

ARE OUR IMMIGRANTS TO BLAME?

THE immense increase, during the last two decades, of the number of immigrants arriving in the United States—the number being twice as large in the last ten years as in the decade from 1870 to 1880—has deservedly attracted the public attention. Fears of its consequences are expressed by men animated with a desire to promote the public welfare and to prevent dangers to the future security and permanency of our institutions. The national legislature has appointed committees to investigate the subject and has proposed measures that may prevent, or at least mitigate, the evils arising from this source. The competition and the struggle of life, selfishness, and patriotism have increased the cry for protection against the evil of immigration and the demand for more or less stringent restrictions against it. The question is of so much importance, that every proposition or measure affecting it should be carefully weighed and examined to ascertain whether the evils complained of are really the results of our large immigration or can be attributed to other causes than those lying at the surface; or at least whether they are not aggravated by circumstances entirely independent of the size and character of the immigration. In short, it is to be carefully considered whether the remedies recommended may not increase the evil instead of mitigating it, and may not be worse than the disease to be cured by their application.

Men are always ready to shift to the shoulders of others the responsibility for the misfortunes which are the results of their own follies, and the American people may be only too willing to listen to appeals for the enactment of restrictive laws, especially if they appear clothed in the garb of patriotic phrases, although it may not be difficult to prove that they emanate from race prejudice, shortsightedness, and selfishness, or that their source is, to put it mildly, rather Chauvinism than patriotism.

The importance which immigration has played in the devel-

opment of the United States can hardly be overlooked even by the most superficial observer. Considering only the size of our population, if the increase of it had been dependent entirely upon the natural increase—that is, on the surplus of births over deaths—the population at present would be hardly more than one-third of what it is. The increase of the population of France was only one half of one per cent. during the six years preceding 1890. In Germany it was 1.006 per cent. The average increase in all the European states from 1820 to 1880 was one per cent. If the same progress had been made in the United States from the year 1790, when it showed a population of 3,929,214, it would be to-day only 14,734,551. Even taking into account the addition of Louisiana Territory, Florida, and Texas, and assuming the most favorable conditions for the increase of our numbers, the population to-day, on a very liberal estimate, could not without immigration exceed 25,000,000. From all indications the prospects for the future are worse yet, and the publications of the tabular statements about the population from the census taken last year, may disclose facts that will alarm intelligent and patriotic citizens. Even taking into consideration the marvellous energy of the American people, their gigantic enterprise, their inventive genius and their eminent faculty for utilizing and applying inventions, their astonishing talent of organization, the tenacity and perseverance with which they fight against seemingly insurmountable obstacles; with all these and other valuable gifts, which are justly considered the most prominent characteristics of the native citizens of the United States, it would have been a physical impossibility for them, unaided, to have controlled and subdued nearly the whole North American continent, to have built 170,000 miles of railroads, to have opened and improved enormous water-ways, and to have populated 1,500,000 square miles of territory, all within a single century. All that we see to-day in the American people—their wealth, their immense achievements, their industrial enterprises—could certainly not have been accomplished to such an extent without the constant inflow of immigrants.

But all the advantages above indicated—even if they were greater than they are and could be attributed to a greater extent to the assistance of immigration than the facts justify—

would have been too dearly bought, if it could be proved that immigration has tended to deteriorate the national character of the people of the United States, and consequently endangers the future and the permanency of our free institutions. On the first view it would appear to be dangerous to introduce annually into the body politic a large foreign element; and without the mysterious and phenomenal power of assimilation possessed by the people of the United States, there is no doubt that this constant and great inflow of foreigners would already have swamped and annihilated the most valuable features of the American character.

I have a very lively remembrance of the impressions I received on the occasion of my arrival in the United States about forty years ago. I had become an ardent admirer of American institutions, from what I had learned of them in my college studies. The ship that brought me over was scarcely fastened at the dock before I ran up the nearest street, and, standing in Broadway near the Astor House, observed the passers-by. From their appearance they were mostly men who worked for a living, but nearly every one of them bore himself as if he was a sovereign. The expression of their eyes seemed to say, "I am second to none; there is nothing so great and so high that I cannot accomplish it, and I intend to fight my way." Not speaking English, I saw that it would be impossible for me to obtain a situation where I could utilize the knowledge acquired during my university studies; and having no means to speak of, I took a few days later a position as common laborer in a factory, although I had never done a stroke of manual work in my life before. After a few hours my fingers were full of blisters, and in a few hours more the blood was running down my hands; but I had been inspired with the energy that I saw in the eyes of those men on my arrival, and I continued, not disheartened by pains or difficulties in my work. I had received the baptism of the real American spirit, and I was never so proud of anything as of the blisters on my hands in consequence of my labor.

I mention these facts to show in a concrete case the really incomprehensible power and influence of the American atmosphere in the assimilation of foreign elements. It may have taken a little more time for others to have experienced the same effects,

but the result was the same with all, unless they were depraved and became the victims of vice and dissipation. That the admiration and loyalty of these adopted citizens of the United States were something more than mere words was proved during the civil war, when they answered the call for the preservation of the Union as willingly as the native-born citizens, and sacrificed their lives for their adopted country. It is impossible to ascertain the exact proportion of adopted citizens that served in the Union army, but it can certainly be asserted that they were inspired with as much patriotism as the native-born Americans and fought as gallantly for the preservation of the Union as their comrades who had been to the manner born. Even the State of Wisconsin, more than one-half of whose inhabitants are foreign-born citizens, and which General Grosvenor called a European province, furnished as many regiments to the Union army, in proportion to its population, as any other State.

But, nevertheless, it cannot be denied that symptoms are appearing in our public and private life of a decay in the character of our people. The only question is: Are they the results of the influence of immigrants, or of other causes which corrupt the native-born citizen as well as the immigrant? The tendency toward the centralization of wealth and power is the most characteristic symptom that has appeared in the development of our public and economic life during the last thirty years. It has undermined the self-reliance of our citizens and induced them to look to the government as a paternal power for help and assistance. It has induced them to engage in a vile chase for success, irrespective of principle and virtue. It has beguiled them into aping foreign customs and habits. It has made them forget that American citizenship is the highest type and has caused them so far to lose their self-respect that they importune our ministers in Europe for introductions at court, and consider it their greatest ambition to splurge in all sorts of extravagances. This degeneration certainly cannot be traced to the influence of immigration. A dozen titled adventurers coming over here from Europe, who are introduced into the best circles, who turn the heads of the belles of society and who induce our "dudes" to imitate their snobbish follies, contribute more to corrupt the

habits and customs of the best classes of our people, who consider themselves pre-eminently American, than a million of poor immigrants. One of the saddest results of these changes in the habits and character of our people is their disinclination to have large and numerous families, which they consider rather a burden than a blessing. It is certainly a mistake to believe that the reluctance of our native population to bring forth sons and daughters is due to the fear that they would have to compete in the market for labor with hordes of immigrants, whose customs are repulsive to them and who are lowering the standard of living. The standard of living of all classes of our population is higher and better to-day than forty years ago, when of the above-mentioned reluctance very little was known; and it is to-day especially noticed among the wealthier classes who never dream that they or their children will have ever to compete with foreigners in the market for labor. The opinion of Napoleon I., who, when asked by Madame de Staël which woman he considered the most meritorious, answered, "the one who has the most children," will find little favor among a large class of American ladies of our day, and some of them may pronounce it decidedly un-American. In glancing over this state of affairs, it is difficult to suppress the suspicion that "something is rotten in the state of Denmark." The roots of these evils are partially to be found in the events of our history, but they certainly have been magnified and multiplied during the last thirty years, and may, if not retarded by the greatest exertions of all well-meaning and patriotic citizens, assume proportions which may in the course of time threaten the stability and permanency of our republic.

To fight, to retard, and to extinguish this pernicious tendency should be the greatest duty and the highest ambition of all thinking men. Our statesmen and legislators, men of letters and journalists, ministers and professors in colleges—in short, all who by talents and position are able to influence public opinion and national character—should consider as addressed to them the warning: "*Videant consules ne detrimentum capiat res publica.*"

It may be said that the above picture is the product of a mind inclined to pessimism, and that the colors of it are taken mostly from life as it appears in the city of New York. If all

this is admitted, it does not detract materially from the correctness and truth of the picture. The inhabitants of New York are no better and no worse than those of other places in the United States. I believe that there are numerous cities in our country which show the same symptoms of decay as those indicated in the above lines. From recent disclosures it appears that one city, which prides itself upon being the most ardent advocate and promoter of some of the views and measures that have contributed materially to the present deplorable state of affairs in our public and private life, excels New York in the hunt for accumulating wealth irrespective of the means employed.

Though these influences may be, here or there, retarded or accelerated by favorable or unfavorable circumstances, by the necessities of nature the same causes will, in a longer or a shorter period, produce the same results. Though we may think that the evils complained of are only symptoms of a disease that has taken possession of our political body, that the character of a nation is not changed by an intercourse of two or three generations, that at present the views and characteristics of former times fight against the extension and progress of the disease, it must be confessed that the impartial observer cannot contemplate without fear and solicitude the future destiny of our nation, and that if the tendencies of the present time should continue unchecked in the future, the fall of the great Western Republic must be admitted to be not only one of the possibilities but one of the probabilities of a future century. The historian of that time, in tracing the course of that most disastrous event to human civilization, will find no difficulty in detecting the sources from which it came; but one thing is certain—immigration will not be one of them.

Whatever we may think of the correctness of the foregoing assertions, at least it seems certain that immigration did not or does not lead to the deterioration of the American national character, and that if symptoms of such a deplorable change appear, they must be traced to other causes. Yet it cannot be denied that a certain class of immigrants, or certain classes of immigrants—for example, those that came during the past year in great numbers from Russia and from Italy—especially if they congre-

gate in single localities, cause inconveniences and may entail great burdens on the communities in which they settle in large numbers. It may be considered the duty of our legislators to prepare and to enact measures by the execution of which these evils, although they may be only temporary, can be mitigated and avoided altogether.

We may omit the consideration of the proposition sometimes made, to extend the time of probation which must pass before immigrants can become citizens of the United States, as not pertaining to the subject under discussion; for such a measure would not diminish or restrict immigration, while it would curtail the power of assimilation. The number of citizens coming here without the intention of making America their home, but only for the purpose of earning more or less money and then returning to their native countries, would be immensely increased thereby; in fact, all emigrants soon would be drawn into that category. The difficulties justly or unjustly complained of as the results of large immigration would therefore not be diminished but increased by an extension of the time necessary for naturalization. Other measures that have been urged with more or less energy and discussed in the public press as well as in meetings and legislative bodies are as follows. It has been proposed:

First, To authorize and instruct our consuls in Europe to provide every emigrant with a certificate, in which it would appear that he is unobjectionable and a desirable addition to the population of the United States.

Second, To provide for an educational test; that is, to require that every emigrant over a certain age, who lands here, shall be able to read and to write.

As to the proposition to provide consular certificates, this would be impracticable. Our consuls in Europe, being unable personally to investigate the circumstances of every applicant, would have to rely, in the main, on the testimony of the civil and municipal officers in whose territory the intended emigrant lived. If he were an objectionable person, had come in conflict with the laws of his country, and had been punished heretofore, his home authorities, in order to get rid of him, would recommend him to the United States consul with the greatest pleasure as a worthy

applicant for the dignity of United States citizenship; on the other hand, if he were really a valuable citizen, they would perhaps decline, in order to detain him, to furnish him with the certificate asked for. It is a known fact that in several parts of Europe organizations exist whose members and officers belong to the highest civil authorities (even some relatives of the reigning dynasties are honorary members of such organizations), whose special object it is to induce good-for-nothing fellows, who are burdens to their communities and even occupants of prisons, to emigrate to America, promising them pardon for their offences and the means to enable them to carry out their good resolutions. The United States consuls could be easily deceived by the home authorities, and, as they would be unable to carry on investigations themselves, the consular certificates would be entirely valueless.

But our consuls in the principal ports in which emigrants take their passage for the United States could do a great deal to ascertain their character and their past history, if they were instructed and enabled to engage persons whose duty it should be to find out from the emigrants, by intermingling with them before their departure, what their past history was and what the reasons were which induced them to leave their homes. Emigrants usually arrive in the port from which they start, a day or two before the steamers sail, and they are lodged in cheap hotels or boarding houses; most of them are usually very communicative and it would not be very difficult for a few detectives within an hour or two to learn the history and antecedents of nearly all the passengers. If undesirable or objectionable persons should be found among them, the consul could advise the immigration authorities in the United States in time to prevent their landing.

As to the second proposition—the adoption of an educational test—its efficiency is very doubtful. It might prevent from landing, some men whose education has been neglected but who possess, nevertheless, a great deal of common sense, industry, and energy, and who might become valuable citizens of the United States. No sensible man will deny or underestimate the value of knowledge and education, but they do not form the only criterion to judge the worth of a man. Culture of the heart is of

as much importance in the formation of the character of a man as culture of the head. I do not believe in an aristocracy either of birth or of intelligence; virtue and patriotism are not privileges belonging exclusively or even pre-eminently to wealth or learning. Scoundrels possess usually a fair education, as far as it can be acquired in school or from books, and an educational test in its practical workings may not prove to be what is expected by its advocates.

In my opinion, the present laws, amended and improved as experience may make it appear advisable, if they are rigidly, conscientiously, and impartially enforced, are sufficient to prevent, if not all, at least most of the evils that are complained of. Immigrants either physically or mentally defective, such as cripples or idiots, are easily ascertained among arrivals and can be prevented from landing. It would be more difficult to detect criminally-disposed persons, but with some diligence and care this can be accomplished. The largest number of undesirable arrivals are the so-called "assisted emigrants" who, either by means furnished by the municipal authorities of their homes or by societies organized for that purpose, are sent to the United States. These could and should be prohibited from landing. If the steamship companies had to take them back they would be more careful, and would instruct their agents not to sell tickets to persons whose landing in the United States might be prohibited. A great deal then would remain to be done to imbue the immigrant with the American spirit, and it should be the ambition of all our citizens to contribute, to the extent of their ability, in one or another way to that end. It is a difficult work, but a great deal can be accomplished. Of course this cannot be done by resolutions, adopted by fashionable clubs, denouncing the immigrant in general and recommending the adoption of restrictive measures of doubtful expediency; it must be done by practical missionary work, by mingling personally with the immigrants and inducing them not to congregate in large cities but to disperse as much as possible in the country. They may not listen to such advice; if so, let them starve. Hunger is not only the best cook but often the best school-master too.

OSWALD OTTENDORFER.

THE UNITED STATES AND SILVER.

It is not proposed to discuss in this article the merits either of the double or of the single standard of money. Much can be, and has been, said of both, but, if it be of any importance, it may be proper to say that the author thereof is, on the whole, of the opinion that it would be better for the people of the world if the double standard were now universally in use. The present financial condition of Europe is such that in all probability it will soon be determined whether the single gold standard, which is now practically the standard of the world including the United States, will be continued, or whether it will be succeeded by the double standard. Should the present crisis be passed successfully, there will be small prospect of any change by the nations of Europe for a long time. If, on the other hand, bi-metallism be adopted by them, then all occasion for discussion of this question as affecting this country will cease for the present. But, if bi-metallism be not adopted, what will our condition be? This question involves other questions:

First:—If the world should become convinced that soon all of the money in use in this country would be silver and paper convertible only into silver, would or would not the immediate effect of that world-belief be harmful to us?

Second:—The transition having taken place, the money of the country having become silver alone, would the country be better off, would it have greater prosperity as a whole than it would have should the present condition continue—that condition involving the free interchangeability of gold and silver and the constant creation by government of as much silver money as will be kept equal in value to gold money by the use which the people of the United States make of it in their business?

Third:—Can and will the people of this country so use silver as money in their domestic business that, without reference to what the rest of the world may do, the price of silver the world