FOREIGN LANGUAGE GROUPS IN AMERICA

BY FRANK J. KLINGBERG*

TODAY there is renewed interest in our treatment of the immigrant, with many of the new books dealing severe judgment upon lapses at one time or another or for one group or another of the traditional welcome to our shores. Almost forgotten, it seems, is our absorption of our many stocks into the body politic. Here the television quiz programs have accidentally shown a cross section of the newcomer in our midst who has learned much in his new land of its history and is joyous in his trade or profession.

There is firm “witness,” in the Quaker’s word, of our generous traditions in colonial times when we received and absorbed non-English-speaking peoples into our body of stalwart citizens. By 1776, the German stock reached an estimated one-tenth of the population of about 2,500,000, and the French Huguenot came to our shores between 1685, the date of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and Independence Day, 15,000 strong.

Up to 1660 the colonists were of English stock. Thereafter the colonies were thrown open to all the peoples of the British Isles and to continental Protestants. Most generous were the proprietary colonies, with Pennsylvania outstanding in its welcome, to religious refugees, including Catholics.

The growth of Britain’s military power between the years 1689 and 1714 is well known, but the part played by the Church of England merits special emphasis. Archbishop Thomas Tenison (1636-1715) of Canterbury knew that Protestantism stood at bay, and he challenged all Protestants to stick together against a common foe and to help the swarming refugees resettle in the non-Catholic world.

In addition, in 1701, Archbishop Tenison joined others in organizing the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign

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Parts to stand firm against the French Jesuits in Canada, the Great Lakes region, and the Mississippi Valley.

In his words, in order to make "room in the Solitudes of his Neighbourhood, Louis XIV has terrified Multitudes into a sudden Flight into strange Lands . . . and for many who could neither escape themselves, nor obtain of him the Privilege of Banishment, he has driven them by a Terror (by mere human strength not to be resisted) into the very worst of all Refuges; I mean, Hypocrisy."

In one two-year period, Tenison raised £25,000 and distributed this huge sum not only in Britain but even more of it in German lands. A pound sterling then was equal to twelve or fifteen pounds sterling in 1914. A salary of £50 sterling was the equivalent of $4,000 to $5,000 today.

By the time of the death of Queen Anne in 1714, friendship and cooperation with continental Protestants, regardless of language, were accepted religious and governmental policies. The Huguenots were skilled in industry and business, and the earlier ones (1660 to 1685) got out with much of their wealth. Those after 1685 often escaped with their bare lives, but they, too, brought industrial skills and especially good taste for their quality goods. The Irish linen industry was one of their major enterprises.

The British helped to settle Huguenots also in Germany. Wherever they went, they prospered; the executive vice-president of the English East India Company was a Huguenot even in Tenison's time.

After various experimental efforts, the Germans were fitted as settlers in large numbers into the new world to use their agricultural knowledge and industrial skills in building a new society. The English authorities in church and state decided to let them have Lutheran and Dutch Reformed ministers, trained and supplied to a large extent by the University of Halle, which became in effect a German missionary society.

Indeed, Heinrich Melchior Muhlenberg, who arrived in America in 1742 to minister to the Lutherans, was at times given the privilege of preaching in Anglican churches, a concession usually denied to English-speaking dissenters, such as Baptists and Presby-

The vast records of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel show no prejudice against the new foreign-born. British and colonial authorities both in church and state accepted the idea and the fact that a foreign language was usually a transitory thing. The best method of Americanization was chosen by the practice of not badgering the newcomer from the continent, but, instead, of permitting the slow attrition of events to make him into a good citizen.

Tenison’s letters to the clergy of the Province of Canterbury followed each other in rapid succession. In a circular letter of 1709 he wrote, “Many Thousands of distressed German Protestants, who through the repeated irruptions of the French, attended with unmerciful Exactness and Inhumanities, have been forced to quit their native country, the fruitful Palatinate near the Rhine. . . . I do earnestly . . . recommend to you . . . that you will use all your good Offices, in setting this deplorable Case in a clear Light in giving to your ability . . . you will show as you have occasion, that the Increase of People is a means, not of Impoverishing or Weakening a Nation, but of advancing the Wealth and Strength of it.”

In short, a welcome to the foreign Protestants was not only good humanity but also sound policy. These continental peoples strengthened Britain and also have played a giant part in building America in peace and in defending our land in war for two and a half centuries.