

## AMERICANIZATION FORUM

(Continued from page 6)

corrections on my part, and she is reproducing subject-matter entirely unfamiliar to her until she comes to class. All her time for home study is put on her commercial courses. These two young women have good average intelligence, with common school training in Swedish. In physical strength and endurance they are both slightly below average, and both have home duties. Miss L. is paying her own expenses by evening work as a pianist. My experiment with these two students indicate that it is quite possible for the average foreign-born young woman to be prepared for a business position in about fourteen months, without resorting to the translation, grammatical, or other language instruction methods which give an academic knowledge of the language at the expense of the idiomatic, practical, every-day means of expression, especially the kind of talking we must all do most of the time.

A prospective pupil, a native of Switzerland, tells me that she doesn't want to learn merely every-day English. She wishes to learn how to express herself in "beautiful English." Her explanation was somewhat as follows: "The English language is so beautiful, but people here don't use it well. I want to learn to use it like I can the German. But when I try to do so, my friends do not understand me. Once a friend looked in the dictionary to see if there was such a word as one I used. She had never heard it, and I pronounced it correctly, too. I don't understand it." I assured her, of course, that I should be very glad to do my utmost to satisfy her desire for aesthetic satisfaction in the realm of speech. As an apology for conditions she described, I called her attention to the fact that our lack of class distinctions brings us into constant touch with people of all degrees of educational training, necessitating use of language simple enough for all to understand. In addition, I had to admit, also, that we overwork certain words, for no better reason than that we find it too much trouble to think of others that would express our meaning more accurately and "beautifully."

The above discussion illustrates the principle, stressed as fundamental by my instructors, and upon which I have tried to base my experiments, namely that English as we use it in ordinary daily life, is one thing, English as found in books, something quite different, and the former is the most essential in making the foreign-born person "one of us;" it should therefore be taught first. Whether the student is speaking, reading or writing, the vocabulary and modes of expression should be tested by the question, "Would we say it that way?" The student soon learns to note the difference between "spoken English" and "book English," as we call these two types of language in our classes. Logically, the subject-matter of spoken language deals with every-day experiences, while aca-

demie English is based on regular school texts. In organizing work preparatory to high school and commercial courses, the big question with us has been how much time can profitably be given to the first of the two stages, the time and means of the student being, as a rule, limited, and continuation work in the higher institution requiring a definite amount of academic knowledge. To this question the fact that students can pursue commercial courses successfully, as indicated above, is a partial answer. Ability to meet the requirements of future employment will, of course, be the final test.

Another type of need our work is designed to meet is that of the foreign-born housewife. There are in Minneapolis hundreds of women, of Scandinavian birth alone, who do not read and write English. A few do not speak the language at all, some very imperfectly. Most of them speak well enough "to get along," which expression usually means that they can transact ordinary simple business affairs in English, while for social satisfaction they depend almost entirely upon people of their own nationality. They are not thoroughly "at home" except in their own small group. So far as we can judge from two years' experience, there is no reason why most of these women should not, with a moderate expenditure of time, effort and money, learn to speak at least as correctly as their native-born friends, to read the popular periodicals intelligently, and to write the ordinary personal and business letters correctly. The women who come to my classes, often missing social affairs to do so, are not exceptional in any respect, as can be judged by the conversation that often takes place in one of our classes when some student tells about trying to persuade a relative or friend to begin work. "She thinks she is too old to learn anything." Mrs. L. speaks up, "Tell her I am fifty-three. When I came to class a year ago, I couldn't understand a word you said. I had been in this country only about a year. Now I can understand almost every word our teacher uses, I can read our small geography, and I can write lessons and stories that we have learned to tell. I like to come to class. It is fun to write. Talking is harder. My daughter has gone to our school, too, and is now in business college. When she studies her shorthand, I say the words for her from her book and she writes them in shorthand. She tells me when I do not say a word just right." The student continues her report: "She says she hasn't time to come to class." Sympathetic comments from everybody: "I have to get the children off to school and put up lunches for them and my husband before I start for class in the morning." From another, "My husband works nights now, and I have meals to get at all hours." A third, "The lady I usually work for only one day a week has been sick and I have been there most of the time this week. She is so nervous that she has made me too nervous to study my lesson. I shall not go

there next week"—and so on, the consensus of opinion being that the prospective pupil can surely learn as well as they, and can be no busier. These remarks illustrate the very real obstacles in the way of the middle-aged married woman who wants to learn English, as well as her natural reluctance to face the difficulties and humiliations she imagines connected with "going to school again." But with this type of student our troubles are usually over when she has "screwed up her courage" to the point of beginning the work. Almost without exception, she keeps coming regularly, works enthusiastically, and makes rapid progress. These women have been the stabilizing influence of our little school. In determining the number of students to be enrolled in each class, no allowances for absences are necessary in their classes. And, in spite of this regularity in attendance, the progress of those women who have only one lesson a week is a constant source of surprise and satisfaction. They are all over forty years of age but seem to learn just as rapidly and easily as the young people.

As yet there has been no time for development of courses along special lines. Any additional help in adjustments to the new environment, not incident to language study, has been unconscious absorption of ideas not put in shape for formal presentation. They have come into our "school home," which is arranged and furnished simply, but with a view to preserving the good taste and cheerful atmosphere of our American home, while affording adequate facilities for school purposes. In this home atmosphere we have discussed our daily affairs, as suggested by our formal lessons, the joys and sorrows of our families and friends, with occasional glimpses of the world beyond. We have had our simple social affairs, in a perfectly natural setting, perhaps putting in two hours of hard work in our class-room, and then going into a small living room to celebrate a birthday, by drinking coffee cooked in our little kitchenette and eating things brought by members of the class. Such close, personal contact, the mutual give and take of ideas and ideals on any one of the planes of human existence where we can all meet as equals, is the real solution of the Americanization problem. No human being likes to be "observed" through a field glass, be it literal or figurative. But the ideas embodied in a "home-school" plant can be brought more clearly and systematically before the consciousness of the housewife, than we have had time to do, in order to put her in touch with our American better-homes movement in its various phases.

In addition to schedules of work and methods of instruction enabling students to attend classes at the most convenient time and to work as rapidly as their circumstances permit, written work, done outside of class and brought or mailed in from any place, keeps the student in touch with his "school home." Thus one young woman has continued work a year from San Francisco.