

Americana

TO ALL peoples an American stands for a tolerant, freedom-loving, and helpful sort of human being. It has taken more than a century and a half to divulge the meaning of the word, American, to all highways and byways of the world. Blood has been shed; money has been expended, courts have been resorted to when necessary to keep alive the tutelary spirit which has made this country so outstanding in the family of nations and for which spirit a true American stands. Of late years there seems to have arisen from a certain portion of the American citizenry the notion that this country is founded on a caste system of racial lineage involving as it does certain privileged classes; while there are some who believe that plutocracy means democracy. One cannot call himself an American in the strict sense of the word, if his forebears were so fortunate not to have sailed over the (balmy) deep in that ominous and hallowed ship which landed at Plymouth with its handful of chosen ones. It is strange to note that though small in numbers on that bodeful day in history when it set foot on these shores, the band has left a flourishing propagation of noble scions who because of their peculiar strain are superior to their fellow mortals. The descendants of those peoples who came to this country on ships other than the forementioned one, are on that account tainted with the bar sinistre, and as such unprivileged to partake of the prerogatives of social, political and educational leadership in this country.

So necessary is it for everybody to understand what the term American imports that nearly every state in the union has Americanization laws on its statutory books. They were enacted so that the immigrant who comes to our shores would imbibe the great importance attached to these laws and fulfill the regulations which pertained to him—in a word, to become Americanized. It is apropos to define here Americanization. Following Webster's New International Dictionary, "Americanization is the process of rendering American; the assimilation to the Americans in customs, ideas, etc.; the stamping with American characteristics." While there are many definitions of this word in so far as they are met in the course of addresses and works of prominent American men, it is universally

agreed that the foregoing definition is satisfactory and fulfills the significance which the numerous Americanization laws tend to convey.

To all aspirants seeking the apex of so-called polite society where mingle our lurid blue-bloods, the crust of our melting pot, it suffices to know that an endorsed racial background, a fascinating surname, and coffers filled with shekels, together with the bent or genius for thinking up novel and bizarre things to do so that heavy-hanging time will be lightened, constitute the tests which scrutinizing lorgnettes demand of its applicants. There are certain accidentals which though not necessary, are, nevertheless, the earmarks of a veteran social lion or lioness. These consist in an affectation of speech and manners resembling in a most apish and parrot way the elite of those envied levees at the famous Court of St. James across the pond; a snobbishness which is perfect only after long cultivation; and a smug respectability which knows no 'mea culpa' nor ever hopes to strike a 'mea maxima culpa,' but which rather cries out again the Pharisaical cant of old: "I do no wrong as my neighbor does: I keep all thy commandments, and give to the poor. I am a just man and not like the publican."

Why do blue-blooded and uncommon so-called Americans like the type which has been just described fear the immigration that pours thousands of foreign-born people in this country? The great majority of common, intelligent, liberty-loving and tolerant Americans has no fear whatsoever in respect to this matter. The great majority of Americans is endowed with common sense enough to know that their forbears were at one time immigrants and contributed their bit for the country's weal. The average American is sane enough to credit the veracity of historical accounts to the effect that many races consorted in those eventful days for a common purpose. He believes that history shows that there existed, before the Revolutionary War, dissipated it forever with cannon shot, an institution of social distinctions with that much-maligned king of history towering at its head down through all its divisions to the self-important esquire, who served as the outermost post between the select and the trammled common folk. He believes further that history has on its pages the records of stalwart and brave men writing by their heroic deeds the birth of a new nation guaranteeing life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Yet one of our uncommon American brethren, who incidentally

holds a responsible chair in one of our American universities and for this reason ought to know better, says: "We do not fear the smell of garlic. We do not fear the foreign accent of immigrants. Let us be quite frank and honest with ourselves, and admit that we fear the allegiance which they owe to a certain red-hatted man on the Tiber. Recognizing that we fear their Romanism, what shall we do? Why, de-Romanize them, of course. Let us bring to them our Protestant evangelical interpretation of Christ. It can be done. I have been on that job long enough to know that. It can be done. The children of these people are turning away from their faith, and their children will be atheists and anarchists. Among the Italians in this country, three millions of them, there are one million Catholics, one million indifferent and one million nothing at all. The two million are a challenge to us, the challenge of opportunity. Let us bring to them the genius of America. What is the genius of America? It is that compact which the men and women on the Mayflower drew up and signed in God's name. It is in the words which Woodrow wrote and spoke in behalf of democracy. Great Americans of American history have reiterated the genius of America in maintaining that the Bible is the rock on which this government was built. Until we have brought God to the peoples who come to us from other lands, we have not touched the fringe of Americanization." This rancorous and bigotry-fomenting speech was given to a smugly respectable audience of uncommon Americans in the city of Providence in the enlightened year 1926, and was heralded as a masterly contribution to the field of Americanization. O Democracy! How many sins are committed in thy name! From the foregoing excerpt one gleams the misinformation that the newcomers to our shores are Godless and have no conception at all of spiritual matters. We seem to have cornered the market in religion. Were it not for the immigrants' homely virtues and their innocent lives, how could America hope to sustain its integrity? It is not the immigrant who makes up our Ku Klux Klan nor is it he who contributes to the Anti-Saloon League;—he is unaware that these two organizations are the guardians of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. A few years' residence in the country will convince him that one organization possesses in their vaults the Constitution with the Amendments I., XIII. and XIV. deleted; while the other will endeavor to show him that there is but one amendment in the whole Constitution, namely XVIII. If the immi-

grant has the temerity to question the fact that in his European home he was told that America was the land of the free, and the home of the brave, he will be sternly reminded that it is—but for those with that peculiar strain, about which we have spoken, in their makeup.

The type of Americanization lecture that refers to the Prince of Peace as "a certain red-hatted man on the Tiber," and classifies the Italian race as a race of anarchists and atheists is a crime against the American spirit of decency. Furthermore, the one who tries to classify the Italian immigrant in disparaging terms, should realize that the word, American, which he harps on so much and which from experience it is manifest that he uses unwittingly, owes its origin to an Italian. He should further realize that there are millions of Americans with red, not blue, blood, who resent such uncalled for and disrespectful reference to their spiritual head, as "the certain red-hatted man on the Tiber." There are millions of Americans who still believe that the Constitution with its Bill of Rights, and their official interpreter, the Supreme Court, have not yet been handed over to the Ku Klux Klan or the Anti-Saloon League, and that Americanism does not necessarily connote a connection with the Mayflower doctrine of superiority, nor that of proselyting immigrants.

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