

VIEWING THE IMMIGRANT'S AMERICANIZATION FROM ELLIS ISLAND

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a case of helping ourselves, if we are to be helped. The first thing that hits us right between the eyes at Ellis Island is the ever-recurring indication that "Americanization" of the foreign-born in America is looked upon as a task to be accomplished entirely by Americans—as though we were a great West Point, training alien rookies to be American soldiers, under rigid military discipline! Well, is that so? Has the foreigner nothing to do with it at all? Has he no sensibilities, inherited affections, or opinions as to the speed with which he shifts his loyalties? Is he just a shadow in gray, doing endless guard mount over the Hudson, by command, and with a pounding exactness down to the last inch of the length of his pace? Or is he a human being, who may or may not be doing or wanting to do, a little about it himself?

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Curiously enough, it was at Cherbourg, in far-off France, only a few months ago, that I found the foreigner making his own groping attempts at Americanization—before ever he had set foot on American soil, and long before any American had ever got hold of him. In the immigration station behind the old French forts of Cherbourg there were several hundreds of foreigners, from every part of Europe, Asia and Africa, wanting to come to America as soon as the new quotas might open. Some had been there for months, some for only a few days. But, as they waited, one by one they began getting ready, as best they could, to meet the test that awaits them at the dreaded gate overseas—at Ellis Island. They tried to learn the language, customs, ways of America. Slow work it was, for though there are plenty of French in the hills that rise behind the breakwaters of Cherbourg, there are less than half a dozen marooned Americans to serve as teachers of "Americanism." It was slow, until an enterprising merchant set up a clothing shop against the walls of the immigration station. A rickety little shack it was—but a shack with a mission.

"Come into the American bazaar!" barked the proprietor, in a medley of continental languages. "Walk into the great American clothes emporium! Hats, coats, pants—a nickel, a half a dime, the twentieth part of a dollar—come in and change your foreign money for fine American clothes! Come in a foreigner, go out an American! Hurry up now! Selling fast! Going, going—!"

Wearily the immigrants wandered in. In twos and threes, then by the dozen they harked to the chant of the spider. And were there doings within? The forts of old Cherbourg never made more outcry than rose from the strife of the trafficking in that "Americanization" shack. Nor had the Kearsarge and the Alabama of 1864 anything on those immigrants of 1924! A battle is a battle, whether it be fought with guns, or with kronen, lire, francs and pesetas.

Then the immigrants began to come out. The first of them wore a sunburned derby or dicer, of the vintage of 1892.

"Ah, yes! I am becoming yet an American," he murmured, as his head winced under the prison grip of the dashing derby. At the same time he looked

longingly at the loose, black smock of Russia that still hid his form down to the knees.

On the dome of the next immigrant reposed a topper of the Daniel Webster variety, badly ruffled but still shining, here and there. "Italiano-Americano!" The five-foot son of Caesar grinned triumphantly as he bent under his smoke-stack burden.

Then came a Greek woman with a waist that split hopelessly at the middle, but made up for it by the upward, wing-like projections of the sleeves, with their 1898 suggestion of tailored angles.

Saddest of all, a serious Swede clasped to his bosom a revolving dicky, resplendent in its horizontal red, white and blue stripes, but with an irrepressible inclination to revolve, instead of staying put. Sadly the Swede strove; bravely he held his own; without heritage of minstrels or vaudeville, without help of any sort, he came, saw and conquered. The dicky stayed put. Some day he will be a viking, or an alderman.

So passed the first lesson in Americanization—and never an American who had aught to do with it! They were doing their best, those immigrants, all by themselves, just as the barking merchant was also doing his best by himself. Some day, perhaps, I shall see those hats again at Ellis Island. Are they on their way, perchance? Will the dicky revolve, at the gate? Or have the sailors thrown the whole array brusquely overboard, to give poor porpoises a taste of auld lang syne?

"But give us a chance!" you will say. "We cannot put an American picket in every old clothes shop abroad, to save the immigrant from adopting the American foibles of the roaring forties!" No, we cannot. But the other day I saw an American come pretty near to it.

At Ellis Island there is a stout pillar which stands between the immigrant who has been admitted and the friend or relative in America who comes here to take the immigrant in tow—to meet, greet, coddle and comfort the new arrival. It is an important old post, that tall pillar. The reunions, the comedies, the tragedies of it—ah well, that is an old story every day, at Ellis Island! But it is a careful old post. For old people, and for young girls in particular, it stands on guard until we know for sure that these helpless wards of our government are falling into good hands. Those who come to receive these innocents from abroad must prove beyond peradventure their identity, and their good intentions. Then, when all is clear and safe, the immigrant comes from one corner and the welcomer from another, and, at the post, they meet! For years the old post has been called "The Kissing Post." For years it has seen more of human life at a tense moment than all the grandfather's clocks of a whole countryside put together. For years it has held its peace. After all, it is a private affair.

But, the other day, it was not so private. There were two long-limbed lasses, embraced in a stranglehold of unabashed delight, in the shadow of the old post. One hug followed another, until even the old-timers at the island began to take out their watches, to see if another record was on its way to being shattered. Then, when it began to seem as though the clutch had been thrown in to stay, there was a