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FUTURE OF HAWAIIAN-BORN YOUTHS

Part I

By Rev. Takie Okumura

WHEN he passed through Honolulu last fall after an extensive tour of Europe and America, General Juichi Terauchi said thus in his interview with resident Japanese:

"I have been repeatedly asked by the Japanese in America whether or not there are opportunities in China for them to engage in agriculture. I told them frankly that they should not go. The conditions of land and climate are vastly different, and so are the living standards.

"You speak of the possibility of cotton cultivation. But you have to make an intensive study of the methods of cultivation that is adaptable to North or South China. The whole question may be to a great extent simplified, if you are planning to work together with Chinese or use a large number of Chinese farmers. Still I can not see any good in giving up your comfortable living and opportunity in America, and starting all over again in China.

"Indeed, many of our people are steadily migrating from Japan to North Manchuria. But migration to China is not even thought of. China is a big country, but those lands which are best suited for agriculture are already overcrowded with people. The only hope for China lies in industrialization, utilizing her vast resources.

"The aim of our holy crusade is to drive out communism from China and help the Chinese people elevate their standards of living. In so doing we will be able to cooperate with them in building up a lasting peace. To think of driving out the Chinese farmers and replacing them with the Japanese is ridiculous. It is entirely out of the question."

The general touched only one phase of the question,—that of agriculture. But even if we consider all phases, we will be convinced that with the exception of a few individuals with special talent, majority of our Hawaiian-born youths should stay in Hawaii. China is not the place for their future expansion.

Some ten years ago when the number of Hawaiian-born youths commenced to increase and the problem of occupation was being widely

discussed, a certain group of men insisted that Hawaiian-born youths should not remain cooped up in a small place like Hawaii but should expand into the vast continents of North or South America. In 1927 when urgent business forced the writer to take a trip to New York City, he had an opportunity of ascertaining whether or not there are opportunities for Hawaiian-born youths on the mainland, and if so, in what line of work. After finishing his business in New York City, he took a southern route, visiting New Orleans and the towns in Texas where Japanese are engaged in rice cultivation. He looked into the farming areas from the south of San Diego to the north of San Francisco and as far east as Ogden and Salt Lake City. In September, 1929 he was again in New York City, and this time he took the northern route, visiting the states of Washington and Oregon, from Yakima and Wapato to Seattle, Tacoma and Portland. In these two trips, he visited every locality where there was a fairly large number of Japanese, and was able to gather the necessary data.

Certainly there are many opportunities for our Hawaiian-born youths on the mainland, but those opportunities are mainly of manual labor or agricultural, and not the so-called white-collar jobs. In the large city banks or firms there are hardly any Japanese employes. If there are any, they are usually either janitor or window-cleaner. Perhaps J. M. Robinson Company, a large department store of Los Angeles, was the only exception. It had on its payroll 15 Japanese clerks. In the stores and firms established by the Japanese there may be some openings, but these are limited. Opportunities on the farms, however, are unlimited, and they may be built into very promising enterprises in the way they are operated.

Speaking of agriculture, there is a large variety of work. There are men who are paid to do the cultivation, men who move from place to place during the fruit season and do the fruit-pickings, men who run truck-farms of five to ten acres, and men who are engaged in big scale farming of 200 to 2,000 acres.

If we desire to become an independent farmer, we must first buy a farm. One of the writer's friends owned a farm of about 60 acres in a place called Cortez. He had opened up 40 acres and planted peach trees. A farm near-by was on sale for \$75 an acre. Around Ogden and Salt Lake City, lands suitable for farming were worth about \$500 an acre. But lands located about ten or fifteen miles away from the cities were from \$200 to \$300 an acre. In the neighborhood of Los Angeles, there were many homesteads. Usually one homestead consisted of 160 acres, and was offered at the price as low as \$40 or \$50. But the homesteader was required to put up his own home. If in the southern district, he had to dig a well. He would be mighty lucky if he struck water after digging 300 or 400 feet, for on some of the homesteads the well had to be dug from 1,000 to 1,200 feet. On the average the cost of digging well ran from \$800 to \$2,500. Around the northern districts, there was no worry about water, but bigger investment had to be made in clearing up the

wooded land and making it fit for cultivation. Easily \$5,000 would be needed as capital for any man going into an independent farming.

Instead of big scale farming, a farm sufficiently large for one family is really profitable. There are many who have succeeded in this type. Of the big scale farming, the late Seinosuke Okuye of Livingston, California, was a notable example. He had a vast grape field, and the year when the writer visited him was the bumper year. He had grapes growing everywhere but many were left on the fields to rot. He said that it cost him more to have the grapes picked and packed for the market. Still in some years he made an enormous profit. Someone aptly said that farming in California is like a big gamble. A year of big profit may be followed unexpectedly by a year of staggering losses. A storm may come, and wipe out all the profit overnight. So, not all can make good by expanding into the mainland, and engaging in agricultural enterprises without any working capital.

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The writer also made a tour of Manchuria. When he was in Japan in July, 1933, he met Baron Yoshiro Sakatani and had a frank exchange of views on Hawaiian-born youths. With baron's introduction to his son who was then in the position of Vice-Premier, he started for Manchuria. At Dairen, he was given by the Manchurian RR headoffice, a three month-pass to travel freely on any of its lines. He had hosts of friends, George Sakamaki, Tokuichi Muramaru, formerly of Hawaii, and the family of his niece at Dairen, Yoshito Kubota, formerly his church member in Honolulu, now running a huge orchard at Port Arthur, Torao Kawasaki, Mitsushige Matsuzawa, Tokutaro Suzuki and Koichi Otsuka, occupying responsible positions at Hsingking, and many others in practically every strategic point in Manchuria. These friends helped the writer visit every nook and corner of the country and conduct a thorough-going survey. The conclusion that he reached may be summarized in a few words—that MANCHURIA IS NOT THE PLACE FOR HAWAIIAN-BORN YOUTHS TO EXPAND. Its climate, its social structure and its whole environment are not adapted to the youths born and reared in Hawaii.

It is also perfectly needless to re-emphasize that Japan herself is not attractive to our youths. Large number of Hawaiian-born youths can not hope to find white-collar jobs, even if they return and try hard.

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After making surveys as mentioned above the writer became thoroughly convinced that with the exception of few talented individuals, the large bulk of our youths, even though they stretch themselves to the east or west, must pursue manual labor. Naturally only a small number of Hawaiian-born youths can expand to Japan, or continental America. The big majority will have to remain in Hawaii. If they have

respect for labor, and willingness and readiness to go through the ~~experiences~~ of farmer in Hawaii, their birthplace, their future will surely become brighter.

Concerned over the future of increasing number of our youths and their problem of occupation, the writer first raised the cry of "Return-To-Farm" in his work in 1923 covering the whole Territory. In those days his proposal was very unpopular. On some of the sugar plantations, men cursed him, "You contemptible cur, the nerve of you telling us to make our sons farmers! We came to Hawaii as farmers and we'll be willing to remain as farmers. But we won't allow our children to follow in our footsteps." That was the prevailing sentiment of the Japanese on the plantations. The Editor of a certain powerful Japanese Daily ridiculed and attacked him. Even the so-called leaders of the community ridiculed and branded the movement as merely an unworkable panacea. But today big change has come. The "Return-To-Farm" idea has become an unshakable conviction.

Even a cursory glance is sufficient for anyone to see the sweeping changes which have come over the sugar plantations in the Territory. They are literally competing with each other in re-modeling or erecting new cottages, and in providing athletic and recreational facilities for the laborers. Working hours have been shortened, and wages have been reasonably increased. We can see easily that sugar plantations are improving their conditions and are making a greater effort to attract our Hawaiian-born youths. It is now up to our youths. If they only have the will to go into farming, there is no longer any difficulty to earn a living.

But this is not the real cherished desire back of the writer's "Return-To-Farm" idea. He fondly hopes that increasing number of our youths will own or obtain a life-long lease of five to ten acres of land and become an independent farmer. When one owns land, opens it and cultivates vegetables or grows fruit-bearing trees, feeds chickens or pigs, he has no longer any fear like that of an ordinary wage-earner. He works day in and out with sweat on his brow, and lives on the things which he produces. He obtains to a great degree the guarantee of livelihood and becomes a truly independent man. Only when we have a large number of men of such type, can we say that we have in Hawaii a true middle class.

A considerable amount of capital is needed for anyone to become an independent farmer. It is therefore wise to work on the sugar plantation and save up the earnings, or have the parents bring back savings kept in Japan and re-invest the money in the enterprises of our youths in Hawaii. Once after the youths have actually gone into the farm enterprises, money can be borrowed from the government. The most important thing, however, is the will to do the work, and where there is will there is a way!