THE NORWEGIANS IN AMERICA, BY OLE LIMA.

Letter dated Cooperstown, North Dakota, March, 1907.

In comparing the conditions of Norway and America, there is found to be quite a difference between the two. When the emigration from Norway first began in earnest fifty or sixty years ago, the difference was undoubtedly much greater than it is now.

The many Norwegian-Americans who have returned to Norway, many of whom have taken up their permanent abode there, have had much influence in changing conditions and customs in Norway. Norway's people have, during the last generation, awakened and begun to utilize in a great many ways the powers of the individual, and also the power of nature for the progress and uplifting of the whole nation.

Raised in Norway, often in poor families, the people heard about the productive America, and in many was created a desire to go to that land. As the years went by the number of those who were drawn to this country by the glittering stories of their returning comrades increased. Older people, whole families, but mostly young men and women came. Everything was strange to them in this new land; many had to pass through difficulties, meet bitter disappointments, and endure many hardships until they became accustomed to the new conditions. Most of them, however, came successfully out of these early trials, thanks to their early training in economy and endurance in struggling on to the goal—independence and an independent income. Work makes people virtuous. This has put an indelible stamp on those who took up the lives of pioneers out on America's prairies and in her forests. Physical labor develops one's thinking power, for a man loaded with work will try to think of an easier and more profitable way of performing his task. In this country one has to figure out what is most profitable, and cannot follow old customs, as is often done in the old country. Even a farmer in America is a real business man, and has to keep posted on the market prices, as well as look after his farm. He is also encouraged to keep in touch with the government of the country, for with his vote he can exert his influence on the community.

All these things have a great influence on a man's character and habits of life. Let one who has for ten or twenty years gone in this school go back to Norway, and his old acquaintances cannot recognize him. When I came to Norway last summer I was often surprised to find that persons who had never seen me before, took me at once for an American. It seems that even the expression of one's face is greatly changed here. I discovered during my last visit to the fatherland that my mode of thinking and my spiritual life had changed so much during my thirteen years in America that I did not feel quite at home with my childhood friends.

Another thing which has a strong influence in changing the nature of the Norwegians in America, is their constant intercourse with people of the different nationalities. Each of these have brought with them certain characteristics. One knows before coming that in America he will come in contact with others than his mother's best child. For it has long been known that when one has committed a crime or misdemeanor of any kind in his fatherland, he will flee to America to escape the arm of the law. Now, to know one's self in the possible proximity to thieves and other criminals, will make one more suspicious of his fellow men. It is an old saying that he who does not keep his eyes open must keep his purse open. And not many have escaped being *taken in* and cheated by some *smart* American. The Norwegian in this way gets into many troubles that he never dreamed of in the old country. This makes him more careful and conservative in his dealings with his fellow men. But, on the other hand, it cannot be denied that there is a chance for the Norwegian who has a tendency to be dishonest to get it developed here; a detriment to himself and his community. It must be acknowledged that the Norwegians have also contributed their share to the vast army in the United States who live as parasites upon the hard work of others. Work is much better paid for here than in Norway, and he who is willing to do his share, is generally able to make a fairly good living. But work is often disagreeable, and if one can make money without working, there is a strong temptation to embrace the opportunity. The temptation is here, and many have yielded to it, and are now moral wrecks "on the cliffs of Mammon." These are today a disgrace to the Norwegian nation.

Even the methods employed by some in securing money are opposed to the laws of justice; others secure it under the name of legal business, but their object is to secure money without giving full value in return. They steal both openly and by treachery, and have carried it so far that it has polluted the very atmosphere and threatens to poison and pollute the whole nation.

Influenced by this spirit of getting something easy, the young people leave home and farm to prepare for the positions where physical labor is at a minimum. The boy wants to do this and that, only no physical labor for him. The girl, if she has mental ability enough, hopes to become a teacher, and when she has succeeded, follows this profession until some man crosses her path. She marries him without having any preparation for the position she is assuming. Too late they discover their mistake, and have to secure a divorce. The great number of divorces in this country is a disgrace to the nation.

In the light of history it is plain that if the American people continue in the direction they are now drifting, the day will come when their vitality will be exhausted. We have already drifted far out of the right course. We have taken in the sails and are drifting downward. Grasp the rudder and turn the ship ere it is too late.

On the other hand, it must not be forgotten that even under these complex and confusing conditions there has been going on just as important, though less noticed development, spiritually. The religious conditions in America have been of such a character as to cause the individual to study it out for himself.

Our Norwegian people in the United States are divided into many larger and smaller religious divisions, which have often opposed each other bitterly. . But this has stimulated the people's power to think clearly and conservatively on religious matters. It has taught many to discern between the assumed and the true religious or spiritual life. The Norwegian immigrant left a country having a state church, where everybody followed old laws and traditions. When he reached America he came into a new environment. He is here free to do as he pleases in religious matters as well as in material ones. Through many years of experience (often bitter ones) many of our people in America have reached a spiritual independence based on the truths of the Bible, which they would not have reached if they had remained in Norway.

The conditions in America, in the spiritual realm as well as in the material, tend to produce more wide-awake people and more independent thinking. But they also tend to produce parasites in the religious organizations as well as in the political. And unfortunately these are also present among the Norwegians.

In comparing the people in Norway with the Norwegians in America, it would be about correct to say that the Norwegian, who has lived a while in America, is more civilized than if he had not been here. He has seen more, experienced more, thought more, and all this has opened his eyes and broadened his view. He is more wide-awake, lives a richer life and in a closer correspondence with his surroundings. His sympathies are widened, and he takes more interest on what is going on in the world.

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