

AMERICAN LETTER

ACROSS THE PACIFIC No. V.

DEAR FRIENDS,

In the same manner as I watched the Rameswaram temple tower from the Ceylon steamer, I kept gazing on at the gradually receding majestic form of the snow-clad "Fuji" from the upper deck of the "Siberia Maru" as she left Yokohama harbour and was directing her course to the far-west, from the far-east, but in an easterly direction. Again a period of life at sea from the evening of the 9th December. The voyage on board the "Siberia Maru" was far more enjoyable than on the 'Suwa' since in this huge liner, there were numerous facilities for passengers to pass their time; there is a big library of books of various kinds and these are daily given on loan to those who wish to read; there are numerous deck games and in addition the ship's officers gave a cinema exhibition of Japanese views and history twice a week after evening-meals, in the big dining saloon, where all cabin class passengers were allowed to assemble. We had besides these, two actual performances put on the stage by the crew with curtains and full dress. Of course there were also numerous music grinders in the 1st and 2nd class drawing rooms for use at odd hours. I had many fellow Japanese passengers this time, some going to Hawaii and some to the United States; and in addition, we had some Russians, a few French, a sprinkling of Germans, a couple of South African burghers and some Jews. All of them were very courteous to me, and I enjoyed their company very much and had nothing to complain. Occasionally when I found time weighing heavily and the daily routine monotonous, I used to go round the ship walking on the deck from one to the other watching the vacant ocean and gazing at the huge trail of white, creamy foam behind the ship. I cannot recount what all thoughts did or did not pass through my mind during those hours of silent observation and meditation, though one idea and that a sure one, was always prominent, *viz.*, that every revolution of the steamer's propeller took me further and further away from home. Oh! how unconcernedly and with what defiance does this huge leviathan of a steamer dash through the vast expanse of surging water. We had some bad weather and the sea was squally for a couple of days at the beginning and even this huge liner was tossed about and waves dashed their waters through port holes into the cabins. I was very much upset one night, when the sea appeared to me, of course, rather rough, and to

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add to my terror a fellow passenger was thrown down into the floor of the cabin from his bed, due to the heavy listing of the steamer. The next day the ship's purser assured me these were only the peaceful pranks of the Pacific. Peaceful and pacific indeed! On the 14th December, we passed the antipodal meridian and I was surprised to hear from the crew that we shall have two days to be reckoned as the 15th December. The rule appears to be that ships passing the meridian from America to Japan gain a day, and those from Japan to America lose a day and so we had 2 days reckoned as the 15th December! By the evening of the 17th the blue mountain ranges of the Hawaiian Islands came into view and by the following morning the good ship entered the beautiful and placid harbour of Honolulu in glorious warm and sunny weather. "The Stars and Stripes for ever" ran the cry from some American passengers on board when a few launches approached the steamer with the Government Health Officers floating the American flag. The Hawaiian Islands form an outpost of the U. S. A. in the Pacific and I saw for the first time American officers in uniform exercising their power; they looked very grim and serious but were perfectly courteous. The steamer halted at Honolulu for 10 hours and of course some of us took advantage of this to see something of the island. Four of us—one Japanese student going to California, two South African passengers (husband and wife) and myself engaged a taxi and went round the Island for about 5 hours. The scene all round, the natural beauties of the tropical island, the luxuriant tropical vegetation in the hills and valleys, all defy description and can never be forgotten, when once seen. Tourists call the Hawaiian Islands the Paradise of the Pacific; the group is made up of 7 or 8 islands and of these the biggest is Hawaii, which contains the lofty Mouna Kea, the highest Island mountain in the world. 14,000 feet above the sea and the active volcano "Kilanea." Oh! how remarkable are nature's ways; that in the broad expanse of over 5,000 miles of water, there should not only be a small area of land like an oasis in a big desert, but that in such an oasis there should arise haughty and lofty mountain peaks rising to 14,000 feet. The city of Honolulu is not in the island of Hawaii but in the island of Oahu, second in size to Hawaii and 300 miles to the north-west of it. It is a beautiful semi-tropical city with all the look of a modern Americanised centre, with up-to-date buildings, roads and avenues. The population is a mixture of colored and colorless nationalities, a regular melting pot

in the Pacific for the amalgamation of the different race, of people. There is a good sprinkling of Japanese and Chinese the latter appearing to monopolize a good number of the eating houses and stores in the locality. Most of the familiar tropical trees are found here, and our driver-cum-guide was actually explaining to us the different trees and their scientific names—such as *Poinciana*, *Santalum*, *Erythrina*, *Artocarpus* etc. We saw numerous and extensive pine apple, banana, and sugarcane plantations, coconut groves, mango and papaya gardens and many such things during our stroll, for over 30 or 40 miles round. The beach along Honolulu is always crowded with men and women enjoying their surf bath and water sports; I asked our guide whether there were not sharks in the water that might be dangerous to sea bathers, to which he replied 'there are no sharks in the sea but there are quite a few land-sharks on the island whom you have to be careful about'. He further added that they were only a few compared to what we may hope to find in the mainland (U. S. A.)! The taxi guides appear to be well versed in everything and talk good English and I questioned myself whether some of them are not themselves the land sharks, he spoke about.

By about 7 P.M. the same day, the 'Siberia Maru' left Honolulu harbour and took a north-easterly direction towards the mainland of America, and again we returned to the monotony of the voyage; but this was to a great extent relieved by the consolation that the destination was fast approaching. On the morning of the 24th the long ranges of the 'Sierras' of California came in sight and by midday with bright and sunny weather, and with a chill breeze, we were fast approaching the 'Golden Gate' leading into the largest land-locked harbour in the world—San Francisco bay. Long before we approached the harbour gate, the immigration officials from land had boarded the ship and all passengers had been ordered to assemble in the dining saloon with their papers in different groups—Chinese and Japanese, Americans and Aliens. With my passports and other papers I took my place in the portion set apart for aliens showing a huge label. But fortunately I was not alone; there were a few English, German and Russian aliens also, and some of these were describing their past troubles with immigration officers, the inconveniences to which some aliens are put to, and all that; incidentally—Angel island—the place to which aliens are sent for days on quarantine, was pointed out to me at some distance. This was sufficient to upset my already un-

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balanced mental equilibrium. Even as the ship was some miles away from the harbour, my mind was filled with conflicting ideas and had become uncomfortably excited. I had satisfaction and pleasure at the thought I should be in *terra firma* soon; but, side by side several ominous thoughts haunted me concerning my unknown future in this new land to which my apparently "mad and rash adventure," had brought me. "Where shall I go," Shall I find any one to help me? Will the sharks I heard of in Honolulu scent me as a green horn and try to do me harm?" These were the thoughts I was experiencing at the time. While in this mood, an elderly man with a grim official uniform and with a bundle of papers accosted me and demanded my passport and connected papers. Though outwardly he appeared very serious and grim he was very courteous and was satisfied with my credentials, but only wanted some reference to an American resident or my local address about either of which I had no idea at all as yet. But luck seemed to favour me. An entomologist friend of mine to whom I had written about my trip but whom I never expected at this juncture stepped in and introduced himself to me and offered himself as referee to the Immigration Official. I cannot express adequately the satisfaction and happiness I felt at this God-send. I was only able to gauge the magnitude of the services this friend rendered me after a day when I was comfortably settled in my lodgings. Being an important and well known official in the city he was able to get me go through the formalities of customs examination etc., very soon, and by the time I was leaving the ship with my friend there were many passengers still waiting to undergo the ordeals and it was already six in the evening by then.

Thus on Christmas eve of 1926 with a flood of election lights all round and in the midst of an ocean of humanity I set my foot on the soil of the Antipodes—the realisation of a wild dream of the past few years. The first tremendous impact of this city at the gate of the great continent was terrible on my mind. I was dazzled, bewildered, amazed and practically nonplussed at my surroundings—it was all a dream land to me that night, as I gazed from the sixth storey of my hotel on the traffic and the activity in the streets below. Streams of automobiles with green and red lights huge skyscrapers with advertisements staring you in 6 and 7 feet

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