

At the Observation Post

With the California Council on Oriental Relations Waging an Eloquent Campaign for Repeal of the "Japanese Exclusion Act," a Quota-Basis Solution Is Suggested

The origin of the rigid caste system in India is lost in the mists of antiquity. But some students of the subject have made the shrewd guess that it is a natural product of racial antipathy in what for countless centuries was a huge "melting-pot" of peoples of all colors and standards of life. Prof. Ramsay Traquair, of McGill University, has even predicted that in time a similar system would develop in America as the fruit of our own melting-pot. Its beginnings, in his opinion, are already apparent in such phenomena as the "color-line," and in other social discriminations based on race.

"Indian society," says the Encyclopædia Britannica, "must not be regarded as aristocratic but as an infinite series of democratic strata lying one above another." Does not this suggest a curious resemblance to our own case? As compared with the Indian our own social structure is still in its infancy. Its bones are as yet mere gristle and as malleable as those of a baby. But thanks, first to the importation over a long period of African slaves, and secondly to a century of unrestricted immigration from Europe, we already have our (relatively simple) series of democratic strata lying one above another. Doctor Traquair's unpleasant vision does not lack in plausibility.

● Deeper Justification

Certainly it should be taken into account as possibly a deeper justification than mere economic considerations for the reversal since the War of our traditional immigration policy, and especially for our exclusion of the Japanese. With the inflow of Japanese into the Pacific Coast States around the turn of the century the fact became very evident that another and a very troublesome democratic stratum was forming. To check it was a part of wisdom. Even the Japanese Government shared this view.



when farmers of the Salt River Valley, Arizona, displayed banners protesting the leasing of lands to the Japanese

One remembers the Gentlemen's Agreement by which the Japanese Government undertook itself to halt the further migration of coolies to our shores. Japan kept the agreement scrupulously even tho in 1913 California—over the protest of Secretary Bryan—passed its anti-alien land-laws.

The Gentlemen's Agreement lapsed with the passage of the immigration law of 1924. A clause in this law, fathered by Senator Shortridge of California, bars "aliens who are ineligible to citizenship." Its aim was so obvious that it has since been known as the Japanese Exclusion Act. In vain did President Coolidge and Secretary Hughes protest against its enactment as an affront to a friendly Power. On the heels of an indiscreet letter from the Japanese Ambassador to the Secretary of State, it went through with a whoop.

No one needs to be reminded of the intense resentment it aroused in Japan, nor that it has embittered the relations of the two countries from that day to this. One hesitates to say that Japan would not have taken the course she has in China and Manchuria



In the melting-pot of the Western World,
there also are millions of Negroes

were it not for this rankling recollection. But it seems reasonable to suppose that it has helped her militarists to dominate her foreign policy, to defy the scoldings of Secretary Stimson and the League of Nations and, finally, to denounce the naval treaty.

Now, let us assume that we have not only a perfect right but every reason to guard ourselves against the social fate that has been India's, or any remote approximation of it, and that to this end we should select the racial stocks to be admitted. Yet there are ways of doing this which need not lead to national hatreds, to armament races and to their natural sequel. One way so far as the Japanese are concerned was that adopted by Theodore Roosevelt in negotiating the Gentlemen's Agreement. Another way is that which Secretary Hughes urged when he sought to forestall the Exclusion Act—namely, that Japanese immigration be put on the same quota basis as that from other countries.

The immigration law, as we know, restricts the number of immigrants a year to be admitted from any one country to 2 per cent. of the number of their nationals who were already here in 1890. On this basis the annual grist of Japanese immigrants to be absorbed by the United States would be lost in a population of 125,000,000. It would approximate exclusion, and at the same time provide for Japan that "saving of the face" so essential to Oriental self-respect.

● Logic of Argument

The logic of this argument is appealing strongly now to Californians themselves. The California Council on Oriental Relations, whose membership embraces a very large proportion of the State's best citizens, is waging an eloquent campaign for the repeal of the Shortridge Amendment. Some of the telling points it makes are these:

The present policy of the United States casts a needless stigma on Asiatics.

Under quota as applied to Europe only 185 Japanese and 105 Chinese would be admitted annually.

No laborers of any kind would be admitted, since United States Consuls would refuse the consular visa to anyone "likely to become a public charge" or likely to compete with American labor.

The whole question is one of good manners. By adopting a policy of quota restriction, while we sacrifice no material interests of any kind, we do remove forever that cause of friction and misunderstanding which alone mars our peaceful relations with our Pacific neighbors.

Sounds sensible.