

FOREIGNERS IN THE CLOTHING TRADE

The clothing trade in its expansion has felt the influence of immigration more than any other. In custom work and factory production the percentage of foreigners is larger than in any other occupation. Owing to political and ethnological conditions abroad the immigration of Jews has been enormous, and Italians have also flocked in myriads to our shores. Of these new citizens thousands take to the tailoring trade, thus enabling establishments in this line to turn out a vast increase of products. It is interesting to note how the principle of division of labor acts here. In ready-made or factory work less than one man in four is a tailor. Instead of requiring four or five years to learn the trade of custom tailor, the majority now take but two or three months to master such simple work as operating, pressing, sewing buttons and filling, although more time is required to become expert. Thus the field is open to immigrants, and is rapidly filled. Nearly all the immigrants land in New York City, which is the centre of the clothing trade. Fully one-half of the ready-made clothing of the United States is manufactured in New York City. In case of trouble, organizations of employes in other cities are met with the threat of transferring the plant which numbers them on its pay-roll to New York. In New York City the industry is practically in the hands of the

Russian Jews, who have displaced the Germans and Irish. One branch of this work, however, that of the finishing or hand-sewing on coats and trousers, is done by Italian women working in tenement houses. Tenement house work is not increasing. Legislation and agitation of the unions have caused the contractors to put their machines into buildings especially erected for that purpose. Still, in the so-called "home-finishing" Italian women do ninety-five per cent of the work, as they are content to receive twenty-five to fifty per cent less returns than those formerly earned by other nationalities. In Chicago the clothing workers are distributed more equally among the different nationalities. The Swedes, Bohemians and Jews make up one-quarter of these workers, the Poles claiming fifteen per cent and the Germans five per cent of the whole number.

The characteristics of the different nationalities in this trade make an interesting study. The position of the Jew is unique. He is not suited to hard manual labor. His instincts lead him to speculation and trade. His individualism unsuits him for the life of a wage-earner or the discipline of labor organizations. So the Jew takes to such light occupations as sewing, cigar-making, and shoe-making. Jewish women are employed less than women of other races, and their children are very generally educated, being kept in school until fifteen or sixteen years of age, and many going to higher institutions of learning. The Jew's idea of a labor union is an organization, very large and strong, to meet a single specific emergency. Their point gained, and the abuse remedied, the union usually ends. The Jew being fond of metaphysics, and interested in general principles, is apt to go into socialistic theories and neglect practical problems.

In Italy tailors earn only about one-half the wages received by the Jews in their former countries and about one-fourth of the wages paid for the same grades of work in Western Europe. The Italian is, therefore, able successfully to compete here with the Russian Jew, and far more able to compete with the German or Englishman, and there are indications that the Italians will soon form the majority of the clothing workers of New York. The Italian and his wife and sister will work in a shop together, while the Jewish woman will not work in a shop after she is married. The Italian, like the Jew, is energetic and thrifty, and will work hard with little regard for the number of hours spent in labor.

The Polish clothing workers are chiefly women. The Polish farmer, coming here, clings to work requiring hard labor, being successful in factory work, where hard automatic labor is required. In Chicago, for instance, where large numbers of Poles are engaged in this class of work, the Polish women and girls are employed in the clothing shops. Owing to the opposition of their priests, the Poles do not join the labor organizations. During various strikes, Polish shops have largely continued at work, keeping their contracts with their employers. It is in their shops that the hardest "driving" is done. They send their children to work early. Among the best people in the clothing trade in Chicago are the Scandinavians, including

the Swedes, Norwegians and Danes. They work on trousers and waist-coats under contractors of their own nationalities. They do not work more than ten hours a day, as a rule, usually in large shops with steampower. Their standard of living is high, and they are very generally well educated. Among them the proportion of women who work is large. In the Swedish shops there are about five women to one man. In the Polish and Bohemian coat-shops the proportion is about two women to one man. In the Jewish shops the sexes are about equally divided, although the women are generally not Jewesses.