

EDITORIAL

COMING INTO CITIZENSHIP WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE OF AMERICA'S LANGUAGE

THERE MAY be introduced extenuating circumstances at a naturalization hearing which may be of a nature to move both examiner and judge to a degree of leniency, but there should be no compromise where the general character of the applicant is involved or when evidence has been introduced to show beyond a reasonable doubt that the applicant is not attached to our form of government and we should forever be through with naturalizing aliens, who cannot read the language of our land and because of this serious handicap are unable to defend their citizenship in an intelligent manner.

Among the reactions from the most recent naturalization hearing in Portland, Oregon, we note this paragraph from a news item in the Oregonian anent the day's hearing during which fifty-five aliens became naturalized:

Although Henry Gerlack, born in Russia of German parentage, had been going to night school for three years he had made little progress and could not read English. Gerlack has been here for nine years, has raised a family, educated his children and otherwise conducted himself as a good citizen. Judge Wolverton decided that he could easily overlook inability to read English and he was admitted.

Henry Gerlack may be an excellent man. We are not taking issue with him. He may even become a better citizen than many of those who are citizens through birth. He may become a citizen of surpassing value compared with a large number of those who are able to pass the language test that proved such an insurmountable obstacle in his case.

We are not particularly anxious to take issue with Judge Wolverton for granting Gerlack the precious paper he is said to have struggled so hard to obtain. The judge has been one of the best naturalization judges we have known. He has generally been just and fair, always willing to consider every basic argument brought to bear upon each individual application.

The state of Oregon recently adopted a literacy test law which will make it impossible for Henry Gerlack to attain the greatest privilege in citizenship—to cast an American ballot, **unless** he can **read** and **write**, to a limited extent, the language of America.

It is inconceivable to believe this to be beyond Gerlack's intellectual capacity.

America's safety is of far greater importance than all the elements of compassion that might be brought to bear in favor of issuing citizenship certificates to applicants pleading inability to learn our language.

Some of America's fairest children, men and women, have had to go through the formality of naturalization because their parents neglected to qualify. Children of such as Gerlack, if forced to do the same thing, will feel less resentment against their paternal parents of whom it can then be truthfully said that they tried hard but failed on account of the language test.

It is better to strive vainly than not to have tried at all. Having made honest efforts and failed is an ex-

tenuating circumstance in favor of the man who has applied himself.

If some of the group activities in foreign languages were abandoned in favor of a more intensive American language study, alien language illiteracy could be largely done away with in America.

We have no quarrel with anyone or anything except the slap-stick naturalization laws over which Congress is habitually quarreling.

The system is wrong. Uncle Sam is being cheated out of his just due by his own representatives.

Give us something tangible to go by and the Naturalization Service and the courts will be enabled to set a uniform standard which will eliminate the clogging up of the naturalization docket with applications from un-Americanized and untrained aliens who trust to luck and sundry pleas for sympathy to help out where qualifications are wantonly absent.

AN IMMIGRANT'S IDEALS THAT ARE WORTH EMULATING

THE IMMIGRANT who has an honest desire to be of the greatest possible service to the country of his adoption and is trying his utmost to fit himself to meet the requirements in citizenship, should get the viewpoint of the late Samuel Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labor, who shortly before his death reviewed his life in America in the following words:

Sixty-one years ago I came to the United States, a boy of thirteen years, with my father, mother, five brothers and sister. What have these sixty-one years in America meant to me? They have meant much. They have meant all that they could—sixty-one years of service, sixty-one years of hope. I have tried hard. They have meant loving my adopted country which gave me the privilege of citizenship. I have tried to serve my country and to prove worthy of the privilege of citizenship and the cause of humanity. As to what I may have been able to accomplish, I cannot say. But to me nothing is worth while, no life is worth living, except for the service you can give to the cause of humanity.

What a wonderful sermon.

What an inspiration these simple sentences contain.

It is refreshing, in these days of so much selfish ambition, to contemplate this brief summing up of values from a long span of life, an immigrant's wholesome vision of America and his noble efforts to live his life as an integral part in that scheme of human emancipation which America has evolved.

What nobler heritage can anyone leave behind, when the soul departs, than the deeds of service, unselfishly rendered, indelibly written into the history of the nation?

What an atonement for alien inequity is the life of the immigrant Samuel Gompers?

What a splendid acquisition to this land of emancipated ideals in political government?

A veritable fortress against reactionary and demagogic radicalism was this naturalized citizen—Samuel Gompers.

A giant spirit of altruism, loyalty and service was this man of small physical stature and build, who in boyhood was made to think that because of his almost diminutive size he could not accomplish any greater life task than roll tobacco leaves into cigars.

He never looked down upon his humble trade. It was honest labor, and while he rose to a commanding