

The Protestant Emigrant and Train Station Mission in Hamburg (1925)

Abstract

Gertrud David produced the 1925 film “Evangelische Auswanderer- und Bahnhofsmision” [Protestant Emigrant and Train Station Mission] to promote the welfare services available in most major German train stations to travelers in need of help. The first such mission began in Berlin in 1894 to support young women moving into the city in search of jobs, and similar missions quickly proliferated across the country over the next three decades. In 1910, the hitherto entirely separate Catholic and Protestant train-station missions established an ecumenical umbrella organization—one of the first in Germany—to facilitate their cooperation. The scope of their services evolved, too. At the end of the First World War, for instance, train-station missions provided services to returning soldiers, prisoners of war, and refugees. Later—during the global depression—they offered aid to the unemployed and the unhoused, particularly children, who desperately needed care and protection.

In one scene from this short production, a woman on the train notices a predatory man approaching a young woman on the train and immediately finds a mission representative, who escorts the woman to safety. Another passage delivers an explicitly cautionary tale, as a young man arrives at the same station without a place to stay and winds up leaving with a stranger who promised cheap accommodations. The man later wakes up in a dirty room, disheveled and robbed of his possessions. The film thus aimed both to generate public support for the beneficial work of the train-station missions and to warn unsuspecting travelers to remain vigilant and on their guard.

Source

Intertitles:

[Graph] German emigration overseas 1860-1924

Train passenger: On Monday, I am emigrating to South America.

[Farmer indicates that he and his family are planning the same, shows him a card from his local pastor asking the Protestant mission in Hamburg to support them. The card reads:]

Pillkallen, July 23, 1925.

Mr. Friedrich Hennig and his family are emigrating to South America. I kindly request that he be assisted in taking care of his travel arrangements during his stay in Hamburg. Signed pastor Gallenkamp

Farmer: The emigration commission will recognize me in Hamburg by this card that I got from our pastor, and they will make sure that I and my family get on the ship safely.

Passenger: I'll get onto the ship safely too – and without this hoax.

Young woman: I want to find a good position in Hamburg. It gets too boring in a small town in the long run.

Criminal: What a lucky coincidence! My aunt is currently looking for a sophisticated young lady to help in her shop.

[Farmer's wife overhears their conversation]

Criminal: You know what? I'll take you to see my aunt today so you won't even need to go to a hotel.

Farmer's wife: If I were you I would prefer the mission's accommodations, Missy!

[Points to a poster advising young women and girls not to trust strangers but instead to seek the advice of the various church support services.]

[Train arrives in Hamburg. The farmer's wife asks a woman working for the Protestant mission to look after the young woman traveling by herself.]

Male mission worker to farmer Hennig: I've organized accommodations for you at the Hapag emigrant facilities in Veddel.

Female mission worker: You are probably a stranger here, Miss. May I offer you my help?

Young woman: Thank you, but I already have accommodations. This gentleman is taking me to his aunt.

[Criminal walks off once he sees the mission worker.]

Mission worker: Be glad. You may have escaped a terrible fate.

[Image of young woman being locked up in a bedroom begging to be let out.]

Male passenger is approached by another criminal on the platform: Do you already have accommodations, young man? I know a nice, cheap place.

Passenger leaves train station with him, passing the Hennigs on his way:

See you on the ship on Monday!

At Veddel train station.

[Many emigrants arriving. Footage of the Hapag accommodation for transatlantic migrants.]

The "nice cheap" accommodation.

[Passenger wakes up on the street after having been made drunk and robbed of his money and papers.]

At the port in Hamburg.

[Emigrants are boarding their ship. Young man watches his ship leave and regrets his foolishness.]

[Map of Protestant mission locations]

Source: *Vom unsichtbaren Königreich: Evangelische Auswanderer- und Bahnhofsmision*, dir. Gertrud David, Gervid Film GmbH, 1925. Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv Filmwerk ID: 81920

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Recommended Citation: The Protestant Emigrant and Train Station Mission in Hamburg (1925), published in: German History in Documents and Images,

<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/weimar-germany-1918-1933/ghdi:video-5182>> [March 16, 2026].