

## ALIEN COLONIES AND THE CHILDREN'S COURT.

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THERE is probably no place where the social, physical and moral effects of the further congestion of our already overcrowded tenement districts, with the enormous and miscellaneous influx of aliens, is more immediately apparent than in New York's Children's Court. Here daily looms up, in a manner most startling, the menace of the congested immigrant colonies to our future citizenship. The army of children burglars, pickpockets and thieves, the multitude charged with less serious offences, the children without proper guardianship, come from these colonies. Practically all of the material brought into the Children's Court for remoulding is a gift from Europe. By the use of means in which there is a large measure of reason and humanity, the saving of the great majority of these children is being accomplished. But the burden that Europe is shifting to us through the steerage is daily becoming more onerous. The fact that there are thousands of children accused of crime to be dealt with is due almost altogether to the evil moral and physical conditions following the massing of immigrants in narrow districts. With the disintegration of the alien colonies in our great cities, and with the enactment of wiser immigration laws, the number of juvenile offenders would be so small that there would scarcely be need for Children's Courts. Simple, too, would be the problem of municipal charities.

A study of nationalities, just completed, shows that eighty-six per cent. of all the children arraigned in the Children's Court, which has jurisdiction over the old city of New York (Boroughs of Manhattan and the Bronx), were born either abroad or of

parents born in foreign countries. For our cosmopolitan metropolis this percentage may not be so striking, but the significant fact is that practically all crime among children comes from the same congested living-spots. These are the breeding-places of the great majority not only of the inmates of our reformatories, but of our charitable institutions.

The moral and physical standards of the hundreds of thousands of aliens being added to our population each year, as the Commissioner-General of Immigration himself gives warning, are falling. The flood is not from the more desirable sources, but from those where there are the greatest illiteracy and the worst living conditions. Virtually one million aliens came to this country last year. Of the 857,046 persons who came in the steerage, during the fiscal year ending on the 30th of June, 1903, more than two-thirds were from Italy, Russia and Austria-Hungary. More than one-fourth of all the arrivals could neither read nor write. This immigration is colonizing in our cities, and, worse than that, in very narrow districts in our cities. The arraignments in the Children's Court speak most forcibly as to the results in New York.

Not only is the present immigration of a much lower order, morally and intellectually, than that of the past, but in colonizing in the cities the aliens are building barriers about their settlements which are not easily penetrated by American ideas of well-being and citizenship. In these colonies they are peoples unto themselves.

The Italian knows of either the Mulberry, Mott or Bleecker Street, or "Little Italy," colonies long before he leaves his native land, and he heads for one of these directly on leaving the Barge Office. More than 250,000 of the immigrants who came to this country last year have remained in New York; and to-day most of this number will be found in the foreign colonies between the Battery and the Harlem.

In a single square mile, bounded on the west by the Bowery, on the east by Mangin Street, on the north by East Houston Street and on the south by Cherry Street, there is a Jewish population alone of 350,000.\* There are 675,000 Jews in the city of

\* For this information the writer is indebted to Dr. David Blaustein, Superintendent of the Educational Alliance, under whose direction a religious census of that district has just been completed.

New York, but the vast majority of the Jewish children who are arrested come from that square mile of congested humanity. So scarce is house room there that a dozen synagogues in that district are forced on the Jewish Sabbath to worship in the rear rooms of saloons, the clatter of the bars sounding in the ears of the congregations. Between 50,000 and 75,000 Jews live in the Borough of the Bronx, but rarely is a Jewish boy brought to the Children's Court from that Borough. The tenements in which they dwell there were built after laws had been enacted which prohibited the erection of rookeries such as are now the homes of nearly all of the population of the lower East Side. There is plenty of room in the Borough of the Bronx, and there children grow up in healthy freedom. Light and air are the most powerful enemies of crime.

The names of 7,647 children appeared on the Children's Court calendar in the year which ended December 31st last. More than half of these children were born in Italy or Russia, or of parents born in those countries. The offences charged ran nearly the entire gamut of the Penal Code. Birth is the fundamental test of citizenship in this country; but, in investigating the subject of immigration and juvenile crime, it is as important that the nativity of the parents be known as that of the child. The parents are responsible for the child's environment, and the environment determines whether or not the child shall start in the path to vagrancy and criminality. Is it reasonable to expect that those children who are taken into the crowded spots that are already the breeding-places of depravity and disease will have a healthy growth?

Russia leads in furnishing work for the Children's Court, with Italy a close second. Of all the children arraigned, more than twenty-six per cent. are of Russian parents. More than ninety-eight per cent. of these children of Russian parents come from the lower East Side, a vast majority, as has already been said, coming from that square mile of territory where the religious census showed that 350,000 Jews lived. It is not long since the Russian Jewish parent enjoyed the reputation of striving always to do the best that he could do for the moral as well as the physical good of his family. Their love of home was proverbial. To-day, however, with the lower order of immigration that is crowding into the Ghetto, a laxity is appearing in the moral standards set by the

parents for the children. This laxity or apathy on the part of the parents has become so apparent that the Hebrew charitable workers who visit the Children's Court view the situation with alarm. Only a few years ago, it was a remarkable fact that there were no Hebrew criminals. So small was the number of delinquent Hebrew children that it was thought it would never be necessary to build a special reformatory for them. There were Catholic and Protestant institutions for the treatment of delinquents, but the suggestion of a Jewish reformatory would have been resented. To-day the number of convictions of Hebrew children is so large that Hebrew philanthropists have subscribed a large sum of money for a protectory.

The effects of the oppression and carefully fostered ignorance in the native country are at once apparent in the Russian immigrants on their arrival here. The Russian arrivals cling to the cities; and, crippled by poverty and ignorance, as they are, what place is there for them but the slum and sweat-shop districts?

The parents have lived so long in subjection that timidity and endless patience under hardship are second nature. Too often, too, on their arrival here, both father and mother, in the fierce struggle for existence, are breadwinners. They work early and late in the sweat-shops or in their miserable tenement rooms, while their children grow up in the streets. No matter how abject the condition of the father may have been in Russia, there, at least, he was czar in his own household. But here his children find a new freedom. They learn our language much more rapidly than their parents, quickly adapt themselves to the new surroundings, bad as they are, and soon outstrip their elders. They feel a superiority to their parents, and this often comes to amount almost to contempt. So engrossed, too, are the parents in their struggle to gather in a few dollars that they do not view this slipping away from their control with the same concern as formerly.

Larceny is the common charge against the Russian children arrested. From their ranks come some of the most skilful pickpockets in the city of New York. Seldom or never is a child of Russian parents arrested for a crime of violence. But in these children the pickpocket bosses, commonly called "Fagins," find their most apt pupils. The methods by which these boys are worked into the pickpocket squads are so insidious that the boys are frequently transformed into thieves before they realize that

they have done wrong. The first lesson is usually profitable and apparently guileless. The Fagin, after winning the boy's friendship as a good-natured and liberal fellow, one day in the boy's sight drops a twenty-five-cent piece into a pocket. He then tells the boy that he may have the coin if he takes it from the pocket without being detected. The instructor is conveniently blind for four lessons. The boy has had and squandered a dollar, wealth he never before dreamed of coming into his possession. A new life has been opened up to him, but all unknown to his parents; Fagin has managed that. Soon the boy is working with the squad playing "stool to a dip," that is, he crowds while one of the other boys goes through the pedestrian's pockets or extracts the contents of a chatelaine bag. The good-natured friend by this time has become a tyrant, and rules by threats and violence. He takes ninety per cent. of the boy's pickings. Next the boy is convicted of grand larceny in the Children's Court. Fagin's dollar has been a paying investment.

Although the Italian population of New York is estimated at less than 400,000, twenty-four per cent. of all the children arraigned in the Children's Court are of Italian parents. All of these Italian children come from within the purlieus of the distinctive Italian colonies down-town, or from "Little Italy," the cities within the city, with their sunless courts, malodorous streets and fire-escapes crowded with food and clothing. About one-half of the Italian children arraigned have been born in Italy. This, of itself, tells something of the character of our present immigration. The fact that there are children to be taken along is not much of a deterrent in the rush for the United States. The children are bundled along like the packs that contain the family chattels.

The thirty dollars which the father has shown to the immigration inspectors, to enable him to get beyond Ellis Island, has frequently been borrowed from a fellow passenger, and is repaid before our new resident and prospective citizen has passed the gates of the Barge Office. The family goes into a miserable room in a tenement that is already crowded to suffocation with men, women and children. Until the father gets work, the family often subsists on the charity of relatives and friends. To many of these parents, the chief concern about their children is that they should help in the breadwinning, and the boys are let out as helpers to

bootblacks whose stands are blocks away; or, as soon as they learn how to make change, they are sent to sell papers. Their new companions of the dark stairways and busy streets teach the new arrivals how to evade the truant officers. If the boy is placed in school, it is more than likely that, after hours, he is running wild with the "gang," which exists in practically every tenement block, and whose daring leader has had more or less experience with the police. The new recruit to the "gang" is taught at the outset that the "cop" is his worst enemy. His first actual criminal experience is when he is detailed "to lay cheese it"—that is, to stand picket while his companions pry the hasp off a basement door. The parents, handicapped, as they are, by ignorance of our language, customs and laws, do not realize the dangers to which their children are exposed.

Then, too, there is a large element among the Italians who seek to have their children committed to public institutions, that they may thus be relieved of the burden of their support while they are being educated. If the city is going to insist on Giuseppe attending school, and his earning-power is thus going to be cut off or, at least, greatly diminished, his parents too often are anxious to have him committed. To them, sending a boy to a charitable or reformatory institution is sending him to "college." The colony knows all about the "college." In fact, the fame of the American "college" has spread over all of Southern Italy; and many of the parents are told before they leave for this country that they will find here institutions where their children will be educated, taught a trade, fed, clothed, and lodged all at public expense. A father or mother who has had a child committed to one of these charitable or reformatory institutions, regardless of the complaint, is often looked upon with envy by neighbors. This does not apply, of course, to all the parents in the colony; but, unfortunately, it is the attitude that is all too prevalent. Many a child has unwittingly told in the Children's Court of the collusion by which his parents hoped to have him "put away" where he would learn a trade.

Instances are many where parents have even charged their children with theft, in the hope that they would be committed. In a recent case, all parties concerned artlessly told the Court that the boy had been brought to this country only three weeks before, solely for this purpose. The justices, who in turn preside in the

court, are thoroughly familiar with all these tricks, and they have found a remedy. The law has been so amended, at their suggestion, that they may now, at their discretion, place the father of any child committed to an institution under an order to pay for the child's maintenance while there. It costs the city two dollars a week for each child sent to an institution because of improper guardianship or destitution, and \$110 a year for each child committed for reformation. When a father, who is the complainant against his own boy or girl, is told that in event of commitment an order will be entered against him to pay the city for the child's maintenance, his charges frequently melt away, and under renewed questionings the culprit becomes a jewel. The amendment of the law has done much to cut down the number of "disorderly child" complaints.

The resourcefulness of some of the parents in the Italian colonies is best illustrated, perhaps, by the experience of an examiner in the Bureau of Dependent Children, who was investigating a case of alleged destitution. A wretchedly-clad woman, with a seven-months-old child in her arms, called at the Bureau recently, with a story of poverty and a husband at home dying of consumption. Her husband had but one leg, and for many weeks before the consumption developed had been without work. The mother said that, if the Department of Charities would take the child, she would seek employment, and probably be able in a few days to give her husband such food as he required. The examiner hurried down into Oliver Street. He found the consumptive in a dingy room at the top of five flights of tenement stairs. The room had been stripped of everything save the bed in which the consumptive lay, its scanty covers, and a wooden leg underneath it. The woman who had accompanied the examiner told, with a flood of tears, how everything had been pawned; they were just about to send the leg to the shop around the corner. The man was barely able to make himself understood. He had lost his leg, he said, in a blasting accident; later, the consumption had developed. That he was in the last stages of the disease, there was no doubt. But the examiner marvelled at the combination of misfortunes. He lifted the bed-covers—two legs were revealed. The consumptive had hired out his services to the parents of the child whose commitment was sought, the wooden leg had accommodately been loaned by a professional mendicant, who lived



in the next block. The city's charity had originally supplied the leg to its owner, but, for business reasons, he wore it only on Sundays or when he was taking a vacation. The father, who had planned all these elaborate arrangements to shift the care of his child on to the city, was at work and earning twelve dollars a week.

There are many recruits to the Italian colonies who come to this country with the intention of remaining only long enough to accumulate a few hundred dollars, a fortune to them. With this they can go back to Italy and live out the rest of their days in what to them is comfort. It is in this process of accumulating their "fortune" that it is of great assistance to them if they can rid themselves while here of the expense of maintaining their children. Parents of this class have no regrets when their children are arrested. Let it be said, however, that there are thousands of Italian parents in these colonies who are intelligent and affectionate, as well as thrifty, and who rear their children with care. But with this class the authorities have little to do.

The small number of arraignments of children of parents from the Austro-Hungarian Empire is a forcible argument for the disintegration of the foreign colonies in our cities. Austria-Hungary is the second largest source of immigration to this country, the steerage arrivals of 206,011 last year falling little below the number from Italy. The percentage of children of Austro-Hungarian parentage arraigned in the Children's Court is barely eleven. The explanation of this small showing is that there are practically no distinctive Austro-Hungarian colonies in New York. There is no common language to cement these people together in a strange land. With their thirty languages they scatter on arriving here, and are quickly absorbed into widely separated districts, where often they find only a few who speak their tongue. Those who speak German seek out the German districts; the Bohemians disappear into the small Slavonic colonies, as do the Poles. The Dalmatians are swallowed up among the Greeks and Italians. Because of this scattering and the fact that the number is comparatively small of those who go into the colonies which respond least readily to American influences, the children of Austria-Hungary give the authorities little trouble.

There has been a heavy falling off of both Irish and German immigration in recent years. This is to be regretted, for past ex-



perience has shown that that immigration is of a desirable class. The percentage of arraignments of children of Irish parents, however, is about ten. Only 8.07 per cent. of all the children arraigned are of German parents. Great Britain, and this includes Canada and the British West Indies, gives a percentage of only three, while France has a percentage of less than one.

The percentage of children arraigned whose parents were born in the United States is 13.66. This includes the negroes, whose percentage of the total arraignments is 3.86. The percentage, then, of white children brought into court whose parents are known to have been born in the United States is 9.80. A large portion of these come from the densely populated "Hell's Kitchen" district. In fact, four per cent. of all the children arraigned in the Children's Court come from that small section on the West Side. In a number of cases, 2.27 per cent. of the arraignments, the children had been born in this country, but the nativity of the parents could not be ascertained. Little more than one per cent. of the children arraigned were of parents from countries other than those which have been named.

From the standpoint of the Children's Court, and with the welfare of city children in view, there is no more important municipal problem to-day than the distribution of arriving immigrants to the less densely populated sections of the city. With the powerful influences of the steamship companies at work at Washington against immigration legislation, Congress is slow to give relief. In the mean time, our future citizenship is in peril.

Recommendations have been made for measures to encourage arriving aliens to move on to the open places of the West. However attractive this proposed solution of the problem may sound, the fact confronts us that the aliens do, and will continue to, cling to the cities. Crops may go to waste for lack of harvesters, but there will always be thousands clamoring for places in sweatshops and for peddlers' licenses. The foreigners are in the cities and there they are likely to remain.

With further building of parks and widening of streets, more light and air will be let into the dense, alien colonies, and thousands will be forced into the outlying districts, where the new building laws compel the erection of more wholesome dwelling-places. The aliens will not leave the old colonies until driven to it. The fifty or seventy-five thousand Jews who have

moved into the Bronx, with resulting benefit to themselves and their children, have gone there of necessity. The East Side Ghetto could not hold them. Months had passed without a single "to-let" sign having been seen in the windows of its tenements.

The task of the authorities in combating the evils of congestion has been and will continue to be an arduous one; the inertia of ignorance and sloth is always hard to overcome. Not the least among the factors potent in this work will be the Children's Court. There, crime and poverty, ignorance and neglect, on the one side, and the law, humanity, charity and reason, on the other, are daily in conflict, with a resulting flood of light on city conditions, and the saving of many children.

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# THE AUSTRALIAN TELEGRAPH SYSTEM.

BY HUGH H. LUSK.

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THE people of Australia own their own telegraph system, and it is managed as a part of the postal system of the country. This arose in the beginning from the fact that, when telegraphs were first constructed, no private company would have taken the risk of making telegraphic communication pay a dividend on the capital required to construct and work the lines. As in the case of the railroads, the choice lay between telegraphs constructed and managed by the Government, and no telegraphs at all; and the people of Australia adopted a system of Government ownership. Each of the five colonies into which the great island-continent was divided began the construction of telegraph lines, and pushed them forward as fast as the spread of population appeared likely to make any return on the outlay. Australia has always been a wealthy country, and especially so since the gold discoveries of half a century ago, and it has always had a tendency to be lavish rather than niggardly in all matters of public expenditure. This tendency has been illustrated in its telegraph system as much perhaps as anywhere. Lines were made, and afterwards extended, in districts where the demand seemed to be small, and where the population was certainly scanty, to an extent which would not have commended itself to the business instincts of a great corporation, and could not have been expected to yield a large return on the capital invested. The result has been that Australia, more than any other country in the world, presents a field for investigating the effects that may be expected to flow from the public ownership of a great public convenience like the telegraph system of to-day.

The whole question was brought into prominence by the debates that took place in the Federal Parliament, in con-