

CHRISTIAN CENTURY

Arizona's City of Exiles

By Albert W. Palmer

AS YOU RIDE along the paved highway from Phoenix to Tucson, you can see, many miles away across the valley but sharp and clear in the desert air, some straight white rows of barracks. They are on the Gila Relocation Project for Japanese who have been evacuated from California by the United States government. This war-created city in the midst of the great open spaces of southwestern Arizona is a curious and perhaps instructive social by-product of this strange and revolution-breeding war.

As you branch off on a dirt road and draw nearer to the project you come at length to a sentry box where a soldier examines your pass and waves you on. Except for this single soldier, you see no evidence of the military and no reminder of the war. On you go through several miles of land just being brought under irrigation and past groups of field workers gathering lettuce, until suddenly around a corner you face row after row of barracks standing in unrelieved angularity in the brilliant sunshine. Although they all look alike, you soon discover that they have different uses. Three are churches (two Christian, one Buddhist), one is a headquarters building, three are stores, several are schools. A little group off to one side forms a hospital unit. There is no saloon, no jail, no bus or railroad depot, no hotel, no theater!

All the buildings are the same size, approximately 20

by 100 feet, and, except for those just mentioned and the mess halls in every block, each building is divided into four large rooms of equal size. Each room shelters a family, and the normal family contains parents and children and grandparents, plus occasionally an unrelated, unattached man or woman. The rooms are scrupulously clean and are subdivided by colorful curtains into living room and bedroom spaces. Furniture, except for iron cots, has been improvised out of boxes and stray lumber with homelike ingenuity and artistry.

Outside, all buildings look alike and are set in straight geometrical blocks with the relentless regularity of typical army barracks. But everywhere the inhabitants are breaking down this grim architectural routine by adding more or less decorative porches, by planting trees, starting grass plots and building rock gardens with a feeling for growing things and skill in gardening very characteristically Japanese. Even artificial trees, made of desert roots and branches and decked out with paper cherry blossoms, and also Christmas trees of sagebrush and juniper, appear indoors. One cannot walk the streets or enter the houses of this strange city of exiles without being constantly reminded of the Japanese cultural heritage of cleanliness, artistry, love of growing things and marvelous ability in the love and control of children.

Only one building seems forbidding. It is the sentry box

up on the butte, a sharp little hill behind the camp, where the reservoir is located. It reminds one of the little guard-houses one sees on top of prison walls. Does it perchance hold a machine gun to overawe the camp? Tactfully you inquire, only to be told frankly and with enthusiasm: "Oh, that's our fire patrol. One of our boys is always up there on the lookout for fires so that he can give the alarm and call out the fire department!"

One discovers later that this city of 14,000, of whom 10,000 are American citizens and 4,000 Japanese-born aliens, is, under the project director, largely self-governing. There is a camp council of thirty-two elected by the blocks, a fire department and a committee on "internal security" which, being interpreted, means a police department. The whole setup is defined in a "charter" drawn up by the inhabitants, with some aid from the camp's legal adviser, and confirmed by the project director.

In addition to the 10,000 Japanese-Americans and 4,000 Japanese (mostly the parents or grandparents of the American citizens) there are a few—a hundred or so—Caucasians. These are the officials, social workers, some of the teachers and a few of the nurses. Note that word "Caucasian"! They are never referred to as Americans, for there are 10,000 other Americans all around them; and they are never referred to as white, which might imply assumed superiority. They are just "Caucasians." None of them has ever been to the Caucasus, and so the word Caucasian has no emotional or nationalistic overtones to disturb anybody. It seems to be a colorless, non-prejudice-creating sort of label which all concerned cheerfully accept and use.

On an Indian Reservation

How did this place, so far from everywhere in the immeasurable desert, happen to be selected? How long will this settlement last? What is its economic basis and social structure? On what terms are these people here and how will they ever get away? Questions like these tumble over one another in your mind. You ask them and get answers like these: This site was selected because it was land under government control, being part of Pima Indian reservation. While it is far from all other settlements, which is probably an advantage, in view of the inflamed anti-Japanese prejudices of a certain part of the public, it is not a hopeless desert but part of a reclamation project supplied with abundant water for irrigation from the Coolidge dam on the Gila river. (Drinking water is pumped from local wells.) Since the land is part of an Indian reservation, the Japanese are not regarded as being here permanently but only "for the duration." This seems unfortunate, for this is just the soil and climate where at least the agricultural-minded members of the Japanese group would be most happy and self-sustaining.

As to economic and social arrangements, the United States government provides basic housing and subsistence for all. Meals are served in mess halls in each block and, except for invalids and babies, no cooking takes place in the homes, which is bad for family unity and discipline. Those who are able to work in some capacity, and choose to do so, may also earn \$14 or \$16 or \$19 a month, according to the type of service rendered. This includes field

laborers, cooks, waiters, mechanics, school teachers, nurses and doctors. The highest skilled surgeon in the hospital, for example, gets \$19 a month, and there are a dozen or more doctors—only one of them a Caucasian. Most of the nurses are also Japanese evacuees, only a very few Caucasian. It is a good hospital and health conditions are excellent. Here is socialized medicine with a vengeance!

A Closed Economic System

Other conditions are equally challenging in their sociological implications. There are three stores—a shoe store, a clothing store and a general store or canteen, which sells miscellaneous articles from ice cream cones to tooth paste, but, by vote of the camp itself, no beer or whiskey. The stores are all operated on a cooperative basis for the benefit of the project. The vegetables raised in the fields are used in the kitchens and also shipped away to other relocation projects not so favorably situated for growing vegetables, but they are not sold in the open market. Caucasians and Japanese employed in the administrative staff or the schools all eat together at the headquarters mess hall where the food is probably better, or at least more in American style, than in the other mess halls. (I paid fifty cents a meal, and could do as well in Chicago!) In addition to the basic subsistence and housing there is also a modest but reasonably adequate allowance for clothing. In short, no one need be naked or hungry, almost anyone can earn \$14 to \$19 a month, but no one any more! Here you certainly have an interesting experiment in a limited form of communism, an experiment likely to be remembered and worth watching carefully as it unfolds.

This lack of contact with the free enterprise system outside is not entirely the result of free choice on the part of the management. It is due to curious correlation of three separate forces: the chambers of commerce, which do not want the camps competing in the open market; the labor unions, which do not approve products of non-union labor; and the Japanese themselves, who either fear they will be exploited or who find the forms of war industry suggested to them unattractive.

Can They Accept It?

In an attempt to avoid criticism from commercial bodies and labor unions the management in this particular project has arranged for a certain kind of war industry (to be more explicit might be to reveal a military secret!) which can operate with a minimum of factory equipment to set up shop right in the camp and employ labor at good wages. But it is very obviously and directly a war equipment industry. Having found something which the business community and the labor unions do not oppose, the question is: Will the Japanese workers themselves accept it? It seems too bad that a chance to make something of general human utility, not a part of the armament for war, could not have been offered them.

Next to this economic problem the most crucial issue in camp seems to be the proper equipment of the only police the project has without calling in soldiers from outside. This "committee on internal security," as it is called,

is a police force without any symbol of authority and equipped with no weapons but its bare hands. The War Relocation Authority, in spite of requests from the project director, refuses to allow this committee even nightsticks such as military police usually carry. If any riot occurs they are helpless, and yet such an incident, like the recent one at Mazamdar, may be telegraphed all over the country and do serious injury to the reputation of thousands of perfectly innocent Japanese. A run-of-the-mine lot of 14,000 people of any racial group is sure to contain some scoundrels and even a few real criminals. No American community expects police to control such with their bare hands. The War Relocation Authority is certainly inviting terrorization and other troubles so long as it does not allow the project director on the ground authority to equip his police force properly.

Religious Services

My own major field of interest being religion, I was especially glad to meet the six devoted, well trained ministers in this camp, and the Buddhist priest. Church services and Sunday schools are well attended. The church where I spoke had an improvised but impressive altar with cross and candles, home-made pulpit and lectern and long rows of benches. Not much decoration, but something better—every bench and floor-board had been scrubbed until it shone. One interesting item of information was that the Buddhists, unable now to get supplies from Japan, borrow Sunday school helps from their Christian brethren, adapt them and use them in their Buddhist schools. They sing lustily, "I would be true" and "Buddha Savior, pilot me"!

The public school teacher reported difficulty in teaching her class in American history about the Bill of Rights, but the ministers seemed to have no inhibitions. They listened to and eagerly discussed with me the recently issued "Christmas Manifesto," which I had a part in writing, with as keen interest and searching questions as any Caucasian ministerial group would have done.

This is dominantly a city of youth. It is the young people who are American citizens, whose school life has trained them in the democratic process and who naturally take the lead. They are clean, alert, appealing youngsters. They want to know, as all young people are asking today, what the future holds for them. Will California let them come back? Will doors of opportunity be opened for them elsewhere? Can they go on and enter into professional life as doctors, lawyers, engineers, business men, nurses, teachers? Will an effort be made to deport them all to Japan—as foreign a country to most of them as to any other Americans—or if not, will they be segregated and limited here in America? These are the questions they are asking.

What of the Future?

How long must this city continue? Until these people can be reabsorbed into the American common life. Here is a great chance for Christian groups and churches to sponsor individuals and families and invite them back into normal life by providing a job—many skills are available—or a farm. These people are clean, law-abiding, thrifty,

industrious, English-speaking, and highly appreciative of friendship and good will. This is a most appealing opportunity for practical helpfulness on the part of the Christian people of America. And, in the meantime, their major needs, not supplied by the government, are recreational equipment and books. They have more Phi Beta Kappa keys than any 14,000-town you know of!

Apart from the Japanese themselves, I met some very admirable "Caucasians." One was the project director, two were missionaries back from Japan and serving the project from the outside, two others were the trained social worker in the camp and his wife, who is in charge of public health. Most appealing of all was a doctor just home from Japan on the Gripsholm. In spite of several months of terrible solitary confinement in a Japanese prison as a suspected spy, he still loves the Japanese people and is serving them as medical inspector of the camps. Here was real Christianity in action—"love that suffereth long and is kind."

V E R S E

Mothers' Petition, 1943

MARY MOTHER, Heart Sublime,
Now we know what anguish thine
As they led your Son away
Treating him as common clay;
Now we know how deep thy cry
As they raised him up to die.

Mary Mother, join the hands
Of the mothers in all lands
In a universal prayer
Of forgiveness, not despair:
"Father, forgive them, all anew,
For they know not what they do."

HELEN M. BURGESS.

War Is a Vacuum

THIS is their god, with bombs for destruction.
This is their god, with terrible wrath
Bursting the skies, splitting the earth,
With vengeance and hate—
A god of punishment, a god of war.

But I had seen God in quiet churches,
In the silence of a home at peace.
I had seen him in love and brotherhood.
I had seen him like a lost child
Crying for home, like a lonely wanderer
From one end of the earth to the other.

I had to say:
There is only war because he is left out,
Because he has been forgotten.
War is the vacuum where God is not.
War is man separated from his God.

RAYMOND KRESENSKY.