

Palangisler 12^{te} September 1914

There must be no nonsense about the answer to this question. One of the most significant avowals in The Register correspondence columns this week is the declaration by a well-known citizen of German descent in Adelaide that—in substance—he would continue to be a loyal and patriotic naturalized British subject with full voting rights and other privileges of citizenship during times of peace, but that in the event of a German invasion of Australia he would rather blow his brains out than help Australia—or, of course, hinder Germany—in an attack by Germans on Australia. His exact words are—“Before I would take up arms against the country of my birth I would rather put a bullet through my head.” Emphatically, this sort of thing will not do. If one could apply to such a serious matter a flippant quotation, one might cite this extraordinary attitude as an exemplification of the old couplet—“How happy could I be with either, were t’other dear charmer away;” but a great deal more than that is involved in the admission just quoted. More appropriate in relation to it is an assurance which has the highest possible sanction—“No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other.” All due allowance should be made for a correspondent who is somewhat prone to fanciful and rhetorical embroideries of his statements, and there is no need to impute motives; but yet withal a decidedly unpleasant and unrestful impression remains.

It is necessary, especially in a time of national crisis, that naturalized Britons should reflect seriously upon their obligations as well as their privileges. Naturalization was never intended to be and is not a one-sided bargain, or a fine-weather agreement; and, in its interpretation in application to any individual, the nation which

grants to a foreigner the great honour of its unfettered citizenship does so with a clearly obvious understanding that it is given and accepted in the spirit of the declaration—"He that is not with me in the day of crucial test is against me." Supposing that Germans were to attempt a landing on our coast and any citizen, naturalized or British-born, were found positively assisting the invader, that citizen would be shot or hanged as a traitor to his country; and negative aid differs only in degree from direct help. In the case under consideration a citizen who has had military experience, and who is particularly shrewd and resourceful, has definitely implied that he would do nothing to hinder a German enemy—that is necessarily involved in the statement that he would not resist the Germans, but "would remain neutral in the strictest sense of the word."

While the pressing trouble lasted this naturalized Briton—who, in spite of all temptations to continue to be a foreigner, became an Englishman—would allow others to defend himself and his Australian family; and, if the Austral-Britons won a victory, he would share in it and resume his business peacefully and prosperously under the protection of the flag for which he declined to fight. If the Germans vanquished the Austral-Britons—well, one has no information on which to base a conclusion, but it is fair to assume that his non-intervention would not be used against him. If, accepting the other alternative offered, this halting-between-two-opinions Ger-Brit-man-on committed suicide, he would really be killing a man who, having taken an oath of allegiance to the King of Great Britain, was under an honourable obligation to fight and die for Great Britain—not to die in preference to fighting for it.

Gentlemen who adopt and act upon such views should have powerfully impressed upon them the homely fact that a man cannot eat his cake and have it. They will not be permitted to be half-Briton and semi-foreigner. They must be one or the other. Naturalization does not place them in a better position than that occupied by the British-born. The mere idea of such a thing would be absurd, even if the naturalization paper itself did not expressly include the condition, as it does. This community, while sympathizing reasonably with native-land sentiments, does not want, and cannot tolerate, anybody who would make a convenience of it, especially any one who was not so patriotically devoted to his native country in time of peace as to be unable calmly to strike his name off the list of its sons. No matter how sincere they are—no matter how harmless so far as intention is concerned—half-and-half people are, if only through their influence, a source of disaffection and of danger. If they could not be whole-hearted, they should never have sworn to be British citizens by naturalization.

In the immediate outlook the pity is that by their indiscreet assertions (which, however, are better freely expressed than masked) such lukewarm Laodicean men as the one who has caused such a painful sensation this week convey to true-blue and loyal-in-war-as-well-as-in-peace Britons the impression that the sentiments are those of naturalized Germans generally in South Australia. If they were, the matter would have to be handled promptly and decisively. There is abundant evidence to prove that they are not, and that they would indignantly be repudiated by an overwhelming majority who scorn piebald citizenship; and when they become naturalized do so for better and for worse, if worse there must be, and not merely as an acceptance of privileges with no obligations

In this connection a pleasant final reflection is the knowledge that many stalwart soldiers of German descent are among the expeditionary force which may by-and-by call upon the Kaiser in Berlin. The British-born sympathize with and honour the wholly and practically loyal naturalized Germans, and are the prouder of them in proportion to the sacrifice which their sworn fealty to their adopted country involves; and these would be the first to admit that there is not room for two flags in Australia.
