

Our All-American Aliens

By JEANNETTE PHILLIPS GIBBS

FEW people realize that there is in this country a group of individuals born here of native stock, many of whom have never left the shores of the U. S. A., even for a Cook's tour, and who are, nevertheless, aliens. They are classified as such in the census returns. They cannot vote. They cannot take the civil service examinations. They cannot fill municipal, State or Federal positions. If they left this country it might be difficult for them to return. Some of them may not have moved from the village of their birth. They are indeed as American as the President himself, and yet overnight they have become German, Austrian, English, Russian, Italian, French or Swedish.

Of the State which claims them as subjects they are utterly ignorant. Give them a public school geography, they might point out their new fatherland as a red, green or yellow area on the map of Europe. But if they were suddenly dropped into this allotted piece of patchwork they would be unable to buy a postage stamp or ask their way to the nearest railroad station. The language which they speak is American. H. L. Mencken himself would be forced to admit it. Their photographs would make better illustrations for a book on New England than for a book on the problem of the alien.

These aliens are all women. Their loss of citizenship is explained by the one word—marriage. Our naturalization act, passed in 1907, provides that any woman who marries an alien ceases to be a citizen of the United States and assumes the nationality of her husband. It doesn't make any difference that she continues her residence in this country. The only way for her to regain her citizenship is for her husband to take out papers and become naturalized. Of her own volition there is no way in which she can compete with the situation. She cannot be naturalized independently. The only thing she can do is to try and persuade her husband to transfer his allegiance from the country of his birth to the country of his choice. This is tantamount to allowing her only the so-called indirect method whose efficiency the anti-suffrage person has always propounded.

It is not her sex that is the handicap, but her status as a married woman—a survival of the old common law theory of the unity of husband and wife, which has been an obstacle in the path of women's progress for so many centuries. Many of these husbands, although intending to live here permanently, are either willfully negligent or sentimentally unwilling to become naturalized, even though their children, being born here, become citizens of the country which refuses to recognize their mothers.

It is not merely the ethical value of citizenship which is the *casus belli*. These women are affected in their ordinary everyday lives. There was a woman, for instance, who was brought up in New England. She married a Scotchman permanently resident in the United States. Money to them was a serious consideration. The woman's earnings as a school teacher were needed to make both ends meet. Aliens, however, are not allowed to teach school in the city where she lived, and, although she had held the position for several years, she was immediately dismissed. Possibly they lived happily ever after, but their expense account certainly had to be readjusted. In a lower stratum of society she would equally have lost her job as a scrub-woman in a city building if she had married a British porter—even an Irish one.

A great deal of talk has been made on the subject of a man's loving his career first and his wife second. Isn't it almost time that a woman shall lead the way in showing that she can love her husband and her career equally, more especially as nowadays, while a husband is a matter of luck, a career is a matter of preparation and determination? A husband is said by many to be a handicap to a career, but a husband who robs a woman of her citizenship places her under an additional han-

dicap. A girl friend of mine had made a success and a reputation for herself as a lawyer in one of the New England States. She married a Canadian and moved to New York. She cannot be admitted to the New York bar because she is an alien.

A San Francisco woman was faced with a similar problem when she married a resident Britisher. She found that she had lost her vote. She wanted it and was more persistent than the average woman who for generations has submitted to the handicaps of sex. So she brought legal proceedings against the Board of Election Commissioners in San Francisco to compel them to put her name back on the list of qualified voters. Her demand was refused in the lower courts. This did not affect her courage. She took her case before the Supreme Court of the United States.

She claimed that the Naturalization act of 1907 referred only to those women who went abroad to live, that they lost their citizenship, but that it could not apply to women continuing to reside here. The Supreme Court decided that this contention was futile. She also urged that the act was invalid, unconstitutional, since it took away her citizenship without her consent and that her citizenship was a right and privilege of which she could not be deprived. The Supreme Court held that she gave up her citizenship voluntarily by marrying an alien, that the marriage in itself was a voluntary act of expatriation. A Supreme Court decision is always an ending, happy or unhappy, to a legal story.



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There are, however, consequences even more disastrous than losing jobs, votes or law cases. War plays havoc with the American-born enemy aliens. They are between the devil and the deep sea. They are suspected of being on the wrong side of the fight by both sides. Their property is taken over by the alien property custodian. Their movements are watched. They are suddenly suspected and disliked in the land of their birth, in the only country whose language and customs they

know, even if they are not herded into an internment camp.

This condition is nothing short of Gilbertian. Why should not women have the same right as men in regard to citizenship, namely, the right of choice? Already nine bills have been introduced before Congress providing for the independent citizenship of women. Seven of them have failed. The eighth and ninth are at the moment of writing before the Committee on Immigration. The eighth was introduced by Mr. Curtis

of Kansas in the Senate. It is a short bill dealing exclusively with the question, while the ninth, introduced by Mr. Johnson of Washington in the House, incorporates the substance of the Curtis bill in a longer bill dealing with other naturalization problems. Canada and Australia have already given independent citizenship to women. We, however, are welcoming foreigners and adopting them legally, at the same time closing the door upon daughters of our own flesh and blood.