

Kosaku Sawada, Nurseryman,
Moffatt Road,
Mobile, Alabama.

Ila B. Prine
Mobile County,

AL-63

KOSAKU SAWADA, NURSERYMAN

On the Moffatt Road in Mobile County, seven miles from Mobile, Alabama, is the Overlook Nursery, partly owned and operated by Kosaku Sawada, a Japanese.

The Overlook Nursery is located on lowground on a gravel road leading from the paved highway. The entrance is by a driveway on the east side, through a gate covered by an orange and black pagoda. The driveway winds among plant beds and hothouses up to Mr. Sawada's home, which is separated from the nursery by a hedge of many different types of shrubs. Most spectacular of these is the *pyracantha formosaca*, which strikingly suggests Japanese origin. ^{why?} Taller than a man of average height, it is a solid mass of bright red berries, almost as large as marbles, on boughs which droop like those of the Japanese weeping cherry. The office of the Overlook Nursery is a plain, square, white building in front of the Sawada house.

Mr. Sawada, himself, is a short, stout man, whose skin is more brown than yellow. His hair is short, straight and black and his bright black slanting eyes sparkle when he talks.

He has been in America since 1906 and he never expects to go back to Japan; he has no desire to. The years have changed his country, so that it no longer seems familiar - and they have also changed Mr. Sawada so that his countrymen no longer recognize him.

More than three decades of outdoor work under the hot Southern sun have burned his skin from yellow to brown. "When I went back to Japan fifteen years ago," he said, "people thought I was a Filipino. One day, I was standing on a street corner scanning a newspaper. Some children passed by and said, 'Look at that Filipino reading a Japanese paper'."

"I have no desire to go back to Japan to live. It's a strange country to me, for I left when a very young boy, and everything has changed so. I have been back only once since leaving - so long time from home I have strange country. If my father and mother had lived it would be different. Even all my school friends are gone or dead. If I go back, nobody knows me - strange people to me." Only a trace of the Japanese speech is noticeable as Mr. Sawada tells his own story.

"Now, I only have two brothers and one sister in Japan and they are strange to me. Their religion is different. So you see I no longer belong in Japan. I am American. I have never taught my children to speak the Japanese language.

"I am contented in this country. The government protects my people here, but, if I were in South America or Mexico, and someone wanted my property, they could take it."

Mr. Sawada's specialty is propagating plants. "I sell them to other nurserymen," he explains. "That is called 'lining out'.

"Lining out is much more profitable than just raising stock, because you sell quicker. So many of the nurserymen quit propagating, because everybody can't propagate successfully. If you get the plant a little too warm, or too dry, too wet, too cold - no good. Just a little carelessness will kill many thousands of plants overnight.

"Many years of experience taught me to grow many millions of azaleas, small trees, camellia japonicas and evergreens. My business is one of a kind that cannot use machines. Most of the work is done by hand. I now have nineteen men employed; they are all Americans. Later on in the Winter months I will employ from twenty to twenty-five men. With my years of experience with propagating plants, I get ninety-five out of every hundred to grow. At that rate it pays. But so many growers cannot get that proportion and that is one of the reasons I started in the lining out business. I am connected with all nurserymen and florists

in the United States. I have membership with the Associated American Nurserymen."

Mr. Sawada was born in Asaka in central Japan in 1887, one of a family of six.

"I was so full of ambition," he says, "and wanted a change, after graduating in agriculture from Osaka University. Having heard that America was a land of plenty, I came to America. I thought I could pick up gold along the highways. But you may be sure I have found that you get hold of money only by hard work.

"I left Japan when I was twenty-one years old and came to Texas to work in the rice fields. That was in 1906 and I stayed there until 1910.

That was hard work in the rice fields, no tractor, no machinery of any kind, just four or six mules to a plow. Plow all winter long; then, in February and March, disc and harrow. In April, sow and drill. Then, when rice come up about six inches high, start irrigation.

"Every section of the field had to be surveyed carefully, sometimes square, sometimes circular, so that no one section will be over three inches high. Let water stand until July or August on the rice, stop irrigation, then it is ready for threshing."

But Mr. Sawada was not satisfied in the rice fields. "I see I get nowhere there," he says. "I see people make good selling orange and pecan trees. So I leave Texas in 1910 and come to Grand Bay, Alabama. I thought when I come to America you could make five dollars picking strawberries and grapes. But I soon learn better.

"I believe in human luck. There are smart people, poor luck. They work hard, but still have poor luck. Then there are some people not smart, but have good luck.

"When I first came to Alabama, it was when the orange tree boom

was on. So I start an orchard and sell trees in Bayou la Batre and all around. Then I bought thirty acres here on Moffatt Road, good sandy land to plant orange and pecan trees. This land is good to dig up big roots off trees. But, soon after I buy here in 1923, big freeze come and kill all the orange trees. Then I had to start something else. This land here is not so good for shrubbery, but I have bought eighty acres more on the Howells Ferry Road - much better land.

"After I come here to this country, I go back to San Francisco in 1916 and marry my wife, who came from Japan. I never see her before I marry her but she make me a good wife. We had four children and nine years ago she die, leaving a three-weeks old baby. Nobody wants to take the responsibility of my children, so I do the best I can.

"All my children in school. One of my boys is in Auburn, Alabama Polytechnic Institute, studying landscaping and horticulture. This is his second year. The other boy is studying business administration and commerce at Spring Hill College. I do not try to persuade their character - everybody different character - but I hope they will make good business men. I tell them they can see what I need here is business education, or the ability to sell after I raise my nursery stock. Infact the whole country needs more commercial knowledge. The farmer today cannot sell his products at a fair price after he raises them. I tell my boys, if I was smart enough and had commercial knowledge, how much better I could do. I don't want to impress them for ^bmad. I tell them give good things, reasonable price. I don't make much money, but I have established good reputation.

"My third child is a girl in the seventh grade at Crichton school. My baby is in the fourth grade."

America's most important problem, Mr. Sawada thinks, is reforestation.

"We have much more extreme weather now than we once did," he says. "People

cut down so many forests. People no longer care for the trees given them.

"I believe in higher control. Thoughtless people destroy recklessly, and the One who controls all things tries to replenish where man destroys.

"I believe that, in our own lives, we must look to a higher control. We must be contented today, and work hard tomorrow. We must cooperate and have forgiveness to each other. The trouble today: everybody wants their own way, nobody give in. We should have community spirit, be good neighbors. Peacefulness and happiness should govern all our lives.

"I do not go to church myself, but I send my children to church and Sunday school. We have a church building in Orchard, Alabama, and my children went as long as a minister came to teach them. Sometimes the Baptist come, then the Methodist, and last the Presbyterian had charge of it. But, for the past year, nobody come, so my children have not gone anywhere. But, just the same, I believe in a higher control.

"I think people in this country are getting too far from this control and it will take a conflagration like Noah's flood to bring them back."

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S.J.