

... Extracts from the report of the Commissioner general of immigration for the year ending June 30, 1903.

PUBLICATIONS OF THE IMMIGRATION RESTRICTION LEAGUE NO. 39.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS RECEIVED DEC-1 1903 PERIODICAL DIV.

EXTRACTS FROM THE Report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration FOR THE YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 1903.

I. Character of Present Immigration.

[*Report of the Commissioner at New York, p. 70.*]

"In what follows I am merely repeating what I have said before in other words. But there are many trite things which bear repetition, and the facts concerning the continued coming here of large numbers of aliens, many of them of an inferior type even in their own homes, is one of these things.

"(1.) The great bulk of the present immigration proceeds from Italy, Austria, and Russia, and, furthermore, from some of the most undesirable sources of population of those countries. No one would object to the better classes of Italians, Austrians, and Russians coming here in large numbers; but the point is that such better element does not come, and, furthermore, that immigration from such countries as Germany and the British Isles has fallen to a very low figure.

"(2.) The great bulk of the present immigration settles in four of the Eastern States and most of it in the large cities of those States. Notwithstanding the well-known demand for agricultural labor in the Western States, thousands of foreigners keep pouring into our cities, declining to go where they might be wanted because they are neither physically nor mentally fitted to go to these undeveloped parts of our country and do as did the early settlers from northern Europe.

"In view of these two propositions it is as irrelevant as it is misleading to assert that, because immigration in the past has been a source of greatness to the country, and because the great building and other industrial operations now going on in the United States require labor, therefore immigration should not be further restricted. Past immigration was good because most of it was of the right kind and went to the right place. Capital cannot, and it would not if it could, employ much of the alien material that annually passes through Ellis Island, and thereafter chooses to settle in the crowded tenement districts of New York. Let it be again plainly stated that these remarks are not directed against all immigration; that the great debt which this country owes to immigration in the

past is cheerfully acknowledged; and that the strong, intelligent emigrant, of which class many are still coming here, is as welcome to-day as ever he was.

“A strict execution of our present laws makes it possible to keep out what may be termed the worst element of Europe (paupers, diseased persons, and those likely to become public charges), and to this extent these laws are most valuable. Without a proper execution of the same it is safe to say that thousands of additional aliens would have come here last year. But these laws do not reach a large body of immigrants who, while not of this class, are yet generally undesirable, because unintelligent, of low vitality, of poor physique, able to perform only the cheapest kind of manual labor, desirous of locating almost exclusively in the cities, by their competition tending to reduce the standard of living of the American wageworker, and unfitted mentally or morally for good citizenship. It would be quite impossible to accurately state what proportion of last year's immigration ALLIED PRINTING TRADES UNION LABEL COUNCIL BOSTON, MASS 10 2 should be classed as “undesirable.” I believe that at least 200,000 (and probably more) aliens came here who, although they may be able to earn a living, yet are not wanted, will be of no benefit to the country, and will, on the contrary, be a detriment, because their presence will tend to lower our standards; and if these 200,000 persons could have been induced to stay at home, nobody, not even those clamoring for more labor, would have missed them. Their coming has been of benefit chiefly, if not only, to the transportation companies which brought them here.

“Relying on the views generally expressed by the intelligent press throughout the country; on those expressed by nine out of ten citizens, whether native or foreign born, with whom one discusses the subject; on letters received from charitable and reformatory institutions in some of the Eastern States, and upon official observation at Ellis Island, I state without hesitation that the vast majority of American citizens wish to see steps taken to prevent these undesirable elements from landing on our shores. Attempts to take such steps will be opposed by powerful and selfish interests, and they will insist, among other things, on the value of immigration in the past to the United States and the enormous demand for labor, neither of them relevant as applicable to the particular question whether the undesirable immigrants shall be prevented from coming here.

“Throughout the discussion of this question, which is becoming of greater importance to the United States every day, it is necessary to bear in mind that Europe, like every other part of the world, has millions of undesirable people whom she would be glad to part with, and that strong agencies are constantly at work to send some of them here. To determine how to separate the desirable elements from the undesirable elements will tax the best skill of our lawmakers, but they will surely find a way to do this as soon as the American people have let it be known that it must be done.

“Aliens have no inherent right whatever to come here, and we may and should take means, however radical or drastic, to keep out all below a certain physical and economic standard of fitness and all whose presence will tend to lower our standards of living and civilization. The only apparent alternative is to allow transportation companies, largely foreign (whether by their own agents or by men to whom a commission is paid for each immigrant secured is not important), to cause eastern and southern Europe to be scoured for aliens, not whose presence here will benefit the United States, not who belong to a stock which will add to the elements on which the country in the past has grown great, not who will bring a certain amount of wealth to their new homes, but who merely happen to have enough money to purchase tickets from Europe to some place in the United States and can bring themselves within the easy requirements of the existing statutes. A too rapid filling up of any country with foreign elements is sure to be at the expense of national character when such elements belong to the poorest classes in their own respective homes.”

[*Commissioner-General, Report, pp. 59, 60.*]

“The problem presented, therefore, to enlightened intelligence for solution, is how may the possibility—nay, probability—of danger from an enormous and miscellaneous influx of aliens be converted, by a wise prevision and provision, into a power for stability and security? If such a solution can be obtained, it seems the part of foolhardiness to make no effort to that end, to trust fatuously to the circumstance that, though numerically immigration was years ago nearly as large in proportion to our population as it now is, no very serious ill resulted from the failure to take any especial care in reference to it other than an inspection at the time of arrival.

“In my judgment, the smallest part of the duty to be discharged in successfully handling alien immigrants with a view to the protection of the people and institutions of this country is that part now provided for by law. Its importance, though undeniable, is relatively of secondary moment. It cannot, for example, compare in practical value with, nor can it take the place of, measures to insure the distribution of the many thousands who come in ignorance of the industrial needs and opportunities of this country, and, by a more potent law than that of supply and demand, which speaks to them here in an unknown tongue, colonizes alien communities in our great cities. Such colonies are a menace to the physical, social, moral, and political security of the country. They are hotbeds for the propagation and growth of those false ideas of political and personal freedom whose germs have been vitalized by ages of oppression under equal and partial laws, which find their first concrete expression in resistance to constituted authority, even occasionally in the assassination of the lawful agents of that authority. They are the breeding ground also of moral depravity; the centres of propagation of physical disease. Above all, they are the congested places in the industrial body which check the free circulation of labor to those parts where it is most needed

and where it can be most benefited. Do away with them, and the greatest peril of immigration will be removed.”

II. Needed Additions to the Excluded Classes.

(1.) Illiterates.

[*Commissioner-General, Report, p. 61.*]

“Irrespective of the effect in diminishing the number of alien arrivals, now approximating one million annually, I am impressed with the importance of still further measures to improve the quality of those admitted. Such measures would be merely additional steps in the same direction already taken in dealing with the question of immigration to this country. They would involve no new departure from a policy which has been pursued for years, and which, therefore, may now be assumed to be a fixed principle of the United States in dealing with this subject. From this point of view, it seems not unjust to require of aliens seeking admission to this country at least, so much mental training as is evidenced by the ability to read and write. This requirement, whatever arguments or illustrations may be used to establish the contrary position, will furnish alien residents of a character less likely to become burdens on public or private charity. Otherwise, it must follow that rudimentary education is a handicap in the struggle for existence, a proposition that few would attempt to maintain. It would, also, in a measure, relieve the American people of the burden now sustained by them, of educating in the free schools the ignorant of other countries.”

(2.) Diseased and Physically Incapable Persons.

[*Commissioner-General, Report, p. 84.*]

“Enough, however, has been learned to convince the Bureau that the inadmissible classes of aliens should be somewhat enlarged. Thus, no diseased or physically incapable person should be admitted to the United States. The number coming is large enough to justify a rigid censorship, so as to exclude all those whose presence would be, either at the time of arrival or soon thereafter, a burden upon some community. With the same purpose in view an age limit might be presented—say, sixty years—and every alien applicant for admission who had passed that age should be refused a landing unless possessing a son or daughter in this country amply able to provide for such alien.

“It seems hardly necessary to enlarge upon the importance from this point of refusing admission to aliens suffering with disease, whether of a communicable nature or not. To meet with the physical

conditions in a new and strange country, to avoid the risk of pauperism therein, diseased aliens should at least exhibit so much prudence as to await recovery in their own homes.”

[*Commissioner-General, Report, p. 120.*]

“The steadily increasing influx of aliens, now amounting approximately to 1,000,000 annually, constrains me to suggest the importance of still further enlarging the list of inadmissible aliens. It would materially diminish the risks attendant upon the amalgamation of such a large and heterogeneous mass with our own citizens to remove, as far as possible, every condition that conflicts with that end. Thus, those who are helpless from senility should be lessened by excluding all those aliens who are sixty years of age or over unless they have children resident here and able to provide for them. Those whose independence is endangered by ignorance might be kept within narrow bounds by exacting of all above a certain age evidence of at least a primary mental training.”

(3.) Morally Unfit Persons.

[*Commissioner-General, Report, p. 120.*]

“For the same purpose, moral perverts might be excluded by requiring some evidence of their reputation for honesty and industry from the authorities in their own countries, while those in any way physically disabled, as well by non-communicable as by communicable disease, or by bodily deformity, accidental or congenital, should be denied admission, as they would become probable burdens upon this country. Such a course would deprive foreign communities of the interest they now have to encourage the departure to this country of those members whose continued residence therein constitutes a menace to the common peace, good order, health, and prosperity.”

III. Much of the Present Immigration Unnaturally Stimulated by Transportation Agents.

[*Commissioner-General, Report, p. 85.*]

“Perhaps, too, it displays a somewhat childlike confidence in the innocence and the implicit respect for law of those persons who are operating the vast transportation business for the benefit of owners who approve any management that produces dividends, to assume that they will not resort, either directly or indirectly, to every known means of selling transportation. That they are inducing through agencies that spread like a vast network over all Europe, having representatives of all classes in every town, village, and hamlet, who are local centres for the distribution of enticing literature showing with all the art of the advertiser and illustrator the glories of the Eldorado on the west of the Atlantic—to which the great majority may gain entrance without hindrance, and from

which even the poor, diseased, and helpless cannot always be excluded—is shown by the subjoined report of Immigrant Inspector Marcus Braun, who was detailed for the purpose of investigating thoroughly and reporting fully on the methods of inducing immigration from Europe.”

[*Special Immigrant Inspector Marcus Braun, Report, p. 95.*]

“The deplorable political and financial conditions of the eastern and southern countries of Europe, coupled with the prosperous condition of the United States, creates a large natural immigration to our shores. The most convincing proof in the eyes of the people of these countries of the exceptional prosperity of our country is the large sums of money, almost unprecedented to them, which annually arrive from friends and relatives residing in the United States. Besides this natural immigration, however, we are burdened with a dangerous and most injurious unnatural immigration which from year to year assumes larger proportions. This unnatural immigration consists of paupers and assisted emigrants, and is induced and brought about by the unscrupulous and greedy activity displayed by a large number of agencies and sub-agencies having well-established connections in the United States and abroad, apparently unknown to the steamship companies, which activity manifests itself in the peddling of steamship tickets and prepaids on the installment plan, both here and abroad, the constant agitation and offers of inducements by sub-agents in Europe, occupying semi-public positions, who, in order to earn commissions, play upon the ignorance and susceptibility of the plain peasant, frequently inducing him to sell or mortgage all his belongings for the purpose of raising the necessary travelling expenses, which latter transaction is also turned to profit by such agent.”

79/21