

## Chapter Twenty-five

### ALIEN STARS ARISE



**I**N the summer of 1921 I had signed a contract with the Kaizo group, which had arranged a series of lectures in Japan by four speakers—Albert Einstein was to explain relativity, Bertrand Russell the consequences of the Peace of Versailles, H. G. Wells his version of international accord, and I was to discuss population control, delivering in March and April eight to ten lectures of five hours each. The five-hour clause I innocently believed to be merely a mistake on the part of the translator, but I had faith in the common sense of human nature and expected the error to be taken care of when I arrived.

January and February were months of feverish activity. I spoke in city after city—Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and elsewhere—rushing back to New York to Town Hall hearings and farewell luncheons and dinners. The prolongation of the Town Hall episode had been entirely unforeseen. If bookings had not already been made requiring my departure in February, I should have postponed the trip. But I had promised, and lecture dates were binding obligations.

Stuart was at Peddie Institute where my brother Bob had gone, captain of his football team, preparing for college, having a full and rich time. Grant was there also but he was barely thirteen, I could not bear to put the broad Pacific between us. The headmaster warned me that he was only beginning to adjust himself to the school and his studies, and would be set back at least a year if I took him with me. I agreed to reconsider, but I am afraid I had made up my mind beforehand.

With scant ceremony and scarcely enough clean shirts, I bundled him up and away, leaving the turbulence of New York behind

Since Grant was to travel on my passport, I had to have it renewed, and had telegraphed Washington for it to be sent to the West Coast where the detail of a visa could also be attended to. At San Francisco it was waiting. With the little book and Grant in tow I presented myself to the Japanese Consul. Instead of stamping it as the usual mere formality, he examined it carefully and then, apologizing profusely, regretted very much that the Japanese Imperial Government could not give me a visa.

Here was a state of things. I asked him whether he could find out the precise reasons. Was it that I as a person could not go there, or was my subject taboo? The next day, after a cable to Tokyo and much polite bowing, he notified me it was both. In varying degrees of amusement and indignation the papers published the fact that the Japanese were turning the tables on the United States, by our Exclusion Act we had implied they were undesirable citizens, and now it was an American who was undesirable to them.

The steamship company would not sell me tickets on the *Taiyo Maru* without the visa. Two days previous to her sailing a Japanese who had been in the United States for the Washington Conference proffered a letter of introduction. He deplored the action of his Government and was desirous of being helpful. "The *Taiyo Maru* is going on to Shanghai. Why don't you get a Chinese visa?"

I always chose to go forward, and there was always a chance that a way might open. A hundred and fifty Japanese who had been at the conference—delegates, professors, doctors, members of the diplomatic corps, secretaries—were returning by this same vessel. Once on board I could meet them simply and informally, and I was sure I could convince them I was not dangerous. The Chinese Consul granted a visa without question, our tickets were delivered, we sailed on the *Taiyo Maru*.

I had never before been on a Japanese liner. The segregation between whites and Orientals horrified me. Here were the aristocrats of a people by nature intelligent, well-bred, well-clothed, inclined to be friendly, taking Grant under their wing, and teaching us both, amid much laughter, to eat with chopsticks. They had made valiant

efforts to adapt themselves to Occidentalism, they had altered their dress and fashion of eating—substituting coats, collars, shoes for loose kimonos and soft felt slippers, forks and knives for chopsticks, they sat on chairs instead of kneeling comfortably on the floor. Yet my compatriots kept themselves aloof. Never did I see the two groups together in conversation, they joined only in sports.

At night members of the crew wrestled in the moonlight, and I gazed down at their deck, marveling at the grips, the holds, the stoutness of legs, the strength of backs and arms, the quickness of action, the primitive, guttural calls of the umpires. Others of the crew stamped their feet and, for good luck, threw pinches of salt towards their respective champions.

Two days out the Japanese asked me to address them. I willingly complied, and the dining room was closed off for the purpose. Admiral Baron Kato, who was later to be Prime Minister, and headed the delegation, talked to me afterwards. He had the culture, courtesy, restraint, and suavity of a true gentleman, rather than the mien of the war lord his title seemed to imply.

Equally genial was Masanao Hanihara, then Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and destined to be Ambassador to the United States. He knew American ways and manners, or mannerisms, if you wish to name them so, he was understanding, and perhaps one of the most fluent of the Japanese I met in the ease of his English. He told me his people were not likely to accept the idea of birth control as a social philosophy, though they were bound to accept the economic aspects, and all the young would be interested as individuals.

Not until later did I learn how happily my contact with these two gentlemen had resulted. They had separately cabled their Government asking that I be allowed to lecture in Japan.

At Honolulu I had one short afternoon into which to crowd so much. With leis hung about my neck I was whisked off for lunch to a magical house at Waikiki, then to a big meeting. What surprised and pleased me most was the complete absence of race prejudice. I looked out over faces, mostly American but with a liberal sprinkling of Chinese and Japanese in their native costumes and Hawaiians in bright Mother Hubbards. Honolulu was the only place I had found where, class for class, internationalism did exist.

Two Japanese correspondents followed my zigzag trail, notebooks in hand, pencils working furiously. They even inserted questions as I was swept towards the boat where, breathless and almost in a daze, we were garlanded once more. They had a scoop and were going to cable their favorable impressions to their papers in Japan.

Their efforts had definitely produced a favorable reaction on board ship. Individuals and delegations of Japanese came into my stateroom at any time—morning, afternoon, or evening—"to be informed." Although they did not knock, this was not considered an invasion of privacy, provided they bowed profoundly on their way in, on entering and on leaving they bowed and bowed, again and again. They seemed to know more about my affairs and my children than I did myself, mentioning things I had completely forgotten, even reminding me of my unspoken thoughts of long ago.

Past experience had taught me that when a despotic and arbitrary screen was interposed between birth control and the people, the desire for knowledge was immeasurably enhanced. This was particularly true in Japan, where the recent renaissance had quickened the public mind. At the announcement I could not land, officialdom was subjected to frank criticism.

A little, round-faced boy called me each morning, murmuring something in a voice so soft and melodious it almost lulled me back to sleep. With the coffee, which tended to wake me, he announced, "Madam Sanger go in maybe. Yes, Japanese Government let her go in." In ten minutes he would return with the reversal of this news. He was aware of the contents of the radiograms which kept the aerials crackling even before they had been delivered to me. One read, "Thousands disciples welcome you." Another, "Possible land Yokohama, impossible discourse." From the ship's daily I learned first that I might lecture, but not publicly, and then, a day later, after continuous derision on the part of the press—all right, I might talk publicly if I wished, but under no condition on birth control. The last word I received was that I could land but speak only in private. From the Ishimotos came the message, "Anticipate your staying with us."

March 10th was so dripping and foggy that when we reached Tokyo Bay I could not see Japan. The arrival of the *Taiyo Maru*

bearing such an array of distinguished passengers as the conference delegates was bound to call forth unusual activity. A veritable flotilla met the ship—police and health officers' launches, mail tenders and press dispatch carriers. Two officials came on board to interrogate me, and the three of us retired to my cabin, where our bags had been hopefully packed. I showed my passport, told the purpose of my visit, explained how I happened to know the Ishimotos and Mr. Yamamoto of the Kaizo group. Inspector and interpreter alike smiled amiably as they plied their questions, ending with the polite query, "Who is paying your expenses?" The implication was that I might be a secret agent sent by the United States Government to deplete the population of Japan and to prepare the way for an American invasion. This was particularly amusing, since I was one of the persons thoroughly disapproved of by my Government.

At the end of the lengthy catechism it was agreed that the ban would be removed if I, for my part, agreed not to lecture publicly on birth control, and provided the American Consul General Skidmore formally requested permission for me to land. I had sent him a wireless message from the *Taiyo Maru* saying I would like to visit the country, if not as a lecturer at least as a private citizen, and asking him to use his influence. Though I had had no reply I sent off a telegram to him immediately, and Grant and I sat down on the luggage to await developments.

The two officials had no sooner taken their departure than the little cabin was filled to bursting with the gentlemen of the press. We started and blinked with each rapid-fire, flashlight explosion. The room was literally smoking with the acrid powder, and not an inch of standing room remained. Seventy were all trying to get in at once, whatever I said had to be relayed and translated to the unsuccessful ones who brimmed over into the corridor.

Meanwhile, we had docked at Yokohama and, when the reporters were finally disposed of, my friends, who had been patiently enduring the rain, greeted me—Mr. Yamamoto, Mr. Wilson of the British Embassy, Baroness Ishimoto, and "the missionary who lived next door." After welcoming me they left, the last named carrying with him my briefcase laden with my most private papers and pamphlets, which I did not wish seized at the Customs.

Now came the tapping of clogs along the passage, and in the doorway were framed slight, doll-like figures, pale white faces, crimson lips, black glossy hair beautifully coiffured, butterfly-looking obis. The trials of the day vanished before their bobbing little bows. Here was a Japanese fairy tale come true.

In precise English the leader introduced the others, this one represented the silk manufacturers, that one the weavers, each of the twenty-five was appearing for some laboring organization. She explained they had been there all day, but it was nothing—they were so proud to be the first to welcome the herald of freedom for women. The Industrial Revolution which had put them to work was still so young that they were in virtual slavery. Yet, she said, they were so accustomed to subservience that it would be a long time until they learned to rebel against their wrongs. Suffrage was slow—Japanese women found it difficult to see its advantages. They could not be stirred by offers of economic independence, it was a higher ideal to have husbands take care of their wives than have them battle for themselves. She was certain no inspiration was to be found in that quarter.

Then, with eyes sparkling, she added, "But when the message of birth control came to us from Honolulu, like the lightning we understood its meaning, and now we are all awakened."

We were served with tea, and I continued to await a reply from Mr. Skidmore, but none ever came. Finally, at seven-thirty, due to the British Mr. Wilson's intercession, the Imperial Government at last opened its gates to me without the sponsorship of my own Government.

I still had to go through Customs. Papers and books, including forty copies of *Family Limitation*, were confiscated. Thereafter I usually left spaces in my diaries instead of writing out names, because I never knew who was going to see them.

The Customs men further minutely examined my clothes, accessories, even necklaces and ornaments, holding them up, laughing at them, calling each other to come and look, in order to inform themselves as much on the composition and design as to determine whether they were dutiable. The data they gleaned thus from incoming travelers they stored away like squirrels—and cheaply-manufactured rep-

licas shortly appeared on Woolworth counters, stamped in purple ink, "Made in Japan "

When I emerged, tired and damp, more crowds pressed around seeking autographs Everywhere in Japan people wanted your signature One man, who spoke some English, said he represented the Ricksha-men's Union and apologized for the trouble to which I had been put "Sometime Japanese Government he little autocratic " For that matter everybody apologized for the Government

After the torrents of rain, logs blazing in fireplaces warmed us in the Ishimotos' charming house at Tokyo Grant and I were both in a large room, almost bare of furnishings, exquisite in its simplicity The fragile walls of painted silk gave an impression of airiness

Next to us was the huge bathroom, the floor and lower walls of burnished, shining copper In the center, raised on legs, stood a great wooden tub with a top that closed down, and a hole for your neck Five or six basins were ranged around the room and, beside each, brush and soap You were supposed to scrub and scrub and then rinse by throwing pans of water over you Finally you entered the steaming tub to relax It was not etiquette to leave any trace of soap in the bath or any evidence of its use, because everybody in the family soaked in that water before the night was over—guests, hosts, and servants in order

I sank gratefully on one of the mattresses borrowed for our comfort and laid on the floor, the rest of the household slept on mats with wooden blocks in place of pillows, a custom which allowed the ladies to keep their coiffures intact for a week at a time Through the frail partitions we could hear the servants laughing and chatting until late into the night, men and women together, carrying on their bathing as though it were a function of eating

Our days were tremendously busy, beginning early with the ringing of the antiquated telephone on the wall People came silently in rickshas and departed after conversing with the Baron and Baroness

Old Japan had extended esthetics into the realm of ordinary existence, and undoubtedly had produced a thing of beauty The gestures of ceremony might have meant little, but they made delightful the arranging of any affair whatever The Japanese always greeted each other with a bow from the waistline, hands gliding down to the knees

The difference between one and another was so subtle that a foreigner could hardly distinguish it, but it was there all the same. A particular mark of respect was the triple bow, graduated according to the social rank—an inclination, a slight pause, a deeper inclination, again a pause, and then down further until the back was nearly horizontal.

Grant, who was very affectionate, had been accustomed to kiss me when we met, whether it were in a restaurant, hotel, on the street, or anywhere else for that matter. But he had to forego this salute in Japan when we observed that kissing was a shock to Japanese sensibilities, and, indeed, was considered immoral. Instead, he took over Japanese manners and became marvelously courteous. Practically every time he spoke to me he made the three bows, and unconsciously I soon found myself returning them with equal formality.

Politeness in behavior, impersonal and ritualistic, was most noticeable in those relationships where we naturally expected habitual and conventional reserve to be thrown aside. When the Baroness Ishimoto's mother and sister were coming for lunch, she donned a special kimono, set out special vases and screens, greeted them with the prescribed bows, wordings, and gestures. Even I noticed the civilities accorded the two were not the same. The effect was that the mother occupied the place of honor as though she were receiving.

Men came also to the Ishimotos' to plan for the various meetings and entertainments. A member of the House of Lords telephoned to say he was a "disciple." The press sought interviews. Early in my career I had realized the importance of giving clear, concise, and true concepts of birth control to those who wished to quote me. This simple policy served my purpose particularly well in the Orient, where technical phrases in English were hopelessly confusing. Under any circumstances our language was peculiarly difficult for the Japanese, and their phraseology was sometimes convulsingly funny. One letter from a dismissed government employee to the head of his department was making the rounds of Occidentals in the East.

Kind Sir, on opening this epistle you will behold the work of a de-jobbed person, and a very bewifed and much childrenized gentleman, who was violently de-jobbed in a twinkling by your goodself. For Heaven's sake, sir, consider this catastrophe as falling on your own head, and remind yourself on walking home at the moon's end to

savage wife and sixteen voracious children with your pocket filled with non-existent pennies and pity my horrible state. When being de-jobbed and proceeding with a heart and intestines filled with misery in this den of doom, myself did greedily contemplate culpable homicide, but Him who protected Daniel (poet) safe through the Lion's den will protect his servant in this home of evil. As to reason given by yourself esquire for my dejobment the incrimination was laziness.

NO SIR. It were impossible that myself who has pitched sixteen infant children into this vale of tears can have a lazy atom in his mortal frame, and a sudden departure of eleven pounds has left me on the verge of the abyss of destitution and despair.

I hope this vision of horror will enrich your dreams this night and good Angel will meet and pulverize your heart of nether millstone so that you will awaken and with such alacrity as may be compatible with your personal safety, and will hasten to rejobulate your servant.

So mote it be, Amen,

Yours despairfully,

Akono Subusu

And on the bottom of the letter the district officer had noted

Gentle Reader, do not sob—

Akono Subusu has been rejobbed

I myself had a letter from a gentleman who wrote, "How I am unavoidably in need to execute your 'Ism' and hope to know your effective method."

Had it been allowed, I should have given forth practical information. Since it was not, I believed if I could make plain to the authorities that I was not going to break this rule in my lectures, they could find no fault with them.

Accordingly, the morning of our second day in Tokyo an appointment was made with the Police Governor. In spite of the early hour the hard little official, his close-cropped hair revealing all the bumps and developments, served us tea. The Japanese always handed you tea as we pass cigarettes—in embarrassment, for relaxation, or just to tie up loose moments. Disregarding the vital subject completely we discussed current topics through an interpreter. Though all the people were intensely serious, they were remarkably fond of plays on words. Merrily I was told my name had created much confusion owing to its similarity to *sangai san*, which meant "destructive to production."

Birth control was thus delicately introduced. For the first time I heard about the Dangerous Thought Law, which had been sponsored in Parliament by a group called the "Thought Controllers," who aimed to exclude from the country all ideas not conforming to ancient Japanese tradition. The Police Governor assumed he knew exactly what I had planned to talk about, and I could not move him from the conviction that I wanted to present a Dangerous Thought.

I was not, however, going to let the matter drop. I went higher up to the Home Affairs Office. A courteous gentleman informed me the Minister sent his regards and hoped to have the pleasure of seeing me some other time. There was no tea. I was politely bowed out.

My next stop was at the Kaizo office, where the entire staff was called into consultation. They were bristly and burly enough to be taken for Russians, only their kimonos identified them as Japanese. One and all decided we should go in person to the Imperial Diet. There, on presentation of our cards, couriers started running around to find the Chief. In a few moments the door of the room into which we had been ushered was opened, and in came the very same man with whom I had conversed at the Home Office that morning. Profoundly embarrassed I explained this was the way of impatient Americans, who were bent on hurrying things along. He was very kind, and said he had been on the point of giving me permission to speak publicly provided I did not mention birth control. When I sketched an outline of a possible population lecture we laughed and agreed the Empire of Japan was not, as a result, going to fall.

Almost from the time of landing I had been deeply conscious that I was in one of the most thickly populated countries of the world. The Ishimotos' automobile honked, honked, at every turn of the wheels to squeeze through rickshas, pedestrians, and children in the narrow, unpaved streets.

In any traffic danger the first concern was always for the baby. I never saw one slapped, struck, scolded, or punished. I never heard one cry, they all seemed happy and smiling, though I must admit a few of them needed to have their little noses wiped. I could not believe any country could contain so many babies. Fathers carried them in their arms, mothers carried them in a sort of shawl, children carried babies, even babies carried smaller babies. I saw a land of one-story

houses but of two-story children. Boys with babies on their backs were playing baseball, running to bases, the heads of the babies wobbling so that you thought their necks were surely going to be broken.

The momentum that had come from the high birth rate was felt in every walk of life. Peers, business and professional men were all having large families. One told me he wanted twenty children. When I asked him how many he had already he replied, "Two," and he was offended when I suggested that perhaps his wife, instead of himself, had had those.

The density of population in tillable areas of Japan averaged two thousand human beings to the square mile, and it was increasing at the rate of almost a million a year. Although they built terraced rice paddies on their hillsides with tremendous labor they could not feed themselves. Furthermore, lacking ore, petroleum, and an adequate supply of coal, they could not develop their industries to a point where they could exchange their products for enough food.

The Government should itself have been disseminating contraceptive information, but the army faction was not friendly to it and claimed Japan could never be respected in the eyes of the world until she possessed a force sufficiently powerful to make might right. It was even then too late for birth control to offset the inevitability of her overflowing her borders, the population pressure was bound to cause an explosion in spite of the safety valve of Korea. How long this could be delayed was a matter of pure conjecture.