



Refugee Mrs. Marie Spreyer (back to camera) is greeted by her daughter, Mrs. Charlotte Kleiss, in a tearful embrace as S.S. Marine Flasher docks. EUROPEAN

They Do Anything to Get Into the U.S.A.

By JAMES MACFARLAND, as told to SIDNEY SHALETT

THE lady—she was not exactly young, and she was almost hefty enough to qualify for the job of fat lady in the circus—was trying to get a visa that would enable her to emigrate from Canada to the United States. It was my job, as vice consul in the United States Consulate General at Montreal, to find out whether she was entitled to it.

I must confess that, after the many dodges, evasions and frauds of every conceivable description I encountered during my three years in the "visa mill" at Montreal, I was a little suspicious when the lady assured me that Uncle Sam didn't have to worry about her becoming a public charge, because she had \$5000 in savings.

"Let's see your bankbook, please," I asked. She certainly didn't look as if she had that kind of money.

"Oh, Mr. Ambassador"—during those three years I was called "Mr. Ambassador" and "your excellency"; also "Bud," "Mac," "Doc," and occasionally some unprintable labels reflecting on the legitimacy of my ancestry—"I don't believe in banks. I've got the money with me."

"O.K.; let's see it."

Slowly she began to lift up her dress.

"Hey, hold on!" I yelled. "I didn't tell you to do that! What's the idea?"

The idea was that she had her life's savings sewed up in her winter underwear. I had asked to see it. Hastily, I withdrew my request. I was convinced. I took her word for the \$5000.

This experience with the walking savings bank, though startling, was by no means unusual. At Montreal I examined, by conservative estimate, some 15,000 applicants for visas. I have nursed my aching ears against a babel of foreign tongues, have intervened in fist fights and have pacified drunks. I have joggled wailing babies on my knee, have fended off bribes and turned a chill eye to the lures of female charmers. I have interviewed, as prospective entrants to the United States, Adolf Hitler's sister-in-law—she thought the Führer was a bum—and Father Divine's beautiful white Canadian wife. On occasions I have been shocked and disillusioned. But I also have been genuinely touched and inspired by the sincerity and resoluteness of purpose of a host of Europeans, Asiatics,

The confessions of an American visa officer who, in fifteen years of examining immigrants, has settled fist fights, pacified drunks, rocked babies, refused bribes—and even resisted the lures of would-be charmers.

Latin Americans and our good neighbors to the north, the Canadians, who want to become American citizens.

From where I have been sitting, it has seemed to me at times that the United States is an oyster encasing a precious pearl, and that half the people of the world, armed with oyster knives, are rushing at it, trying to beat each other to access to that pearl. Out of all this experience has come to me the desire to tell something of the labors of those almost unknown workers in Uncle Sam's Foreign Service, the officers who handle visa cases.

The visa officers too often are denounced as inhuman monsters, unfeeling clods and dunderheads by would-be immigrants (and their friends) who are blocked by oversubscribed immigration quotas and inflexible regulations. Also—particularly since the recent alarms about the presence of dangerous alien communists in our country—we visa officers are lambasted as a careless, stupid lot by American critics who would nail our hides to the wall for every visitor or immigrant to our shores who goes wrong.

It happens that the officers who handle visa cases are neither sadists nor dupes for communist Trojan

Horses. They—I feel I can write this now, since I am being transferred to another branch of the Foreign Service—are an often-overworked lot who are deeply sensitive to the human drama that is played before their desks. The visa officer is called on to administer a difficult, complicated law, and no exceptions for humanity's sake are permitted. It is not an easy job. I think it is to the credit of the young men—visa cases usually are handled by juniors of the Foreign Service—who serve from Antofagasta to Zurich that they remain as sympathetic and tolerant as they do. Also, that they stay out of a padded cell!

There is no deception that a visa-hungry applicant won't try in order to get into the United States. One day a man entered my office wearing the reversed collar and the clothing of a priest. Since my father is a minister, as were my mother's father and grandfather, I've been around men of the cloth all my life. This man talked less like a man of God than anyone I'd ever met. Playing a hunch, I broke off abruptly in the middle of a question and challenged him sharply, "You're not a priest, are you?"

"Nah!" he said. "I just rented this suit—thought it would be easier this way."

Actually, though ministers, priests or rabbis who come to the United States to practice their calling are admitted over and above their native country's quota, there was no need for this man to practice this deception. He was a Canadian, and Canadian-born migration to the United States is unrestricted. If his record was good, he could have come in without the priest's getup.

153,929 Headaches a Year

THE headaches connected with being a visa officer are due to the fact that only a limited number of quota visas are allowable each year—153,929 to be exact. There are several hundred thousand more would-be immigrants than visas. There are two general classifications of visas—immigration and nonimmigrant. The nonimmigrant visas, which include visitors' and diplomatic permits, and so forth, are relatively simple to administer.

Immigration visas are divided into two types: nonquota and quota. Nonquota visas mean exactly what the words imply—immigration permits that are granted as extras on top of the regular quota. Admission on a nonquota visa does not subtract from the regular quota. Nonquota visas go to wives and minor children of United States citizens, to bona fide students, to persons born in Canada, Newfoundland and all independent republics of the Western Hemisphere, to clergymen of all faiths, and professors coming to the United States to carry out their professions, and to women born in the United States who lost their citizenship only through marriage. There's also an exception for aliens previously admitted for permanent residence, who may have been temporarily out of the United States without relinquishing their residence here.

The most desperate attempt to twist the non-quota regulations that I encountered was the case of a woman from an oversubscribed quota country. She went through a marriage ceremony with her brother, an American citizen, in hope of getting in immediately under nonquota status. It didn't work.

Quota visas really get complicated. First, there has to be an opening under the quota. Then you have to satisfy Uncle Sam that you don't fall within any one of thirty-two "excludable classes." They cover everything from idiots to anarchists. There also is a system of preferences set up within the quotas: first preference goes to husbands and parents of United States citizens, and to skilled agriculturists, and second preference goes to wives and minor children of legal—but noncitizen—United States residents. Displaced persons and certain classes of aliens who served the Allied cause during the war get next priority.

The quotas themselves are pegged on an Act of 1924. This act provides that the current annual quota shall be "a number which bears the same ratio to 150,000 as the number of inhabitants in continental United States in 1920

(Continued on Page 105)



Author Macfarland at work interviewing immigrants. These—Vilmos Haasz and Elizabeth Zollner, Hungarian midgets—are happy because they were okayed for entrance into the land of their dreams.



These didn't make it. Along with thirty-six other Mexicans they were driven from Texas to Chicago in a false-bottomed truck loaded with cantaloupes. The police handed them over to immigration men.

Clergymen of all faiths are eligible for nonquota visas. Rabbi Feiweil Kresch, his wife and child, originally from Poland via France, have just arrived on the Queen Mary and are clearing immigration.



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(Continued from Page 25)

having that national origin bears to the total number of inhabitants in the United States in 1920," but the minimum is 100. This made things fine for the British, Germans and Irish, but tough on Greeks, Turks, Chinese, natives of the various Baltic states and others.

Now let's wade a little deeper. Quotas, of course, are neither interchangeable between nations nor cumulative. So, in 1947, when the British, for example, used up only 22,917 of their 65,721 quota, the difference couldn't be transferred to Greece or Turkey, whose quotas, respectively, are 307 and 226, and who had thousands clamoring to get into the U.S.A. Nor can Greece, Lithuania, Estonia, Portugal, Spain, New Zealand, Australia, Turkey, and the other low-quota countries get credit for the war years, when there was no way for them to send over even their limited quotas.

To some observers, on the side of the applicants who wanted to get in and couldn't, it seems "wasteful" that Nepal, Nauru, Bhutan and Andorra each are allotted 100 numbers under the

as he stalked out. That was the last we saw of him.

There was the time the two lovely young Swedish girls came up for their visas and said they were going to support themselves in America as circus acrobats. There was nothing in their papers to indicate they were performers, so I said, "How do I know you're acrobats?" Before you could say "allez-oop" in Swedish, they were right in the middle of an extremely convincing acrobatic act. They got the visas.

It was lucky for the girls that this took place when I still had an office big enough for them to do back-flips in. When the war ended, Montreal became such a busy center—near New York, it was a mecca for foreign visitors who had to leave the United States in order to apply for a permanent visa—that we couldn't keep up with our business. My office was subdivided with plywood and frosted glass. Soon there were four cubicles and four vice consuls struggling hopelessly to meet the tide. There rarely were fewer than eighty applicants a day. At most, we could process fifty to sixty on our best days.

I'll always remember the Montreal Consulate—inadequate, not because Uncle Sam didn't want to do better, but because of the acute office-space shortage in Montreal. Drab, once-white walls, sparsely decorated. Wooden benches in the reception room. Often there was such a mob in the hallway that you had to enter your office by a side door. They even got your home address somehow. We periodically were besieged at home.

I rarely resented the desperate ones; they aroused my sympathy. I did get sore at the ones who tried to use pressure—letters from big shots, appeals from high-powered lawyers, threats of political reprisals or even physical violence. Although physical threats largely are ignored—we didn't even have a cop on duty in the consulate—there was no forgetting the fact that a visa officer in Asia was murdered several years before by an applicant he had turned down.

Of course, it was hard to retain the correct diplomatic attitude toward those who attempted bribery, and I felt nothing but contempt for some of the brazen females who occasionally tried to use sex as a bait for the visa officers. My most vivid recollection of the female applicants in the would-be-charmer class was that they never were short on mascara and heady perfumes.

There was the case one day of Miss B, a young woman extremely circum-spect both in appearance and in conduct. Immigrants sometimes are required to have an affidavit from an American citizen guaranteeing that the applicant will not become a public charge. Miss B's affidavit of support was signed by a bachelor in the States. I studied the document carefully and noted that it ended with the promise: "I guarantee to support Miss B and take care of her in the manner in which she has always been accustomed."

Miss B's police record showed thirty-six convictions for prostitution.

The woman who taxed my diplomatic poise to the extreme, though, was the harassed mother of two children who finally blew up after a four-hour wait. She jumped up, ran into the ladies' room with her two children, and shrieked through the door in French, "I shall sit right here, monsieur, until you give to us the visas!"

I was all for letting her sit there, because we didn't have enough chairs in the waiting room anyway. But she

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PARDON MY SUPERABUNDANCE

By William W. Pratt

With cocktail glass and snacks in hand,

And napkin on my knee,

I face a social problem that

Has often bothered me:

When tardy guests are introduced,

Would I be less a clown

With mouth and hands full, standing up,

Or lap full, sitting down?

law, but in 1947 no visas at all were issued for these countries. Another gimmick is the fact that, under the law, a person is charged to the quota of the country of his birth, except in the case of certain Asiatics, who are charged to their racial quotas regardless of where they are born. For instance, if the child of a dyed-in-the-wool British or French couple happens to be born in Greece or Egypt, little Montmorency or Pierre is a Greek or Egyptian, so far as getting a visa is concerned.

I was on duty in the Montreal consulate one day when a young gentleman walked in to apply for a visa. You didn't have to look at his passport to tell that he was as British as Yorkshire pudding—he was a 100-proof distillate of tweed, fog, Oxford, 1066 and all that.

The lad would have entered easily under the ample British quota, and he probably would have made a very fine citizen too. But it happened that he was born in Athens. That meant he couldn't get in for several decades.

I still recall his reaction when I broke the news to him that he was a "Greek." He surveyed me with an awful glance, opened and shut his mouth soundlessly a couple of times, then thundered, "If you, sir, enforce any such foolish law as that, you are a miserable disgrace to your country! Good day, sir!" You could almost see the banners flying and hear the fanfare of trumpets

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was creating a sort of bottleneck in our facilities. So, after a while I got up and said in my best French, "Madame, it is necessary for me to interview you face to face about your visa, and I certainly cannot come in there." It worked.

Often there were more poignant dramas. Once I was the instrument for informing a young woman that the "aunt" with whom she was living was really her mother. The girl's parents had separated when she was an infant. The mother did not want her second husband to know she had been married previously. So the child had been farmed out and brought up to believe her mother was dead. Only in the past five years the girl, now a young woman of twenty-five, had come to live with the "aunt" who really was her mother. I caught the discrepancy in names on the birth certificate I was examining, and asked the "aunt" to explain. She broke down in tears, confessed the story and, turning to the girl, said in a choked, shaken voice, "You're my daughter." It was the most dramatic moment I've ever witnessed.

On the other hand, I occasionally was the cause of breaking the embarrassing news to some couple who had been living together for twenty years or so that they really weren't married at all. You'd be surprised at how many people make the mistake of thinking they're wedded after obtaining the marriage license—they just don't know there has to be a ceremony too.

I remember Tony, a volatile Italian, who had jumped ship and entered the United States illegally some twenty years before, and turned up in Montreal to make a legal entry. I asked him how come he and his American wife had children fourteen and fifteen years old, yet their marriage certificate was dated only the previous month. With much gesticulation, Tony told me the story of how, in the process of getting square with the immigration authorities, he had gone to his priest for proof of his wedding and had learned the awful news that he had mistaken the license for the ceremony.

"I jump on the phone, call my wife and say, 'Come quick!—the kids, they no good!'" Tony excitedly narrated. "My wife, she come running straight to the priest's, and we get married right there."

Once I was Santa Claus to an elderly widow. Going through the pile of papers she brought to my office in support of her visa application, I noticed a \$2000 life-insurance policy on her husband, who had died several months ago. She never had collected it—in fact, she didn't even know what it was. I telephoned the insurance company for her and arranged for her to collect. When she left, nothing I could do could prevent her from getting down on her knees and saying a prayer for me.

Sometimes I have had the happy task of telling astonished applicants that they won't need a visa, because they have been American citizens all their lives without knowing it. This usually is in the case of persons whose American parents emigrated from the United States to Canada.

A whole book could be written on the deceptions people use. One of the phoniest is the fake-farmer racket. Some applicants get the idea that if you are a farmer you can walk right into the land of milk and honey. So men who really are storekeepers, garage mechanics, factory hands, and so forth, will get themselves up in ridiculously obvious rube outfits. One of

the accessories—and they aren't even subtle about it—is an application of manure, rubbed on the new boots or store pants. Half of them don't know a thresher from a niblick. When I asked to see the purchase or option papers on the farm they claimed they intended to operate, the masquerade was over.

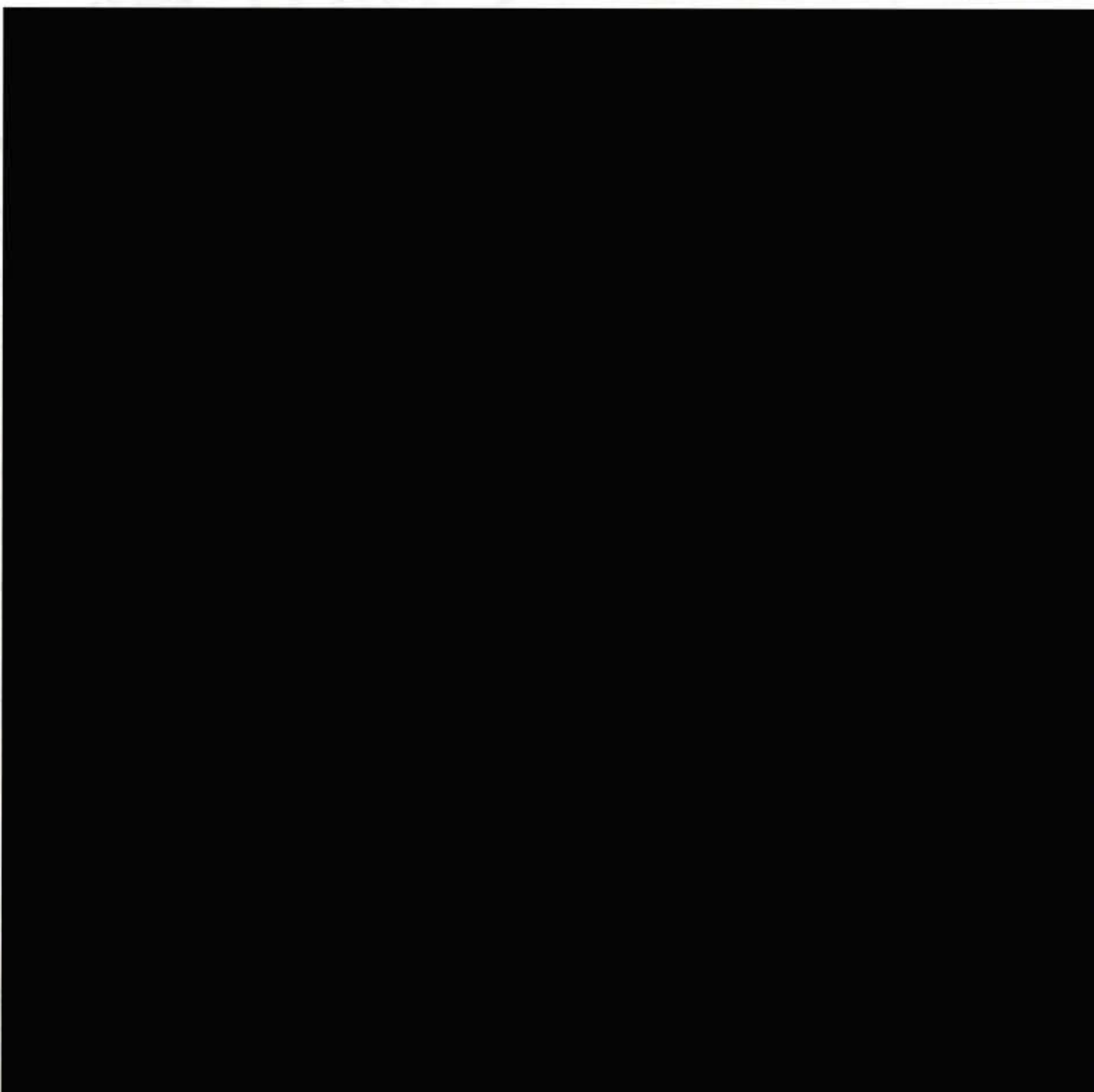
Another time, a neat, well-mannered young man brought me a glowing letter of recommendation, purportedly from a bank president, and solemnly assured me he'd never had so much as a parking summons from the law. When, in accordance with immigration statutes, I called for his police record, I learned he had been convicted twice for grand larceny, once for arson, and had been deported twice from the United States for illegal entry. His letter, of course, was a forgery.

Still another bright lad had the notion that I would let him in if he could persuade me he was going to live in the States with his American-citizen brother

in everything from factories to hod carrying, but not household servants. So, many a would-be immigrant, who wants to come to America to labor in the pickle plant, tries to convince us he really is coming "to live with my uncle." Unfortunately for him, Uncle Sam usually has been confidentially tipped off as to the real reason, and the visa officer has to say no.

It takes a pretty formidable array of documents to support an application for a visa. The applicant must show his passport, birth certificate, good-conduct certificates, evidence of support in the United States, and so forth. The most unprepared of all applicants I ever encountered was a woman who came in with only a faded and crumpled snapshot, showing her with a group of friends, eating a hot dog at a picnic.

The most prepared of all applicants was a man who came in with 426 pages of documents. He was a German—very thorough.



who had just been discharged from the United States Army. I would have, too, but I wanted to see some documentary evidence of this citizen-veteran brother.

A few days later the boy returned and meekly confessed that his brother hadn't "quite" been in the Army, but had "tried to enlist." On a third appearance, he changed the story again and admitted that the brother was not a citizen, but a legal resident of the United States.

On Trip No. 4, I got a little impatient and asked, "Do you really have a brother?"

He was insulted. "Sure I do," he said. "He's right out here in the hall."

Then it came out that his brother never even had been in the United States, and was waiting his turn to apply if the first brother could get through.

Thousands of immigrants fudge a bit to evade the contract-labor provisions of the Immigration Law. The law provides that no person shall be admitted who has been induced to come to the United States for the purpose of accepting "manual employment"—a broad field that takes

didn't know was that the fellow had a criminal record for theft. And prominent business and professional leaders unwittingly will endorse dangerous alien communists.

I do not wish to condemn employment of legal counsel in immigration cases. But in practically all instances it is unnecessary, and sometimes the immigrant is charged an exorbitant fee for little or no service. In a simple case of applying for a visa, the applicant can get good and faithful service, entirely for free, from the immigration or consular officers. One woman, who had been in the United States on a visitor's permit and now was applying for permanent entry through the Montreal office, told me she had been charged \$500 by a lawyer for "assistance."

"What did he do?" I asked.

"He told me what papers to write for; I wrote the letters," she said.

I am indebted to a New York attorney for providing the prize tear-jerker of my three years in Montreal. His written plea in behalf of his client ended:

R. B. has already crossed into the first longitude of the twilight of life, though the shadows are not yet apparent. The remainder of the journey should be under a peaceful sunset, unobscured by the clouds of separation, unswept by the winds of remorse.

The correspondence file, in general, is sometimes bewildering. One woman, angry because an officer had asked her the stock question, "Have you ever been a communist or Fascist?" excoriated him in a letter to the State Department: "I am no more a communist or a Fascist than is the Secretary of State, and that officer should have the sense to know it and not ask me such questions!"

Another wrote: "Don't bother about me any more. I've just become neutralized by marriage to my American wife."

And, from a woman, this one: "In accordance with your suggestion, I have consorted with the immigration officials, who told me to write to you about this and that you would invite me up right away."

One man gave his profession as "negligee operator," and another fellow listed himself as an "unemployed relief director."

The experience I like best to remember is the time I had to give a literacy test to an old gentleman who was deaf and dumb and who knew only one language, Yiddish. He was a spry, likable old gentleman, and I wanted very much to help him join his relatives in the States, but the law said I had to determine that he was literate in some language. I suppose he could "speak" Yiddish in sign language on his fingers. But I couldn't, so that was no help.

I brought out the printed cards in various languages that we have for these tests, and his eyes brightened at the Yiddish card. I had been schooled so I could read these cards. I pointed to the word for "dog" on the Yiddish card, and by elaborate gestures asked the mute to signify to me what it meant. He got down on all fours, scratched, hopped around a bit and made a guttural sound in his throat that certainly sounded like a bark. I pointed to the word for "tree." He went through the pantomime of planting a seed, then the business of a trunk and branches growing, and finally he chopped it down.

The old man got his visa to America.

THE END