

# Waving the Yellow Flag in California PART I

By JOHN B. WALLACE

THIS seems to be the open season for perils and menaces. With all the perils and menaces now threatening our devoted country not from without but within it certainly looks like rocky sailing for our Ship of State. A strange thing about these menaces and perils is that they seem to run to colors. Hardly has one of our southern brethren been persuaded to resume his seat after declaiming the dreadful menace of the black when up pops a brother from the East or Middle West and raves about the red. And now out here on the Pacific Coast we have discovered a new peril. It's a yellow one this time. And most appropriately it is the yellow press that has done the most to advertise this latest menace to our national peace and vegetable gardens.

Another peculiar thing about these perils is that we have seemed to invite them upon ourselves. We throw our doors wide open, invite in the oppressed peoples of the world and then, after they have with great enthusiasm availed themselves of the invitation, we hastily cast about for means to kick them out. Of course we didn't invite the Negroes to this country. We brought them over—rather forced our hospitality upon them, as it were. And the reds—we found one bunch of reds already in possession of the country. What we didn't swap away from them with beads and bad whiskey we took by force and then herded what reds had survived the whiskey and buckshot on to reservations.

The reds who are causing us annoyance now were originally whites but underfeeding and overtalking gave them their present complexion. Short rations and an indigestible mental diet are apt to have that effect.

It is a comparatively easy thing to dispose of the black menace and the red peril.

But our yellow peril out on the Pacific Coast is indeed a peril of another color. We are not dealing with ignorant Negroes or half-starved, half-baked theorists from darkest Europe. The Japanese are a race every whit as proud and sensitive as our own—a race that considers itself to be just as good if not better than any nation on earth. And what is more to the point it is a nation that is ready to back its claims with several million trained soldiers and a big fleet of modern warships.

Once before we had an incipient yellow peril out on the Pacific Coast. A bunch of Chinamen had the nerve to think they could come to our land of the free and obtain a monopoly of the chop suey and laundry businesses. But we soon showed them where to head in, or rather where not to head in.

Now to be frank it was only a short time ago that I discovered we had this yellow peril in the form of the Japanese in our midst. As a matter of fact, the greater part of our three million more or less white residents of California was also in dense ignorance of the fact that we were living over a smoldering volcano. We had had a few slight earthquakes, it is true, but we had never laid them to the Japanese. The first intimation came last winter when it was discovered that one George Shima, the Japanese potato king, had what virtually amounted to a corner on potatoes. Mr. Shima, it was charged, was profiteering. Of course none of his white rivals among the commission men would descend to such tactics. They laid it on to Mr. Shima. At once our little brown brothers suffered a slump in popularity. And then to cap the climax, this spring the Japanese obtained a corner on the strawberries. No more nice berries at one nickel a box. Two for a quarter was the minimum. If it looked like a glut the Japanese would destroy a large quantity of berries and keep the price up. At least that is what they were accused of doing, although it was never proved and the district attorney's office failed to prosecute. The price of everything else had aviated but Californians demanded their inalienable rights. Strawberries always had been five cents a box. Down with the Japanese for daring to ask more!

Then a few of our enterprising politicians discovered that their fences needed repairing. What better material could be found than the carcasses of the Japanese. They had no vote, so wham! on to them with both feet.

Thus once more the yellow peril was brought to the fore after lying quiescent for a number of years while the Japanese Navy was policing our unprotected Pacific shores during the late unpleasantness and the local Japanese were supplying us with vegetables and fish. Our politicians were too busy then bringing our boys out of Siberia and the yellow press needed its space to apologize for and extenuate the depredations of the Germans.

Agitation against the immigration of the Japanese commenced in California back in 1906 and 1907 when Japanese laborers began coming into the country in such numbers as to constitute a real menace to the laboring men of the country, who at that time were finding it difficult to obtain jobs for themselves.

The matter was taken up with the Federal Government in an attempt to have the immigration laws amended. The government, not wishing to appear to discriminate against the subjects of a powerful and friendly nation, entered into diplomatic negotiations with the Japanese Government and the so-called *gentleman's agreement* was drawn up. Under its terms the Japanese Government agreed to restrict the issuance of passports to the United States to students, business men and farmers.

After Japanese laborers had been thus excluded the state legislature of California passed a bill in 1913 forbidding Japanese to own agricultural land and limiting leases to a period of three years. This provision, of course, was only applicable to such Japanese as



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Of Sacramento, state senator and president of the California Oriental Exclusion League, is one of the strongest opponents of Japanese immigration and colonization in the state. The five points of the league of which Mr. Inman is president are: Cancellation of the *gentleman's agreement*, exclusion of picture brides, rigorous exclusion of Japanese as immigrants, confirmation and legalization of the policy that Asiatics shall forever be barred from American citizenship, amendment of the Federal Constitution providing that no child born in the United States shall be given the rights of an American citizen unless both parents are of a race eligible to citizenship.

were ineligible to citizenship and did not affect the rights of Japanese born in the United States and therefore citizens per se.

An initiative petition has been prepared which would place a measure upon the ballot next fall that would practically prevent a Japanese from owning or leasing any agricultural land whatever in the state.

This petition is being circulated at the time I am writing this article and I do not know just what success it is having. Men who have leased large tracts to the Japanese have assured me that the proposed law is unconstitutional and that they do not fear it.

Since the close of the World War the California Oriental Exclusion League and similar organizations have kept up a constant agitation against the Japanese. There was an attempt made by state senator J. M. Inman, president of the league and one of the most active foes of the Japanese, and others to introduce anti-Japanese legislation at the last session of the legislature. Failing in this a determined attempt was made to induce Governor Stephens to call an extra session to consider such legislation.

Governor Stephens remained deaf to appeals, however, but instead put the State Board of Control to work gathering statistics. These statistics, to which I will refer in detail later, evidently caused the governor to experience a change of heart, for soon after receiving them he indited a letter to Secretary of State Colby asking for Federal aid in solving the problem.

Up to the present the State Department has taken no action upon the governor's letter but a congressional sub-committee on immigration and naturalization is now out on the coast taking testimony upon the question. This committee will continue its hearings until late in the fall.

This in brief is the history of the legislative steps taken against the Japanese up to the present.

After reading the newspaper articles and the statements of some of our Senators and other near statesmen I was prepared to find the citizens of California in a furor of excitement over a new invasion of the Pacific Coast by the Japanese. But careful and thorough investigation found them to be in a remarkable state of calmness considering the dire predictions daily hurled at them. Perhaps living so close to a peril has insured them to a situation that Californian representative statesmen at Washington view with alarm.

Reliable statistics have been hard to obtain. The figures furnished Governor Stephens by the State Board of Control are perhaps as nearly accurate as any. These have been gathered, I understand, largely from the Japanese consulates and correspond in many respects with figures furnished me by the Japanese themselves. The latter allege, however, that the Board

of Control counted all the Japanese coming into the country but failed to allow for those returning to Japan.

The Board of Control also included five thousand students at present at college in Japan. These latter are, therefore, not menacing us now but constitute a reserve menace, as it were.

That the people of California are not stirred to deeds of violence against the Japanese is not the fault of some of the agitators. Their entire appeal is based upon passion and prejudice. Justice and fairness have no part in their creed. There is also a considerable number of patriotic men who sincerely believe that it is advisable to prevent further increase of the Japanese in this country but are willing to accord to them the undoubtedly excellent qualities that they as a nation possess. These men are not responsible for the fulminations of the yellow press. But there is a certain class of politicians who are ready to stir up race hatred and bring this country to the verge of a war to gratify their own ambitions.

These men are only defeating their own ends. There is no wide-spread sentiment against the Japanese among the laboring class, the class most easily excited to riot. Their feeling as far as I have been able to learn by questioning men of various trades and crafts is largely one of indifference. The Japanese in this state are nearly all farmers. Instead of being in competition with labor they are supplying the laborers with food. Farm labor is so scarce that the small number of Oriental laborers, Japanese, Hindoos or Chinese, cannot fill the demand.

Neither can I find any strong sentiment against the Japanese among the farmers themselves. There is some bitterness, it is true, evidenced by farmers who have been brought in direct competition with the Japanese but even in the reports of the hearings before the immigration committee, as printed in the newspapers most strongly opposed to the Japanese, I find nearly as many farmers testifying for the Japanese as against them.

Every banker to whom I have talked has had nothing but good words for the Japanese. Business men generally speak favorably of them and deplore the agitation against them.

The greatest opposition to the Japanese seems to be in the northern part of the state. They have concentrated strongly in certain districts there, and in some cities such as Stockton and Sacramento there seems to be a decidedly bitter feeling.

In Stockton especially, some of the citizens are so opposed to the Japanese that they refused to appear before the immigration committee and testify because the committee had visited the immense ranch of George Shima who reclaimed the river delta lands.

They overlooked the fact that an investigating committee is supposed to investigate both sides of a question. Such prejudice, however, is not common and there has been a disposition among both those opposed to the Japanese and the Japanese themselves, to give the committee all the aid in their power in uncovering the real truth of the situation.

I have lived upon the Pacific Coast for thirty odd years. During that period I have had considerable dealings with the Japanese, both as a newspaper man and an orange grower. I have known them as house servants, as railroad laborers, as orange pickers, as business men, as farmers and during my college days as fellow students. I have found them to average just about the same as any other nationality. I have known good ones, bad ones and indifferent ones.

As desirable immigrants, I would class them with the Germans and Swedes except for the fact that their Asiatic race prevents them from becoming easily assimilated.

They are industrious, thrifty, cleanly and honest. There is no class of immigrants that adopts American customs more quickly than the Japanese. A Chinaman may live in this country for a lifetime but he still clings to the dress and habits of his native land. But from the moment a Japanese lands in this country he begins to pick up our ways. It is this habit of his, in picking up our ways, that has made him unfavorable with the housewives in California. Since he has obtained control of the berry and vegetable markets he has been suspected and, I fear, justly suspected of profiteering. Anyhow he has carried co-operation to the nth degree and I'll confess has aroused a feeling of envy among farmers and fruit growers who thought they had a corner on the co-operative principle.

The Japanese are law abiding. As a newspaper reporter I worked around police headquarters in several of the larger northwestern cities and I cannot recall ever having seen or heard of a Japanese being booked for theft or burglary. We have had them in for gambling and fighting among themselves and occasionally for intoxication but they seem to have an innate respect for property rights.

I have heard it charged that they are cunning and deceitful and were guilty of sharp practice. In some individual instances I have found this to be true but no more so than any other race that comes to a foreign country and is made the prey of every sharper and crook. In nearly every instance where it has been charged that the Japanese attempted to take advantage in a business deal I have found that the man who made the complaint had simply been beaten at his own game. The Japanese are shrewd and when they are in doubt they go to a white lawyer. I believe that anyone who deals honestly and fairly with the Japanese will receive the same treatment. At least that has been my own experience with them. Much of the prejudice against them I have found to be due to ignorance and