

Ellis Island To-day

By REV. HENRY M. BOWDEN



ELLIS ISLAND TODAY

WITH the outbreak of the war the work at Ellis Island ceased in consequence of the cessation of immigration in large measure and the need of the Island for other purposes. Some of the Societies retained missionaries at the docks for work among the few people who landed, but the Congregational denomination had no one rendering such service. With the reopening of the Island a year ago the work was placed on an entirely different basis, and it is continuing on that basis.

The General Committee on Immigrant Aid at Ellis Island is composed of representatives of the Societies doing work there, and has the general oversight of social service activities. There is a Director of Social Service appointed by the Government, who is in administrative charge. This Director is Colonel Helen R. Bastedo, who was connected with the women's transport corps during the war. Colonel Bastedo has special rooms set aside for the benefit of the children who are confined in the detention rooms, and the little



Children Marching to Music in Kindergarten at
Ellis Island



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folks are allowed in these special rooms for a part of each day. Here they are cared for, and to some extent instructed by those in charge.

Mrs. Jennie F. Pratt has been appointed by The Congregational Home Missionary Society as its worker among the children on the Island. She is an Italian, but has received her training in this country, in Chicago and at Columbia University in New York. Her work at the Island is with the children, who are allowed to come from the detention rooms to the children's room, where she supervises their play and does what teaching is possible. Some of the children are held for a few days only, while others are at the Island for several months, while their cases are under consideration. This work for the children is a new thing at Ellis Island, and is a great boon to those who feel very keenly the hardships of the detention rooms.

In the old days before the war, every worker on the Island practically did everything in the line of missionary work that came under his or her observation, and each was more or less a law unto himself. This meant freedom for the individual worker, but it also meant a great deal of duplication of work and much loss of time. It was not, however, so serious a matter in those days, when there were sometimes sixty workers on the Island. The Government recently made a ruling which allowed only fifteen workers in all, and it has become necessary to organize the work much more closely in order that the small number of people there are to care for it may, in some measure, accomplish the things that are needed. The missionary or social worker is a buffer between the immigrant and the Government agencies which he



Roszika

many times misunderstands and which do not always understand him. As a case in point, an Italian girl was on the eve of deportation as being of bad moral character, when it was discovered that the impression was due simply to mistranslation of what had been



Children Detain

said in evidence. Had it not been for the discovery of this fact by one of the social workers, the girl would have been deported with an utterly undeserved stain upon her character. The missionary and social worker also serve as a connecting link between the immigrants and their friends in this country.

For example. Last fall a woman arrived from Eastern Europe with five children and no money. Her husband was supposed to be at a certain address in a

western city, but letters sent by the Government to that address were returned. One of the social workers was asked to locate the husband if it were possible, and two or three days later he arrived at the Island from the Middle West. When asked why he had not



ed at Ellis Island

met his wife, he replied that he had thought she was lost. Seven months before she had started for America, but had suffered delays, and had been all that time on the road. In the meantime the husband had moved and his mail had not reached him.

At the present time no one knows just what will be done in the way of changes in immigration laws. It seems probable that changes of some sort will be made. What interests us most, however, in our work on the

Island is not so much the law as the immigrant. It is not our business to make laws, but it is our business to take care of the people. Whatever changes may take place in the laws covering the admission of aliens, there will be aliens arriving in the United States. Our task is to see to it that these aliens are brought into some sort of sympathetic connection with the life of the country into which they have come. Almost without exception, those who come here do so with the intention of making themselves a part of America. If they are received with an intelligent sympathy, they will play their part in the common game. If they feel that other people are trying in all ways to get the best of them, they will consider that it is their game to get the best of the other people. This is the practical question that is before us in all our work with those who are coming from abroad.

A question we all ask when we think of the people who are coming into the country through Ellis Island is what do all these foreigners propose to do here? What part do they take in ordinary life? The average immigrant is the man who does our work—the man who digs our ditches and makes our steel. In very large proportion the ordinary hard work of the country is done by immigrants and in some lines of business the common labor is almost one hundred per cent foreign. Many of the people who are coming in at the immediate moment, however, are not themselves workmen. There is a very large immigration composed of the wives and children of men who have previously come to the United States, but who were unable to send for their families until the close of the war.



Guiseppe

More important than the things which these people do is the attitude which they take toward life, and we find that here they are pretty much like the rest of us. There is as great diversity in their opinions and in their response to the duties and privileges of the life into which they come, as there is among ourselves. In general, observers notice that a foreigner in America is more apt to take a serious interest in life than is the American. Probably the cause for this is not far to seek. We Americans are here and we have for ourselves what advantage accrues from having been born in the country and having a heritage of past prosperity. The foreigner must make his own way—often no easy thing for him to do. He is forced to take life seriously. A few days ago a Slovak called the writer's attention to his three daughters: "My oldest daughter," he said, "is a trained nurse, now working in one of the hospitals. My second daughter is a trained teacher in the public schools. My third daughter is in high school, training as a missionary. These are the three things we must have in this world: hospitals, schools and missions." This was the reaction upon the life of the Slovak steel



Three Armenian Sisters at Ellis Island

worker who had trained his three children to take their part in what he considered to be the three most serious occupations of the community life of the people of the new world.

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