"A SINGLE LEAF"

For the anniversary issue on the founding of the Tule Lake Project, the Editor has asked me to write an article on the social background of the Pacific Coast Japanese from the "school boy" Japanese to the present day. I accepted the job gladly, thinking that it would be an interesting research. I read up on the history of Japanese and their problems on the Pacific Coast, and even went through the voluminous reports and transcriptions of the Tolan committee hearings. And now the job seems appalling. I have decided that I am not a scholar after all, but would much rather be a poet. From sheer laziness I prefer to insinuate the forest from speculating on a single leaf, which is the methodology of the poet, rather than to present the forest by gathering statistics on the number and variety of leaves per square mile which is the methodology of the scholar.

This particular leaf refers to myself, a nisei, who lived on the Pacific Coast, now living in a relocation center. The forest is all of us Japanese who were living on the Pacific Coast. I shall try to tell about myself, how I lived, how I thought. It is impossible that this particular person is typical of all the

nisei who lived up and down the coast from San Diego to Bellingham, in the fishing villages, in the city apartment houses, on the farms, in sawmill camps. It is hoped, however, that from the account of a single person, one may get an idea of the vast forest which we are a part.

"LAND LAW"

The America that I know is the Pacific Northwest, the farmlands of the Puget Sound region. The first impressions of childhood are those of clinking harness as father drove his team early in the morning, to clear the land going out with his rumbling sledge loaded with dynamite and chain to snag out the roots. I remember the dull blasts, the huge piles of stumps burning, the digging of endless ditches through the black muck; the first days in the country schoolhouse, munching peanut butter sandwiches, playing cop and robber; the teacher who used to play the organ with such fervor as we used to sing "Good Morning to You!" Childhood days in retrospect seem full of peace and happiness, but there was one thing which I remember as a dark shadow over my childhood and youth. In those days there was a word I remember my parents using in hushed voices, often I would hear it while half asleep and a vague unhappiness would trouble me. "Tochi-ho"--was the word; "Land Law".

What "Tochi-ho" meant I was to realize as I grew older. For several years after the passage of the alien land law, my father went to work for a dairy, doing the team work and raising cow feed for the corporation. However, he was never happy working for someone else, and was talking about the "futureless job". Then one spring he was given a half an acre on which to grow lettuce. My mother took care of it, and the crop was sold at a good price. Next spring we were given another acre, this time mother grew peas, and there was a bountiful crop and a good price. Gradually father worked less and less for the dairy, and more and more for the family, and it was in this way we extended our precarious independence. No money, however, ever came directly to us, for the "land law" prohibited Japanese aliens from leasing land or buying land for agricultural purposes, so that we were not supposed to be "farming", but "working". The crop was all sold by someone else, and we kept a diligent record of the time spent working on the farm.

It was a strange and difficult decade for the Japanese farm-

ing pretty sure that he would not run afoul of the "land law". In schools, or when it was necessary to fill out occupational blanks, we would swallow our pride and write "farm laborers" when asked about our parent's occupation. Gradually, however, the specter of the "land law" dissolved from the consciousness of the Japanese community. It was not that the law was changed, but rather that the children became citizens of age, citizens with rights to be like anyone else, first here, then there, then at an accelerated rate throughout the valley, until most of the families were to farm the land again. Many nisei became good farmers, many began to take active part in the cooperatives, many began to go into the shipping business, some for private shippers, others working for the cooperatives. Twenty years after the enactment of the alien land law, no one paid any attention to it, least of all the white Americans, for seeing the orderly rows of crops that filled the valley, the vegetables and berries that were so plentiful, the thousands from the towns and cities who found employment as harvesters in the summer, they knew where the prosperity of the valley lay.

As we grew older along with the dying of the "Land Law", our consciousness as "Japanese", a racial entity, grew less and less. As most Japanese families, we were intensely "neighbor conscious". There is a Japanese saying "The neighbor next door--more than the brother far away"--meaning that the man next door is much more important than any kin who may be far away. It might seem a strange philosophy to a people to whom family is so important, but when considered thoughtfully, it is but a manifestation of the intense social consciousness of the Japanese.

Whatever the principles may be, we were always close to our American neighbors. The first of the vegetables would go to our neighbors, they in turn would bring their venison from their hunting trips and trout from their fishing trips. At Christmas, the same Santa Claus would visit both houses. The children would go Easter Egg hunting together. Mother would exchange recipes. At school as we grew older, there was less and less consciousness of race, progressing together we made new friends, and through clubs and Boy Scout troops, and Hi-Y, through the fellowship of learning algebra and suffering Julius Caesar together, we became personalities, rather than Japanese or "hakujin". Because of intelligent and high-minded teachers, no one felt "out" of any class room discussions.

The social life of our parents, however, was to have a different direction. In spite of the neighborly friendliness with everyone, still the difference in the backgrounds and the barrier of the English language haltingly used kept them from being wholly satisfied. They wanted their friends, especially those from the same "ken", or province from which they came, so that they could talk of their boyhood, of the rivers and villages that they had known together in their youth.

When two old men get together, their provincial dialects would come forth, so that an understanding listener could tell immediately from which province these men had come. Thus were born the "Kenjin Kai's" (Provincial Clubs) so maligned in the American press as some mysterious power to control the members in a political--way--which in reality were semi-formal groups of people from the same locality, whose bonds were common childhood. It could well be imagined that New Yorker meeting another New Yorker on the other side of the Atlantic would have a great deal to talk about in common.

"NIHONJIN KAI"

The unique institution of the first generation Japanese, however, was the Japanese Association. It was founded wherever Japanese were found in numbers. Historically it was first founded in San Francisco in 1900 when during an outbreak of Bubonic Plague, all Orientals, both men and women, were subjected to a violent form of injection in public, and the Japanese as a group protested to the municipal Health officers against the practices. This is not to say that the Japanese Associations stem from this occasion, but the incident serves to illustrate the general characteristics and the raison d'etre of the organization. Fundamentally it is not a social organization. Rather it acts as a clearing house for the problems that arise to any racial minority, especially with a language handicap.

A list of the activities of the Japanese Association of Auburn, Washington during the last several years would be illuminating as to its character. When in 1940, the new income tax laws went into effect, bringing into the fold of income tax payers many Japanese farmers who had never had an income large enough to be familiar with income tax forms, to whom the terms Capital investment, depreciation, non-exemption, were difficult, it was the Japanese Association which took the initiative in bringing to-

gether many farmers and with the aid of the nisei from the Japanese American Citizens League explained to them the working of the complicated tax forms. When the nisei soldiers began to be drafted into the army, it was the Japanese Association which sponsored banquets and gifts for the departing soldiers as is appropriate to the occasion.

Another activity is the sponsoring of the New Year's Day meetings, to which all the residents of the district came to exchange greetings, abolishing sensibly the old custom of "Wenshi", of going from one house to another until by the time the fourth house is reached, one is necessarily intoxicated from the obligatory cups.

The Japanese Associations of the Pacific Northwest were instrumental in holding a series of annual conferences for the nisei farmers, securing for the lectures and discussions specialists from the State Department of Agriculture and from the State College of Washington. The delegates were asked to bring back to their respective districts notes and suggestions to be reported to the local association meeting. Dearest to the heart of the youngsters was the annual Japanese Picnic, looked forward to as an institution of many decades' standing. One can see from the foregoing activities that the Japanese Associations has its closest counterpart in the Chamber of Commerce of the American civic life. Gradually of late, its powers and necessity for its existence have been waning, to be replaced by the younger people's groups.

In passing, it must be said that it was the existence of the Association with its group entity, with its ponderous threat of group disapproval which was largely responsible for the low crime record of the young Japanese immigrants in their younger days.

THE NISEI WORLD

Like the Japanese Associations, the Japanese Language school was a distinctly issei-sponsored institution. There are a variety of reasons for their establishment in America. First there is the pride that most first generation Japanese feel in their Oriental culture. To many parents, the thought that their children should be unable to read or write in the language of their parents was unthinkable. Coupled too with the meagerness of American literature on Oriental matters, with the richness of the heritage of culture that could be opened with this key of language, it is little surprising that parents insisted upon the

children learning to read and write the Chinese characters.

Secondly, there was the vocational consideration. As the nisei grew up, more and more it was realized that position in American firms were closed to them, and that the only firms which would employ the second generation Japanese were the Japanese firms or American firms doing business with the Japanese, and that they were employed on the basis of their knowledge of the Japanese language. Consequently, there was a tremendous interest in the study of the Japanese language when it was felt that the success in life seemed to depend on whether or not the second generation could read and write in the language of their parents. It is to be seen that the difficulties were tremendous, and the results achieved fall far short of expectations.

There is another world in which we lived, the nisei world. This, too, was a world full of groups and institutions. The first group for the young people was the Japanese Young People's Society, an all-inclusive group for the young people in their teens. It had been sponsored by the Japanese Association to educate us socially, not in the sense of mingling together, but rather as a medium through which we would begin to feel our responsibility as young men and women. That was the ideal conceived by the elders. The members' ideals were quite different. We had as our leader a liberal intelligent young man who was nisei, and we had the privilege of listening to him talk about the structure of Japanese language, about the history of Oriental culture; we learned to work together with the girls in preparing for parties and banquets.

On rare occasians we went to theaters together. We did not quite reach the stage of dancing until several years later. However, games such as drop-the-handkerchief, winkum, hot potato, were thrilling enough. Several times the Japanese Association received protests from outraged people who had heard terrible stories of behavior, claiming this creation of the Association to be a moral disgrace to the Au-

burn community.

Many demands were made that the group be divided into girls' and boys' groups, and that they meet separately as is proper. However, our leader stuck it out, and Japanese Young People's Society survived its first trial by rumor.

NISEI GROUPS FLOURISH

As the nisei grew more numerous, more and more groups began to be formed. First the Christian young people formed a group known as the Auburn Christian Fellowship, its members generally composed of the children of the few Christian families in the district. Then the Buddhist young people were organized into the YMBA and the YWBA. There was a girls' club organized known as the Lioness Club, why so named, I never found out.

There were, in addition, many athletic teams, baseball in the spring, basketball in the winter, sponsored by the Young People's Society. At one time there were five teams in existence in our community. The teams would play on the high school grounds or in the high school gym. Similar teams were organized in the communities throughout the valley, and of course in Seattle, where there were many teams with hoary traditions dating back more than two decades. In addition there were Judo groups, and Kendo groups.

The most important group however, was the JACL, or the Japanese American Citizen's League, a group for the nisei of the voting age, to study civic matters of interest to the nisei, with something of the character of the Japanese Association, but American in ideals. The Japanese American Citizen's League was national in scope, and the biennial conventions held in the typical American style were large affairs with mayors present, sight-seeing tours, sayonara balls in the best hotels.

Such then were the three worlds in which we lived: the world of the America of everyday, with no differentiation from the Caucasian Americans, the world of the nisei, the world of the first generation Japanese. The correctly integrated life of a healthy minded nisei lay in the proper balancing and coordinating of the three worlds. Gradually, of course, the power and the influence of the last-named is waning. To many nisei who have founded independent homes, the influence of the issei world is almost nonexistent. For them the problem is the proper balancing of the world of their nisei friends, and the world of American in general in their proper perspective.

It must be admitted, of course that the division of the social world into nisei, issei, and American classification is purely academic. Who is to say whether going to play with a nisei team in a competition with a local commercial team is a nisei or an American activity? Each activity may not fall into the correct category, but they do show the general character of our overlapping worlds. It may be illuminating to show the activity of a person for a given week to see how a nisei may divide his time among the different worlds in which he lives.

INTEGRATION OF LIFE

I lived on a farm at the edge of a small town of a population of 4,000. Daytime activities, of course, were wholly devoted to the farm work. In the free time in the evening, let us see how this person, who was myself, spent his time. Let us begin with Monday: Monday was the night on which the local camera club met, of which I was a member. This may be called a purely American activity, at least as far as the group and atmosphere went. This group met at various members homes, and the wise cracks, the refreshments, the topics of conversation were wholly American. Tuesday nights were Judo nights. One might say that these were wholly nisei-issei nights, one's companions were wholly nisei, but the activity taught was the ancient courtesies and skills of Kodokwan.

Wednesday night was choir practice. This might be called a wholly American night. The choir was that of the Methodist Church, and I was accepted into this group as a useful if not a thoroughly reliable bass. Thursday night was Judo night again. Friday may be a 4-H club meeting. This might be called an anomalous nisei-American world. The group was wholly composed of the Japanese boys. The 4-H club of Auburn, the ideology, and materials furnished from the county agent's office were nothing if not American: the 4-H creeds, the materials on how to construct a cold frame, how to mix fertilizers, how to keep a farm record.

Saturday might be free, and one might go to the public library to browse around and talk with others who have come for the same purpose. Or one might go to a basketball game to watch the local team play against another. In this case it would be a purely nisei night. On Sunday evening one always spent a wholly nisei night, meeting with other nisei in the group which met in the Salvation Army Hall, a group of about 20. Other nisei might go bowling,

for which there were good facilities in our town, the nisei formed teams which competed against the commercial and fraternal teams of the town.

Sometimes a traveling Japanese film showman would come. Those nights would be wholly Japanese. Girls might go to learn Japanese flower arrangement from a teacher who made a trip out to the country once a week. This, too, would be a wholly Japanese evening.

One can see the variety and the richness of a life possible to a nisei, and one can realize that living in a world of a racial minority could be an actual asset, and not a liability. As this minute account of a week is given, one can see that there is nothing that cannot be understood about the life of a nisei if one but takes the trouble to imagine how such a life would be.

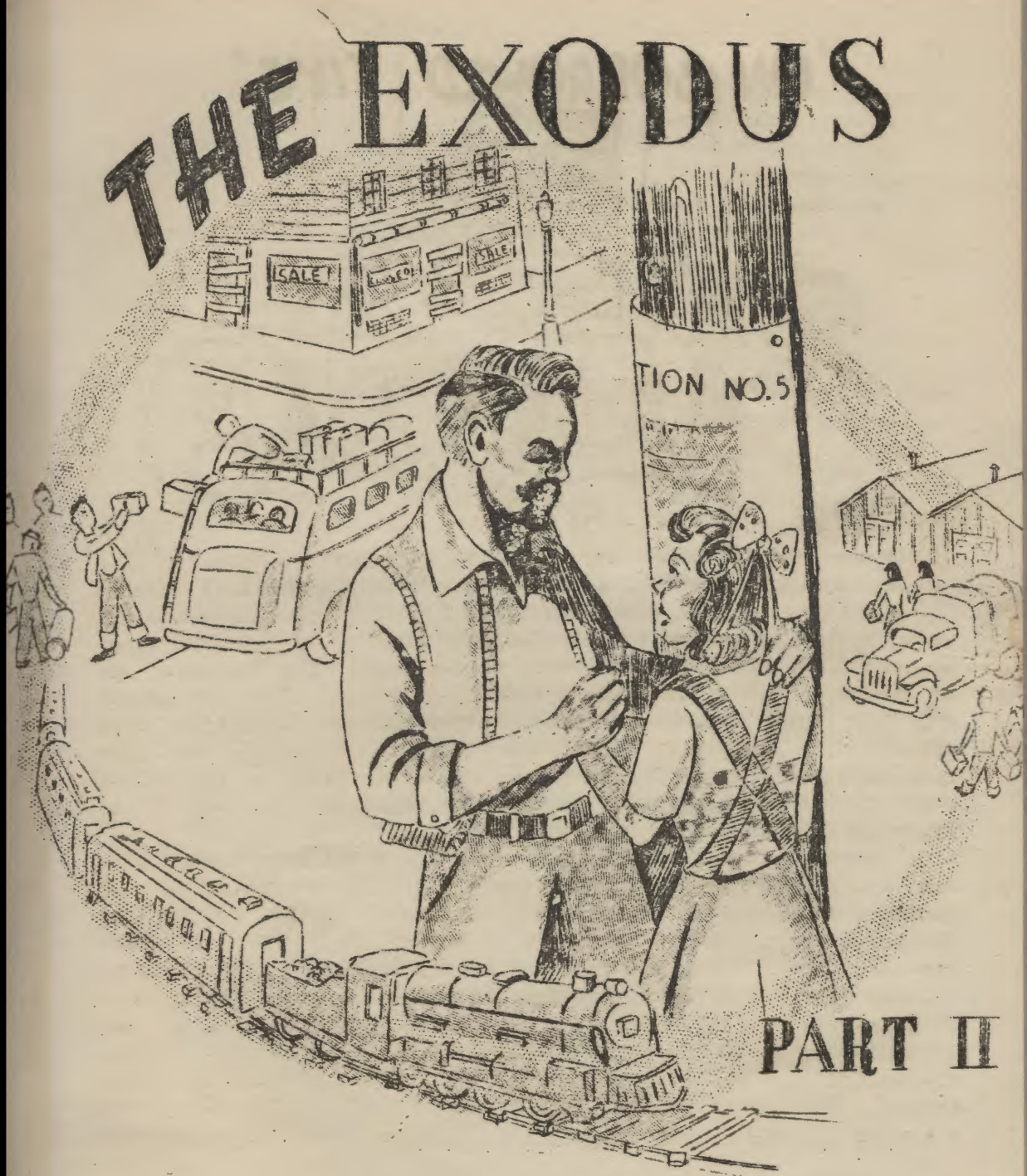
Now in closing to touch briefly upon the social aspects of the life in these relocation camps. Life within these camps is not in any sense a black hole of frustration as many might think, nor on the other hand, a light-hearted round of depraved idle pleasures as some congressmen seem to think. There is food enough to sustain life decently; if one is ambitious one can learn many skills, learn the English language if one be deficient in it; there is work enough for everyone, and to many college trained individuals, this is often the first opportunity to exercise their knowledge actively in the community's behalf.

The evils lie in something more subtle than physical privations. It lies more in that something essential is missing from our lives. No matter how insulated a person was psychologically, yet he walked the streets or the roads of the country side and saw other human beings. Here the cutting off of self is complete. The barbed wire with its watch tower is a real and actual demarcation line between two real worlds. It cuts into the efforts toward real integration of life for which the nisei has been so hungry, the successful balancing of our lives of all the elements of the three worlds of which he is a part.

The primary problem is that of keeping alive in the residents the sense that they are a part of the national effort. The most devastating effect upon a human soul is not hatred but being considered not human. The only true solution to the problem of the nisei lies in solving the problem, not humanely, but in a human manner, of restoring the sense of oneness with the world at large.

--Shuji Kimura

THE EXODUS



PART II

AND THE WAR CAME

It seems now that the war came with a dramatic suddenness late on a Sunday morning, as dramatic and sudden as if it were an earthquake or a tidal wave. We feel a helplessness against wars, something akin to the helplessness that we feel toward those natural disasters. War, however, is man-made. Its beginning may be sudden, but it is a long time in building. The slow growth and the ever closer imminence of this war was experienced more directly and deeply in the months before its coming by the Japanese on the Pacific Coast than by any other group in the United States, yet paradoxically enough, we hoped and believed in its impossibility more than any other group.

I suppose that no one can say when the first step toward this war was taken. Some might say that it was the beginning of the Manchurian incident; others, the 1924 Exclusion Law, or the Versaille Treaty, or the Russo-Japanese War, or the Sino-Japanese War--one might pick any train of events and trace its course to today. It is fruitless, however, to trace the cause of an event to a previous event, for such a process is endless. I think that it would be more to the point to talk about the people themselves, the clash of their ideas and ideals, how the people feel about things. So I want to talk, not of tracing of events, but of our feelings and our hopes, how this particular person lived through