

Viewing the Immigrant's Americanization From Ellis Island

A Wholesome Analysis and Some Conclusions by the United States Commissioner of Immigration, Who is Pointing out Some of the Specific Things We Might Do to Americanize the Foreign-born, and Incidentally Touching a Few of Our Most Acute Omissions and Commissions of the Past

[The Americanization of the millions of aliens in America who have lived here for years as foreigners and as parts of the foreign country from which they, each of them, have come, as well as the Americanization of the present daily quota of approximately one thousand new arrivals who pass through the gates of Ellis Island to the accompaniment of the dull thud of the triphammer, has somehow become one of the most vexatious problems of present-day America. No matter how you personally regard this problem, it is here, and will continue to hold the center of the stage of public attention for years to come. Thousands express their opinion on the subject, but only a few contribute anything of merit sufficient to pass on. Among the Americans who today are discussing this question in an intelligent and interesting way is the present United States Commissioner of Immigration at Ellis Island, Major Henry H. Curran. Few Americans can have the opportunity to study the immigrant so closely as the man who admits him, the man who actually controls the gateway through which flows the human tide that is still coming in under the American code of restriction. He is charged with the responsibility of passing upon the admissibility of each individual immigrant before the immigrant is finally permitted to enter America proper, to take his place among the people of this country—in the language of the marriage ritual—"for better or for worse." Few of those who have held the post of United States Commissioner of Immigration before him have given the problem such careful study as Commissioner Curran. He has gone to the trouble of following the immigrant on his way into the new homeland. He has studied the defects in our assimilation and naturalization code, or shall we say the unfortunate circumstances arising from the fact that we are still floundering between "the devil and the deep sea" because we haven't been able to agree sufficiently on the subject to set up a decent code or tangible formula. He has seen the need of a complete change in the whole system of dealing with the immigrant, if the object—his complete assimilation—is to be realized for the good of the future America.]

In the following article, the second of a series from Major Curran, which appeared recently in the "Elks Magazine," he discusses intimately some of the fundamental elements for consideration in the all absorbing question of Americanization. In the first article, which was reproduced in the October, 1924, issue of The United American, he discussed the immigrant question from many interesting angles and concluded with a plea for federal action for an adequate national Americanization plan and program. In the present article the Commissioner has touched, perhaps lightly in some instances, almost every phase of Americanization, deprecating the wrong and pointing out the right attitude and action. Read between the lines and study the views of the Commissioner, and you will agree that his perspective is as all-embracing as his logic is sound. Perhaps he has not given the attention and space to some of the remedies suggested that he has given others; but, nevertheless, through these articles the Commissioner has proved himself fully conversant with all the phases of immigrant life in America with which we come in contact in our analysis of the Americanization question.

The United American hopes within the near future ultimately to have a closer contact with the Island and the problems which are daily passing there in review, not alone present a close-up of Ellis Island and the Commissioner, and the problem of the immigrant, but the problem of the suave agitators, muckrakers and "friendly" interpreters who frequently call at the Ellis Island immigrant station, generally for other purposes than those stated.

The Commissioner's entertaining style adds enjoyment to the reading of his treatise on the subject, but his earnest appeal for an American sense of responsibility alone, is so captivating that no intelligent citizen can read without asking himself the question, "what am I doing to live America and set the foreign-born an example conducive to his Americanization and assimilation?"

—The Editor]

II.

THERE is no way of taking part in the human jack-straw game that goes by the name of Ellis Island, without being stood up against a wall twice a day and told to explain "How we can Americanize all these foreigners who are coming in." That much is sure. I know, because for some time now I have been running Ellis Island to the daily trip-hammer accompaniment of the old question, "How can we Americanize them?"

That is a fair question, too. You and your wife, with good reason, want to know how to take into the family these foreigners who come from every corner of the globe, who boast every race, creed, color and shape of political head; who possess every degree of innocence or rascality, virtue or vice, intelligence or ignorance; who come here to be your intimate neighbors and, shortly, your political equals. You know that they are still coming, in the hundreds of thousands every year—small wonder that you nourish a natural curiosity as to where they turn up and how they turn out! For the sake of your children, to whom you bequeath our common country in the exact mold in which you and I fashion it, you would like to have a look into the future loyalty, patriotism and understanding of the foreigners of to-day who will be the Americans of to-morrow. And so naturally enough, you turn first to the men and women at the gate—at Ellis Island—where the foreign thousands troop off the ships and into the U. S. A. every day in the year—and to us who actually see them go by, who sort them, know them, admit or deport them, you put that puzzling old query, "What do we do with them?"

Let me say what I can of it, now in passing, while the thousands still go by. In a former article I put down some suggestions that are agreed to by those who have been at Ellis Island many years more than I, as to "how not to do it," in this game of Americanization.

By way of beginning, there is this to be said. You will have many a plan, backed by actual accomplishment in your own experience, that you find no hint of in these few words from Ellis Island. All that is so much to the good. We do not know it all here at Ellis Island, even when it comes to studying the arriving foreigners—not by a long row of apple trees. For, foreign or American or half-and-half, they are all human beings, and no one yet has made a map of human nature that can be hung on a wall and taken as a text. Human nature is a baffling, vanishing, reappearing proposition, and the end of it is never. But, if a suggestion out of our Ellis Island experience is worth something—is worth anything—then we have helped, be it ever so little. And, heaven knows, we need help nowadays in these United States of ours, if we are to continue to be a nation and not break up into a collection of contending foreign colonies that will some day make a mess over here like a second edition of all Europe at war over there! So too, it is

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