

## “---ABS’LU’LY ’NENTIRELY RENOUNCE ’NABJURE---”

### *Hyphenated Americans Might Not Be So Half-Hearted in Their Americanism if America Were a Little More Whole-Hearted in Welcoming Them to Citizenship—Not Even a Flag in the Naturalization Court*

By DEEMS TAYLOR



A WITNESS.

upon your breast the emblem of citizenship. Wear this badge always, and may the eagle that is on it never see you do aught of which the flag will not be proud.”

I wonder if you are thinking what I thought when I read that ritual and that pledge. It seemed to me that here was a man who knew how to make America real and vital to a new citizen, who knew well how to make the ceremony of naturalization the unforgettable moment that it should be. And I thought: If an officer of this government takes these pains to welcome a new citizen who was born here, how much more eager the government must be to greet the new citizens who have come to us from foreign countries. What is that ceremony like?

So, one Tuesday morning, I went to the second floor of the Federal Building, at the lower end of City Hall Park, to see our newly naturalized citizens of foreign birth take the oath of allegiance to the United States of America. Let me describe what I saw:

I saw a large, ugly room with a high ceiling—a courtroom, its yellow painted walls hung with oil portraits of men in judicial robes. At one end of the room was a railed-in space. Behind the rail, at a table, sat a kindly faced man wearing horn-rimmed glasses. Behind him rose the judge's bench. Here sat a man in black robes, with a stout, soothing-looking court attendant standing beside him.

Around the sides of the room and across the other end were rows of benches. Here sat the applicants for citizenship, with their friends and witnesses. Looking at these people I began to realize why ours is like no other nation on earth, and why, on the other hand, it is a little like every other nation on earth. For here sat Italians, Frenchmen, Germans, Irishmen, Poles, Swedes, Russian Jews, German Jews, negroes, Englishmen—men and women from every corner of the civilized world, gathered together to declare themselves Americans. On the whole, a modestly, even shabbily dressed crowd, and a serious crowd. It was a significant moment for these people.

It was not so serious to the people in charge. Not that they were flippant; they were just bored. As I came in, they were administering the oath of allegiance to one Samuel Kessler, a young Russian Jew.

“Hold up your right hand,” said the



“HOLD UP YOUR RIGHT HAND.”

man in horn glasses. “Do you hereby declare on oath that you absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance, mumble, mumble, for'n power or principality, mumble, mumble, mumble—Patrick Gallagher!”

Samuel Kessler looked a bit bewildered. He probably wondered what Patrick Gallagher had to do with his becoming a citizen of the United States. He may be wondering yet; for, as he did not move promptly, the bailiff touched him on the arm and waved him toward a door. Samuel Kessler had become a

citizen. After filling in a paper upstairs he would be free to vote, and to pay taxes, and do jury duty. His great moment had come and gone. Fifty years from now he can tell his grandchildren of the proud day when he stood up before a man who said: “Do you hereby declare on oath—mumble, mumble—Patrick Gallagher!”

Patrick Gallagher, as you have guessed, was not part of the oath of allegiance. He was simply the next candidate.

After him came Thomas Carrol, a

negro. He had with him two witnesses, white men.

“Hold up your right hands,” said the man in horn glasses. Up went three right arms. Down came Thomas Carrol's, pulled down by the bailiff. In fact, one of the bailiff's chief jobs seemed to be that of standing behind applicants and witnesses in order to pull their arms up or down at the proper times.

The man in horn glasses spoke again. “Doyousolemnlywearthatthetestimony subscribedbyoustruesohelpmeGod?” he observed.

The witnesses nodded.

The official turned to Thomas Carrol. Up went Thomas Carrol's right hand, hoisted by the bailiff.

“Do you hereby 'clarenoath 'tyou abs-lu'ly 'nentirely renounce 'nabjure—mumble, mumble, mumble—Virginia Marozzi!”

Out went Thomas Carrol, citizen and up came Virginia Marozzi with her two witnesses. After her came Jacques Valon, a Frenchman; Giuseppe Spolino, an Italian, and Carl Gustav Erickson, a young Swede.

“William Morris Ullman!” called the man in horn rimmed glasses. A young German Jew came forward with his three witnesses. They were sworn in, and then the official prepared to administer the oath of allegiance to William Ullman.

“Do you hereby declare 'noath that you absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance—what? Oh, no. That was the sixteenth, I think—to all foreign powers and principalities, mumble-mumble”—

I didn't quite realize, at first, what had happened. Then I knew. An officer of a Federal court had stopped halfway through administering the oath of allegiance to the United States of America in order to answer a question put to him by the bailiff.

Confound it, I'm not blaming the man! I don't blame any of the court officials. They must do their work as it is laid out for them. They must do it hurriedly, for there is much of it, and they have not sufficient time in which to do it right. No wonder they are bored. So would you be, if you had to naturalize fifty persons in one scorching August forenoon. Their government doesn't care; why should they?

I say their government doesn't care. In that room there was not one symbol that might suggest the United States of



THE BAILIFF.

America. There was not even an American flag. One thing, though, the government did do. It set its prospective citizens a singularly bad example in the way of obedience to law. This was a Federal District Court, and, as such, was naturally without the jurisdiction of local ordinances. So the United States government calmly violated a stringent law of New York State. It kept a water cooler in a public place without providing individual drinking cups. There was one tumbler, bountifully decorated with thumb-prints. I was thirsty, but I did not drink out of that tumbler. I had seen some of the people who had used it. I try to be democratic, but I could not use that tumbler.

In the lives of all of us there are two supreme crises—two events predestined and inevitable: the day we are born and the day we die. These new citizens had chosen to add a third great moment, not inevitable, perhaps, but deeply significant. For what is naturalization but a voluntary rebirth, the renunciation of an old life and the choosing of a new? In that moment a man says: “Though I was born in another country I am not of that country. The things for which it stands are not the things that I desire most. And so I choose this as my native land; here is freedom; here are my ideals!” It is as though a man should choose for himself a new mother.

How many men make that choice lightly? Not many, I think. What of yourself? Suppose you found that the United States no longer stood for the ideals that meant everything to you; suppose you decided to renounce allegiance to this country and become the citizen of another. Would you come to that decision without thought and without regrets? Do you think that such a decision costs a man nothing?

These men and women who take our oath of allegiance are doing what we naturally consider a fine and commendable thing. It is the highest compliment they could pay us. But do not forget that to thousands of men and women in Europe they are committing an act that is very like treason. And these new citizens know that.

They are not altogether happy as they take the oath. They are at the crossroads. They may have lost their love for the country they have left; but they do not love ours—yet. They approve of it, they admire it. It is for us to make them love it, to make them revere the flag that is its symbol.

And what are we to give them? What do we give them? Is this to be our welcome, the memory we would have them carry away of their first moment as Americans—this hurried gabbling of meaningless words, this scramble through a perfunctory ritual that lacks even the poor dignity of a grammar school commencement?

The people we call hyphenated Americans are in the wrong, of course. They have no business to become American citizens and renounce allegiance to another country if they do not intend to make that renunciation complete and permanent. But perhaps they would not be so half-hearted in their Americanism



OURS IS LIKE NO OTHER NATION AND A LITTLE LIKE EVERY NATION.

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NOT LONG ago the government decided to admit some American Indians to citizenship. Instead of being wards of the nation, living by sufferance on a government reservation, these picked Indians were to be given title to their lands and were to be made voters and taxpayers.

The problem of naturalization was a bit delicate. It is difficult to know just how to go about “naturalizing” a man whose ancestors were robbed by your ancestors of the land you purpose to give him and tax him for. The simplest way would have been to give the Indians a paper, or something, and let it go at that. But our present Secretary of the Interior happens to be Franklin K. Lane, and Mr. Lane is an extraordinary being—a public official with an imagination.

What he did was to write a special ceremony and ritual for the occasion, and then travel out to the reservation to conduct the ceremony in person. Here it is:

The Secretary stands before one of the candidates.

“Joseph T. Cook, what was your Indian name?”

“Tunkansapa,” answers the Indian.

“Tunkansapa, I hand you a bow and arrow. Take this bow and shoot the arrow.”

The Indian does so.

“Tunkansapa, you have shot your last arrow. That means that you are no longer to live the life of an Indian. You are from this day forward to live the life of the white man. But you may keep that arrow. It will be to you a symbol of your noble race and of the pride you may feel that you come from the first of all Americans.”

The Secretary now addresses Tunkansapa by his white name:

“Joseph T. Cook, take in your hands this plough.” Cook does so. “This act means that you have chosen to live the life of the white man. The white man lives by work. From the earth we must all get our living, and the earth will not yield unless man pours upon it the sweat of his brow.

“Joseph T. Cook, I give you a purse. It will always say to you that the money you gain must be wisely kept. The wise man saves his money, so that when the sun does not smile and the grass does not grow he will not starve.”

Mr. Lane now takes up the American flag. He and the Indian hold it together.

“I give into your hands the flag of your country. This is the only flag you ever will have. It is the flag of free men, the flag of a hundred million free men and women, of whom you are now one. That flag has a request to make of you. Joseph T. Cook, that you repeat these words.”

Cook then repeats the following after Mr. Lane:

“Forasmuch as the President has said that I am worthy to be a citizen of the United States, I now promise this flag that I will give my hands, my head, and my heart to the doing of all that will make me a true American citizen.”

The Secretary then takes up a badge upon which is the American eagle, with the national colors, and, pinning it upon the Indian's breast, speaks as follows: “And now, beneath this flag, I place