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At the Gateway*

Charles L. Thompson, D.D.—in address at Des Moines, May, 1906.

Come with me to the shadow of Liberty's Statue in New York harbor and see one of the mightiest missionary chances our country offers. Stand with me in the great immigrants' hall at Ellis Island. See them come over the gangway and into the hall! Weary thousands from many foreign lands—all drawn by the magnet of Liberty. The voyage has been hard, but every hour brightened by the hope of a home in Liberty's land! They are almost there. They file up the aisles. Doctors and other examiners await them.

Will they pass the ordeals? Ah, the strained and anxious faces! Fathers with their earthly goods on their backs; mothers with babes in their arms or tugging at their skirts. When the doctor passes them how their faces lighten! But ever and again he draws a chalk-mark on the breast. That means—"Suspected. Pass to a room yonder for closer examination, probably for deportation." Then how the face falls! The hopes of years are dashed! Oh, the tragedies of these coming Americans! And it must be; immigration laws are right and must be enforced.

But you and I believe in immigration. We remember it made us. We are all immigrants unless we are Indians! In our fathers and grandfathers we were foreigners and some of us, I suppose, a pretty poor lot! But see how fine we are now, how well educated and good-looking and essential to the Republic! And what Christian forces of the country have done for us they will do for those who are coming now. I know they are far from the spirit of the Pilgrims and the Dutch. They file in from Russia and Austria and Italy.

They know little of and care little for our free institutions.

A few months ago I said to Commissioner Watchorn at Ellis Island,

"Are they coming as fast as ever?"

He replied, "Yes, and I am not afraid of their coming. They will make good Americans."

And when I remembered that he—that splendid American—himself came as a steerage immigrant, I saw the basis of his cheerful hope. I join him therefore in saying, "Let them come." I would put up no bars east or west, save such as must protect our health and morals. Our history is too full of honored names which from foreign shores have helped to build our greatness to justify any but the largest views. They who oppose immigration fly in the face of all our history and in the face of sound philosophy as well.

Brunetiere has said, "There are no Americans—only an amalgam." It is amalgam that has made the American and as Spencer said, "This amalgam will produce the finest type of man." Therefore let us give welcome to immigrants, not be altogether appalled when they come a million a year. Let us have a dignified confidence in the power of American Christianity. It has not lost its moulding force. Only let us apply it.

There is no more sacred or patriotic duty to-day than that of meeting the incoming millions with the welcome, the sympathy, the counsel, and the instruction of the Christian missionary. We are doing a little—seven pages of statistics in the Annual Report of the Home Board attest that the Presbyterian Church is not wholly recreant to her duty. But how the magnitude of the work towers above our faith and our enterprise!

* The Home Mission Topic for August is Present-day Immigration a Challenge to Christianity.