

**BRIDGING THE ATLANTIC:  
A DISCUSSION OF THE  
PROBLEMS AND METHODS  
OF AMERICANIZATION**

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**SARKA B. HRBKOVA**

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# Bridging the Atlantic

**A Discussion of the Problems and Methods  
of Americanization**

by

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CALIFORNIA

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H6**FOREWORD**

In response to many calls from various parts of the state for a discussion of the Immigrant problem, the address "Bridging The Atlantic" was presented to thirty or more Nebraska audiences by Professor Sárka Hrbková. Later the address was amplified and extended into a series of talks on the various phases of the problem. The gist of these discussions, together with an appendix of recommendations looking to effective Americanization, is herewith presented.

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### BRIDGING THE ATLANTIC

Contrary to what might be expected by this title, this is not to be a learned discourse on an impossible engineering feat, embracing such technical terms as masonry, abutments, cantilever, girders, beams, semi-elliptical arches, piers, etc. I couldn't define such terms if I wanted to. Engineering requires a knowledge of pure **mathematics**. The building of this special kind of bridge over the Atlantic involves only some simple calculations. For the education of a constructive engineer it is necessary to have a knowledge of **optics and drawing**. To erect the connecting structure between the European kind of civilization and the American kind—one must have **eyes** that see clearly, sympathetically, and you must **draw** right, just conclusions and not draw on prejudices.

It was one day when crossing from aft to fore of the monster ocean-liner on which we sailed back to America that some one facetiously remarked, "Well, one can practically walk dry shod from Europe to America. These long new ships are regular bridges, for by the time you get to the bow from the stern, she has touched the other shore." When I viewed and talked with some of the immigrants in the steerage and later with other passengers who rarely moved out of the luxurious Palm Garden or First Saloon end of the boat, my heart was a little heavy, for it seemed to me that from third cabin to first was leagues and leagues farther than from France to New York harbor.

When our boat again hove in sight of the First Lady of our Land, by which I mean the glorious Statue of Liberty on Ellis Island, it was one of the sweetest joys of my life to greet in reverent spirit this symbol of America. And then when I saw down below the thousands of immigrants crowding to the rail to catch their first glimpse of the Land of Promise—while the setting sun tinged goldenly the monster torch in the hand of Bartholdi's colossal figure, the hope came that America would indeed fulfill all the heart longings of these newcomers who had, to be sure, crossed the ocean, but still had ahead of them the yawning, unbridged chasm that separates the alien from the native born American.

There are two kinds of Americans—those who welcome the

alien and those who would slam the toll-gates of the bridge in his face. Those who welcome the foreigner, see an opportunity for the highest expression here of what he brings across the bridge of the Atlantic as his contribution to American civilization. The others will maintain that the foreigner is wholly the gainer and the native American the loser by the invasion of the so-called "alien". There are certain people in America who always look askance at the newcomer—warily—cautious—lest some dire contagion be contracted. You have to be a foreigner or a descendant of a foreigner to get the benefit of that sort of attitude. It is like the small boy in school who was asked by his teacher, "Why do you scratch your head?" His answer was, "Because I'm the only one in the room who knows just where it itches." You see,—I know where it itches.

#### Nicknames for Foreigners

The attitude of those who would say it was a case of only receive and no give on the part of the immigrant is the attitude I would like to dispel. It is such people who regularly insult the descendants of Michel Angelo, Murillo, Columbus and the thousand other great Italians by calling them "Dagoes". It is such people who always call a Hebrew or Jew a "Sheeny", forgetting all about the race of Disraeli, Zangwill, and of the greatest Jew of all—Christ. They call a German a "Dutchy", a "Sauerkraut" or a "Limburger", never regarding the fact that Goethe, Frederick the Great, and Bismarck belonged to the so-called "Limburgers". When they call a Bohemian or Czech a "Bohunk", they never think that John Huss, the religious reformer and martyr who preceded Luther by over a century, Komensky or Comenius, the educator, Dvorak and Kubelik, musicians, were Bohemians or Czechs. To such people, all Irishmen are "Paddies", all Japanese, "Japs", all Chinese "Pigtails", and so on, ad nauseam. And yet those very people resent, and rightfully, hearing Americans called "Gringos" by Mexicans, or "pigs" and "Americansche Schweine" by Germans.

The application of such sneering or slang terms never did and never will be an indication of the American gentleman or the American lady.



### Justice

If we wish fair treatment for ourselves, we must first of all accord it to others. Emerson says, "If you want friends, be a friend." The burden of this plea today is not that you be generous to the foreigner, but that something better and finer than generosity be accorded him—and that is—justice. Justice is greater than generosity. We need to be just to him and just to America. We must concede, but he, too, must be fair and return service for advantages gained in this country.

And if today there is a nation on earth that possesses and fights for the principles of justice it is the United States. It is this sense of justice that is the real framework of the bridge across the Atlantic and it is sympathy and understanding that form the approaches and props of the spans of that bridge.

I have unmixed Slavic-Bohemian blood in my veins for at least 400 years back and I suppose, in a way, am as proud of it as you are that you are descended from the early defenders of the American commonwealth when it was not yet a nation. But I am far prouder of the fact that my people chose **this country**, these glorious United States, as the place in which to bring up their family. For it is here that fair play, a square deal, justice, is afforded to all.

### Proportion of Foreign Born

Of our population of 110,000,000, one person out of every seven was born outside of the United States; one out of every three was foreign born or of foreign parentage. In other words, there are over 13,000,000 persons of foreign birth and over 20,000,000 of foreign parentage. Fully one-third of our total population is of foreign born stock. Of the 33,000,000 persons of foreign birth or foreign stock in the United States, 31.1% are English or Celtic; 28.5% are Germanic; 13.3% are Latin or Greek; 10.1% are Slavic or Lettic; 9% are Scandinavian; 7.1% are unclassified; 1% are unknown.

Germany and its political and military leaders counted on this very heterogeneity of our population as a source of strength to themselves and as a fertile field for their disrupting propaganda. They figured that the conglomeration which makes up

America had no cohesion and would disintegrate when attacked. Von Bernhardt was cock sure that since the Germans, alone, of our inhabitants were well organized, they would continue in allegiance to Germany for, to such as he, it was inconceivable that there could be any bonds to hold them to America, which, after all, is but an accidental agglomeration of races and people among whom no deliberately planned cult of nationalism had been fostered.

### Character of Population

How America with its lack of linguistic and racial homogeneity responded when the test came is the most glorious chapter in the history of our marvelous nation of assimilates. In order that the response made might be fully evaluated, requires an understanding by both the American and the Americanized of the immensity of the problem of the unification of the mind and spirit of the population of our land. It is indeed a problem to make Americans of these surging, ebbing, responsive, sullen, singing, cursing, sorrowing, carousing, harmonious, disputatious elements, some coming from lands of liberal thought others from age-old autocracies—all of them with dreams of a more or less realisable Utopia, which the magic word "America" spells to them. America means to the idealist, the full opportunity to express himself, free institutions, religious and political liberty for self and descendants, whereas to the materialist it signifies the attainment of individual ambitions, economic advantage, escape from the military and tax burdens of the old world.

The immigrant leaves behind intolerance in religion, autocratic rule, heavy burdens of government, a hard and fast class system, severe military service, a perpetual struggle with poverty.

But has the foreigner crossed the bridge to America empty-handed? Is there nothing of value that he has brought that will help in moulding him into the ideal American—real or hypothetical—whom we have set up on a pedestal and want the foreigner to imitate even if we don't do it ourselves? We are often like the old school-master who said, "Don't do as I do, but do as I tell you to do."

Walt Whitman has well said in his poem "Pioneers, Oh Pioneers"—

"All the past we leave behind,  
We debouch upon a newer, mightier world, varied world,  
Fresh and strong the world we seize, world of labor  
and the march,  
Pioneers, Oh Pioneers!"

The foreigner gives up forever, in most cases, all his former haunts with all the attendant sacrifice and strikes out into the new, untried world of America.

#### Evaluating the Foreigner

What does the foreigner bring? First of all he brings himself. "But what is that?" the restrictionists and anti-immigrationists among you will say. It is strong, robust, perfectly healthy, perfectly formed bodies for one thing. Our immigration laws keep out all who are physically unfit.

The case of a twelve-year-old flatfooted boy who was refused admission on account of weak physique, though all the rest of the family came in, is an example of the strict severity with which the physically unfit are excluded.

Another case was that of an Austrian cavalry officer who was debarred because of bow legs caused by riding horseback. Otherwise he was perfect physically. One wonders what would happen if certain native Americans ever got out of the country and had to depend on passing immigration restrictions to get back.

Of the males of militia age, 18 to 44 years, in the United States in 1910 the total was 20,473,684. Nebraska's foreign born population totalled 176,662 of whom 102,330 were males, but not all citizens by any means.

Ten or twelve years ago Broughton Brandenburg, in a work entitled "Imported Americans", advocated keeping a card index of all foreigners. His plan would have averted many of the difficulties which our government encountered during 1917 and 1918. The text noted also suggested the following valuable plan:

"To the card-index system should be added a regulation compelling all aliens to report, at regular intervals, their where-