

Racial Prejudice

In an article on immigration, the Toronto News points out that in 1901 the foreign population of Canada was six per cent. of Canada, and in 1911 eleven per cent. It thinks it likely that in 1940 the foreign population will be one-half. The article goes on to say that the foreign element is not necessarily bad, but requires guidance.

It is worthy of note that during all the time the foreign element in Canada has been growing Imperialism has been growing. Thirty years ago, when the foreign element in Canada was hardly appreciable, hardly anyone dreamed of Canadian soldiers taking part in a European war. Sixteen years ago the country was rather startled by the idea of Canadian soldiers taking part in a British war in South Africa. To-day the participation of Canadian soldiers in a European war is taken for granted, and a Canadian army of 150,000 men is being raised.

Until the twentieth century, immigrants came into Canada in a very thin stream. The fertile lands of Canada, though accessible by railway, almost went begging. Then suddenly immigrants began to arrive in great numbers, so that in the decade from 1901 to 1911 our increase in population was as great as in the thirty previous years. Of these immigrants the greatest number came from the British Islands. The United States followed closely, and then came the continent of Europe. All the nations of the continent of Europe together did not send us as many people as either the United Kingdom or the United States. For instance, in 1913, when the maximum of immigration was reached, the United Kingdom sent us 150,542 people, the United States 139,009, and all others combined 112,881.

Of the European immigrants, by far the greater number were from countries now allied with Great Britain, Russia sending us 25,000 and Italy 16,601. The German immigrants were only 5,000. The Austrian figures included many persons who were discontented with Austrian rule, and are difficult to analyze for that reason.

But the curious fact is that there was a prejudice against Russians and Italians, who are now regarded as friends and allies, and no such prejudice against Germans. It is pretty safe to say that twenty years ago, if a Canadian had been asked what class of Europeans he would have preferred as immigrants, he would probably have selected Germans, and that the bringing of 100,000 Germans to Canada would have been heralded as a grand achievement of constructive statesmanship.

The air was then full of notions of the superiority of Northern races and of the Teutonic peoples. The collapse of the general admiration for Teutonic things may do good if it opens our eyes to the folly of most notions of racial superiority and racial inferiority. There are, it is true, marked racial differences, but they are differences which show, not that one race is inferior or superior to another, or necessarily hostile to another, but that each race has its own genius and its own defects, and that a combination of all is necessary if the highest ideals of humanity are to be realized.

Canada, like the United States, is destined to become a nation of various races, a blend of various qualities. That is not a drawback, but an advantage. Of course there must be assimilation, but assimilation does not mean a dull uniformity, nor a forced adherence to one pattern. Each of us has something to learn as well as something to teach.