

Immigration and Citizenship

A study of the immigration question in the United States has been made by Miss Frances Kellor, who has worked hard to improve conditions among immigrants. Much is said of the difficulty of making foreigners into good American citizens. When they do not become good citizens, Miss Kellor blames the authorities who represent the nation. "No helping hand is held out to them; there is no national policy of dealing with them. When they pass through Ellis Island they are turned adrift, often to be exploited by padrones and to be cheated by sharpers." The alien is apt to get his first lessons in citizenship from the ward boss. A large part of the influence of Tammany, it used to be said, was due to the fact that Tammany took care of the immigrant and gave him a job. Who could blame him for being grateful to Tammany? The New York Post says:

"But there is worse than that, for the newly-landed find themselves regarded not as potential citizens, but merely as workmen—a commodity. The crudest labor which Americans will not perform is theirs, often under conditions that in themselves are a grave indictment of our Americanism, and not only in our great industries. Miss Kellor will take anybody to the large estates owned by the best-known 'old families' and show that, if immigrant labor is employed, it is housed in miserable shacks, lacking the decencies and comforts of an American standard of living."

Where the immigrant does well, it is by his own efforts. The nation, as represented by its officials, regards him coldly. The writer once observed an examination of immigrants at a minor port of entry, and he observed that the intending immigrant, if of the artizan or laboring class, was treated as a sort of suspected criminal.

It is clear that if a nation wants to acquire good citizens, it must win their affection and confidence. They must feel that the nation, even in enforcing its restrictions, is looking after their interests, and will guide and protect them. The poor immigrant is accused of lowering the standard of living. But who would not live well if he could? Miss Kellor asks whether it is the immigrant who lowers the standard of living, or the man higher up. And the answer must surely be that the chief cause of degradation is the demand for cheap labor—the man who takes a rake-off on labor, from the padrone to the millionaire.