

The South Sea Islands Under Japanese Mandate

By *Walter B. Harris*

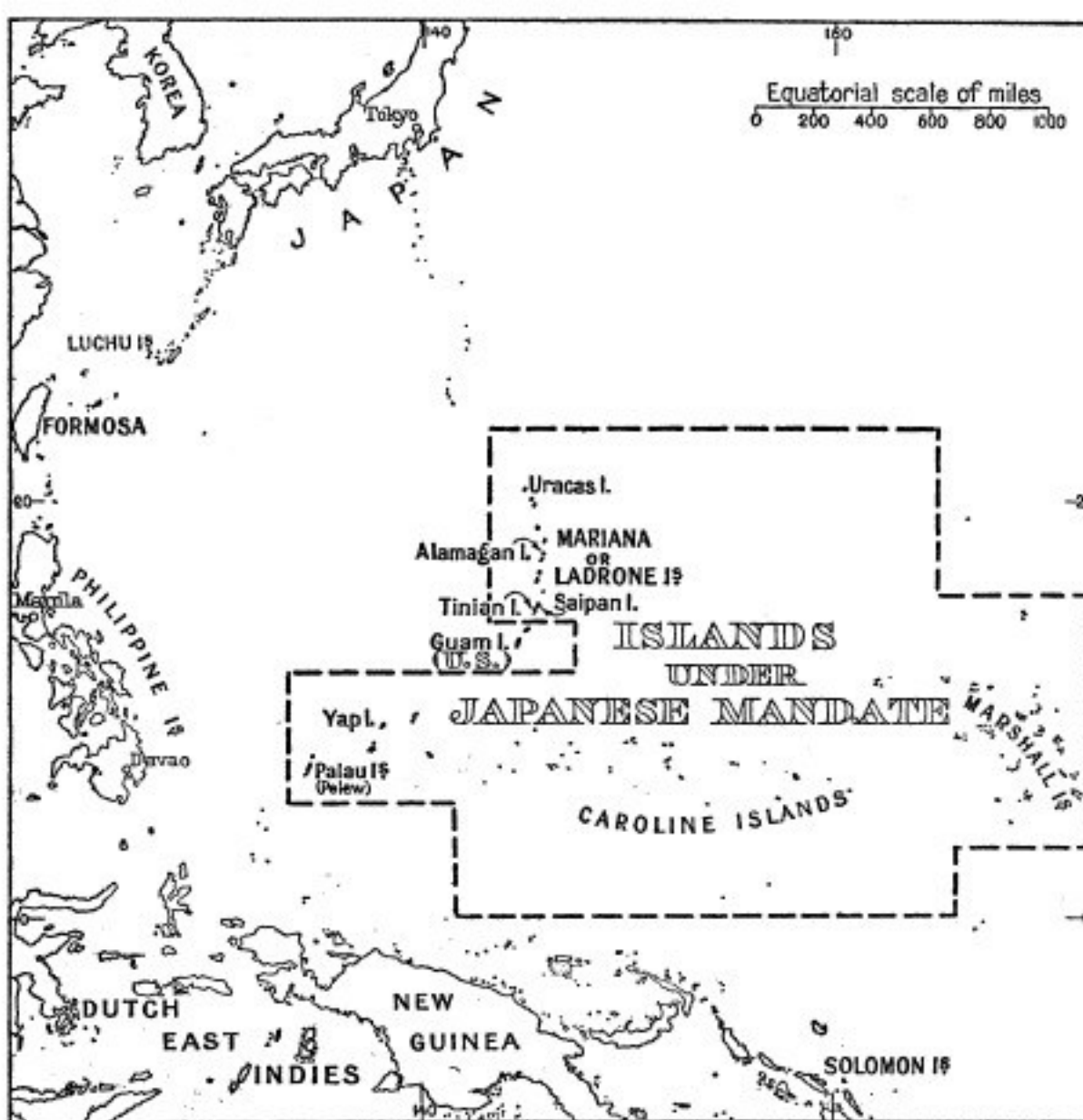
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IN 1899 the Spanish Government, deprived of the Philippine Islands and Guam by the terms of the treaty of peace that followed the Spanish-American War, sold to Germany its remaining possessions in the Pacific -- the Caroline and the Mariana archipelagoes. In 1920 the Council of the League of Nations charged the Japanese Government with a mandate over these and the Marshall groups, which since the opening of the World War had been occupied by a Japanese defense force. In 1921-22 the Japanese garrison was withdrawn and the control passed into the hands of a civil Japanese administration known as "The South Seas Bureau," which continues in operation today.

The three archipelagoes -- the Mariana, the Caroline and the Marshall -- lie scattered over a vast expanse of ocean in the form of a triangle. The base is constituted by the Caroline and Marshall groups which, at a distance of only a few degrees from the equator, extend east and west for over 2,500 miles. The apex is the furthest removed of the Mariana group, 1,200 miles to the north. So remote is the situation of these islands, and so far are they apart, that the writer's journey from Japan to the three archipelagoes and on to Davao in the Philippine Islands necessitated a voyage of over 7,000 miles. Yet in all this ocean vastness the aggregate area of the land surface of the three groups, comprising 623 islands besides hundreds of smaller islets and reefs, is only 700 square miles.

It was in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that little by little these islands were discovered and reported. The first recorded navigator to penetrate these seas was the Portuguese Diego da Rocha, who sighted certain of the islands in 1526, the same year in which Magellan recorded the existence of Guam, Saipan and Tinian in the Mariana group. Two years later the Spaniard Saavedra visited and described one of the minor groups. The Palau Islands were added to the map by Villalobos in 1542, though Drake had previously seen Yap. In 1686 Lazeano penetrated further afield and gave to the southern archipelago the name that it still bears, "Las Islas Carolinas," after King Carol II of Spain. But the combined discoveries of these early navigators were limited and it was not till a survey was undertaken in 1824 by the French ship "La Coquille"-- and four years later by the Russian corvette "Seniavine" -- that precise knowledge was acquired as to their relative positions and importance.

The native population of the three archipelagoes -- to which in more recent days the geographical title of Micronesia has been given -- are no doubt the descendants of Malaysians from the west and Polynesians from the east, with some Melanesian blood from the south, but there are marked distinctions between the inhabitants of the different groups. Two divisions are widely separated -- the Chamorros and the Kanakas. The former, who number in all about 3,000, are reported to be the more intelligent. They are found in the Mariana group and in the island of Yap and Palau (Pelew) in the western Carolines. Their original home is said to have been Guam. The Japanese authorities report that while the Kanaka population remains stationary in numbers the Chamorros are increasing. The Kanakas are far more numerous, numbering about 45,000, but the name includes many different types of Pacific islander. In the western islands the trace of Malay origin is very evident while further east Polynesian characteristics predominate. To the south the type is more Melanesian. The Chamorros and Kanakas, although amicably disposed, live entirely



separate, the Chamorros considering themselves a superior and more civilized race. Many languages are spoken in the archipelagoes and often the dialects of islands of the same groups are so different as to be unintelligible to the neighbors. Today under the Japanese Mandate the Japanese language is being introduced as the inter-island tongue and is already known and spoken amongst the majority of the younger generation within reach of educational facilities. Unfortunately it is a difficult tongue to acquire.

The natives of the islands vary in character as they vary in appearance, but as a general statement they may be described as docile, law-abiding, thriftless and idle. Nature supplies them, at little or no cost and almost without effort on their part, with practically all that they require, for except near the settlements they wear little or no clothing while their food consists almost entirely of wild fruits and wild vegetables. A few seeds scattered broadcast generally produce a crop in excess of requirements, without cultivation or attention. The staple articles of diet are, however, the coconut and the bread fruit. The former flourishes in all the coral islands and along the coasts of the mountainous groups while the latter grows wild in profusion in the forests. To vary the menu the native has, almost at the sole effort of gathering them, the yam and taro, the banana and papaya. Fish there are in abundance, and pigs both wild and domestic. On some of the islands deer abound. For luxuries, easily obtained by barter, there are oranges and lemons, mangoes and pineapples. With such a choice of diet it is perhaps little wonder that the natives are disinclined to work. Such tasks as they will consent to engage in, are as a rule inefficiently performed and only undertaken intermittently. The period of employment is seldom prolonged and rarely lasts more than the time required to gain a specific sum for a specific purpose. The result is that native labor as a factor in the agricultural and industrial future of the islands will play a very insignificant part. Even as its best it is rated, both in efficiency and in wage, at less than half the value of imported Japanese labor. The only place where continuous native labor is employed -- though even here the individual never contracts for more than one year's work -- is at the phosphate mines in Angaur, where as many as 450 men are usually at work, of whom about 350 are natives.

The difficulty of obtaining local labor has led to the introduction of a large number of Japanese workers, the majority of them coming from the Luchu Islands which lie between southern Japan and Formosa. Although these are Japanese subjects they are in character and language more closely allied to the Chinese, with whom in the past they were intimately connected, and are described as being honest and hardworking but grasping and difficult to handle. They show a remarkable capacity for combination and in these South Sea islands they have already formed effective trade-unions. The Japanese of pure origin are as a rule reluctant to emigrate and form but a very small minority of the 18,000 subjects of Japan who have come and settled in the islands. The immigrants are for the most part employed in the cultivation of sugarcane, or in the sugar refineries of Saipan and Tinian, or are engaged in the fishing industry. Thus they are not actually in competition with native labor, for the sugar and fishing industries have only recently been introduced. Nor was foreign labor engaged until native labor had proved to be inefficient even where and when procurable.

Were the problem of the future of 48,000 natives of the islands limited to their employment in

industry it would not be one of a very serious importance, for industry is, and is likely to remain, very restricted. But the natives are at the same time the principal proprietors of the soil, that is to say the owners of the greater part of the surface area. Unfortunately they are as inefficient and as idle in their agricultural pursuits as they are in their other work, with the result that a great extent of the islands consists of uncleared and unproductive forest land. Such cocoanut plantations as they own are decreasing in value, owing to neglect and to the economic situation which renders barely remunerative the harvesting of the cocoanut and the preparation of copra. Meanwhile they are bringing no new land under cultivation so that the area of agricultural and productive property on the main islands is extremely small. Nor is there much inducement for the native to increase it. The forest land, which is mainly owned by individual natives, or by native communities, produces all, and more than, they require for their subsistence without any effort on their part. They have only to pluck the wild fruits and to carry them home. But besides its economic aspect the question presents another and more important consideration -- its political and social significance. What is to be the future of these 48,000 natives?

By the existing law the proprietorship of native land cannot be transferred by purchase, or by any other means, to a foreigner -- Japanese or other -- though it can be disposed of amongst the natives themselves. Were this regulation to be repealed there is little doubt that the natives, thriftless, ignorant and careless, would be tempted to sell for a handful of silver their rights of possession and would in a very short period of time have spent the sum received, to find themselves without land and without money. By the existing laws the natives are permitted, with the consent of the Japanese authorities, to lease land to foreigners, but so incapable are the majority of them to safeguard their own interest that such leases are bound to result in abuses. In other countries where similar circumstances are found this system of direct lease between native and foreigner has proved very unsatisfactory. It would be infinitely preferable that the Government should become the tenant, on a long lease, of the native land and that the Government should sublet to the foreigner. The natives would thus be assured of a rental over a long period of time guaranteed and paid by the Government, which in turn would collect the rent from the foreigner. The abuses which otherwise are bound to ensue where the land is directly leased by the natives to the foreigner would be avoided. Owing to their dependence for subsistence on the wild fruit trees of the forest all leases should contain clauses to protect, in totality or in sufficient quantity, these necessary sources of supply. If the Japanese Government is unfortunate in that the 48,000 natives of the islands are idle, it can at least congratulate itself that a bountiful and beneficent nature supplies them with food.

In accepting a mandate over these islands the Japanese Government took upon itself a task of no little responsibility. Their remote situation and the distances that separate them -- an average of over 400 miles in the case of the more important islands -- renders administration complicated, arduous and expensive. Each small center requires the equipment and staff that would have sufficed for a much more extensive region. The life of the officials is one of exile, far removed from their homes and cut off from the world, without any compensating advantages. The climate is hot, damp and enervating, and there are few or no congenial occupations. Nor is there local encouragement, for the native is too indifferent to appreciate the excellent work that is being carried on for his benefit, and in certain islands, more especially Yap and the Palau group, he has set his face sternly against progress and civilization and adheres with tenacity to the customs and superstitions of his ancestors. Yet little is known abroad of Japan's self-imposed task, and it was with evident satisfaction that the Japanese local officials found an opportunity to point out to the writer during his six weeks' visit to the islands the results of so much excellent endeavor and efficiency. It is to their efforts that success is so largely due. The administration of justice, education, hygiene and sanitation, research work, and the moral and physical training of the young, have all received due consideration. The general principle underlying the civil law is that all cases shall be dealt with in conformity with local customs, unless contrary to public order or good morals. In criminal cases the law of Japan holds good. The law-abiding instincts of the people render the policing of the islands an easy task and the number of the police force is remarkably small -- about 110 altogether. The men are enlisted from Japanese and native sources in the proportion of three Japanese to one native.

Free primary education is afforded to native children above the age of eight years. In places where it is necessary or advisable, the children are clothed and fed at government expense. Medical treatment is furnished. Although the difficulties of communication impede general education 45 percent of school-age children -- between eight and fourteen -- attend school, the total number of native pupils exceeding 2,500. Children from the smaller islands are received as boarders, and some 320 boys are being lodged, clothed and nourished. A certain amount of technical instruction is given, the subjects being carpentry, the forging of metal and other handicraft. There are also short-term classes in agriculture. The writer visited many of the schools, in which the teachers are trained Japanese instructors. One and all reported the native children to lack intelligence but to be

willing to learn. During class the boys are neatly dressed in shorts and singlets, but in many places they discard their clothes immediately they leave the building and only don them again on their return.

In the mission schools the instruction given is principally on religious subjects. One or two have boarding-houses for boys, and food and clothing are supplied in special cases. Japanese is today being taught in a few of these mission schools -- a necessary innovation in the interests of the children. Christian pupils attending the government schools, where there is no religious instruction, attend divinity classes at the missions of their respective churches. The mission schools are free of Japanese supervision but must comply with simple regulations as to registration and the furnishing of annual reports. The fact that the Christian missions in the islands receive substantial financial aid from the Japanese Government is sufficient proof of the liberty of conscience under the Japanese administration. An official declaration states that "the Japanese Government, considering that Christianity is the faith best suited to the natives" has charged the Congregational Church of Japan to undertake missionary work. At the same time the Japanese Catholic Church was encouraged to enter the mission field and since 1931 has been assisted by Spanish priests. The latest Japanese statistics available show that about 30,000 of the 48,000 natives profess Christianity, of whom over 16,000 are Catholics and over 13,000 Protestants. To minister to their spiritual needs there are nearly thirty missionaries, with native pastors and assistants. Several of the missions have been long established, that of the American Board of the Congregational Church for about eighty years.

There is no doubt that the native's knowledge and understanding of Christianity is very small, though it is probably sufficient for his spiritual needs. When we take into account all the endeavor, sacrifice and care that has been expended by the estimable missionaries upon the education and moral welfare of the islanders it must be confessed that the material progress has been slow, in spite of the number of converts. It is certainly true that very few of the natives ever emerge from the state of undeveloped intelligence and moral irresponsibility that mark every phase of their existence, and Christianity, though fervently accepted and often hysterically practiced, seems more a continuation in a new and happier guise of earlier superstitions than a break with the past and the adoption of a new religion. It often takes but little to provoke in places of Christian worship the dancing that they have been taught to suppress as unseemly and heathenish in the forest. The native elders of the congregation have been known to demonstrate their faith by prancing round the church with wild gesticulations and uttering raucous cries, while the rest of the worshippers are struggling with one another in a state of almost frenzied riot. Long years of instruction have not sufficed to suppress the promiscuity that marks the relations of the sexes both within and without the bonds of matrimony. In some of the islands the native has adopted clothes -- often a doubtful advantage. Under missionary guidance the womenkind were taken from their primitive semi-nudity and clothed in the most unbecoming of garments, resembling the homely nightgown depicted in the caricaturist's drawings of early Victorian days. It seems hard that if these island women are not permitted to introduce new styles of dress they should not at least be allowed to follow the evolution in the fashion of female night apparel in civilized countries, which I am told has in late years been remarkable.

In hygiene much has been accomplished, especially in the very important question of the supplies of drinking water. The introduction of galvanized iron roofs facilitates a clean supply, as the rainfall all over the archipelagoes is abundant. In many of the islands the inhabitants are entirely dependent on the rain for fresh water. Few of the more serious tropical diseases are known in the islands, their remoteness and inaccessibility having kept them free of infection. Malaria is non-existent owing to the absence of the malaria-carrying mosquito. Dysentery (amœbic) and frambœsia, dengue fever, hookworm and maladies due to intestinal parasites are common. Skin diseases are more temporarily disfiguring than serious. The prevalence of frambœsia has been diminished by treatment with salvarsan. Intestinal parasites affect 90 percent of the population and hookworm between 40 and 50 percent. Venereal disease is known but is not prevalent. Leprosy is rare and cases are as far as possible segregated. The public health of the inhabitants of the island of Yap causes the authorities considerable anxiety on account of the prevalence of tuberculosis. Every effort is being made to combat the malady, but with little success; and in 1929, 55 percent of the deaths amongst the inhabitants were due to tuberculosis in some form or other and 44 percent to tuberculosis of the lungs. The death rate from the disease is 30 per 1,000 -- above the total death rate of civilized countries.

The South Sea islands of Micronesia vary much in formation and in appearance. Those of the Mariana group are mountainous with active volcanoes. In the Marshall archipelago, on the contrary, none of the islands rises more than a few feet above the level of the sea, being atolls of coral formation with a central lagoon surrounded by an encircling reef dotted with islands. The lagoon of Taluit is twenty-five miles in circumference. In these coral islands the vegetation is

limited to trees and plants that will flourish in brackish water and support strong sea winds. The cocoanut palm predominates and is often the only source of food supply. The principal islands of the Caroline archipelago, with the exception of the Palau group, are of basalt formation and are densely forested, but round their shores and in their vicinity reefs and coral islands have sprung up, forming at places not only barriers that create sheltered anchorages but even separate and distinct clusters of islands. The Palau group, in the western Carolines, is of volcanic origin and the islands are remarkable for their broken coast line and for the number of small conical wooded islets clustered in the straits that separate them. Here again the land is forest-clad, but there is a much greater variety of vegetation than is found elsewhere and the scenery is very attractive. A coral reef encircles the group. In all the islands there is a very noticeable absence of animal and bird life. The wild boar and the wild goat are the descendants of domestic animals. Monkeys and snakes are unknown, and crocodiles are not found in any of the islands east of the Palau group. Birds ashore are few, and immense distances of sea are traversed without the sight of any variety of sea bird.

The writer's visit of six weeks' duration to the islands gave him an opportunity of appreciating the admirable work of the Japanese administration. The relations of the officials and the natives are satisfactory. The hospitals, which in several places are being enlarged or reconstructed, are well equipped and spotlessly clean. They are frequented and much appreciated. The schools are adequately organized and physical drill and games have become popular. But the impression that the observant traveller takes away with him is that the native races represented in the islands are of a very primitive order and often of a degraded type. They are, generally speaking, idle, sensual, unintelligent and slovenly -- in short, essentially savages. Their enthusiasm seems capable of being awakened only by orgies of grotesque dancing accompanied by the disfigurement of the features and bodies by the application of crude coloring matter. The Christian natives who abandon some of their savagery find consolation in hysterical religious demonstration and in the singing of hymns. It is a vast improvement but the spirit is little changed. The natives have no past and will have no future. They are not decreasing in numbers and will continue to live just as they are living today -- uselessly, loosely, but contentedly -- giving little trouble to anyone and benefiting no one by their existence. Unconscious of the passage of time and indifferent to progress, they pluck and devour the wild fruits of the forest and continue the quite unnecessary propagation of their race.

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