

THE WEST COAST JAPANESE

By GRACE E. WILLS

At the commencement exercises of the University of California this spring, just four and a half months after the national disaster at Pearl Harbor, President Robert Gordon Sproul announced, "The winner of the University medal cannot be here today because his country has called him elsewhere."

The recipient of the medal was a young American citizen, born of Japanese parents, a twenty-one-year-old premedical student. He could not be present because, with others of Japanese ancestry, he had been evacuated from the military zone in which he lived and sent to one of the army's temporary Assembly Centers. Before he left college he said to friends, "It's tough to be an American imbued with the ideals of democracy and to be regarded as a potential enemy."

So feel others among the young Japanese-Americans who have lived all their lives in this country and have been educated in our schools. Many wish ardently to have a part in helping America to win the war. But at the same time they are realists and know the enormity of the defense problem which December 7 so suddenly imposed upon the federal government and upon military and naval authorities on our West Coast. If it is sheer military necessity that is evacuating them from a one hundred and fifty mile wide coastal zone (ninety-eight thousand men, women and children) they are anxious to cooperate. But in their hearts they hope that later when they arrive in a permanent Relocation Center for the "duration," there will be found a constructive contribution they can make to American life and the war effort. They will be glad if, from there some of the young men are drafted for the nation's armed forces. There are several thousand Japanese-American citizens already under arms, serving in Canada and Iceland.

Although opinions differ among Caucasian-

We are continuing our investigations of the wholesale evacuation of Japanese-Americans from their homes in the Pacific Coast region. Further facts on the situation will be printed in a forthcoming issue.

Americans regarding the necessity for so complete an evacuation, and regarding the constitutional question involved in moving American citizens, all groups are agreed that only the military authorities have all the data upon which to base such a serious decision. Granted the neces-

sity, it had to be accomplished as speedily as possible to leave the armed forces free for their special job of active defense of the nation. The problems of organization were great before thousands of families could be lifted from their homes and transported to the Assembly Centers. Suitable sites, publicly owned and capable of accommodating a minimum of five thousand persons, had to be prepared in but a few weeks. Army engineers and construction workers did a magnificent job. Sociologists and social workers aided the army in every way possible in the tremendous undertaking. They worked with the administration day and night, planning such details of the evacuation as touched their fields of service. The responsibility and organization were the army's but the concentration and devotion of these men and women to the job to be done contributed inestimably to the efficiency of the first mass *civilian* evacuation in America's history, for which the nation had neither previous experience nor trained personnel.

In any country there are some citizens who for religious or idealistic reasons find it hard to reconcile themselves to the paradoxes, the inherent violence, of war. They guard jealously the values of the human spirit. On the Coast some of them for years have been close to the young Japanese-American citizens in churches, in colleges, in citizenship clubs. It is indeed a tribute when such as they have nothing but praise for the kindness, the patience, the humanity, with which the army performed its gigantic task of moving the evacuees. One said, "The soldiers, far more than some of the rest of us, never forgot the fact that most of the evacuees are American citizens."

In the evacuations, family units have been kept together as the Japanese wished. Distributed among the population of these temporary centers are various social groupings. Among these are

GRACE E. WILLS, after four years in Hawaii studying the life of the islands, is now living in California, where she collected the data for the present article.

the *Issei*, or aliens born in Japan, those who are not considered a danger to the safety of the country. (The dangerous ones were interned right after Pearl Harbor.) Of the inner allegiance of all of these none can be certain, but many are simple, hard-working folk who have lived in this country for forty years and more, and in whom is no guile. Their pastors and their Caucasian neighbors testify to that. Their devotion is to their American children, and they regard America as their friend. Japan's action on December 7 made them sick at heart. A few just like these committed suicide for shame. Said the note of one: "Japan goes greatly wrong. I cannot face my good friend America, so I have to die."

There are elderly scholars also among these uprooted *Issei*, and artists and small business men. Perhaps the change is most difficult for them. They have no more resilience of youth.

Among the young American citizens is a small group known as the *Kibei*. Although born in America, they have spent some time in Japan, having been sent by their parents as a rule, for educational or business purposes. This group has presumably been exposed to propaganda and influence. Some are sympathetic to Japan. But many cases are known of *Kibei* who became even more appreciative of their American citizenship after what they saw while in Japan.

The third and largest group is the *Nisei*, who have never been to the country of their parents. Apart from their features they are much like all other young Americans, with the same variations in intellectual ability, the same reactions and sensitivities, the same interests in sport, in dancing, in the movies and the funnies. Few of them understand the Japanese language or are even interested in things Japanese. But in the process of growing up, of rubbing shoulders with America, they have lost the respect for elders, the devotion to duty, the reverence of their Japanese forebears. Moon-viewing or hanging poems on beautiful trees would seem tame occupation indeed to some of their modern young souls.

The most intelligent of the *Nisei* have concentrated on understanding the essence of America. Perhaps their interest in the meaning of that word "democracy" would put to shame the casualness of many other of our youths. To some of them it promises a new world founded on justice and human brotherhood. In the centers this group misses most the contact with Caucasian friends.

But they are not grumbling. They know well the history of their Japanese fathers in these western states. They are aware of the crisscross of politics and the economic strains. Through their studies they understand clearly why Cauca-

sian workers in the past feared the competition of Japanese laborers as they came in increasing numbers into these states. In their response to the hunger of the agriculturists for cheap labor, the immigrants were unaware for a long time of the threat they themselves constituted to West Coast labor, and therefore to the American standard of living. The intellectual *Nisei* see plainly why their people inevitably became the football of politicians for several decades, and the scapegoats of frustration. Since they worked for the railroads or in the fields, the gang-boss handled all their affairs. They undertook the menial jobs which were uncongenial to white men. Often enough they did not know that the gang-boss underbid all other labor to gain an entry into industry for newcomers from Japan. Then, having in this new land no families, no recreation, no common language for communication with American workers, they toiled instead long hours in the fields, setting even more deeply than the Chinese before them had set the pattern for oriental labor. And not alone for oriental labor, but for migratory workers of any race.

Trouble came when the Japanese showed they were not content to remain an unsettled people. They hungered to have their families with them and wanted homes in which to live. To clothe and educate their children they needed wages more nearly approximating those of Caucasian labor. And so they bought or leased a few acres of land when they could do so, and set up as independent farmers. If they leased, they were favored tenants because of the way they cared for the soil. And they were willing to pay higher rentals than the Caucasians. Because all members of the Japanese families helped in the fields, they were able to produce more than their Caucasian neighbors and to bring down the prices for the pleased consumer.

The Japanese loved this new country. They reclaimed waste deltas and wild valleys. They almost made deserts to bloom. They had a genius for plants and for the soil.

In the cities they did a lot of the work connected with the process of living. They labored in markets, restaurants and hotels, and people liked them individually. Women enjoyed their kimonos, and sought their *sukiyaki* dinners. They appreciated their graciousness and cleanliness.

The men among the Japanese are inherently skilled craftsmen, with knowledge of woods and household decorations possessed by few peoples. But unfortunately oriental exclusion was inculcated in Californian institutions, and they were barred from the building trades and crafts.

Yes, there was much the Japanese did not understand. And from 1900 on, anti-alien groups

sprang up, which were like dry grass for the spark of the politician. There is not space here to write of the efforts of these leagues against the Japanese. Twice President Theodore Roosevelt sent to California a representative of the federal government, to investigate situations which were a breach of American treaties with Japan, treaties which Japan observed faithfully in the days before her military revolutionists came into power.

But these visitors from Washington only made California more obstinate. In the East, Congressmen complained that the state was trying to dictate the international policies of the nation, that the tail was endeavoring to wag the dog. For years there was little sympathy in the capital for the demand to exclude the Japanese.

Theodore Roosevelt saved the situation by proposing the Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan to restrict immigration of its laboring nationals to the United States. It is a matter of record that Japan scrupulously observed this agreement also.

After 1913, when the California Alien Land Act forbade aliens ineligible for citizenship to lease or purchase agricultural land, the Japanese did this in the names of their citizen children.

In 1920 there was agitation to debar Nisei from the franchise. In that year too, anti-alien groups united to form the powerful California Joint Immigration Committee, including the American Legion, the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West, the Federation of Labor, and other groups and clubs.

Then came the passing of the Immigration Act in Washington in 1924. President Coolidge signed it with deep regret. But the act put an end to further immigration of Japanese and relieved apprehensions lest they should dominate the West.

To the Japanese, life is like the bamboo stalk. Trials occur with regularity, like the joints in its stem, and the intervals between are not long. But surely December 7 brought the heaviest trouble of all to the West Coast Japanese.

In this crisis the Nisei dreaded the resurrection of those elements which have always been opposed to their fathers in California. They kept away from state officials, but some of them cooperated with the F.B.I. and the Naval Intelligence officers in apprehending disloyal aliens, as a perusal of the newspapers of the period corroborates. In Los Angeles, a prominent member of the Anti-Axis Committee of the Japanese Colony was Tokutaro Slocum, who is also a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and of the American Legion, "and talks the language of a typical veteran." "Any price we pay is not too great to win this war," he said. "On the night of December 7 he aided the F.B.I. and Naval Intel-

ligence by leading them to the homes of certain dangerous and subversive persons among the Japanese and they are now interned," wrote the reporter.

In the new year telegrams poured into Governor Olson's office urging him to request federal authorities to remove from California all Japanese, both American-born and alien, at once. A certain radio commentator joined in the clamor. Letters and telegrams poured into Washington also, but comparatively few were against the demand for evacuation. Some Japanese, disturbed over the situation, sought permission from General De Witt to evacuate themselves. But this voluntary evacuation was soon called off, having proved a failure because of discrimination and hostility. The county of Tulare, to which many of these people went, is a focal point of the Associated Farmers of California, an organization well known to be anti-Japanese. Its farmer-membership is voluble in political offices and in newspapers. Since April Tulare County farmers have had their own guerrilla troops, the Bald Eagles, who wear no uniforms, take no drills, keep no membership lists and furnish their own guns.

One Japanese said now: "If evacuated we do not know where to go. We wish to be directed by the government and sent together, with our families intact, and in sufficient numbers to help one another over a difficult period of adjustment."

The military authorities began to plan for action along that line. They deemed it necessary both to protect our defenses from sabotage and also to protect the Japanese from possible mob violence during the mounting passions of war. In February Congress sent a committee headed by Representative John H. Tolan of California to hold hearings on the West Coast and to learn the temper of the people. The committee listened to all who would come to it, right and left and center, and its printed record is strong and vital, more alive than many novels. The West Coast is in its pages, with its humanity, its pugnaciousness and its fears, all real.

Evacuations began while the committee was here. It discovered there was not yet an Alien-Property-Custodian to assist the evacuees, and it wired Washington. In other ways too it helped greatly. Machinery was set up to care for the property and problems of evacuees, but at first there were wide gaps between the protective intentions of the government and the actual performance, on the ground of inexperienced personnel. When property could be stored, there was a limit to the amount. Government agents assumed charge of some kinds of property, but always at the owner's risk. Before the machinery

got to working properly, Japanese suffered often through the false advice and misrepresentations of unscrupulous persons on the outside. From every point of view, the task of moving ninety-eight thousand people of all ages has been stupendous.

The evacuees have been understanding and patient. But hundreds of them read the papers every day and, like us, see items such as this from a Los Angeles paper, reporting a meeting of district attorneys of southern counties with state attorney Earl Warren.

"The group of prosecutors also expressed themselves in general discussion as favoring amendments of the law [Alien Land Law] in a manner which would permit the state to resort to the Courts in a more efficient manner, to ferret out land ownership by persons whom the state suspects of having acquired such property illegally. In this connection the prosecutors expect to ask the state legislature to make it possible to sue oriental aliens in the state's courts to prevent them through injunctions from owning and acquiring land."

Two suits have been filed in the courts, on behalf of the heads of the American Legion and the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West. These suits involve the disfranchisement of thousands of young people of Japanese parentage. They were brought against the registrars of San Francisco and Alameda counties, to strike from the rolls the names of ninety citizens of Japanese ancestry—who voted by mail at a recent municipal bond election—because they come under the jurisdiction of the Emperor of Japan.

Some citizens believe an attempt is being made to obtain possession of Japanese lands. At the hearings of the Tolan Committee this thought was voiced. But Mr. Lawrence Hewes, director of the Farm Security Administration with jurisdiction over four western states, points out that, of the land operated by the Japanese, only thirteen per cent is in fee simple and owned by them. Eighty-five per cent is merely leased from Caucasian owners who have considered the Japanese excellent tenants. A large proportion of the properties operated by them is marginal land. Will it be as productive under Caucasian management?

At present, in mid-June, the greater part of the West Coast evacuees wait in the temporary Assembly Centers. By fall all of them will be living in one or another of the centers of the War Relocation Authority (civilian). Military guardianship will be evident only on the outside. There will be no soldiers inside. So far as is possible under the circumstances, this civilian Authority wishes the centers to become real homes. Apartments are small, about twenty by twenty-

five feet, and subdivided to suit the families inhabiting them. They are prefabricated buildings supplemented with tar paper. Evacuees may use their own furniture and decorations.

Much in the proposed program will depend upon the administrative personnel of each center, upon their realization of the serious social and psychological problems involved in these drastic evacuations. This realization is as important as their practical qualifications. So far the appointments of which I have known have been of a fine caliber, indicating genuine concern on the part of the Authority and a sense of the nation's great responsibility in this temporary uprooting of thousands of people. One of the virtues of the West Coast Japanese is their horror of idleness and dependency. In the present Assembly Centers employment for every one is not possible, but in the Relocation Centers there will be no idleness. The centers are to develop noncompetitive industrial and agricultural programs which will enable them to become as self-sustaining as possible. They can manufacture many of the requirements of the army and navy during this war.

The Relocation Authority, under the direction of Milton B. Eisenhower, is responsible for the safety and care of the evacuees until after the armistice. It is charged with protecting from outside exploitation those evacuees who as voluntary members of the "work corps" may travel here and there to assist in seasonal agriculture. Firms or individuals applying for such help must undertake to pay the traveling expenses of the workers, and to protect them from violence. This is the part of the program which some citizens fear may be subjected to pressure from great agricultural interests, especially now that Mexico is in the war and her labor therefore not available.

Some of the young Japanese look forward with great hope to arrival in the Relocation Centers, especially the more creative of the college-trained youth. One small agricultural group dreams of a self-supporting coöperative project, and the plan has received attention.

We are at the beginning of an unpredictable period in the history of our Japanese-American people. It is possible that out of this enforced migration may come something constructive for the evacuees and for ourselves. The break-up of the ingrown Japanese communities, and the collaboration with Caucasians in the Relocation Centers, may hasten the assimilation of the Japanese into American life. But to those who are interested in the welfare and the legal rights of thousands of young Japanese-American citizens, it is of real concern that when at last the war is over, the way will be open for them to return to their former life.