

FIRST FACTORY SCHOOL

For the Purpose of Eliminating Illiteracy Among Immigrant Women

Claribel G. Hill

The school for immigrant girls was conducted in the factory of D. E. Sicher and Company, 49 West Twenty-first Street, New York City, with the co-operation of the Board of Education. The teacher was furnished by the Board of Education, the space, heat and light by the employer, and the girls were paid while attending school at their average earnings.

The school was held from 9 to 11:30 o'clock, each girl receiving three and three-quarters hours per week, or three-quarters hour daily instruction. As no class consisted of more than seven girls, the instruction was practically individual.

The object of the class was to eliminate commercial illiteracy, and girls who could not read or write English were selected. The course covered forty weeks. No definite text-books were used, the work being almost entirely original, and an effort was made to teach English to the girl by means of the things she needed or used in her daily life, namely:

Correspondence—Business Interchange, Social Interchange, Post Office Regulations, Geography, Writing, Reading, Spelling and Language.

Civics—Origin of Legal Holidays, Lives of Statesmen, History, Good Citizenship, Merits of Our System of Government, System of Government and Patriotism.

Hygiene—Personal Cleanliness, Physical Culture, First Aid to the Injured, and Foods—Their Nutritive Value.

Mathematics in its Personal Application—As a Money Medium of Exchange, Personal Expense Accounts, Work Reports,

Table of Weights and Measures and Four Fundamental Operations.

Evolution of an Undergarment—Geography, Physical and Political; Shipping; Manufacture, Economic; Bleaching, Spinning, Cotton Plant and History.

Practical Information—Local Laws, Health and Safety; Routes of City Travel; Alphabet as a Guide to Common Things, Want Ads, Dictionary and Directory.

How to Use Methods of Communication—Letter Writing, Telephone and Telegraph.

The result has fully justified the experiment in every way. Forty girls received certificates of literacy at the graduation exercises, held in the factory, June 4, 1914. These exercises were attended by some of the most prominent educators in the country, and it was most inspiring to see how well these girls took their part in the exercises. Most of us realized that we would fall far short of the showing made by the girls if called upon under similar conditions in their native lands.

The girl's efficiency has been increased 15 per cent, shown by the fact that her wages increased from 19 cents to 23 cents per hour. This, of course, shows a commercial benefit to both the employer and employe. The girl herself has gained in many ways that cannot be reckoned in dollars and cents: in her poise, her self-respect, the consciousness that she is "somebody," and able to meet others on an equal footing.

We expect to continue the school next year, and hope to have many other factories join in the good work.

A JEWISH EVENING

David de Sola Pool

New York

A Festival and Pageant of Nations was held in New York City in the early part of June. This was arranged jointly by the People's Institute and the Social Center of Public School No. 63, to be a folk festival

expressive of the customs, songs, dances, lore and ideals of the various immigrant groups found in the motley metropolis. The Jewish *Volksgruppe* took prominent part in the Pageant, and a special Jewish

evening was arranged by the Society of the Jewish Institute for June 4th. The entertainment for this evening was made up of English and Yiddish addresses, Hebrew national songs, Hebrew synagogue melodies, Yiddish folk songs and selections from Yiddish operas.

It may be hypercritical to question whether the entertainment would not have been described more correctly as a Yiddish evening, rather than as a Jewish evening. The spirit of the entertainment was "Yiddish" throughout. The rendition of synagogue melodies by the cantor and choir of an orthodox synagogue was welcomed with the utmost enthusiasm. This parading and degrading of sacred song for popular amusement is characteristic of conditions only among Yiddish-speaking Jews. The language used predominantly throughout the evening was Yiddish. The majority of the songs were Yiddish songs. An Italian Jew, a Turkish Jew, and many an American Jew would have found the evening as strange and as unrelated to him as the Slavic or the Irish evening would have been.

Yet this fact may not be considered a fault. The organizers of the evening could not have arranged it otherwise. The *Golus* tragedy of Eastern Europe overflowing these Western shores necessitates this identification of the Jewish immigrant group with the Yiddish immigrant group. It is also this Yiddish group which has preserved most strongly elements of popular song and lore, which rightly or wrongly may be called Jewish.

More interesting than the form of expression which the Jewish festival took was the fact of its expression. Despite the characteristic depressing *Golus* nature of the entertainment itself, the spirit that caused the evening to be held was stimulating. One felt that the evening bore witness to a twofold change—a change in the immigrant's conception of what America demands of him and a change in America's methods of receiving her settlers. One felt that the Jewish immigrant was claiming his right to be a Jew in America and that American democracy in its most popular representation was gladly conceding that right. One felt that the immigrant Jew was making a manly assertion of his

own individuality, of the value of his own traditional ideals and of the determination to dream his own dream, and to focus his own vision within the American frame, while America applauded this assertion of self. One felt that both the Exile and the Mother of Exiles were giving convinced expression of their mistrust of the euthanasia of the melting pot. One felt that America was saying to the immigrant Jew: "We abhor sameness, mediocrity, uniformity; we value personality, character, individuality"; and that the Jew pledged himself to give these qualities to his adopted land. One felt that the Jewish evening, with its tactful omission of shrieking references to "this great and glorious country," and its wise control of the flag-waving fury, showed the way for a deeper and more significant patriotism. One felt that the Jewish evening marked a clearly defined step upward in its conception of mutual responsibilities between the immigrant Jew and his adopted land. One felt that it gave some measure of guarantee of a future Jewish development of the Jew in America.

One may be truly glad of this living and effective protest to the specious, clap-trap turgidities of the vaunters of the melting pot.

Mr. Bernard G. Richards opened the exercises with an address. The pupils of the Jewish National School, with J. Friedlander as leader, sang a number of Hebrew songs with spirit. Platon Brounoff sang a number of Yiddish folk songs, and the pupils of the Jewish National Radical School sang Yiddish songs. The chants sung by Cantor Joseph Rosenblatt, of the Congregation Ohab Zedek, evoked great applause. The Yiddish operatta singers, Madam Rosa Karp and Kalman Juvelier, sang selections from Yiddish operas with dramatic effect. There were other songs, recitations, etc., and several addresses.

Leon Moisseiff spoke in Yiddish on "Jewish Art in America," and Dr. de Sola Pool spoke of the "Spiritual Contributions of the Jew to America." A poem by Joseph Friedlander was read.

In the parade that ended the Pageant, the Poale Zion singing group made a fine impression with its songs.