

# THE JAPANESE BUGABOO

BY DAVID WARREN RYDER

ABOUT two years ago, in a thriving interior town of California, a banquet was held at which were present the chief American and Japanese business men of the community. A few days later the local post of the American Legion adopted a resolution as follows:

*Resolved*, that we look with disfavor and disapproval upon any gathering intended to promote *good fellowship* and social affiliation between the Japanese and our own people.

This resolution embodied and evidenced a spirit which, after long fanning by mountebanks seeking political advantage, lately culminated in the Japanese exclusion section of the new Immigration Act. How far that measure will take us toward war only the future can determine. But already, as everyone knows, it has aroused a deep and desperate resentment in Japan, and almost completely destroyed all the good effects of the Disarmament Treaty of three years ago. The Japanese believe that it insults them wantonly and unforgivably, that it affronts their national honor beyond endurance. What do we get to counterbalance that loss of good will? Not much. As I shall show, the Japanese peril was and is largely imaginary. The Japs, in point of fact, were not trying to grab the whole Pacific Coast, they were not doing any appreciable harm to the whites among whom they were settled, and they were not a menace to American institutions. What started the agitation against them was chiefly the discovery that it was useful politically—that it offered a sure and easy means to arouse the fears of the mob, and so make votes. Some honest men, to be sure, shared in those

fears, and even some more or less wise men, but in the main they had their foundation, not in reality, but merely in political buncombe.

All peoples, of course, have their faults, and the Japanese are surely no exception to the rule. But in the campaign conducted against them in California they have been condemned for their virtues quite as often as for their vices. Because they are orderly and not in jail, because they are thrifty and energetic, because they marry, set up homes and raise families, they are "dangerous," they are a "menace," they "threaten white supremacy." These are but a few of the many charges brought against them—charges that might be brought quite as properly against a dozen other races of aliens in America. They are not brought against these other aliens because they have votes and can thus strike back. The Japanese, having no votes, can be attacked without fear. In consequence every ninth-rate California politician, when other issues fail him, falls back inevitably upon the Japs.

## II

Anti-Japanese agitation in California first definitely manifested itself in an effective way in 1907, when there were demands for separate schools for all orientals in San Francisco—demands that were not withdrawn until President Roosevelt had agreed to get from Japan a pledge to prevent any more *new* laborers coming to America. Roosevelt fulfilled his promise, and as a result the Japanese Government, under what has come to be known as the Gentlemen's Agreement, undertook to prevent any more

laborers emigrating. According to responsible American officials this agreement worked with "a fair degree of satisfaction," and there is no evidence that Japan ever violated it.

Agitation against the Japanese again became active in 1913, when, despite the fact that the Secretary of State, then William Jennings Bryan, went all the way to Sacramento to protest, the Legislature passed and the Governor approved a measure forbidding the sale of farm land to Japanese and limiting to three years any lease to them. With this law on the books, the agitation ceased and antagonistic sentiment again subsided. All during the late war cordial relations existed between American and Japanese residents. Japan was praised by eminent Californians for patrolling the Pacific and thereby releasing our warships for Atlantic duty. Agitation, however, was dormant, not dead; for early in 1919 it reappeared, albeit not until it had been revived by certain candidates for political office. One, in particular, became extremely active. He paid a visit to the San Francisco Immigration Station and thereupon gave out to the newspapers a statement characterizing the Japanese as a menace. Next, he delivered an address to the State Legislature. Although the Legislature had been in session nearly two months, not a suggestion had been heard of anti-Japanese legislation; but a few days after his address several new bills appeared. They were pressed for passage by their proponents, but were defeated through the influence of the Governor, William D. Stephens, who had received a cablegram from Secretary Lansing, then at Versailles, stating that such legislation might embarrass the negotiation of the Peace Treaty. Criticism of the Governor for coöperating with the Federal Government was most vehement among certain anti-Japanese members of the Legislature, one of whom, in making a speech before a San Francisco labor body, referred to him as California's "so-called white Governor." Nor were efforts abandoned to get through the post-

poned anti-Japanese legislation. The Governor was requested, urged and threatened in an endeavor to induce him to call an extra session of the Legislature. To all of such demands, however, he replied that the importance of the Japanese problem required that any attempt to solve it must be kept entirely free of politics, that it ought to be preceded by a fair and comprehensive investigation. Finally he was moved to issue a formal statement, the essential portion of which follows:

In my opinion the present agitation in California was inspired by candidacy for office. It is true that many worthy citizens have allied themselves to it. The fact remains, however, that the dominant factors in the movement are actuated by their desires for political preferment. For five years one member of the State's congressional delegation at Washington has occupied a seat in the United States Senate. With exceptional opportunity, because of his affiliation with the national administration, he has accomplished nothing in all that time toward keeping Japanese undesirables away from our shores. Now that he is a candidate for re-election, he raises an outcry about the Jap question. Manifestly the grave concern he now expresses awakened only when he found it necessary to create an agitation on which he might ride back into office. Further proof that the present agitation has largely become a candidate's agitation is furnished by the fact that still another senatorial aspirant has lately joined in the hue and cry and is widely accused by friends of the incumbent Senator of trying to steal the thunder of their candidate.

Despite this statement, denunciation of both the Governor and the Japanese continued. Anti-Japanese politicians declined to await the result of the Governor's investigation and proceeded to draft a measure which was put on the ballot by initiative petition and carried in November 1920, by a large majority. This measure, which was subsequently upheld by the United States Supreme Court, reinforced and reaffirmed the anti-Japanese land law of 1913, and denied Japanese, either personally or as guardians for their American-born minor children or through corporations, any of whose stock is owned by Japanese, the right to lease agricultural land, with forfeiture to the State of the land involved as a penalty for violation. To get the signatures necessary to put the measure on the ballot and carry it at the

polls a State-wide campaign against the Japanese was made, aided by a section of the press that had always been strongly anti-Japanese. Even while the Immigration Committee of the House of Representatives was in California, Oregon and Washington (in the Summer of 1920) trying to make a comprehensive and fair investigation of the whole situation, the politicians and that section of the press referred to continued their agitation—the politicians by making startling statements that were nearly always exaggerated and often groundless, and the press by playing up in glaring headlines every bit of evidence unfavorable to the Japanese, and either omitting altogether or burying in qualifications everything favorable to them.

These newspapers, for instance, variously published that from 40 to 75 "picture brides" were at the San Francisco immigration station when the congressional committee visited it, whereas everyone, including the reporters, knew that there were exactly 10. Everyone knew, too, that a well-known Japanese had said "no" to a question as to whether he had ever received Government secrets from a Japanese young woman of his acquaintance who had worked at the San Francisco Post-office as censor of mails during the war, but one San Francisco paper which circulates widely throughout all northern California carried this story on the front page under a big black headline: "Japanese Agent Taps Postoffice." Thousands of people who read this failed to see the obscure retraction published a day or two later, and so, if they didn't hasten to join the Japanese Exclusion League, at least they became more fully convinced of the dangerousness of the Japanese. The public was almost completely at the mercy of this sort of thing. Under the circumstances it was not surprising that the anti-Japanese initiative was carried at the polls by a large majority. Indeed, the only surprising thing was that some 225,000 citizens voted against it.

### III

But what is it that the Japanese have done in California that has made them, according to their opponents, so much of a menace? They are alleged to have secured ownership and control of a vast amount of the farm land of the State. What are the facts? The total land area of the State is 99,617,280 acres, of which 27,931,144 acres are farm land. Of this the Japanese own 74,769 acres, and leased (when leasing was permitted) 383,287 acres; all of which amounts to something less than 2 per cent of the total. Another of the charges against them is that their increase in numbers endangers white supremacy. The 1920 census put California's total population at 3,426,861. Of this number 70,196 or 2 per cent were Japanese. To the charge that the Japanese birthrate is high, answer can be made that there is always a high birthrate among new immigrants, but that, as prosperity and better standards of living prevail, the rate declines. Already, in certain sections of California and Oregon where normal family life has prevailed amongst the Japanese for some time, the birthrate has declined materially.

It is often asserted by those opposing the Japanese in California that the latter already produce a major share of certain necessary food products, such as berries, small fruits, asparagus, lettuce, tomatoes and all kinds of green vegetables. This is doubtless true. But in doing so they have not driven out the Americans because there were no Americans to be driven out. The American farmer, at least in the West, has no taste for the intensely arduous, stooping labor necessary to produce such crops in commercial quantities; he prefers to devote his attention to wheat, oats, barley, corn, alfalfa, beans and rice, which require much less labor to raise and are more easily marketed. But the Japanese do not object to this kind of work, and, finding little or no competition from Americans, less in fact than in any other line of endeavor, they have gone in ex-

tensively for the production of the crops mentioned. California for some years has depended almost entirely on the Japanese for its supply. On whom it will depend if the Japanese are ever expelled I do not know.

But in this connection I offer for what it is worth the gratuitous statement of a white American farmer of Central California, made to me as the two of us were traveling to San Francisco. He told me that he had a ranch of 200 acres, most of which was devoted to raising berries, small fruits and garden truck, and that the actual work was done by Japanese whom he hired at daily wages. Although eligible for exemption from military duty, he had enlisted and fought in France, and when he returned and the American Legion was formed, he joined the local post. In a few months he was, to use his expression, "called on the carpet for hiring Japs." A good deal of discussion went on, he contending that the Japanese were indispensable, and the Legion taking the contrary view. Finally, the Legion proposed to furnish him white labor if he would discharge his Japanese. He agreed, discharged the Japanese, and was sent twelve young white men to whom he paid \$5 a day, with board and room, for ten hours' work. Before the end of the first week five complained that the work was too hard and quit. At the end of the second week there were but three remaining, and by the middle of the third week these too had gone. "So," said he, "I have the Japs back and God knows what I would do without them." I may say in passing that I have been told stories substantially like this by at least a hundred white American landowners from Los Angeles to Sacramento, many of whom stated that they preferred white labor, and had once refused to employ Japanese, but had been forced to it by their inability to get anything else. A crop of lettuce or beans or tomatoes—like time and tide—waits on no man; one must either get it harvested when it is matured, or lose it.

As to the majority of the Japanese now in California, I find nothing to indicate that they are not striving to live in complete compliance with the laws and in harmony with American habits, ideas and standards. They are still, of course, strangers in a strange land, but they evince great eagerness to learn and to conform strictly to the standards of American life. If dealt with in a spirit of tolerance they would, I feel sure, leave little to be desired in the matter of loyalty and conformity. Californians, in general, are not disposed to vicious or unjust acts; hence if the politicians and the press would only cease their incessant calling of names, I believe that the Japanese question would virtually take care of itself.

That this is no idle assertion was clearly developed at one of the Immigration Committee's hearings. The town of Livingston—a farming community in Central California which has among its residents a number of Japanese farmers and shopkeepers—suddenly became aware that its Japanese population was increasing rapidly. According to the testimony of various witnesses, new Japanese seemed to appear every day as if by magic. It was not long until the matter was the subject of general conversation, and the appearance of signs such as "No More Japs Wanted" and "Japs Keep Out of Livingston" indicated a rising tide of anti-Japanese sentiment. At this juncture a half dozen of the leading white residents, headed by the intelligent editor of the local newspaper, got together to see what could be done, fearing that anti-Japanese sentiment might increase until it provoked some untoward event. The first move made was to summon a prominent Japanese resident—one of the first settlers in the community and a man who had led all the Liberty Loan and Red Cross drives among his people there. He had the situation explained to him in a friendly way. The committee assured him of its desire to protect those Japanese who were bona fide residents, asked him if he had any information as to the cause of the

sudden influx, and suggested that he coöperate to see what could be done in the matter. He answered without hesitation that he did not know what the trouble was, but that if given a day he would find out. The next day he came back with the news that a white real estate firm in San Francisco that either owned or controlled a large tract of land near Livingston, acting through and with the aid of a San Francisco Japanese, was locating Japanese on this tract. He stated further that he believed this should be stopped and that if given a few days he believed he could stop it. He organized a committee of his own people, went to San Francisco and there had his life threatened for interfering in what evidently was a lucrative business. But when he came back it was to announce that no more Japanese would come to Livingston. No more came; and within a few weeks those who had come during the sudden influx were gone. With such a result, said the witnesses, their little committee disbanded, the anti-Japanese signs came down, and there was no further trouble. It may be of interest to add that although reporters from several of the large California newspapers heard this testimony, no mention of it above a half dozen lines ever appeared in print.

#### IV

Now for Washington and Oregon. The total population of Washington is 1,356,621; and the Japanese number 17,114—1.3% of the total. The total area of the state is 42,775,040 acres and the farming land amounts to 6,573,548 acres. Of this the Japanese operated 20,500 acres, all under lease, for the State constitution contains a provision forbidding farm land ownership to all aliens. In Seattle there are a number of Japanese groceries, dyeing and cleaning shops, hotels, laundries and barbershops. Many of these employ some white help, and nearly all of them observe the American rules and regulations common to such lines of business. Labor

leaders in Washington have encouraged the unionizing of the Japanese as the most practicable means of preventing undesirable competition from them. A considerable number have joined American unions, and many others belong to Japanese trade organizations which prescribe the same hour and wage scales as prevail in similar trades among Americans. Japanese barber-shops in Seattle and Tacoma, for instance, observe the same hours and charge the same prices as American shops. I have heard no general complaint in Washington that the Japanese are injuriously competing with the whites, and have found no wide-spread belief that they are threatening the destruction of the economic or social structure of the State.

The total land area in Oregon is 61,188,280 acres, of which 11,685,000 acres is farming land. The total operated by Japanese under both ownership and lease is 10,096 acres, or a little less than one-tenth of one per cent. The population of the State is 783,389, and the Japanese number 4,022, or one-half of one per cent. There are no Japanese sections in the large cities, and no communities in the State in which Japanese predominate. In Idaho, whose population is 431,826, and farm land area 5,283,000 acres, the Japanese number 1,731 (one-half of one per cent) and own 2,733 acres of farms. In Montana the Japanese own and operate 10,000 acres of farm land out of a total of 13,545,000 acres, and number 1,250 in a population of 547,593.

The following table compiled from figures appearing in the annual reports of the Commissioner General of Immigration, shows the Japanese arrivals and departures from 1909 to 1922:

Year	Admitted	Departed	Net	
1909	2,432	5,004	Minus	2,572
1910	2,598	5,024	"	2,426
1911	4,282	5,869	"	1,587
1912	5,358	5,437	"	79
1913	6,771	5,647	Plus	1,124
1914	8,462	6,300	"	2,162
1915	9,029	5,967	"	3,062
1916	9,100	6,922	"	2,178
1917	9,159	6,581	"	2,578



<i>Year</i>	<i>Admitted</i>	<i>Departed</i>	<i>Net</i>	
1918	11,143	7,691	Plus	3,452
1919	11,404	8,328	"	3,076
1920	16,174*	15,653*	"	521*
1921	14,274	15,545	Minus	1,271
1922	12,837	15,278	"	2,441
Total	123,023	115,246	Plus	7,777

It will be seen from this that during the 14 years, 1909 to 1922, the Japanese population of the United States increased through immigration only by 7,777; and that during the last two years more Japanese left America than came in.

## V

A decade ago the predecessors of those politicians who are at present waging a campaign against the Japanese based their opposition on the inferiority of the Japanese. But that argument was long since abandoned, and a new one had to take its place. The new argument is that the Japanese are unassimilable. The average anti-Japanist makes an argument something like this: "I admit that the Japanese are frugal, sober, orderly, intelligent, thrifty and law-abiding, but we do not want them because they are unassimilable." Asked *why* they are unassimilable, he will say: "because they are oriental; because they are different." Usually, if the inquiry is pursued, it will develop that he bases his whole contention, not upon careful inquiry, observation and investigation, but solely upon a personal prejudice or upon what someone has told him. This was rather clearly brought out by a number of questions and answers during the progress of the Immigration Committee's hearings. The questions, propounded by a member of the Committee and answered by a prominent California anti-Japanist, were in substance as follows:

Q. What do you mean by stating that the Japanese cannot assimilate?

A. The Japanese cannot assimilate because their ideas and ideals are foreign to those of the United States.

Q. Are there social and other restrictions placed

upon the Japanese; are they discriminated against?

A. Yes.

Q. Is not their inability to assimilate the result of these restrictions and discriminations?

A. Yes; partly.

Q. Has your experience excluded contact with prominent Japanese?

A. Yes.

Q. With what prominent Japanese have you discussed the question of assimilation or whether or not the Japanese do desire to become American citizens?

A. None.

Q. Then, do you know whether or not the Japanese people do desire to be assimilated and do desire to become American citizens?

A. I do not, except as I have stated.

One of the chief difficulties in discussing the question of assimilation is that the average American assumes that there is but one process—physical amalgamation through inter-racial marriage. He ignores sociological assimilation and does not know that even physical assimilation is to some degree possible without inter-marriage. This latter statement would be denied by all of the opponents of the Japanese, but against their denial may be placed the fact that carefully collected records show that Japanese children born in America are about four pounds heavier and one and one-half inches taller at a given age (from ten to twelve years) than children born in Japan. As to sociological assimilation, it is quite apparent even now. No one who has, with unprejudiced mind, observed and talked with the American-born Japanese, from the children in the elementary schools to the youths of both sexes in high schools and colleges, can escape the fact. The rapidity of the progress made depends, of course, upon the attitude of the whites. Discrimination and distrust retard it, while tolerance and friendliness encourage it. Colonization unquestionably hinders it, but colonization is the effort of the Japanese to protect themselves against discrimination, and the way to end it is to end the discrimination. With it ended there is every reason to believe that the Japanese will be found to be quite willing to diffuse throughout California, Oregon and Washington. I believe that they want to assim-

\* Including Hawaii.

ilate, and that they can and will if permitted to do so.

The California anti-Japanese land law was adopted by the voters in November, 1920. A week or two later the Japanese Exclusion League of California announced plans to carry the anti-Japanese fight into other Pacific Coast and Western States, in an effort to induce these States to adopt the California program. It was said that with this accomplished the East no longer could accuse California of standing alone on the Japanese question. Accordingly, the Japanese Exclusion League despatched telegrams to the Governors and other officials of ten or twelve Western States urging that the California program be adopted. Particular attention was paid Washington and Oregon. In Washington a small group responded at once. An initiative measure similar to the one carried in California was prepared and petitions in its behalf circulated throughout the State. But when the time came for filing, the petitions were found to contain not even half the signatures required by law. However, the matter was brought before the next Legislature and after a bitter fight an act was passed (by a narrow margin) forbidding the leasing of farm land to all aliens. In Oregon a similar act passed the Assembly but was defeated in the Senate by almost two to one.

The campaign was carried also into Montana and Idaho, despite the fact that in those States Japanese land ownership and population were negligible. As a

matter of fact, the proponents of the measures in the Legislatures of these States made the plea that such measures should be enacted simply to help California. They were, however, in both cases defeated. As to the other States into which the campaign was carried, Nebraska and Nevada passed acts denying ownership of farm land to all aliens, Louisiana a law denying such ownership to aliens ineligible to citizenship, and Wyoming, Utah and Colorado rejected bills to the same effect. It is worthy of note that all the alien land laws passed, save the ones in California and Louisiana, were made to include all aliens, thus avoiding the discriminatory feature to which the Japanese Government had always objected.

## VI

Now all of these laws and attempts at laws are reinforced by the harsh and unyielding provisions of the new Immigration Act. What its effects will be in the long run no man can say. It does not, of course, molest the Japanese who are already here, but perhaps it will eventually discourage them sufficiently to cause most of them to go home, or elsewhere. If it does, then the politicians of California, having advocated it for their gain, will be the ultimate losers by it. For once the Japanese "peril" is forgotten they will have a hard time finding another issue that is so favorable to the arts of the stump, and so fruitful of votes.

## EDITORIAL

THE charm of politics is simply the charm of fraud. . . . But maybe that is too harsh. Perhaps it would be better to strike out the word fraud and substitute inexactness. The human race, it must be obvious, has no liking for exact men. Even when the thing they do is important, difficult and touched with gaudiness, it seldom gets them much admiration. In all the poetry, drama and prose fiction of the world there is no record of a hero who was a mathematician, an architect, or even an engineer. I can recall at the moment, indeed, but one engineer who appears in respectable fiction at all—the Alexander of Willa Cather's "Alexander's Bridge"—and he is depicted there as a moony and absurd fellow, and, what is more, as a very bad engineer. Yet engineers do work that is spectacular, that calls for a great intellectual daring, and that is often full of serious physical risks. The world passes them over for painters, for money-grubbers, for sailors—above all, for military men, practitioners of the most inexact craft known to man. What it likes best is the sketchy experimentalist in life, whose skill is a great deal less important than his luck.

This fact, as I say, may account for the attention that is given to politicians, a class of men otherwise extremely uninteresting and even disgusting. The work they do, in so far as they do any work at all, is actually unimportant, despite its apparent bearing upon all of us. What, indeed, are the odds in the present campaign whether the Hon. Mr. Coolidge holds the throne of Lincoln and Harding or the Hon. Mr. Davis ousts him from it? Both are the helpless victims of a system that they can neither change nor control; both are flies upon a wheel, just as you are and I am. If Coolidge wins, Davis will have to go back

to the law; if Davis wins, Coolidge will have to go back to the law. That is the chief, and perhaps the only issue in the combat. Yet fifty million Americans follow it as if it were something portentous and epochal, and a great glamor is thrown about the two antagonists. Its lack of sense, I believe, is its chief charm. It would attract far less attention if its premises were solid facts and it moved relentlessly toward a logical conclusion. Whatever is demonstrable is not popular. The folk, after a hundred and twenty-eight years, are still against vaccination, and after twenty years more they still believe in democracy.

### II

The wonder is that politicians have not, by this time, got more science into their ancient art, and so developed a surer skill at it. No other craft shows so many thumping quacks, or in such high places. The best here seem to be worse than the worst. On the level of precinct politics a technic has been developed that seems to work very well, at least once in three times, but on the higher levels it is all empiricism and blundering. I point, for example, to the inept and childish manoeuvres of the great whales of the art when they meet in a combat to the death, say at a national convention. There every hoof is on the gas, every nerve is astrain, every brain is working in ice. And there such follies are witnessed as must needs fill every judicious observer with a sour and sickly mirth.

The two conventions of the past Summer were both made brilliantly amusing by the almost fabulous incompetence of politicians. At the first, in Cleveland, an amateur of no discernible weight or dignity