

EDITORIAL

## WHERE SENATOR O'GORMAN SLIPPED.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**O**N April 18, the new immigration bill with the educational test amendment being before the Senate, the Junior Senator for New York, James A. O'Gorman, declared his unqualified opposition to the exclusion of immigrants on the ground of illiteracy.

The opposition was well founded.

Illiteracy is but one of the many manifestations of social tyranny. Where illiteracy flourishes it will be found accompanied with other earmarks of class-rule, and class despotism. The battle that Francisco Ferrer waged upon illiteracy in Spain, tells the story quite clearly. His assassination by a ruling class that bred illiteracy, as one of its handmaids for Labor exploitation, only underscores the fact. To open the gates of America to the politically oppressed of all nations, and to shut the same gates in the face of those victims of the identical oppression whose mental capabilities also have been shackled, shackled by illiteracy, is to put a premium upon oppression when complete. It is tantamount to saying: "If you European and other nations oppress your peoples by half only, if you oppress them only politically, then we shall receive them with open arms, and give them a chance to liberate themselves. But if you do the job 'brown'; if you carry out your system of oppression so far as to shackle their minds with illiteracy, then we shall put a premium upon your oppression; we shall join you; we shall refuse admission to them; and thereby keep them where they will have no chance to cast off that, the yoke of illiteracy." Senator O'Gorman did well in standing up against the illiteracy clause.

Less felicitous was the Senator when he announced his favoring a "character," or "morality" qualification for the immigrants, and when he closed, saying: "Impose any character test, and it will have my support."

Senator O'Gorman was a Judge; a distinguished Judge. He is now a legislator to-boot. Sufficient unto the day are the imperfections of language. The wise

legislator, especially if he has judicial experience, will cultivate preciseness of expression. Can anything be less precise, can any term be looser than the word “character,” or “morality,” as tests?

An immoral person is a social leper. But are all people who have been considered “social lepers,” in the history of man really immoral? In the older day of the Roman empire the Christian was considered a “moral leper,” and frequently was he tied to a pole, smeared with tar, set fire to, and burned into a “living torch.”

Later, about a thousand years later, the Protestant, who, as the “religious” spokesman of the bourgeois revolution, sought and succeeded to break the physical and mental shackles of feudal despotism, was pronounced a “social leper”; and, whenever caught, he was “passed over to the secular arm,” to be quartered, or broken on the rack, or burned at the stake.

In our own days, in many a quarter, the Socialist is considered a “moral leper.” Did not Father John L. Belford of the Church of the Nativity in Brooklyn, in this very year’s April number of his parish paper *Nativity Mentor*, say: “He (the Socialist) is more dangerous than cholera or small pox—yes, he is the mad dog of society, and should be silenced if need be by a bullet”? Is the test of “character” or “morality,” to be applied to them also?

There is such a thing as “immorality.” Nobody doubts that a swindler, a rapist, a forger, a burglar, etc., etc., are immoral. The danger lies in the stretching of a word beyond its legitimate sphere. The historic instances just touched upon illustrate the danger. “Morality,” “character,” are terms too loose for “tests,” especially in legislation. There is no danger that swindlers will slip through. The test must be specific. Then it is understood. Loose words, unspecified, are elastic sheets under which more might be covered than is at first and generally understood—under which everything might be covered that the holder or applier of the sheet chooses. When it comes to that, law ceases to be law, and becomes the will {of} an individual. It becomes dogma.

Senator O’Gorman slipped there.

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