

American

September, 1942: p. 30

Today 72,000 of our Japanese citizens live behind stockades under U. S. military guard because some of them betrayed their adopted land . . . A tragedy of divided loyalties

OUTCAST AMERICANS

by WILLIAM ROBINSON



Exile begins, as the U. S. Army moves the Japanese out of Los Angeles as a military precaution

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||| DOC was scared. And you couldn't blame him.

There he was, at thirty-nine, an American, born and reared; taxpayer, voter, clubman; honor alumnus of a famous university; authority on intricate phases of surgery. He was dapper, chipper, proud; a well-tailored little man who had lifted himself by his bootstraps.

And his world was crumbling.

Ten days earlier his California-born wife had taken their two sons and fled to friends in Utah. That left Doc where I found him—in San Francisco, disconsolate, bewildered, in the ruins of his life. Now Uncle Sam had given him just 48 hours to wind up his affairs and prepare to get out of town. The notice was nailed to a telephone pole outside his office door. He didn't know where he was going, nor when, nor how.

Doc is a Japanese-American.

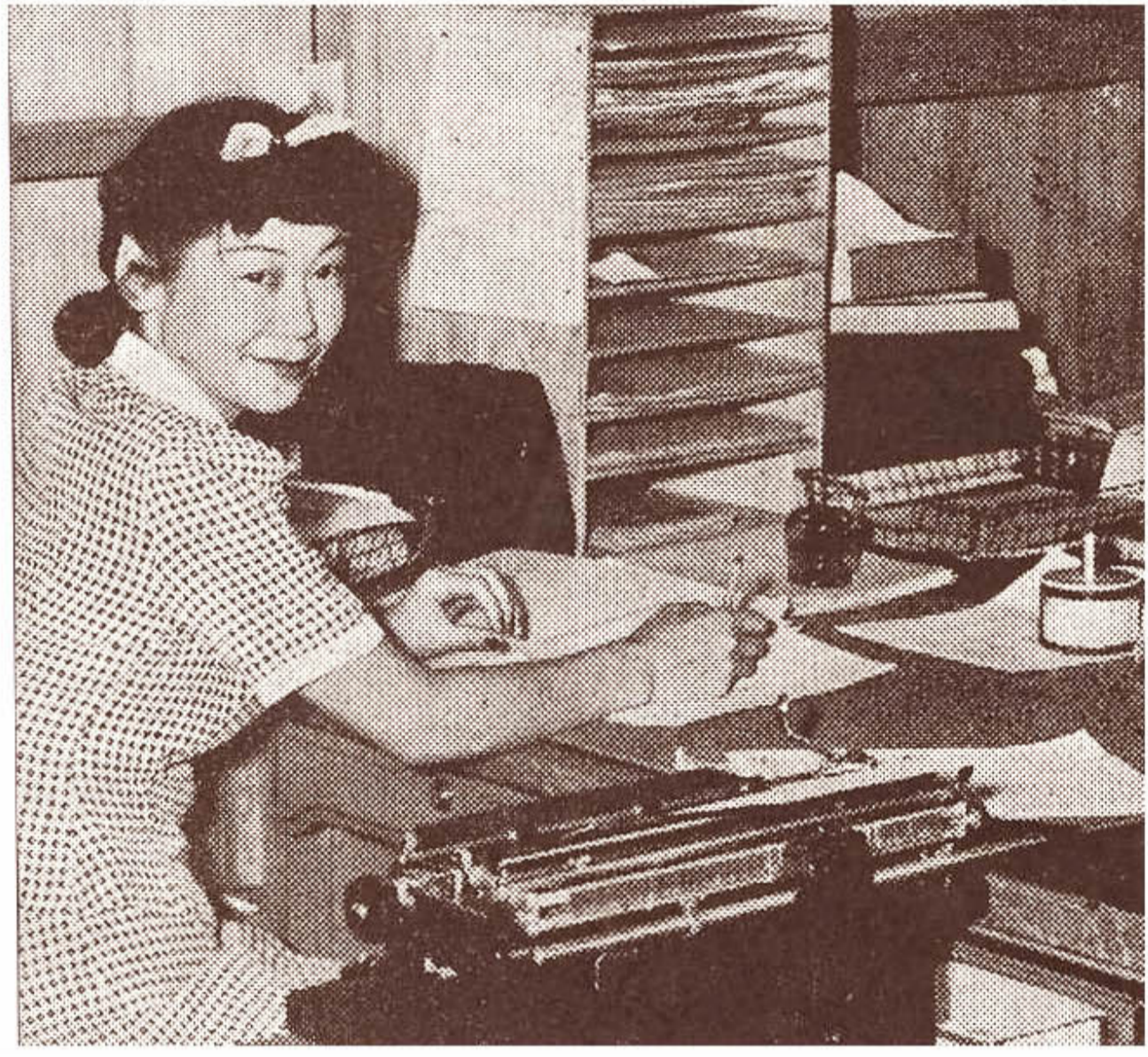
He had been caught up in a fantastic backswirl of the maelstrom of war. With 72,000 other American citizens of Japanese ancestry—men, women, children, and infants—he was being evacuated from the Pacific Coast, now become a theater of military operations, to join 42,000 alien Japanese in exile for the duration.

In Doc's office, I sat on the operating table, Doc on a white stool, endlessly toying with a pair of bright forceps. He was trying to bluff it through, laugh it off, but he kept coming back to personal perplexities. Would they keep him behind barbed wire? Would they confiscate his money? Could he practice his profession in camp? That made him think of the patients he was leaving.

Outcasts



Mealtime for interned Japanese at Manzanar Government camp, in Owens Valley, California



Oko Murata, former Los Angeles secretary, runs the camp office and interviews internees

“What can I do about Mrs. Tayama? I had her slated for an operation next week. And little Taki, with that infected arm.” He named others and their ailments. He looked searchingly at me. “Say, do you suppose the Government would make an exception in my case? I’m needed here!”

“Why don’t you ask them?” I suggested.

“By George,” he said impulsively, “I will! I’ll go see them right now.”

We emerged into Japtown’s principal business street, already more than half deserted. Doc got into his car and started the motor, and then, leaning out, he said, as though it were an afterthought:

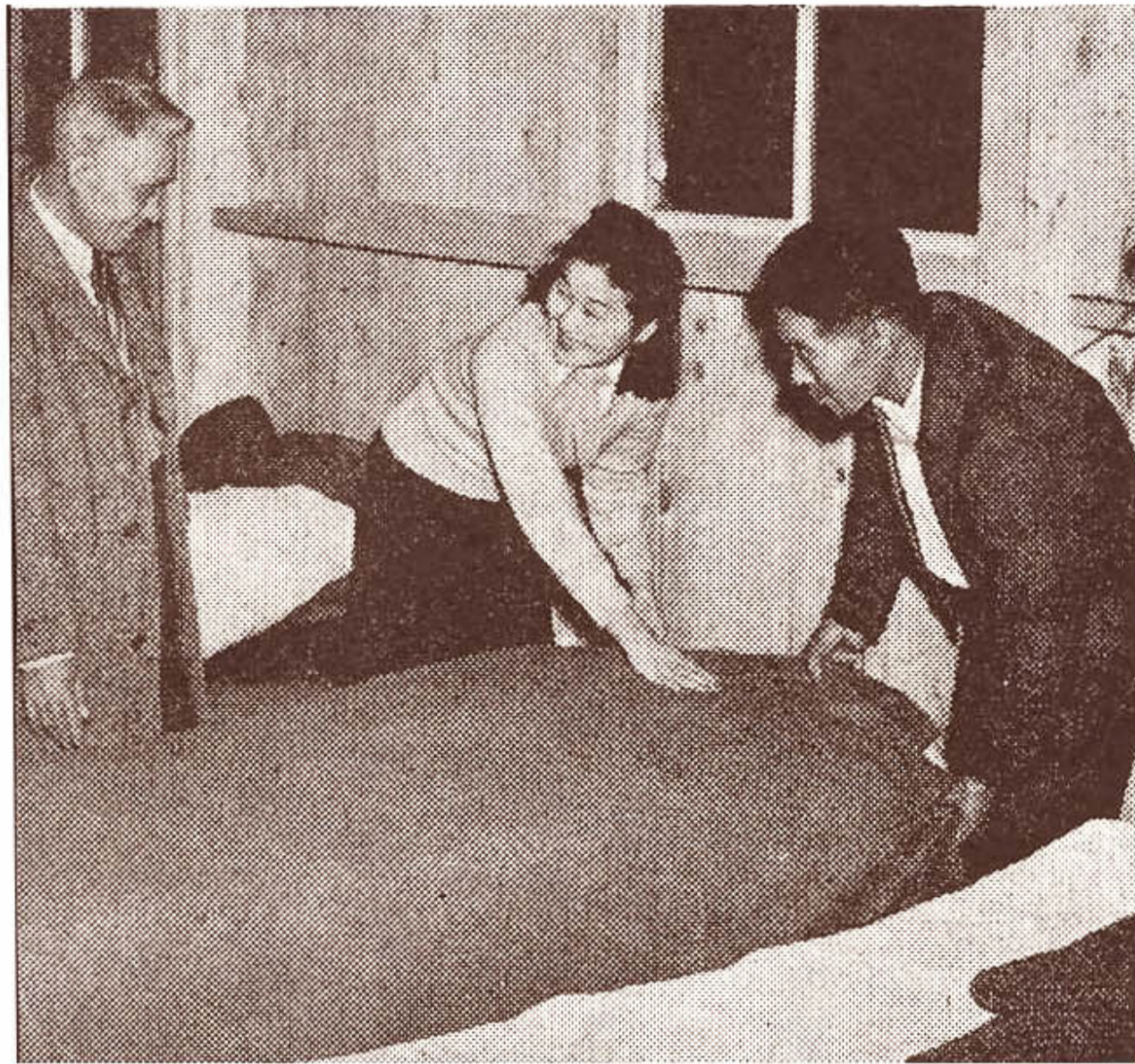
“By the way, I’ve been wondering whether families will be permitted to live together in the camps . . .” His voice trailed off. Japs usually hide their sentiments. Sometimes you wonder if they have any.

I told him what Army officials had told me—that every effort would be made to keep families together. He nodded absently. “Oh, well, I just wondered. Give me a ring tomorrow and I’ll tell you what happens.” He drove away.

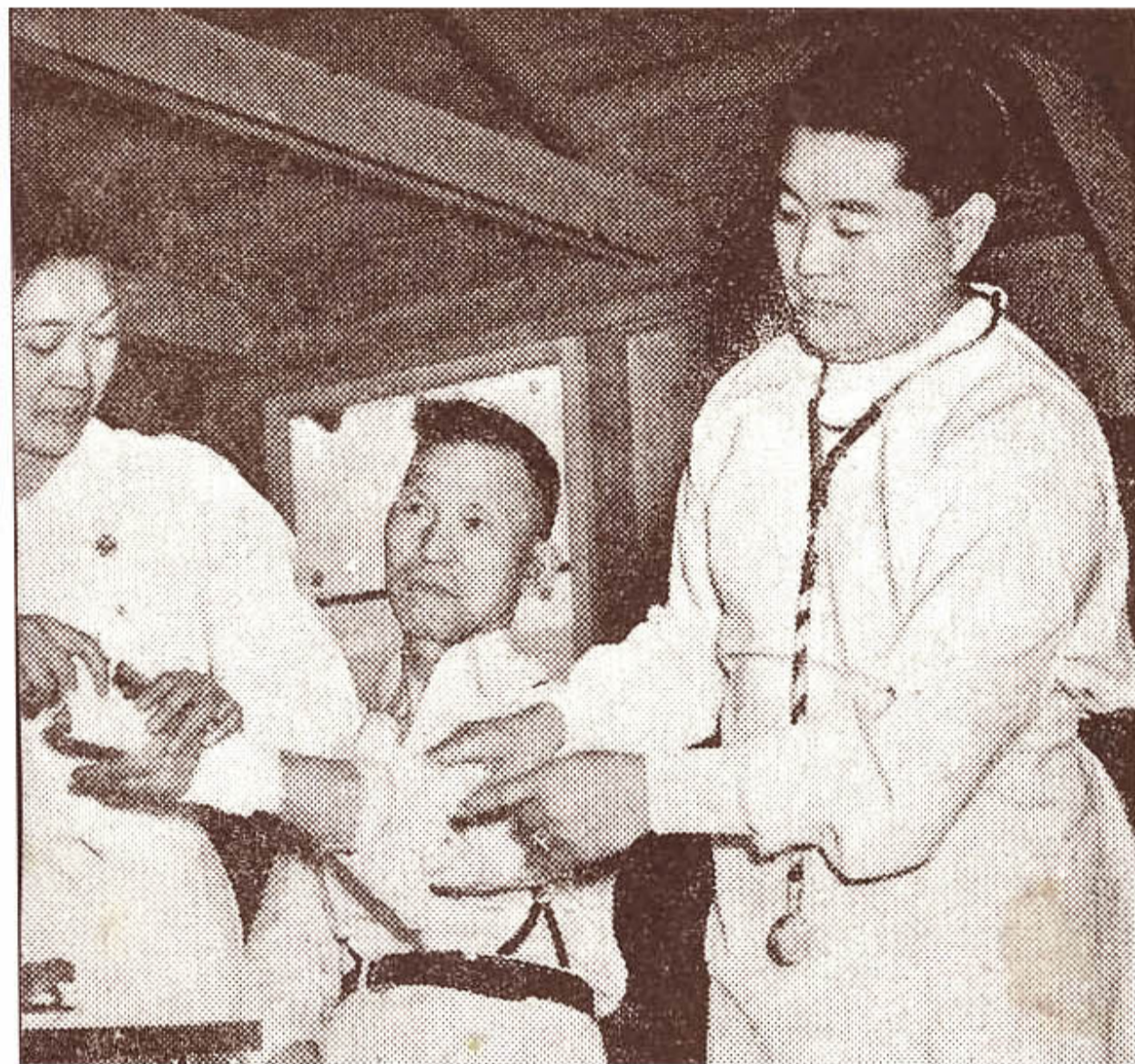
Five days later I got around to calling Doc’s number. “I’m sorry,” said the operator impersonally, “that number has been disconnected.” . . .

As simply, as inexorably as that, Japanese vanished from our Western seaboard. In late March, fifteen weeks after Pearl Harbor, they were still doing business as usual from Vancouver to San

Outcasts



Gene Hashimoto, stenographer at Manzanar, shows the men how to make beds in the barracks



Nurse Fumiko Gohata and Dr. James Goto attend a patient in the 150-bed camp hospital

Diego. By June 1 they were gone, swallowed up into stockades, reception camps, and resettlement areas established far back from the military emplacements along the coast.

Behind this monstrous mass migration lies a baffling problem in human justice. Doubtless, many of the Japanese are loyal, trustworthy Americans. But strange things have happened on the West Coast. Investigators have picked up irregular radio signals; a wireless set was discovered in a fishermen's truck; in a Jap home, agents found a searchlight cunningly concealed in a chimney; strange lights have flashed out to sea, possibly to pass on information to enemy submarines. The Government is acting generously and kindly toward the Jap thousands along the West Coast; but because this is total war, intelligence authorities are taking no chances. They have no intention of jeopardizing the safety and security of the entire West Coast by allowing a few hundred or even a few dozen Jap fifth columnists to remain and carry out their work of treason and sabotage.

Japanese born in Japan, or elsewhere outside the United States, are forbidden the right to become American citizens. But their children, born in America, are American citizens. Thus, about two thirds of all persons of Japanese ancestry in the United States are Americans by birthright, subject to all the rights, privileges, and duties of any other

Outcasts

American. But are they truly Americans? Is their allegiance unquestionable?

Military and civil authorities in California, Washington, and Oregon frankly don't know. Japanese children customarily attended language schools where they learned the mysticism of Nippon. Every Japanese child is taught to obey its parents unswervingly until they die. Since many of the elders to whom American citizenship is denied are bitter about the discrimination, it is reasonable to assume this also rankles in their offspring.

Authorities know, too, that many American-born Japanese have a personal problem of divided citizenship. By birth, they are Americans under our laws. But—and here's the catch—if the birth of a child was registered with a Japanese consul, the child is entitled also to the citizenship of Japan, under Japanese laws.

In the first excitement after Pearl Harbor, some West Coast legislators debated the advisability of amending our law so that a child of foreign parentage would be required at maturity to produce evidence that he had resided most of his life in the United States and conducted himself in a manner that would demonstrate his fitness for citizenship.

The motion was sidetracked and eventually forgotten, on the ground that no Caucasian could hope to plumb the depths of Oriental minds. Also, it was impossible to determine which American-born Japanese had been registered with the consulates; the busy Japs burned all records in the first moments of the war.

Of course, if you wanted to be naïve about it, you could ask each American Japanese to take an oath of allegiance. But authorities had a hunch it wouldn't amount to much. Two California-born and American-educated Japanese—Hideo Okusako and Charles Hiasao Yoshii—had sworn allegiance to the Stars and Stripes during every year of their schooling, and are now blatting Japanese propaganda to America from radio stations in Tokyo.

Today many mature American Japanese don't know where their own sympathies lie. I am convinced of that, after talking with hundreds of them. All their friendships and contacts are in America. Many don't know either the customs or the language of Japan. Yet, so thorough was their home training, they would feel themselves traitors if they aided America in a war against Japan.

America has never assimilated them. During business hours they associated with white Americans, but after dark they lived in huddled colonies. When they moved into a district, whether in a city or a countryside, Caucasians moved away. Their neighbors were other Orientals or dark-skinned peoples.

Outcasts

Their dual nationality was reflected in their homes. The food usually was an eerie blending of East and West. One Jap family proudly served me strawberry shortcake covered with a gooey, dark brown sauce containing chopped almonds. It was good, but hard to eat with chopsticks, which many Japanese families prefer to knives and forks.

Their confusion extended to their religions. About half of all the Japanese in America are Buddhists, according to official surveys. The others are scattered through all the Christian faiths. Denominations never seemed to make much difference to the Japanese themselves; they went where they were welcomed. In an upper-caste Japanese home one evening, I saw a rosary and a copy of Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures, lying on a teakwood table in front of a pot-bellied image of Buddha.

WHAT cast the die against these strange people was the fact that they had, intentionally or by chance, clustered around important military objectives in the West. One Army airfield was surrounded to the depth of a mile or more by Japanese truck gardens. A Navy base near Los Angeles was flanked by a colony of Japanese fishermen. Near Seattle, Japanese populated an island where movements of ships could hardly be missed. Literally scores of miles of strategic highways along which military columns had to roll were fringed by Japanese-held properties. Military men shudder to think what might have happened in an emergency if those highways had been dynamited or blocked by wrecks of Japanese trucks.

Yet it is characteristically American and democratic that, at first, the Japs were given a chance to leave the coast voluntarily. About 1,000 did. Since many of their elders had been quietly gathered in at the outbreak of the war, a fiery little priest, the Rev. F. J. Caffery, of Los Angeles, became their shepherd. He led a grotesque flock that day late in March—a 10-mile-long procession of automobiles in all stages of decrepitude, over 300 weary (*Continued on page 96*) miles of meadow and mountain and desert, into oblivion. I went along.

We started at dawn from a park in Pasadena. As the ragtag column started chugging forward, soldiers materialized from somewhere and took places in the line. At the end came an army mechanical unit, complete with tins of gasoline and tow car. They hauled more than one of those jalopies up the mountains before the day was over.

Civilians hardly looked up from their chores as the weird parade went by, although one farmer had erected a sign in his front yard: "Good-by, Japs. See you in Hell." Another had rigged up a signpost with an arrow pointing to: "Tokyo, 6,874 miles."

Outcasts

AFTER hours of desert travel, we entered flat, dusty Owens Valley. Gaunt mountains rose in the west; beyond them lay the waste of Death Valley. Eastward, close by, towered the snow-clad Sierra Nevadas. In the last light we passed the foot of Mt. Whitney, highest peak in the continental United States. Just at dark we came to Manzanar. Soldiers stood guard at the gate.

Then the camp consisted of two dozen long, barracklike, low buildings, sheeted with tar paper and slats. Each building was divided into four compartments, and each compartment held 16 steel cots. An enormous ditching machine was roaring and snorting in the middle of the street, cutting a sewer trench. Under floodlights, hundreds of workmen were building new barracks.

Through this bedlam wandered the new arrivals like wan ghosts, each with his bundle of bedding. I watched an old man peering into the rooms. At the first three he shook his head, but he went in the fourth and dropped his bundle on a cot. I went over to see what had attracted him, but couldn't tell; to me, they all looked alike.

Up the line, somebody began hammering lustily on a dishpan. The crowd surged that way. I found myself wedged against a slender young Japanese in United States Army uniform, except for insignia. He said his name was Iijima, he had enlisted at St. Louis, Mo., in September, and been mustered out with honor in February. "Why?" I asked. He shook his head. "Search me," he said. "I guess they don't want us in the Army."

The dishpan was being hammered at the door of the communal dining hall. When 1,000 of us crowded in, the walls were bulging. I found myself facing a tall, prim young Japanese girl. Her name, it developed, was Oko Murata. A private secretary in Los Angeles, she had volunteered to do office work in the camp. "I knew I'd have to come sooner or later, so I thought it might as well be sooner," she smiled casually. There were 20 other American-born girls in camp, all aiding in organization.

After a time I walked back down the street. Near the ditching machine I came across a wiry, middle-aged Jap crouching and sifting dirt through his fingers.

"Me," he said, "I'm gardener. Damn' good gardener. Best in Beverly Hills, you bet. This, damn' good dirt. Plenty thing grow here. You watch see." He got up and looked up and down the street, measuring with squinted eyes.

"Here I'm go plant begonia," he said. "There, maybe good cineraria. Make nice border lantana. Fix up middle street like parkway, maybe, with plenty nice flower shrub." He fell silent, busy with his plans. Finally he said, "Yes. Very good. I'm make this little bit of heaven. You watch see." . . .

I went back to Manzanar in early summer. More than 10,000 Japanese were there. The snow line had moved far up the mountains and the gullies were chuckling brooks. The tar-paper shacks were still squat and ugly, but no uglier and much more orderly than many Western desert camps.

Kids were playing ball on a diamond at the edge of town. Girls in slacks and gay print dresses were sitting on the side lines, calling shrill advice. Tall, prim Oko was at her desk in the Administration Building, yawning over columns of figures. She had spring fever, she said. She gave me the

Outcasts

gossip.

Three of her girl-friends had met and married young evacuees. One was already expecting. Some of the boys had organized a swing band. A mimeograph newspaper, the *Manzanar Free Crest*, had made its appearance, full of good-natured gags. The police—all Japanese evacuees—had raided three prosperous crap games. Almost \$1,000 worth of war bonds and stamps had been sold through the camp post office.

The schools were running full time, using the standard California educational system and textbooks. Several nurseries were operating for the convenience of mothers. A town council, called the Advisory Board, had been formed to work on administrative matters with the army-civilian management set up by the Government. Several church services were held weekly and meetings were always crowded. The hospital was going great guns, momentarily expecting a rush of maternity cases. Young Dr. James Goto, its chief, had finished inoculating evacuees for typhoid and smallpox and was busy with \$100,000 worth of equipment and supplies.

I couldn't find my ambitious little gardener friend, but I saw his handiwork everywhere. There were "flower shrub" in tidy parkways and clusters of blossoms in gardens. And on the north side, in the lush, warm shade, cinerarias were taking root.

AFTER that first voluntary evacuation in March, the gloved fist of the Army closed down on Japanese who hadn't gone. From the Presidio of San Francisco, Lieut. Gen. John L. DeWitt, commanding all military operations in the western United States, had issued crisp orders.

First, all Japanese still at liberty were "frozen"—prohibited from traveling more than 5 miles from their homes, never after dark. Next, evacuation zones were set up, bounded by streets in cities or township lines in rural areas. Finally, one after another, the zones were evacuated.

Each person was permitted to take bedding and linens, but no mattress; toilet articles, extra clothing, and essential personal effects. No family could take more than its members could carry. No pets could be taken. No personal items or household goods could be shipped to the assembly center. The Government provided for the storage of heavy household effects such as pianos and refrigerators. On the appointed day, fleets of military trucks rolled into the zone. Soldiers supervised the loading of the evacuees and their bundles. At a signal, the caravans rolled away, leaving whole square blocks of cities and square miles of farm land tenantless.

Economically, the departure of the Japs presented no particular problem in the cities, although bank clearances fell off temporarily in some localities and house servants were hard to get. But it was different in the country. Japs had owned or controlled 11,030 farms valued at \$70,000,000. They had produced virtually all the artichokes, early cantaloupes, green peppers, and late tomatoes, and most of the early asparagus. They owned or controlled the majority of the wholesale produce markets and thousands of retail vegetable stands.

When they disappeared, the flow of vegetables stopped. Retail prices went up. Many vegetables vanished entirely. There were rumors of a food shortage. Into this situa-

Outcasts

tion plunged dynamic Larry Hewes, regional director of the Farm Security Administration and agricultural member of General DeWitt's Wartime Civil Control Administration. He ranged the farms night and day, cajoling the Japs to keep planting up to the final minute and recruiting white farmers to take over their lands when they had gone. He insisted upon fair prices or equitable share-cropping agreements, and by mid-summer the West's agriculture was rolling along as though nothing had happened. . . .

NOW that the Japs have been rounded up and tucked away for the duration, what shall we do with them afterward?

There is one answer, although it doesn't take a long-range view.

At four isolated points in the West, workmen are now constructing new camps to be known as Resettlement Areas. One is in western Oregon, in a great flat, treeless sink known as Tule Lake. Another is on the desolate Colorado desert, on the California-Arizona boundary. There will be others later farther inland, in Utah, Colorado, Idaho, and New Mexico, if the Government is able to overcome the vehement protests of the officials and people of those states.

All of the land to be used for resettlement belongs to the Government; most of it is controlled by the Indian Bureau. It is planned—although rather nebulously—to put the Japanese evacuees onto this land and encourage them to develop its latent agricultural resources.

They will be paid for their work. Secretary of War Stimson has set wages for a 44-hour week at from \$8 to \$16 a month, plus free food, shelter, medical care, and hospitalization. Free clothing will be issued "when and if necessary." In addition, all evacuees will receive coupon books to buy items at the camp canteens. No family may have a total of more than \$7.50 in coupons in any month.

"Naturally," a spokesman for the Wartime Civil Control Administration told me, "the land will revert back to the Government after the war, with all improvements."

"But what about the Japs themselves?" I persisted. "What will happen to them?"

He shook his head slowly. "We can't see that far ahead," he replied. . . .

Two things keep recurring to me as I write this report. The first is the well-scrubbed, moon-shaped face of tiny Kiku, who used to be our housemaid. Her father, an immigrant, was my gardener. He brought up a bottle of saki the night she was born and we drank a toast to the new arrival.

Kiku came to my study the other evening to say good-by. Next morning, she said, they'd come for her.

Searching for words and trying to be bluff and hearty, I said, "Well, have a good time. Where will you be?"

She stood in the doorway like a timid little mouse, her face expressionless. "I don't know, sir. They don't tell us."

I cleared my throat. "No, of course not. Well, take care of yourself."

She turned, and with her back to me she said, "I hope you will think of me. I shall think of you all."

I said, still fumbling awkwardly, "Sure; you bet. Well, so long."

She didn't answer. The door closed and she was gone. I don't know where she is now.

The other thing I keep thinking about is

Outcasts

the poignant inscription on the Statue of Liberty. You'll find these words down toward the bottom, serenely untouched by the howling storms of more than half a century:

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free; the wretched refuse of your teeming shores. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me. I lift my lamp beside the Golden Door."

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