

THE CENTENNIAL BOOK

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The Japanese in Hawaii

By UTARO OKUMURA

A little over 62,240 Japanese immigrants entered Hawaii between 1885 and 1898. Every one of them had come here on three years' contract. When the term of their contract expired, some of them returned to Japan, while many preferred to remain at work in Hawaii. But almost every one had an idea of going back to Japan as soon as he could earn a fortune. To accumulate this, they sacrificed all standards, or ethics of everyday life. Naturally, the community which they formed in Hawaii was exactly like that of a frontier town of the West, of which we frequently read. It was a community without social control or social order.

Moreover, they had transplanted to Hawaii the worst features of the native customs and manners and habits of the lower classes. On any festival, or holiday, or celebration, they used to hoist their country's flag and revel in noisy shouting of "banzai." Japanese passing through Honolulu on their way to America were wont to rejoice over the establishment of "Japanese villages" in Hawaii. But the travelers from the mainland were amazed to see in Hawaii an actual spectacle of the "Yellow Peril."

In July, 1898, Hawaii was annexed to the United States. The status of Japanese immigrants suddenly changed. All contract laborers became free laborers, and the labor exploiters began to pour into Hawaii. They told fabulous stories of wealth and opportunities for work on the mainland. Thousands of the ignorant immigrants, lured by these imaginary tales, flocked into California. Even specially chartered steamers began to appear and carry off on each voyage thousands of Japanese from Hawaii. In six years, from 1901 to 1907, almost 40,000 came into Hawaii as free laborers. More than half of these immigrants had come to Hawaii, not with the idea of settling on these islands permanently, but of crossing into America.

The panic in California was inevitable and unavoidable. The sudden deluge caused fears and suspicions—the fear of cheap Oriental labor, the danger of low moral standards, the importation of detestable customs and manners. The Californians began to fear that their state would soon be like Hawaii. "Go and see Hawaii!" they said. This outcry was like pouring oil on the flame of anti-Japanese feeling, resulting ultimately in the "Gentlemen's Agreement" and the restriction of Japanese immigrants from Hawaii and Japan into America.

Since July, 1846, when Commodore Perry knocked at the doors of long-isolated Japan, a most friendly relationship has existed between Japan and America, a relationship which was envied by other nations. It is a great misfortune that agitation has given rise to a feeling of restlessness, misunderstanding, and suspicion between these two peoples.

The blame is on the Japanese themselves, who have had undoubtedly



THE HILO JAPANESE CHURCH.

the greater share in inciting the fears and suspicions of America. What the Japanese in Hawaii have done has stamped deeply into the mind of the American people in Hawaii and America the impression that Japanese are unassimilable and undesirable people. When we realize that the condition of Japanese in Hawaii has been the root of all anti-racial sentiment in California, we cannot help but feel our tremendous responsibility. Japanese in Hawaii should strive to destroy the mist which is sweeping over the two nations, and should keenly feel that it is their duty to remove all traces of charge against Japanese in general.

A man never cares to eat anything but nourishing and digestible food. Just so, America is not enthusiastic about admitting into its territories people who are unassimilable and undesirable. The Japanese in Hawaii have been too indifferent and too selfish. They have shown in many instances their absolute indifference to good American customs. The appeal to build up the islands' industries or material resources has not in the least attracted them. They have rather preferred to send home the bulk of their earnings to be hoarded up there. On many occasions, they have displayed unscrupulously the crude native customs and manners, and they themselves have invited the charge of unassimilability.

Within the last ten years, however, a great change in the character, thought and taste of Japanese in Hawaii has appeared. The taste and spirit of the drifters have disappeared, and the majority of the immigrants have come to think seriously of settling here permanently. They have begun to invest their money in the island industries, and have come to see that they must assimilate American ideas and ideals, if they they are to live here in Hawaii and work shoulder to shoulder with American people. After the United States entered the World War, Japanese enthusiastically participated in the different loan drives and other war relief activities. These are but concrete examples of Japanese becoming assimilated with American life. The process of assimilation is very slow, but it is possible, if Japanese in Hawaii particularly would strive toward this goal with utmost energy and strong determination. Only through actual assimilation can Japanese in Hawaii or the mainland attain salvation.

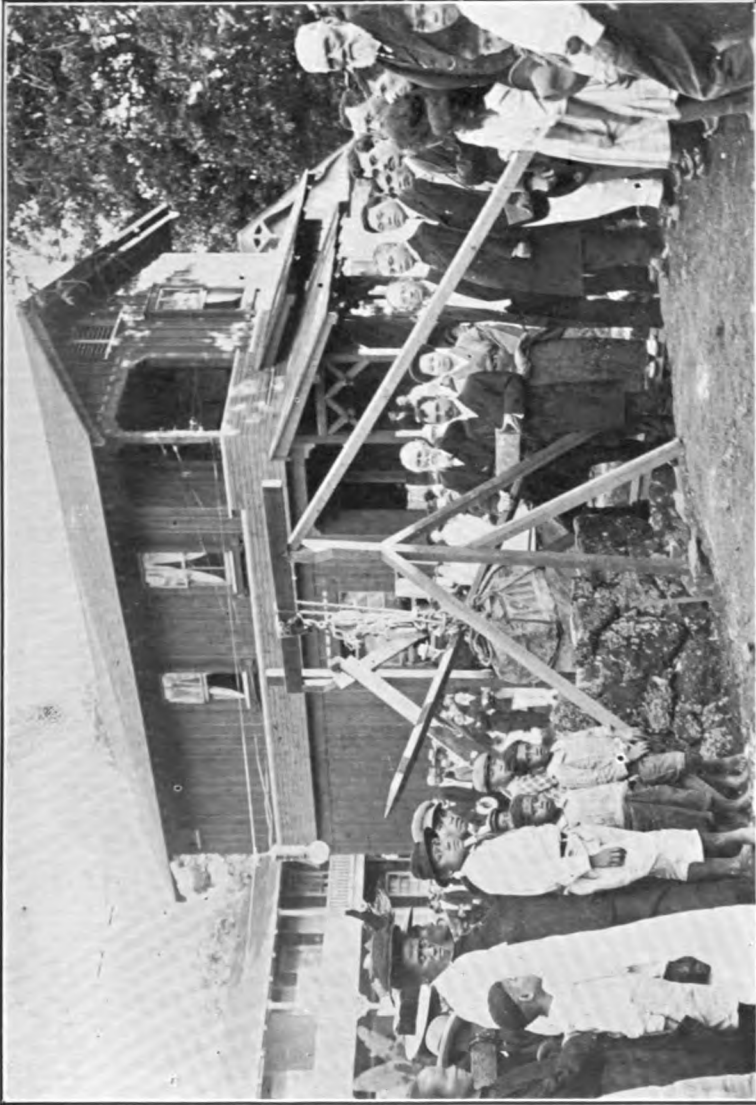
But today, with the steady increase and growth of the Hawaiian-born Japanese, Hawaii is facing a vital problem of citizenship. To the Japanese it is a most difficult problem of enabling their Hawaiian-born children to cast their votes intelligently and to become good and loyal American citizens. Yet these young Japanese, instead of being the "elect people," are probably the most unfortunate creatures on this earth. They are sneered and scorned by conservative Japanese as hopelessly "foreignized"—Japanese without the true elements of the Japanese character, naturally incapable of ever becoming good and faithful subjects of the emperor. Then, on the other hand, they are un-American in the eyes of the American people, simply because of their birth, physical appearance, and seeming lack of enthusiasm for America and American citizenship. Instead of decreasing, these un-American, non-Japanese youths are increasing annually at an amazing rate, from

4000 to 5000 per year. There are approximately 30,000 Hawaiian-born Japanese children in Hawaii. It is safe to say that there are approximately 10,000 children who possess American birth certificates, and about 362 registered voters in 1919.

It is no wonder that American people whose interests in Hawaii are so great look with anxiety at the future of Hawaiian-born Japanese. Hawaii, in the first place, was opened by American missionaries. Today many of the leading statesmen, business men and captains of industries are their descendants. Naturally, all races are being treated in a Christian spirit, with frankness and with a spirit of good will.

Among the Japanese in Hawaii there are two dominant ideas. One of these is that the children born in Hawaii should be educated to become 100 per cent American citizens and that the realization of such a citizenship goal by Hawaiian-born Japanese is best not only for Japan but also for America. The other is that of the majority, who believe that the children, born in no matter what countries, should be educated as subjects of Japan. These people do not harbor any prejudice against America, nor do they openly oppose the policy of Americanization; but they sincerely believe that it is an act of disloyalty to Japan to turn out thoroughly Americanized Japanese, or in other terms, "citizens with the countenance of Japanese and hearts of Americans." The almost incessant friction of these ideas has been the underlying cause of most of the problems among the Japanese in Hawaii.

On the eve of his departure from America, Viscount Ishii, former ambassador to the United States, said thus in part: "America is not the place for those who persistently oppose Americanization or Assimilation. Such people should pack their belongings and return to Japan." These words of Viscount Ishii are applicable in more than a few ways to the Japanese in Hawaii, and could be read by them to advantage. Americanization, or assimilation is most essential to the future progress of Japanese in Hawaii.



LAYING THE CORNER STONE OF THE NUANU JAPANESE CHURCH, HONOLULU.