

RUSSIA IN AMERICA.

Improvement of the Condition of Immigrants in Baltimore.

PRACTICAL SYMPATHY FOR THEM ALL.

Facility with Which the Newcomers Are Assimilated—Literary and Educational Advantages—Peddling as a Means of Earning—Industrial Pursuits.

A lady devoted to the education and improvement of the condition of Jewish immigrants writes as follows to THE SUN: In a recent editorial, headed "Russia in America," THE SUN made use of the following expression: "Those Russian immigrants who, during the last three or four years to the number of from six to eight thousand, have come to Baltimore have already adopted our mode of dressing, our business methods, our social habits, and their children play our games and sing our songs, frequent our schools and speak with readiness our language." This is a text for which abundant commentary and illustration can be found. The children at play, who called forth the above reflections, are really American products. The surprising thing is that in their elders the process of assimilation begins almost at the moment when the immigrant sets foot on this soil—nay, even earlier, for his compatriots who have preceded him have kept him well posted upon affairs transatlantic, and he has thus learned at least enough to put his mind in a properly receptive frame. His desire to become an American is shown in numberless ways. The question naturally arises on our own side, Are these the people with whom we are to desire a close affiliation? What qualities have they to add to our national character? It has always been recognized that people who can overcome the inertia fostered by familiar surroundings and who, tearing themselves away from the conditions, under which they have grown up, seek a new, distant home, are desirable acquisitions for the latter. These Russians, it will be said, have not come willingly; they have been forced away from their homes, in fact. Russia may be said to have sent them here, using American soil as her dumping ground for undesirable subjects. The truth, however, is that Russia has only recently, after much diplomacy and urgency on the part of European Jewish leaders, yielded permission, ungraciously enough, to all Jews who wish to emigrate to do so. All along she has been driving her Jewish subjects from all parts of the empire into a restricted area called the Pale of Jewish Settlement, not measuring more than one-thirtieth of the whole Russian empire, and even there subjecting them to irksome restraints in the way of trades to be piled and mole of life to be adopted. An alternative is offered—a change of faith will wipe out every difference existing between the privileges of the Semitic and of the Aryan subjects of the Czar. How often this alternative is accepted we have no means of determining. So much is certain—ease, preference, wealth and enjoyment of the inalienable rights of men were not purchased at the price of conscience, truth and uprightness by those who have emigrated to this country. These are self-motivated men and women, bringing to us an addition to the staunchness, the unflinching adherence to what is looked upon as truth,

ture of a great deal of German with some Hebrew and Slavic elements. German their forefathers carried with them when they were, during the middle ages, driven in great hordes into Poland. With strange conservatism it was never abandoned, but cherished like a sacred treasure. Thus it has come about that in this jargon, not fed by the new developing German, there have been preserved many archaic words and forms which are curiosities to the philologist, somewhat as American English is closer to Shakespeare's language than that of his countrymen. But the Jew invariably recognizes that a jargon has no justification in the presence of an united, pure, literary language. Accordingly no time is lost in setting about acquiring English, and, except in the case of the well advanced in years, the end of a short period finds them unwilling to use anything but English as a medium of conversation.

EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES.

AS SOON as the immigrants arrive their children are sent to the public schools, and for themselves, since the city makes no provision for them, they have established night classes. During the winter two night schools, whose chief purpose is the instruction of the immigrants in the rudiments of an English education, are in full operation. One, on Lloyd street, is under the auspices of the Society for Educating Orphaned and Needy Hebrew Children, an old society of more than forty years' standing. The other is on Front street, and was opened by the immigrants themselves. The history of the latter is significant. The Hebrew Literary Society was started four years ago, distinctly and consciously for the purpose of preventing these men and women, who are struggling for the bread they eat, from sinking into the slough of materialism by providing intellectual entertainment for them. At the beginning of the second year of its existence a library having been collected, a lecture course established and a modest membership obtained, a night school was started. A tuition fee of thirty cents per month was exacted from all who were known to be able to pay. The institution thus rid itself of all objectionable features of charitable undertakings with educational purposes. Thirty pupils presented themselves the first evening. The number rose to sixty before the week was over, and at the end of the season one hundred and fifty had enrolled. During the second season five hundred were under instruction, and during the one just ended seven hundred and eight men and women were taught in seven English classes, two arithmetic classes and one bookkeeping class. The pupils range in age from nine to sixty, but only such children are accepted as pupils as are put to earning a livelihood in the factories and cannot, therefore, go to the public schools. It has happened again and again that children and father, sometimes that husband and wife, have sat on the same bench, side by side. One young woman said she came to learn English in order that she might to some extent be able to superintend her children's studies when they grew to be old enough to go to school. Great enthusiasm prevails among the pupils. Sacrifices of time and comfort are cheerfully made by them in order to secure a working knowledge of the language. Recently a half-grown boy gained permission from his teacher to leave the class every evening at 9 o'clock—one hour before the session closes. His reason was that he was compelled to work at night, but that he had prevailed upon his employer to allow him one hour for school. For the same reason it happens that at certain times of the year certain trades whose work is slack at the moment are more numerous represented than others. Season after season these pupils return, able to come continuously for perhaps not more than two months, yet finally acquiring a fair knowledge of the subjects taught. It is pathetic to note that on Thursday evening the school is not quite half its size on any other evening. The reason of this is indicative of the staunchness of these people. They are at work making up for the time they are bound to lose on the short winter Friday aft-

and the endurance to what is looked upon as a trial, and the endurance which we possess as an inheritance from those other persecuted sects who sought a new world in earlier times.

PEDDLING TO LEARN ENGLISH.

That should be sufficient to insure them a welcome. But in a community of practical men one must have in readiness practical reasons for a measure or a view—in spite of one's own conviction that the ideal point of view is in the end also most fruitful of practical good. Those who know the Russian tin-peddler or the match-girl or the suspender-hawker as familiar figures, and are conversant with the stock argument of the anti-Semite that the merchant is not a producer, only a consumer, a parasite, may possibly be inclined to shrug their shoulders and impatiently dismiss from their minds any moral or humane considerations with regard to the reception of the Russo-Jewish immigrants by America. The German argument cannot have validity for a country in which the merchant plays an important role. Granted, however, that it has validity, there are some facts concerning Russian Jews which should be known by the man who adjudges their case before he renders a verdict. In many cases peddling is an occupation of which the peddler himself is ashamed. The stress of circumstances has made him resort to it for a livelihood. One man, indeed, moderately wealthy, became a peddler because he was convinced that he would by peddling acquire the English language in a short time. Let us assume that the immigrant is skilled in some trade. He applies to a master workman. The Russian Jew, besides encountering all the difficulties with which the path of a laborer desirous of entering a guild is beset, is hampered by the additional circumstance of not working on the seventh day—the Sabbath. Hence he must set up for himself, for he cannot, under these conditions, find employment with others, and if brains, skill and willingness constituted a sufficient capital he could start out in this way. In point of fact, however, not knowing the language, he must either peddle or enter the few trades, such as cigarmaking and tailoring, that are so conducted that the observance of the Sabbath entails a diminution of wages, not a loss of position. A great many, accordingly, lay aside the trades they have pursued since their youth and learn the easy branches of the above trades. Despite these drawbacks, the writer has had work done in Baltimore by Russian carpenters and cabinetmakers, Russian shoemakers, Russian plumbers and gasfitters, Russian dressmakers, Russian embroiderers, Russian painters and glaziers, Russian jewelers and goldsmiths, and Russian butchers, bakers and confectioners. I know, also, that there are among them bricklayers, blacksmiths, furriers, tanners, tailors, bookbinders, printers, compositors, barbers—in fact, I venture to say that all trades may be found represented among them. As the years go on of course many stick to the trades which necessity has forced upon them, but some return as soon as they have learned how to ply them under American conditions to the various vocations of their earlier days. Moreover, those who are interested, either from motives of humanity or by reason of race fellowship in the prosperity of the Russian fugitives, recognize the importance of enabling the Russian Jews to maintain their reputation for skill in varied industries. Accordingly in a number of our large cities trade and industrial schools are in full operation, their membership being recruited from among the young Russian immigrants and the American-born children of the older ones.

TILLING THE SOIL.

Since a number of years we have had reason to deplore the decrease of prosperous small farmers, and the decline in numbers of the rural population of New England has produced a great deal of wailing discussion. The Russian Jews, therefore, can bring no more forcible and effectual letter of recommendation to American citizens than the fact that they are settling upon abandoned farms, and in one locality in Connecticut at least have been successful beyond their own dreams. Their colonies, Vineland, Carmel, Rosenhayn and others, I will not adduce as examples, for in these places the aid of older Jewish communities had to be enlisted before

bound to lose on the short winter Friday afternoons on account of the early setting in of the Sabbath.

The great growth of the school was a surprise to its directors, and they were compelled to appeal to the community at large for funds. The Baron de Hirsch fund committees have contributed to its support, and there are indications that another year will see both night schools on a firm financial basis. I may add as a hint to our board of public instruction that the night schools have been used not only by the Russian Jews, but by other immigrants as well—Germans, and, more particularly, Catholic Russians and Poles. Moreover, they have had on their rolls even children whose ancestors have been Americans for three or four generations, sometimes of English stock. These, too, were able to enjoy the advantages of the public school for only a short time, being compelled to work in order to eke out a meagre living. Furthermore, it should be noted that there is far less ignorance among the newly arrived immigrants on subjects of general interest than among their children, who are supposed to have been educated under American influences. This is because these influences have been exerted less at school than in the factories and shops, whose elevating and wholesome atmosphere for children is a matter for doubt. So far as the immigrants themselves are concerned the negative statement made about their attainments is hardly fair. An appreciable percentage of those that frequent the night schools are cultured, intelligent men and women, abreast of the times, speaking and reading several foreign languages and versed in history and literature. They need merely a vehicle in which to convey to their fellow-workers an idea of their inner worth.

ADVANTAGES OF NIGHT SCHOOLS.

In view of all this it is not justifiable to ask why our city does not arrange for the opening of night schools? In a Century article it was remarked that the massing together in our cities of foreign immigrants, baleful in most respects, is a fortunate circumstance, inasmuch as it presents the opportunity, if we will embrace it, for exercising Americanizing influences. Most of our seaport towns and large inland cities do so at least to the extent of providing night instruction. This certainly would be one way of lessening the evils supposed to be attendant upon immigration from foreign lands.

In the Russian night schools the chief aim pursued is the teaching of the English language for all practical purposes, and the chief subject dwelt upon is United States history and geography. All connected with these evening classes have agreed in saying that their experience has been that the pupils show unexpected interest in our political institutions. The discussions carried on between pupils and teachers often turn upon current political events, the views defended by the different political parties, the commercial policy of each, judicial procedures and the machinery of the State. Opportunities for comparison between methods Russian and methods American are never allowed to escape unused by the pupils. On one occasion it became necessary to explain the difference between the Julian and the Gregorian calendars, and the explanation was wound up with the remark that the natives of Russia had had practical illustration of the workings of both calendars, Russia using the Julian and thus being twelve days behind America in time. "Twelve days!" contemptuously came from one of the pupils, "twelve centuries would be nearer the truth!" This expression embodies the feelings of men pursued and hounded in one country for which, as such, they have much affection, and treated with common humanity in another.

An experiment has been made in one of these classes to use, as the sole text-book for reading, grammar, geography, spelling, dictation and conversation, a well-illustrated, substantially-pound and admirably written United States history. The experiment has been successful, since it gave the opportunity not only for teaching the above subject, but also for inculcating love of the country which was their home and for which they might fitly be said to have patriotic feelings.

A FRIENDLY INN.

Decide maintaining one of these schools

Jewish communities had to be enlisted before they arrived at their present prosperous independence. Yet surely they, too, illustrate the Russian Jew's willingness to act not only the part of intermediate agent in the exchange of finished products, but also that of a producer—to exercise in happy surroundings the skill which he has acquired under untoward circumstances, or to submit to trials, troubles, losses and bitter experiences of all kinds, in order to lead the honored life of an independent tiller of the American soil. This sturdiness and determination in the face of a hard fate have been shown by the isolated Jewish farmers who have rented farms in the counties adjoining Baltimore city. Most of these arrived in America with some remnants of their former wealth, and unhesitatingly applied them to the renting of land. At first their ignorance of American products, American methods, and the climate operated against them, and some were reduced to the extremity of seeking help from their city brethren. But the fact that this required aid was cheerfully extended, and that many of those giving the aid have expressed the determination to imitate the example of their farmer friends, speak volumes. Only a few days ago I ran across one of these more venturesome immigrants who had had the pluck to invest his all in land, live stock and scanty implements. He had just sold a wagon-load of green stuff, and was apparently satisfied with his day's work. He refused to dwell upon the sickness, the poverty and the misery that had threatened to bring ruin upon himself, his delicately-reared wife, and his three sturdy, hard-working boys during the bitterness of our winter. He was hopeful and quite sure that a year and a-half's experience with American farming had taught him how to weather the next hard season. At all events even a severer tug than the last would find him unwilling to give up a venture that had been his ideal in a country where the Jew may be a lessee of land for a limited term of years, but not its owner in any but a few districts.

READINESS TO BECOME ASSIMILATED.

The Russian Jew's readiness to become assimilated with his new surroundings springs from practical and also idealistic considerations. It is advantageous for him from an utilitarian point of view to become Americanized as rapidly as possible. But even if it were not useful, gratitude would make it meet for him to imitate in all respects consistent with morality and the dictates of conscience those who have treated him with generosity and humanity. His first endeavor, therefore, is to acquire the language of the land. In this he is aided by a circumstance peculiar to his case. The linguistic talents of his race are matter of universal comment. But the Jew in Russia has had this faculty still more highly developed by living among various peoples with diverse languages. Some of them thus have a knowledge of both Russian and Polish. Of course, it goes without saying that all, with perhaps the exception of a very small percentage of country people, have had a very thorough training in Hebrew, many being able understandingly to recite chapter after chapter from the Bible and by preference reading novels, magazines and daily papers in the language of the ancient prophets and poets. Curiously enough, the language habitually spoken by most of them is a barbaric mix-

Besides maintaining one of these schools, the Russian Jewish community has also opened a Friendly Inn, where strangers are received upon their arrival, a large school for the religious instruction of their children, and a number of synagogues. I am confining myself to the mention of the institutions which they have established with their own means. It is impossible to gain an idea of their private charities. Before the establishment of the Friendly Inn, and even now when it is taxed to its utmost capacity, it is a very usual thing to find that one family, not too richly endowed with the gifts of this world, makes room in its own narrow domicile for weeks for another newly arrived and destitute of means. In short, their communal life is rich and varied, and their home life far from unlovely.