unfortunately such people are of little worth to themselves and less to America. They can become Americanized only by taking them into our social and political life, by making them proud of America and by teaching them our ways of viewing human relationship. I believe this can best be done through the school. I am hoping the day is near when the Ameri-

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