

HOME SEEKERS IN WESTERN LANDS.

A DAY IN THE NEW "CASTLE GARDEN."

By F. BALGARNIE.

ELLIS Island, the modern Castle Garden of New York, is undoubtedly during the height of the emigration season the most cosmopolitan centre in the wide world. There, on any day of the week, men, women, and children from every country in the Eastern Hemisphere, clad in every variety of garb—Teuton, Slav, Celt, Saxon, Hindoo, Arab, Turk, Greek, and Scandinavian—are gathered in crowds, chattering loudly in myriad tongues, gesticulating where speech is incomprehensible, and endeavouring by many a device to naturalise themselves as speedily as may be to their novel surroundings.

America! that hospitable land which is the bourn of their most ardent hopes and aspirations, in which they mean to make a free prosperous home, is still to some of them as far distant a reality as it was when they sauntered down the green slopes of Mount Hermon with tear-dimmed eyes, or said a sad farewell to the old moss-grown homestead in a Brittany apple orchard, or carried off a pot of shamrock from Queenstown Harbour. It is true that but a narrow river strip now separates the emigrants from the mainland, but it may prove to them an impassable gulf, should the United States Government so determine. This dread uncertainty notwithstanding, care seems to sit lightly upon them, for the majority are in blissful ignorance of the new regulations which deny admittance to the absolutely destitute and infirm, as well as to the criminal.

Stringent as is the law, the executive department under Colonel Weber, Inspector-in-Chief, could not possibly be conducted in more humane and considerate fashion, and the whole staff of officers and matrons seem endowed with sensibilities as tender as their power of discernment is acute.

It is a matter of almost every-day

occurrence for three or even four thousand persons to pass through the hands of the emigration authorities, and it is this ever increasing influx which caused the transference of head quarters from Castle Garden to the Barge Office, and within the last few months to Ellis Island in the North River, which is set apart purely for emigration purposes. Here a large oblong building has been specially erected, and with a square turret flanking each of its four corners, it is quite a conspicuous object on entering New York Harbour. Within is a large reception room where the emigrants wait their turn for passing through the turnstile and responding to the various interrogations as to nationality, age, trade, finance, and destination which are invariably addressed to them. Any one too ill to proceed on his journey or suffering from an infectious disorder is detained in the well-appointed hospital, and if necessary is ultimately transferred to the city hospital—this branch of the service alone costing the United States Government \$100,000 per annum.

Every assistance is also rendered to those in perplexity, for although a very large majority have booked themselves through to the State where they have friends or employment in readiness for them, there is a minority which imagines that New York is Eldorado, and that once set foot in the New World all anxieties are at an end. It is such as these who are alike the despair of the statesman and of the philanthropist; these shiftless beings who, with scarce a dollar to call their own, cherish wild ideas of fortunes to be won, or farms to be bestowed for the mere asking. While fair lands are waiting for the plough and dry deserts for the irrigator who shall make them "blossom as the rose," hundreds and thousands of miles of distance prove the insuperable barrier which keeps the penniless emigrant in New York and adds to the miserable swarm of

persons of all nationalities which has made the Bowery a perfect byword—by reason of its terrible over-population, crowded into tenements, under conditions worse than any in London, only second in horror to the notorious Neapolitan chambers, or the honeycombed district of San Francisco known as Chinatown.

When a Transatlantic Liner crosses the



PEASANT GIRL IN SEARCH OF WORK.

bar, the first class and intermediate passengers are at once landed, while the steerage contingent are detained and are transferred to tenders, which carry them with bag and baggage to the Island where the business formularies must be transacted. The friends of the emigrants are in waiting. They have been here since dawn of day, and may, perhaps, have to wait until after sunset before the last passenger has been landed. There is a sense of eager expectancy in the air; but the greatest order prevails, and it is difficult to realise that these well-dressed men and fashionable-looking girls were themselves less than twelve months ago new comers to a strange land. Now to all intents and purposes they are Americans; hosts come to welcome the guests, whose advent they have hastened by sending their savings, wherewith to purchase the ticket which shall extricate father, mother, sister, or sweetheart from the miseries of rack-rented Irish bog, or over-taxed Italian *città*. At length the long hours of suspense are at an end, and the smart young

servant girl has her arms clasped tight round the neck of a venerable son of Erin, who starts back with a half-sheepish look as his gaze wanders from his own tattered coat to the attire of his lady daughter. The small brother seems even more abashed—not even a big bag of “candy” reconciles him to his once bare-footed, red-petticoated sister who has become such a superior-looking person in one short year. But father, mother, baby sister, and little brother are soon all at their ease, for out of the depths of a mysterious looking basket, coats, shawls, and hats have been produced of latest New York fashion, and each member of the family now feels on equal terms with the elegant daughter who had at first seemed so overwhelming in her unwonted magnificence.

While this transformation of tatterdom has been proceeding in one part of the hall, a very different scene has been enacted only a few yards away. Again it is a young girl who has acted as pioneer for the old folks at home, but this time life's drama was a tragedy, for she is told that the face she had so long ached to see is cold in death, and the dear form of the mother has found a watery grave in mid-ocean.

In the hospital too a mother is weeping over the little child who lies dying in her arms, and in the mortuary the body of a nameless man is stretched, whom the Steamship Company have persisted in landing, and who will again be returned to the ship, with the intimation that the emigration authorities do not undertake the landing of corpses. And so this poor emaciated remnant of humanity is battledored from steamer to landing-stage and back again, to find an unknown grave outside the harbour bar.

Nor is it fair to be severe upon the United States Government for this sorry state of things, for too many of the steamship companies employ more or less unscrupulous agents, especially on the borderlands of the Mediterranean Sea, and many an ignorant peasant is tempted with specious promises to abandon his little all, and to embark in a vain pursuit after health and happiness.

A separate room is provided for the girls and single women who have come off alone to seek their fortunes in the new world. This department is almost invariably crowded, for so great is the demand for servants, or as they are more usually called “hired girls” or “hired ladies,” that young Scandinavian, German, Swiss,

and Irish peasants are tempted to make the first start which shall eventually lead to the emigration of the entire family. As a rule, employers or reliable friends come to claim the new comers, but failing this, provision is made that no girl need of her free choice go into New York as a homeless wanderer.

Colonel Weber is a man of the world, and his quick eye discriminates between the true and the false persons who come to befriend his charges. Occasionally a girl emigrates on promise of marriage, and whenever the slightest suspicion arises as to the genuineness of these matrimonial prospects, a detaining hand is in all kindness laid upon her, and in fatherly fashion the Colonel interviews both bride and bridegroom, and if he believes that the man means to play the girl false, he acts the part of officiating priest, and sending for the Registrar and a special licence has the knot tied then and there in his presence.

It seems incredible, but it is no less a fact, that foolish girls now and then emigrate with the view of wedding men they have never seen, and cases of personating the true bridegroom every now and then occur.

The action of Colonel Weber, far from being tyrannical as would seem at first sight, is realised, by those who know the inner history of the department, to be in every sense beneficent, and many are in this manner saved from the harpies who ever lie in wait to pounce upon guileless victims. Another interesting providence is in readiness in the person of the agent of a Ladies' Benevolent Society. She invites to a home any girl who is in trouble, and who has, as is not infrequently the case, been shipped off by the cajolery of some betrayer desirous of avoiding expense and disgrace.

Of all nationalities, the Jews to their honour are the most solicitous over the interests of their co-religionists, and whatever the ultimate lapse into poverty may be, help is invariably forthcoming at the outset.

These special agents together with one or two missionaries are the few persons

privileged with a footing on Ellis Island, in addition to the ample staff of New Castle Garden officials provided by the United States Government. Many of these are men and women of no small linguistic acquirements; one of the oldest men on the staff speaks seven languages, and passes with perfect ease along the gamut of tongues from Hindustani to Hibernian English, and modern Greek to German *patois*.

All day long the many turnstiles are kept in constant revolution, and the crowds of emigrants, as they disembark upon Ellis Island, march off in files to the intervening clerks who stand in position to receive them. "Click, click," goes the turnstile, and a swarthy turbaned Arab, direct from Mount Hermon, his brown arms gaily tattooed, passes his examination as to occupation, possessions, and so forth, and then makes way for a fair-haired broad-shouldered Teuton, who gives in his name as George T. Bokholt, aged twenty, and declares in response to interrogations that he has twenty dollars



UNDER TEMPORARY DETENTION.

in his pocket of "reines Geld." His blonde little sister Frynge accompanies him, neatly dressed in Sunday black frock, while behind them comes a bright-looking Alsatian maiden, Adele Blaess, with her all tied up in a red cotton handkerchief and a few dollars in her purse which she proudly displays, together with a railway ticket which will take her to her aunt on the Pacific coast somewhere near San Francisco.

These are passed, and "click" goes a neighbouring turnstile, where a quick-witted official gets his Hindustani in

readiness, as a little white-turbaned visitor comes in sight, and at his heels a lonely Afghan who baffles every one by his speech, and who would be utterly forlorn were it not that a kindly Syrian family have taken him under their wing. The spokesman for the Syrian party is bright black-eyed Sultana Meinnia, who, dressed in French fashions purchased *en route* at Marseilles, and possessed of a marvellous facility in speaking both English and Spanish, seems commander-in-chief of the motley caravan of her fellow country people, the majority of whom are still in the rainbow-hued garbs of their sunny land.

Hungarian peasants in homespun, the men in rough jackets and top boots, the women with short petticoats and kerchiefed head-gear, are next in line, behind them an Austrian mother, her child on one arm, an unwieldy bundle in the other which she clutches with difficulty, unaided by any one, least of all by the Roumanian peasant who stares placidly at her, and draws his sheepskin more tightly around him as he tries to push before her. Meanwhile Italians and Poles are filing in at a third turnstile, while another contingent of Arabs engross the entire attention of two officials. Amongst these is a little twelve-year-old bride, Zehenig by name, who, coming straight from the mountains of Lebanon, has nevertheless picked up a lace hat, feathers, and flounces somewhere on the voyage. Indeed, most of the Orientals stop at Marseilles and there, for a few francs, lay in a stock of manufactured curios and relics, which they dispose of to credulous Westerners as genuine native articles.

The bride's elder sister follows up in the rear—picturesque in her lace mantilla coquettishly thrown over her massive coils of hair, beneath which gleam a pair of the boldest of black eyes, while the brilliant red shawl over her shoulders and startlingly blue dress make her an object of universal attraction.

Behind them again, a group of tired-looking Arab mothers are wearily standing, with heavy bundles of bedding poised on their head, tin pots and pans jingling on their arms, and cross hungry children clinging to their skirts. Their gay coloured bodices are open, revealing their skinny necks; and long gold earrings are rivals in colour of the wizened cheeks of women who are mothers at fourteen, and old women at twenty-four. Panting,

heated, and worn as these poor women are, their lords and masters follow them with the coolest unconcern, pipe in mouth, hands in pockets, utterly oblivious of the fact that they are now treading on American soil, where man has the special privilege of being burden-bearer for the race.

Meantime all those under temporary detention have assembled in an ante-room, where they squat on the floor, lounge or sit around, some fast asleep, others singing to a guitar, upon which a gay Lothario of a Portuguese is strumming old love songs. Behind this lively group a little barefooted Mohammedan maiden, her toes tucked up under her quaintly figured petticoat, is weeping bitterly and drying her eyes at intervals with her lace mantilla. She has been deceived by some Beyrout ticket agent, and now finds to her dismay that the ticket she holds in her hand, instead of taking her to Chicago, must be given up at New York. With but four dollars in her pocket and never a friend within a thousand miles, she is in the very depths of despair, and it is hard to make her realise that the authorities are in telegraphic communication with her friends to whom she will be sent, provided they are found willing to receive her. But Colonel Weber's sole attention at this moment is concentrated upon a well-to-do looking German couple, who stand with scowling faces while he investigates their case. The middle-aged "Frau" is the chief offender: she is a bigamist with a decidedly romantic vein in her composition.

Fifteen years before she had married her first love, and five years later he was sentenced to penal servitude for participation in outrages and consequent murder.

When prison bars separated her from her husband, believing that woman should not live alone, she hied her to the New World, and there took unto herself a simple-minded fellow, who, making no inquiries, was content to bask in the sunshine of a capable "Hausfrau" who could cook good dinners and add to his savings. But the soul of a professional cook may have its sentimental side, and in the intervals of dishing up the courses, her mind wandered back to the cottage in the Fatherland, and when a "Zeitung" intimated that the term of ten years was at an end, she said farewell to her pots and pans and announced to her second husband that she was seized with an unutterable longing to revisit the Father-

land. So her trunks were packed, her husband embraced her in affectionate ignorance of her design, and not until weeks after did he miss his naturalisation papers. Still no suspicions were aroused in his simple breast, and it was not until to-day that the horrid truth dawned upon him. In response to a special messenger from the Emigration Office, in he now rushed, and found himself face to face with his faithless wife and her old love, whom she was introducing to America, by means of the stolen papers, as a duly naturalised and respectable citizen. White with rage, the much injured man stood speechless, while the woman at bay declared with cool effrontery that she had been legally divorced ten years before, and now merely desired that her old love should live as a friend of the family and helper in the business. The second husband, needless to say, did not see the matter in this light, and the ex-convict (under the new law) was returned to his ship with the intimation that there was no room for men of his sort in America.

Not infrequently there are as many as forty cases which call for special investigation on any given day, out of a disembarkation of three to four thousand souls; of these, for example, out of a group of Italians, five are proved to be convicts, seven utterly penniless and physically incapable of work, who would at once come upon the public charge; these twelve are therefore prohibited from landing upon American soil, and if they succeed in so doing it will be by sheer strategy. The remaining twenty-eight having given bonds for good behaviour pass through the turnstile.

In an inner apartment a Dutch family of fourteen persons is congregated, grandparents, father, mother, aunts, uncles, and children, clean, well dressed, and well provisioned with money, but each and every one possessed of an identical physical infirmity which manifests itself in bent back, or lame arms or legs; after medical inspection they pass muster, and are transferred to the tender which plies between the office and the mainland.

The bleating of babes is heard above all other sounds. Mothers are hushing tired little ones to rest, and in a corner stretched upon the floor is quite a kindergarten of little flaxen-haired darlings, who have fallen asleep over their buns and milk.

The restaurant arrangements are excellent. May, 1895.

lent, and good plain food at moderate prices is to be had in abundance; German sausage and Irish stew being the *tour de force*, but the Northern sighs in vain for his whiskey, the child of the sunny south for his purple wine, and the Englishman for his beer, as all drinks of an alcoholic kind are excluded from this Prohibition Island.

Colonel Weber, who has been for so many years Chief of the Emigration Department, has many stories to tell of his especial *protégés*. On one occasion an eight-year-old Englishman arrived, labelled from "Liverpool to Philadelphia, care of the Captain." He had enjoyed himself immensely, but was so unwilling



MOTHERS ARE HUSHING TIRED LITTLE ONES.

to leave the ship that the captain had to send him ashore under special convoy, to frustrate his desire to play stowaway on the homeward trip. A still more juvenile voyager was little Patrick Mahoney, who had been despatched from Cork—with about as much care as is usually bestowed upon a Saratoga trunk—to rejoin his mother on Long Island. This two-year-old toddler, or "Tiny Pat" as he was universally called, became the pet of both steerage and saloon, and found scores of willing slaves ready to do his bidding. Arrived at Castle Garden, no mother was there to welcome the baby, and the forlorn little waif was at once taken possession of by a matron, scrubbed down, dressed in new clothes, and then, at the urgent request of the Colonel's children was sent to their home where "the perfect beauty of a flaxen-haired boy, sweet as a peach," as his admirers describe him, became such a centre of

attraction, that there was mourning and lamentation when the distracted mother came to claim him. The poor stupid creature had mistaken the date of the ship's arrival, and had come down to the docks three or four days too late.

Italian stowaways are a great bugbear of the new as well as of the old Castle Garden, for they are usually incapable as well as penniless. Societies, however, exist which on occasion will take them in charge and endeavour to convert them into good citizens. The Padrone system is the greatest curse of all in America, for under it hundreds of labourers are enticed over to be let out on contract or sweating systems. Many English, as well as Italian girls, are tempted by specious promises and are then hired out as street



LABELLED "LIVERPOOL TO PHILADELPHIA."

organ-grinders, singers, or tambourine players. They are practically sold into servitude without even the advantages of the slave, for, when broken down in health, their good looks vanish and, sweet voices become hoarse, they are turned adrift to go—"God knows where."

To freedom-loving, free-trading Britons, many of the Ellis Island regulations may appear harsh and tyrannical; America, with its wide fertile plains, only waiting for the husbandman, ought to be the refuge for all of every degree, and there seems an element of selfishness in a people which decrees otherwise.

On the other hand, the United States of America occupies a proud position by virtue of its attainment to a higher civilisation for its "common people" than any other country in the world, if we except, perhaps, the Australasian and Canadian colonies. A mere "triumph of mediocrity" it may be, but it is a triumph in which the greatest possible number of people share, and its Government is naturally anxious that the upward trend of centuries should not become retrograde by the influx of foreigners whose standard of comfort is low. Emigration is, indeed, an enormous factor in the future of that great continent; the figures have risen with fluctuations from 9'127 in 1821, to 560'319 in 1891. A very small and steadily decreasing proportion of these emigrants hail from the British Isles; the majority are from countries where really free government is unknown; while many are escaping from absolute tyranny and come prepared with but one idea, viz., "to vote agin the Government," and are apparently incapable of grasping the new situation in which they so suddenly find themselves placed.

The true remedy would be, not to restrict emigration, for America needs population as much as population needs America, but to deny civil rights to all those unable to pass a simple constitutional examination conducted in the English tongue.

As each State enjoys Home Rule in this most important department of state-craft, many an ignorant emigrant becomes a voter within a few months after arrival, on having stated his intention of taking out papers of citizenship when the five years' residence required by the Federal Government has expired. The old Puritan State of Massachusetts sets an example which is worthy of imitation, inasmuch as it denies the vote to every foreigner until he has been resident at least five years in the country, and can read the constitution and write the English language with some degree of exactitude and has paid tax within two years.

A leading article in a New York newspaper recently drew attention to the existing abuses as illustrated by the case of a man who, on coming to claim the rights of voting, was asked by the Registrar "What is the governing power of the United States?" The candidate for enfranchisement, scratching his head, looked terribly puzzled, but after sundry jerks from his wife who was standing by,

he managed to stammer out, "Yes, sir, I know, it's the Sinnit." "Quite so," replied the officer; "but what are some of the other factors in Government, it is the Senate and what?" "Yes, sir, indeed," replied the aspirant. "It's the Sinnit and Wat." And so far as can be determined this highly intelligent and newly arrived foreigner, while still an alien, was not denied admission to the list of those who by their expression of opinion at the poll are determining the future of the great Western Republic. To balance this danger, the United States seem gifted with a supernatural power of absorption. While in New York every second person to be met with in the street speaks a strange tongue, out West in Colorado or California, Washington or Nebraska, the English tongue everywhere prevails, and the foreigner is to all intents and purposes as much an American as his native-born neighbour. Especially in the Far West, English is taught as a foreign language, and the juvenile foreigners who might resent the additional duties imposed upon them in the schools are encouraged by finding that in their turn young Americans are called upon to apply themselves to the acquisition of German or French.

Dr. Harris, Minister of Education at Washington, D.C., remarked that after many years of practical experience he has come to the conclusion that the best means of Americanising the foreigner is

to educate in polyglot fashion according to the nationality which preponderates in any town or district. Hence Americans, who are proverbially the poorest linguists in the world, are waking up to the need of applying themselves to the acquisition of languages other than their own.

But to return to the travellers. It is now late in the afternoon, the exchange bureau, restaurant, and waiting rooms are closing, and Ellis Island will soon be deserted. The tender is in waiting to convey the last band of emigrants to the mainland, the baggage room is fast disgorging its multifarious and curiously labelled luggage, and by the time the mainland is reached the Expressmen will be in readiness for the final transfer of passengers and luggage to the railway stations. Arrived there, the emigrants have nothing to do but "board the cars" and take their seats. These second class or emigrant cars are very rough compared with the luxurious Pullmans, but they are nevertheless not infrequently fitted up with berths upon which travellers may spread their own ship's bedding, and they are invariably provided with lavatory and cooking arrangements of a simple kind, while the ubiquitous ice-water tank is like a grateful fountain in a weary land, as the train slowly crawls night and day over the parched plains of Arizona or the alkali-blotched deserts of Utah and Nevada.



PIONEERS.