

CHAPTER XII.

IMMIGRATION.

Among the questions asked of those canvassed by the Michigan Labor Bureau while the late Henry A. Robinson was State Labor Commissioner, was one relating to immigration. The desire was to get the opinions of the wage-workers as to the desirability or non-desirability of restricting the inflow of other nationalities upon United States soil, and particularly upon that part under the control of the people of this commonwealth.

The answers indicated, in a general way, that a majority of those canvassed favored the restriction of immigration. But many attached provisions to their answers, many added conditions to their "yes" or "no." It is therefore both appropriate and pertinent to look a little into these objections to immigration, and see how much value should be attached, from the standpoint of the wage-worker, to the general opinion that the restriction of immigration would result in steadier employment and higher wages for the working class already on these shores. Some of these conditional answers to the question of immigration were:

I favor keeping out all foreigners unless they come to stay.

No Canadian should be allowed to work here and then spend our money in Canada.

Open the doors to all except those unable to work, or confirmed paupers.

Keep out every foreigner but artists. There is no true art in this country.

Anarchists and socialists are the only ones who should be prevented coming to this country.

Let in everybody but Chinamen.

No more should be allowed to land. There is not enough work for us who are here now.

The more who come, the less there will be for us to eat.

It does not seem to me that the restriction of immigration will help us wage-workers anything to speak of.

Immigration and big families are the two great curses of the working men in the United States who have to work for a living.

On one thing all are substantially agreed: The people of the United States do not desire, and will object to receiving, cripples and those who are in any way afflicted with contagious or other serious diseases. It is plain that such classes are undesirable both economically and socially. They are consumers and not producers, and consequently their presence lessens the average wealth of the nation, and burdens the wealth-producing classes with their maintenance. They can do nothing but inflict an injury; they can be nothing but incubuses and poverty producers.

Another class, also, general opinion objects to as undesirable immigrants. This class is known as the "pauper" class. But the word "pauper" is commonly used to mean so many different things that it should be defined. According to Webster a pauper is "a poor person; especially one so indigent as to depend on charity for maintenance; or one supported by some public provision." If all "poor persons" were put in the class of paupers, it is feared the majority of the inhabitants of Michigan would have to plead guilty to the impeachment; certainly this is not what is meant by "pauper." The other definitions are better: "One so indigent as to depend on charity for maintenance; or one supported by some public provision." It is certain that 999 persons out of every 1,000 are united in declaring that paupers as above defined should not be allowed ingress. The other one person in a thousand would probably declare for the immigration of paupers in order to have proper objects on which to bestow charity.

But is this what is meant when speaking of "the pauper 'labor' of Europe," or "the pauper 'labor' of

Canada?" Certainly not. The demand for the restriction of immigration reaches those who are neither crippled, diseased, illiterate, ignorant nor lazy. It is a demand that the strong, healthy, ambitious young men and young women of Canada, for example, shall not be allowed to cross the Detroit river for the purpose of bettering their social or financial condition. It is a demand that the hardy Pole, or Italian, or German, or Irishman, or Englishman, eager and anxious to work—so anxious to earn his own living that he will labor hard for very little—shall not be allowed to step upon our shores. It is a demand that the very classes shall be kept out for whose benefit a few years ago the Michigan legislature established an information bureau, and had printed in numerous languages pamphlets, with maps and other illustrations, telling of the resources of Michigan, and imploring foreigners to accept of its natural wealth and so help to build up a prosperous and glorious commonwealth. These are the people whom those who favored the restriction of immigration wish to keep out. They demand that people able and willing to work shall not be allowed this privilege. They ask that all except those born in the confines of the United States shall be denied the right to change their habitation in the pursuit of happiness, if such pursuit happens to point in the direction of this republic.

The demand that "anarchists," "communists" and "socialists" should be kept out, and if already here, should be sent back, is not one calling for very serious thought. There are anarchists and anarchists, as there are socialists and socialists. Some are obnoxious, some are not only not harmful, but are helps in building up an intelligent and self-respecting democracy. The anarchists who would wantonly destroy either life or property; or the communist who wants to divide other people's wealth among the undeserving; or the socialist who would rob the prosperous for the benefit of the lazy, are dangerous persons, and society has the

right to make regulations, even to the point of exclusion, to protect itself. But are there such in this country? And if so, where are they, and how many? The writer has a wide acquaintance among all classes of social reformers, but he must confess that, so far, it has never been his fortune, or misfortune, to come across either anarchists, communists or socialists who teach or practice such foolish doctrines. On the contrary the anarchists, communists and socialists of his acquaintance are in the main industrious, law-abiding citizens, above the average in intelligence, whose only sins, if they are sins, are in making some one phase of the labor movement too prominent compared to all the elements and incidents that enter into the problem. It is safe to assume that all the vicious anarchists, communists and socialists in the United States could be transported in the hold of any one of those ocean steamers making a business of carrying human freight. They are so few, compared to the entire population, that the effect of their presence on work and wages must necessarily be infinitesimal. A United States consul in Germany reported to our department of state some time ago: "I learn that it (socialism) takes no stronger form than a desire for a republican form of government. * * * The number who follow the red flag (anarchists) is below zero."

If, however, all those who have socialistic views were to be excluded from the benefits of this country, it is doubtless true that a great exodus would occur. All the ships in the world would be unable, in a year, to transport them to other shores. This is because certain phases of socialism have become popular, so much so that not a few see what Herbert Spencer calls the "coming slavery" in the near future. The people's party movement has certain well defined socialistic features. Bellamyism, which has a large following, is socialistic; and even the Honorable Hazen S. Pingree, when mayor of Detroit, advocated certain reforms in municipal government which his enemies denounced

as extreme socialism. Yet neither the members of the people's party, the followers of Bellamy, nor the late mayor of Detroit can be classed as undesirable citizens. Few of them but what produce more than they consume, and doing this they must necessarily be defenders of the rights of property, and upholders of morality and good government.

Why do people desire the restriction of immigration—the stoppage of the inflow of those able and willing to labor? It is because they think it will reduce the competition for work, thus making their own employment steadier, and probably at an increased wage. Simmered down, that is what it amounts to. They think there are too many people here already. They see, in their own experience, that the average number of days in the year in which they are employed is decreasing, and that while the average wage per day has increased, yet at the end of the year their idle time has kept them in poverty. So they reason that if fewer workers were competing for work, the amount of work to do would be performed by fewer persons and be spread over a longer period, to the benefit of themselves and their families in the increase of the amount of their annual receipts. It is self-protection that leads them to favor non-immigration.

The same idea crops out in the reply of the carpenter who thought that big families were a curse. Big families grow into men and women, and these must in due time labor for a living, thus competing with others for work. The belief seems to be, the fewer there are of us, the better off will we be.

Is this the true remedy for low wages and lack of work? Will restricting immigration or reducing the size of families give steadier employment or better pay? The writer is compelled to answer *no*. There can neither temporary or permanent benefit arise from following such a policy. An impassable Chinese wall around the country would not favorably affect the average wages of the country or prevent the rise of

millionaires and the increase in the number of poverty-stricken wretches to be found in every nook and corner of the land. It is possible that in some trades, in some localities, and in some occupations, a temporary advantage might be gained by excluding those who would immediately compete with the workers already here. But such temporary gain would, by inviting competition from those engaged in other more illy compensated lines of work, eventually reduce the wages to the average even if wages did not in the reaction, as is very likely, fall below this life line—the cost of maintaining a family in the manner demanded by that class of labor.

The true remedy for lack of work and poor wages does not lie in the direction of restricting healthful and natural immigration. Michigan has soil sufficient to support with all the comforts of life more than 5,000,000 people. Michigan has wealth enough within its borders to employ, if capitalized, from 1,000,000 to 3,000,000 wage-workers. Can there, then, be too many wealth producers competing for work in a population of 2,500,000 souls, or about 600,000 wealth producers? Only about 10,000,000 acres of Michigan's 36,000,000 are under cultivation. There are at least some 18,000,000 acres of virgin soil remaining capable of being put to productive uses.

What is true of Michigan is true of the United States as a whole. There is ample room for 1,500,000,000 souls between the Great Lakes and Mexico, between the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. The country is rich in resources that have never been touched. There is only needed the magic touch of intelligently conducted labor to double the per capita of wealth and immeasurably increase the happiness of all. There is enough labor to be performed to give every one steady employment at remunerative wages. Indeed there are not too many wealth producers in the country; there are too few to do the things demanding attention. What is needed is not restrictions on liberty, but the

abolition of those restrictions that make the laborers beggars for employment and destroy their manhood from very love of their wives and children.

Each desirable immigrant brings with him to this country, not only an intelligent, directing brain and a pair of willing hands, but also a stomach to be fed, a back to be clothed and a human soul to be housed. He is a consumer as well as a producer. He gives work to others as well as does work himself. He has wants that must be supplied and that keep pace with his improved social and economic condition. The weaver of cloth, the maker of shoes, the molder of stoves, the cultivator of the soil, all are called upon to supply his wants, for which he in return gives a *quid pro quo*—full value. This is the only condition on which the others will exchange the results of their labor for his. Now what damage has he been to the community? Has not he really been a benefit? Suppose a bookkeeping account were kept between him and the community, it would read something like this:

Mr. Immigrant,		
In account with the community.		
Cr.	By one week's work.....	\$10.00
Dr.	To one pair shoes, labor cost.....	\$2.00
	" meat and vegetables, labor cost.....	1.00
	" flour and sugar, labor cost.....	1.00
	" fuel, labor cost.....	50
	" cloth, labor cost.....	2.00
	" rent	1.50
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		\$8.00
	Profit on sales.....	2.00 \$10.00

Thus, Mr. Immigrant has exchanged his labor, valued in the market at \$10, for labor valued in the market at \$8, has given the landlord, the banker and the employer \$2 profit, and has made employment for weavers, shoemakers, miners and farmers. In all this, who is injured?

Take the case of a Canadian who works in Pingree & Smith's shoe factory in Detroit, for example, and lives in Windsor, Canada:

Mr. Windsorite,	
In account with the community.	
Cr. By one week's work which sells in the market for..	\$15.00
Dr. To wages earned.....	12.00
	\$3.00
Profit to community.....	\$3.00

Has there been any loss here? Is not Detroit \$3 the better for Mr. Windsorite's labor? What has he taken away with him? Maybe gold, maybe silver, maybe paper money, which is a certificate exchangeable for the precious metals. But whatever he has taken he has left more than he took. For the gold or silver is of less real use than the shoes he made. Gold is simply another form of labor, and it as well as shoes will in time wear out.

There can be something said in favor of the Canadian working in the United States and living in Canada. If the Windsorite lives in Windsor and works in Detroit, he competes for work alone. If he both lives and works in Detroit, the competition between laborers for work is the same, but the competition between laborers for land is increased. His presence as a citizen is accompanied by an increase in rents, which is equivalent to a decrease in wages. Increased rent for land is always at the expense of the wealth producer, and the fiercer the competition for the soil, the less the wage-worker has to purchase the comforts and necessities of his existence. Widen the habitable area of those making Detroit the place where they exercise their faculties in the production of wealth, and the result is cheaper land, which means a less outlay for rent. This is just what permitting one to work in Detroit and yet live on the other side of the Detroit river does. If half the citizens of Detroit could find some other spot in which they could live and yet still work in Detroit, it is evident that rents would fall.

Cannot it be clearly seen that those who work in Detroit and yet live in Windsor are, in the matter of rents, doing a service to Detroit renters?

Here is a truth worth grasping: If there were fewer Canadians, or Italians, or Poles, or other foreigners in the United States, there would be less work for us who are already here. Immigrants do not deprive Americans of work. They give employment to Americans and others, and always exchange their labor products to the advantage of both sides to the bargain. Business is carried on under no other condition; it could be carried on under no other condition. It must be profitable, or it ceases to be.

The apparent over supply of labor arises from a very different cause than immigration. It has its foundation in the fact that the natural outlet to labor is clogged. This outlet is the land. The United States census of 1880 shows that 20 per cent of those engaged in all the occupations were foreign born; but only 4.85 per cent of those engaged as agricultural laborers were foreign born. Yet 14.69 per cent of the farmers and planters were foreign born. This seems to indicate that whenever their finances allow, foreigners go upon the land; so that it is safe to assume that were fertile and accessible land practically free, a much larger percentage of foreigners than now would go upon the land, thus relieving the congestion in the cities. The bar to the land is its legal possession by those who do not occupy it, or work it, and who demand toll from every one who is willing and anxious to exert his strength and intelligence in making it fruitful.

As a result, there is less demand for labor, and in consequence greater competition among laborers: two evils that rest heavily on wage-workers, and that seem to prove that there are too many workers and too many good things being produced. Too many good things in the world? What a ridiculous statement! In no line of human activities are there too many good things. There may be a disproportion of one good

thing compared to another good thing, but it is not because there are too many of the one, but because there are too few of the other. Where there is an apparent over supply of one article, investigation will develop an under supply of others. There cannot be too much wheat or too many shoes produced while one person has not tasted white bread or a child goes barefooted. In all probability half the human race does not know what wheat bread is, while another half is innocent of the possession of shoes or anything but the rudest and most primitive kind of foot covering.

Make it easy for the people to reach fertile land without paying toll, and the immigration flurry will assume its due proportions in the labor problem. The congestion in the commercial centers will find a natural outlet; the manufacturing interests of the land will have broader and better markets for their wares; and mechanics, artisans, tradesmen and laborers alike will feel the throb of quickened commerce; and poorhouses, soup kitchens and all kinds of eleemosynary institutions will have to search for patrons on which to bestow their charity.

There are dangers from immigration. The workers of each nation have their rate of life, that is to say, their social customs that regulate the cost of rearing a family and supplying its members with those things necessary for their existence, and which enables them to "be as good as their neighbors." This rate of life regulates the rate of wages. As a rule people will work for what will enable them to keep up this rate. The satisfaction of their desires is obtained by this wage. Now it is plain that were a nation with a high rate of life to be suddenly deluged by intelligent and capable laborers whose rate of life was much lower, the competition, while natural opportunities are monopolized, would bring a hardship on those of more expensive tastes. There are sections of the United States where such a state of affairs has existed. One is California, another is Massachusetts. In the one

the Chinese have worked evil to the native American; in the other the French Canadians have driven those of other nationalities from the cotton factories. The only economic basis for Chinese exclusion is the fact of their slow assimilation; they seem to be the same today, yesterday and forever. Therefore they menace civilization, and their exclusion becomes an economic and social necessity. There is no other nation seeking our shores of which this can be said. All others almost immediately raise their rate of life, and become as tenacious of their "rights" as those to the manor born. They acquire more expensive habits, and demand a wage sufficient to enable their indulgence.

But under those conditions which would practically give labor unoccupied land free, and that would give to society, for society purposes, those values created by the community, the dangers of any trouble arising from a conflict by reason of different rates of life by different nationalities would be reduced to a minimum, as no one would work for anyone else at a less wage than he could earn working for himself. The employers would be compelled to pay that rate of wage which would satisfy those of the highest rate of life seeking employment in that particular calling; and as the tendency of humanity under natural conditions is to progress, the tendency of wages would be steadily upward, until the wages paid was the equal in value to the labor performed. That is the highest rate wages can attain.

The history of the world tells the story of comparatively high wages, prosperity, steady employment and absence of poverty, wherever an intelligent and industrious people enjoy the blessings of a free and fertile soil, and an economical and honest government.

With the millions of acres of rich lands in the United States still unoccupied, the time is far distant when there will be even an approach to population outrunning subsistence; to the time when there will be more people desiring work than there is work to be performed.