

GOOD-BYE TO THE IMMIGRANT PRESS

BY ALBERT PARRY

LAST October the New York *Volkszeitung* suspended. It was the only German-language labor daily in the United States, and one of the oldest radical papers (*geb.* 1878) in this land. A fortnight earlier, late in September, the Milwaukee *Herold*, the only German daily in that very German town, died after thundering and prospering for the many years since 1861. In May, the 104-year old *Courrier des États-Unis* of New York, whose one-time editor, Leon Meunier, was largely responsible for the gift to the United States by France of the Statue of Liberty, emitted a frantic SOS for succor, and in June sadly abandoned its daily edition, confining itself to a Sunday issue. In Buffalo, where the very air had always seemed nothing but a hissing wave of Polish consonants, an influential Polish weekly, the *Rekord Unista*, died lately. And simultaneously some melancholy statistician discovered that the aggregate circulation of the Jewish press in America had declined from 717,146 in 1916 to 450,000 in 1932.

It isn't only the Depression which is smiting the immigrant press. It is also the Immigration Act of 1924. Instead of the 1,218,480 immigrants who entered during the fiscal year of 1914, and the 805,228 who came in 1921, only 97,139 were admitted in 1930-31 and only 35,576 in 1931-32. The Depression is simply finishing for the immigrant press what the act started: in the same fiscal year of 1931-32 no less than 103,295 unemployed or otherwise disheart-

ened aliens left the States for good. The preceding year saw 61,882 go—or two for every three admitted.

A decade or so back, the leaders of the immigrant world in America claimed from 10,000,000 to 14,000,000 readers for their press. But the Federal census of 1930 showed that only 1,224,995 out of 14,025,800 foreign-born residents of the United States over ten years of age were really unable to speak English. Of the 869,865 foreign-born white persons who did not read English only 392,732 could read and write their own languages. This broke to matchwood the assertion that millions of potential buyers could be reached in no other way save through advertisements in the foreign-language papers. Moreover, it began to appear that a foreigner who does not read English usually does not read anything at all. I quote, in point, from the *Italian News* of Boston, apropos its campaign against the financial waste of religious celebrations:

The *News* has on many occasions denounced the custom, but to no avail—for the *News* is printed in English, and those who carry on such foolish celebrations do not read our language. *Nor do the majority of them read their own language.*

The national advertisers, trimming their sails to the rough going of these times, have nearly all cut their appropriations for the immigrant press. Some of them say it's economy only; others say it's economy plus the waning ability of the immigrant

press to pull in customers. Still others point virtuously to the radicalism of a certain section of the press. This excuse (twisting the war-time whoop, "Don't feed the mouth that's biting you!") is employed by some of the public utility companies and tobacco concerns. Whatever the reason or excuse, there is the fact: the immigrant press has been losing advertising even faster than the Depression-pinched native press.

The motion picture companies, once notorious for the flourish of their expenditures, have been very wary of late, and even the free-of-charge publicity given their films by the foreign-language papers seems to be no longer valued. In January, 1932, the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer publicity department discontinued sending out foreign-language press releases. The immigrant papers used to publish these releases gratis, but the MGM people, of course, had to pay the eighteen or twenty translators. When the hard times deepened, this expense was cut off. Now only the English releases are being sent out to the immigrant press. If any translating is done the editors must do it.

II

Every time an immigrant paper publishes an obituary of Mike Karaszlascz or Fritz Budenheimer or Nick Popandopoulo or Salvatore Malegretti it really writes another line into its own protracted obituary. The dead (or home-going) immigrant-reader is not replaced by another client. So the immigrant press grasps the children of its customers as a last and desperate straw.

Last October, appealing for funds in behalf of the Foreign Language Information Service, Miss Ida M. Tarbell stated that "40,000,000 of our American people are

immigrants or the children of immigrants." The children, who outnumber the parents by 26,000,000 to 14,000,000, do not need the immigrant press, but the immigrant press sorely needs the children. Thus it turns to English in its dying stage. But usually in vain. It is almost symbolic that the *Tageblatt* of New York was one of the first Yiddish newspapers to launch an English section, and one of the first major old-established immigrant papers to die after the Immigration Act of 1924. Its English section, with an "Are We Jews?" column and an Aunt Ray's Club for the kiddies, could not save it. It died in 1928, on the high crest of everybody else's prosperity, of its own anemia of circulation.

But the faith in the all-curing powers of the remedy dies hard. In the American Jewish Year Book for 1932-33 I count 126 titles of Jewish periodicals in the United States, and 100 of them are published wholly or partly in English. In 1924, according to the FLIS figures, only one Yugo-Slav publication in this country had an English section, but in 1932 fifteen Yugo-Slav papers had such sections. Back in 1927, the *Follia Di New York* said editorially in its English section that "the Italo-American of today, just one generation removed from his Italian-speaking parents, does not read the Italian dailies," that "he is too Italian for the American press and too American for the Italian press," and that only "the gradual introduction of English into the columns of the Italian press" would solve the riddle. In an optimistic attempt to catch this Italo-American, 25% of the Italian papers in this country had put in English sections by 1932, an increase of 20% since 1924.

About half of the seventy Czecho-Slovak papers have English sections now. Six Hungarian weeklies carry English sections, all started since 1924. Ten out of the

seventy Polish newspapers are spiced with English. The invasion of the Norwegian press by the English language was strong even before quota days, for the peak of migration from Norway was reached and passed in the 80's. O. M. Norlie has estimated that 11% of the Norwegian newspapers started in America in the period from 1847 to 1917 were partly or wholly in English (I quote from Robert E. Park's "The Immigrant Press and Its Control," 1922). Today the FLIS reports that six out of the thirty-one Norwegian publications surviving have English sections, which means almost 20% of the total number.

In the English sections sport leads as a topic, particularly in the Slavic and Italian press. Jokes and comic strips, fashion columns, bedtime stories, and imitations of Arthur Brisbane follow in the order named. An occasional lachrymose short story, not of the boiler-plate variety, but penned by an immigrant journalist or reader, is used. Religious and fraternal-order papers, mostly Scandinavian and Slavic, devote their English columns to short-story contests, and, of course, the most pious story usually wins. Rural papers, particularly Scandinavian and German, use the bulletins of the Department of Agriculture, also such elevating items of unknown source as "Cats Are Responsible for Creeping Eruption" and "At Last Smokes Cigar Given Him 63 Years Ago." Readers' letters in English, no matter how trivial in contents, are printed prominently, for they offer the editors an illusory proof that their English sections are at last succeeding.

On the whole, the English of the immigrant press is improving. Today I cannot find anything comparable to such editorial notes as this one culled from the New York *Carroccio* of 1926: "We tanks Dr. Paolo de Vecchi, mentionated at the end

of the letter." The editorial policies of the bi-lingual papers are now rather enlightened and on the level. You will hardly find any longer the situation described by H. C. Sartorio when, in 1918, he told of "Italian newspapers with laudatory articles on America written in English, which no Italian would read, and with an article in Italian in the same issue that the American would not understand, painting America in the blackest colors." But the better English and the more honest policy do not compensate for the unoriginal contents of the English sections, or for their frequent divorce from the probable interests of their supposed readers.

Thus, the Chicago *Greek Star*, advertising itself as "printed in English and Greek and known the world over," was lately using its English to huzzah for the moribund Mr. Hoover and to argue heavily about "French Logic and German Arms," as if the Greek confectioners and boot-blacks and their progeny in the Middle West were likely to follow it either way. Similarly, the *Gazzetta Del Massachusetts* devotes the precious English of its double space editorials to the petty intra-party squabbles of the Democrats in Boston and elsewhere. Again, the English page of the *Eco Della Nuovo England* (Springfield, Mass.), subtitled "A Page of Live News for the Advancement of Americanization," does it to the astonishing tune of a "Harvard Baccalaureate Hymn," with the full text in a heavy frame in the center of the page. This neglect of the reader's probable interests reaches its apex in the *Japanese-American News* of San Francisco, which howls in its English-language editorials for increased American armaments!

The most intelligent attempt to switch to the English language was made, in the middle 1920's, by Abraham Cahan and

his Yiddish *Forward*, but even that attempt failed. At the height of the *Forward's* success, Mr. Cahan concluded that Yiddish in America was doomed. He made caustic fun of those co-workers of his who hailed it as a living force, and believed that soon even President Coolidge would have to learn it. At his insistence the English section of the *Forward* was instituted in a new form, with a stress on Judaism and general topics rather than on the old soap-box cant of Socialism. At the time, he said that he was prepared to see the entire paper converted from Yiddish into English.

The two editors of the four English pages of the *Forward* tried their best to make the section lively and robust, interesting and profound. They ordered articles from Ramsay MacDonald, Bertrand Russell, John Macy, Bruce Bliven, Joseph Wood Krutch, and other mainstays of the *New Republic* and the *Nation*. They cocktailed the weighty treatises of these sages with their own homely essays on how to catch a good Jewish husband. They tacked notices on the bulletin-board of the Columbia University School of Journalism, humbly angling for ideas and contributions. They dispatched East Side youths and maidens of literary gifts to the ghetto post-office and police-stations to interview Jewish mail clerks and Jewish cops; to cheap lodging-houses to hear and record the tall tales of Jewish hoboes; to the Tombs to witness the meetings of pious old Jews with their gangster sons. They published some forty articles of the present writer on the Jews of Hollywood, the Northwest, the South Sea islands, Colorado, Louisiana and other parts of the distant *Provintz*.

But the combination simply did not work. The readers' response was, on the whole, insufficient. The young Jews, like the young Italians, Slavs and Swedes, ap-

parently did not want to be seen in the subway reading their parents' paper. Even the English print of that paper had a peculiar look, a foreign air. The unwritten law of the publishing world, that every page must be self-sustaining in the advertising it brings, did not work in regard to those four pages of the *Forward*, just as it failed to function in regard to other English pages of other immigrant organs. Anon the four pages were cut to two. Anon the two editors were reduced to one. And then Mr. Cahan conceded his defeat, and the English section was killed.

But there was no cause for the Yiddishists to triumph. For the circulation of the Jewish press in America continued to wilt. U. Z. Engelman, in the *Menorah Journal* (July, 1928), estimated that the aggregate circulation of the Jewish press in 1927 was only 536,346, or but 79.2% of what it had been in 1914 and 74.7% of what it had been in its great boom year of 1916—this despite the fact that from 1913 to 1927 510,799 new Yiddish-speaking immigrants had entered this country. My own recent canvass of authorities brings down the aggregate circulation to a new low of some 450,000. Well, this is no surprise when you read that from 1924 to 1927 the annual number of Jewish immigrants admitted into the United States was no more than 10,000. It is no wonder when in the American Jewish Year Book for 1932-33 you read that during the year ended June 30, 1931, a total of but 5,692 Jewish immigrants entered this country, or 5,834 less than during the preceding year, and that only 1,455 Jews were admitted during the six months ended December 31, 1931.

The failure of the English section as a circulation-getter is now admitted by all the editors who have tried it, and many of them begin to pursue a new objective: to teach the English-speaking young the lan-

guage of their parents, to introduce *foreign-language* sections into the *English-language* publications of the East Side.

Thus, *Atlantica*, started in New York in 1923 as an all-English publication by and for the Italians, introduced, early in 1932, an Italian section. Now it uses its English part for hoarse entreaties to the young Italians: "Know Your Language!" To prove to the young Joes that the language of the old Guiseppes is getting to be fashionable in the States, *Atlantica* prints rosy statistics showing how many boys and girls are studying Italian in the American schools in lieu of that old favorite, Spanish. The *Eco Della Nuovo England*, in its English section, thus tries to entrap the native-born into reading its Italian pages:

The Italo-American weekly can be the means by which father and son meet on the same field. The son trying to read his father's page: "Dad, what's this word that looks like argument—does it mean the same thing?" "Yes, change the *u* to *o*, add an *o* to the end and you have a pure Italian word—here it is, *argomento*." One could make a game of it—say that each week ten words be taken from the newspaper columns and learned.

Many other immigrant newspapers—sometimes the very ones that used to print lessons in English—now display lessons in their own language. Thus, *Jednota*, of Middletown, Pa., prints Slovak lessons on the reverse side of its large English sports page, and the *Morgen Journal* of New York and Philadelphia has recently started lessons in Yiddish. It is this paper that in 1928 absorbed the withered *Tageblatt*, with its English page for the young. The *Yiddish*, a bi-weekly of New York, gently advocates the introduction of Yiddish courses into the American public schools. The hopes are high but hazy. In part they are based on the much discussed fecundity of foreign-born mothers. If the ships won't

bring new customers for the immigrant press, then the lessons and the mothers will do the job. But alack, even this hope is now blasted, for Dr. Joseph J. Spengler, of the University of Arizona, has demonstrated that the fecundity of the immigrants has decreased largely since 1920, and is now not much above that of the native stock. Onerous economic conditions and birth-control propaganda—including an enlightening campaign by the immigrant editors themselves—are to blame.

III

The immigrant press for years worked at two contradictory tasks: to promote the Americanization of its readers, and to preserve their feeling of being different from the Americans. In the first part of the task, it was aided by the movies, the tabloids, the radio, the war-time stoppage of immigration, and the post-war legislation against the new influx; by the war-time hysteria against all foreigners and foreignism, and by the post-war prosperity and quickened tempo of American life. In the second part of its task it was all alone. Only in a few cases, as in those of some Italian publications, did help and inspiration come from the government of the old country.

Torn between its two opposing aims, and succeeding only in the one least advantageous to its own welfare, the immigrant press could not be anywhere save on the downward path. The very presence of an English section in an immigrant paper showed the advertisers that it was no longer the only gate to a large block of consumers, that these consumers very likely now read a Hearst paper or *Liberty*. If the masthead of the Erie (Pa.) *Gazette* has a small-type subtitle, "formerly *La Gazzetta Di Erie*," what right has it to

claim that it is the sole representative of the 20,000 Italian residents of Erie? In fact, it admits in the same breath that only 5,000 of them do not read or write English. Many American advertisers proffered such posers to the immigrant papers, not once and not twice. It was in sheer defense that some of them began to abandon their English sections, and to revert to panicky pleas to the second generation to learn mamma's and papa's speech.

It was only in the case of the German publications that the introduction of English proved a success as often as not. Scores of such transformations took place in the period from 1900 to 1914. The American participation in Europe's butchery and the concurrent anti-German crusade at home accelerated the process. A FLIS report says that it was and is exceedingly simple:

The *County Journal*, or *Courier* may be taken for German or English names, and *Demokrat* or *Herold* need only a slight change in spelling to make them English and conform to a pronunciation which was probably common long before the publication adopted the English language.

But there is more to it than that. The Germans, even after their Americanization, continue as a more or less close-knit community, and even the Americanized paper remains their mouthpiece. The higher caliber of American-German journalism, as compared with that of other racial groups, makes the German readers continue with the transformed paper rather than switch to a Hearst paper or a tabloid. The German publishers in this country are the only ones of all the immigrant brethren (the Scandinavians proving an occasional exception) who own and operate papers not only in their own language but in English as well. Some of these English newspapers are so well molded into the American scene that their

German origin or ownership is known to only a few. The Ridder family, starting with the New York *Staats-Zeitung*, now owns, in addition, such typically American papers as the New York *Journal of Commerce*, the *Long Island Daily Press* (Jamaica), the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*, the St. Paul *Dispatch*, the Grand Forks (N. D.) *Herald*, the Aberdeen (S. D.) *American*, and the *Seattle Times*.

There is, also, some small degree of success when an immigrant group tries to exploit the American interest in its home country. The *American-Scandinavian Review* for years has been aiming its careful but lifeless English at such Americans as have longed toward the lands of the Vikings and Knut Hamsun, and many of its articles read as if they were written by travel agencies. But such success is usually not lasting, for American fads change as quickly and as unpredictably as the weather in New York. *Free Poland*, a semi-monthly, and the *American-Greek Review*, a monthly, both of Chicago, gasped their last in 1919 and 1928 respectively, after a five-year spell of life apiece. *Armenia* and *New Armenia*, of Boston and New York, had a longer but a more fitful career, full of lapses, the last coming in 1929. The latest failure is that of an Ukrainian monthly in English, a most transitory affair. *Atlantica*, as part of its programme, tried to interpret Italy to the Americans, but found practically no native-stock listeners, and so turned full-face to the Italo-Americans.

Most of these English-language enterprises were started by immigrant groups which had only small reason to look for the interest of Americans. On the other hand, a group that could have scored a big success in talking English to Americans did not stir at all. I mean the Russians. Of the twenty-odd Russian publications in

this country, only one weekly in Chicago carries an English section, and it is the feeblest sort of syndicated stuff, of no interest either to Russians or Americans. The most logical paper to satisfy the American curiosity about the Five-year Plan country was the *Russky Golos* of New York, the largest Russian daily in this country. It presents a peculiar and safe combination of pro-Soviet policies and non-Communist ownership and staff, and it was just the right vehicle to explain Russia to America in the sympathetic but non-Union-Square manner of Louis Fischer, Anna Louise Strong, and Maurice Hindus.

But in 1929, at the highest leap of the American craving for things Russian, the publishers of the *Russky Golos* invested their surplus money, not in an English section but in a real estate development on Long Island. Its pages were filled, not with English discourses on the Dnieprostroy Dam and other such projects, but with Russian advertisements urging the purchase of Queens lots. The field was finally scooped by the *Moscow News*, published in English at the Soviet capital, and mailed and sold here in surprising stacks (from 15,000 to 20,000 copies each issue). The *Moscow News* flourishes while the Russian papers in America, having lost their only chance of recovery, continue on their downward swing, together with the other immigrant papers.

The Americanization, not of the language, but of the methods of immigrant publishers usually brings them nothing but harm. Here I allude especially to chain-ownership and consolidation. Chain-ownership introduces into the immigrant press a boiler-plate in its own tongue, and puts the stamp of turgid sameness where previously color and independence, however provincial and naïve, held sway. You will now find the same editorials in the

Tribuna Italiana of Portland, Ore., and the *Gazzetta Italiana*, of Seattle, Wash. Generose Pope, having acquired control of the three most important Italian newspapers in New York (the *Progresso Italo-Americano*, the *Corriere d'America*, and the *Bollettino della Sera*), has recently reached out into Philadelphia and bought the twenty-seven-year-old *Opinione*. There probably won't be much independent opinion left in *L'Opinione* now. In the Slavic group, the *Svornost* of Pittsburgh, the official organ of a Slovak brotherhood, controls eight newspapers, supplying them with syndicated matter. The Yiddish *Forward* of New York has a Chicago branch plant and edition; the *Morgen Journal* has a Philadelphia edition.

Consolidations have been noted recently in the Italian, Polish, and Russian fields. But the most drastic ones go on in the German division. The *Freie Presse*, of Lincoln, Neb., represents a merger of no less than forty-one small German weeklies in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, and the Dakotas. The German *Tribune* of Omaha is also a result of numerous consolidations. Mark Villchur, of FLIS., remarks in an unpublished report:

These consolidations have been instrumental in placing the remaining papers on a more solid footing, but they also often marked the disappearance of the type of the country editor who usually combines printing, social activities and social leadership with editing a town paper.

So slides down the immigrant press, once a power of the first magnitude. The slide, on the whole, has not been quite as rapid as the raw statistics of migration and Americanization would warrant. The immigrant press clings to the body American with tenacious teeth. It isn't so much that the immigrants need it and so cause it to cling; it is rather the publishers and editors

who need their jobs and the illusion of their influence in the community. Most of them have no other jobs and glory to go to, and so, desperately, they trim the frequency of their publications, cut the size and number of pages, dispense with contributors, and lean heavier on the scissors and paste. Finally, they pare their own salaries to the bone, not to mention the wages of those who work for them. But they stick to their mastheads, vaguely hoping for better times, even though the tide is definitely against them and there is not a single chance that America will ever reopen her gates to a fresh Babel from overseas.

The more dispassionate heads among the immigrant leaders admit, mostly among themselves and not for publication, that their press is doomed. Competent observers estimate that by 1937 or '38 the number of immigrant papers in this coun-

try will decrease by another 20% or 25%, and that by 1950 there will be very few left—perhaps no more than you would be able to count on your fingers and toes. Recently, the publisher of a Polish newspaper, one of the best known in the land, betook himself to Poland and then came back to his American home. As a result, there is arising now, under his direction, a large export-and-import organization known as Ampol, a privately-owned imitation of the Russian Amtorg. He hears the knell of the immigrant publishing business, even though his paper is as yet among the soundest money-makers in the field. In good season he prepares another nest for himself. He is generally counted as one of the shrewdest and most farsighted men in the game. The fact of his defection to strange gods is more ominous than volumes of figures on the decline of the immigrant press.

THE ARTS AND SCIENCES

Pathology

A NEW THEORY OF INSANITY

BY WINGATE M. JOHNSON

ALTHOUGH insanity has been recognized since the dawn of history its cause in many cases is still a mystery. A rough dividing line has been drawn between organic mental disturbances, in which there are demonstrable changes in the brain, and the so-called functional diseases, which supply by far the larger part of our insane population.

A new theory of functional insanity has been set forth lately by Professor Wilder D. Bancroft, head of the department of chemistry at Cornell, and his associates, Dr. R. H. Gutsell and Mr. J. E. Rutzler, Jr. This theory is the outgrowth of some observations and experiments made to test a view advanced in 1875 by the celebrated French physiologist, Claude Bernard, that "anesthesia is due to the reversible coagulation of some of the proteins of the brain and of the sensory nerves. Unconsciousness results from the blocking of the centers of consciousness, and insensitvity to pain from the blocking of the sensory nervous system". This concept of anesthesia is not generally accepted by physiologists, but in the most painstaking series of experiments yet undertaken in its study, Dr. Bancroft and his associates have made out what seems to be an excellent case for it.

Coagulation, it may be explained, is the process of thickening or solidifying a colloid. A very familiar example is the making of gelatin. One still more familiar is

the cooking of an egg, either by heat (boiling, frying, or scrambling) or by alcohol (eggnog). Alcohol is a coagulating agent which every one knows has a definite action on the brain. Ether and chloroform act in a similar manner, but more quickly and forcefully.

Bernard's conception of anesthesia by ether and chloroform was that they were carried by the blood to the brain and nerves, and produced a slight coagulating effect on their proteins, which resulted in loss of consciousness and of sensation. When given cautiously for surgical anesthesia, this coagulation disappears soon after the inhalation of the anesthetic is stopped, and consciousness and sensation gradually return. If, however, too much is given, the coagulation is "irreversible", and death results.

In their experiments, the Cornell workers found that other substances than ether, chloroform, and alcohol have the same effect of coagulating or agglomerating nerve proteins. Among these are morphine and the hypnotic drugs. (The hypnotics may usually be identified by their ending in *al*—chloral, veronal, luminal, allonal, amytal, and so on.) They also found that another class of drugs—chiefly those of the so-called halogen group—have the opposite effect of liquefying, peptizing or dispersing the brain proteins. Of these, they found sodium thiocyanate the most effective. For ease in pronunciation they have rechristened it by its German name, sodium rhodanate—"the rose-colored salt".

As might have been expected, they