

World's Sunday School Convention, Tokyo, Japan



Smoke was pouring out of the windows of the big convention building by the time the first of Tokyo's fire companies began to arrive in the Station Plaza on which place Convention Hall faced. By this time the building had been completely cleared of the hundreds of convention participants, who were in it at the time the fire started.

The Convention. (Editorial Comment From the Japan Advertiser.)

What standard is one to apply in judging of the success of such a gathering as the Sunday School Convention? It is—there would be no point in denying the fact—for many of the members a pleasant holiday. It is also an opportunity for exchanging views and experiences, and it is an occasion on which sinking faith may be strengthened and courage revived. As the missionary sees it, it formed a means of encouraging and inspiring the Japanese churches by reminding them that they form part of a great international army. From all these points of view the convention must be regarded as having been successful. The sense of change which makes a holiday visit to the East such an unforgettable experience was supplemented by the overflowing hospitality which the Japanese nation never fails to extend on such occasions, and the kindness that made many Japanese offer their rarely opened homes to the guests added greatly to the pleasures of the visit. Of the vast stimulus provided by the assembling from the ends of the earth of a company of earnest workers for an engrossing cause there is no need to speak. The more technical benefits accruing from exchange of experiences and comparison of methods will be summed up by more competent pens, but there is no doubt that in its function of mutual education the convention was also successful.

In visiting a non-Christian country the organizers of the convention were inspired by the hope that the gathering would conduce to the spread of the Christian gospel in Japan. The fulfillment or failure of this hope can only be tested by time. Any attempt to anticipate results would be mistaken. It was at least evident that the Japanese Christians who were present were greatly heartened by the spirit and atmosphere of the gatherings. They are a small minority—how very small is not always realized—and it is seldom that they find themselves accommodated in the best building in the capital, befriended by the leading men of the Empire, and occupying the daily attention of the press. Moreover, it is naturally difficult for a tiny minority to maintain its energy amid the indifference of the mass, but when this minority finds that it is part of a movement which embraces the whole sweep of Western civilization its heart is uplifted and it is encouraged in its task of "leavening the lump."

In the sixty years that have elapsed since the opening of Japan, less than one-half of 1 per cent. of the total population of the country have embraced Christianity. Less than half of that half per cent. belong to the Protestant branches of the Christian Church from which the convention is drawn.

Opinions differ as to the moral to be drawn from these figures. Some hold that they furnish sufficient evidence that Japan's reply to Christianity is a polite but explicit No. Others see in them an incentive to renewed effort, to closer study of the conditions, to unceasing consideration of the best methods of approach. It is difficult to see what other answer is possible to a faith which has inscribed on its banners the missionary mandate, "Go ye out into all the world and preach the gospel." Sixty years is but a moment in the life of a nation, even when, as with Japan, it has been a moment crowded with movement and change. In that half century Japan has been dazzled and engrossed with the material miracles that the West displayed to her eyes. There are signs enough that many minds are conscious of a gap in her moral acquirements. When the novelty of wealth and power beyond the dreams of old Japan has worn off the moment may arrive when the East will turn to the message of its greatest teacher. In awaiting and preparing for that time the Church has to remember that the missionary problem is not simply that of bringing light to a people that sit in darkness. Japan has inherited a Buddhist faith of high value while it predisposes the minds that have been saturated by its principles to impugn the Christian philosophy of vicarious sacrifice and atonement. The missionary to Japan must therefore be able to cope with his opponents intellectually, and successful work in this field demands great qualities of mind as well as of heart. In so far as the meeting of the convention in Tokyo has brought the nature and extent of the problem home to many active leaders of the Church, it can be expected to strengthen the agencies which are laboring to bring Japan to Christianity.

CONVENTION HALL AS IT WAS.

Our first glimpse of the Convention Hall was had on the way from our train that had brought us to Tokyo, as we went to the comfortable, modern Station Hotel. Two hundred yards away, on one side of the great central plaza, stood a handsome concrete building, four stories in height,

rectangular, finished in white cement stucco. It was modeled after the French Gothic, with low square towers at the four corners of the building. The Japanese architect and builders had done an amazing piece of work by its erection since the 23d of July, and any American city would have counted it an unusually creditable gathering place for a convention. It seated twenty-nine hundred people. Concealed electric lights on the outer walls threw out a soft golden radiance as night came on, and the architect had placed in niches in the outside walls plaster modeled crows and bats in expression of a Japanese symbolism of eternity.

Directly in front of the hall was a semi-circle of evergreen and chrysanthemum bushes, not in bloom, but filled with tiny unopened buds; and in front of that deep green background was a wonderfully beautiful group of sculpture. A large globe represented the earth, showing continents and oceans. On the right stood a figure of the Lord Jesus, His right hand resting on Japan on the globe, His left hand raised on high, holding a shepherd's crook. A little African boy kneeled at the front of the globe, looking up at the Lord in eager, rapt adoration. On the other side was a group, an Anglo-Saxon woman, seated, a little Japanese girl by her side with an open book in hand, a little Anglo-Saxon girl, and a turbaned boy from India. Nothing could have been finer than this setting forth of Christ and the children and a missionary teacher.—S. S. Times.

INTEREST OF JAPANESE IS GREATEST SURPRISE.

By Justice John J. MacLaren,
Senior Vice-President of the World
Sunday School Association and
Chairman of the Tokyo
Convention.

As far as I have been able to ascertain, both from the delegates who have attended the convention and from the many Japanese who have taken an active part in the big meeting, the universal opinion is that the convention at Tokyo has been a great success.

The unanimous opinion of the officers and others who have been identified closely with it is that the Eighth Convention of the World Sunday School Association has far exceeded expectations, both in an inspirational and in a material way. The greatest surprise to the foreigners who have come thousands of miles to the Orient to attend the world gathering seems to be the unusual interest which the Japanese themselves have taken in the convention. I do not think that any delegates, before coming to Japan, imagined that so many prominent men of the country would take such an active and prominent part in promoting and carrying out the convention program and in entertaining the hundreds of foreign delegates as they have.

I do not think that any of the leaders in the World Association anticipated that their Imperial Majesties, the Emperor and Empress of Japan, would have identified themselves with the convention to such an extent as they have done by accepting from the delegates the portraits which were painted by one of the Sunday school representatives. The same tolerant and extremely hospitable spirit seems to have characterized the attitude of all the people from the highest to the lowest.

The delegates found that the arrangements which had been made for their reception by the people of Japan were far in advance of those in the cases of the seven previous conventions.

What was thought at first to be a terrible calamity has even turned out to be a blessing in disguise. The destruction by fire of the magnificent hall which had been prepared for the meetings of the convention a few hours before the convention was to have been formally opened called for expressions of sympathy from many of the Japanese officials and individuals, and brought the World Sunday School Convention before the whole world in a more striking manner than could otherwise have been the case.—The Japan Advertiser).

EXPRESSIONS OF FRIENDSHIP.

The Japanese newspapers contained many expressions of friendship for the members of the convention, and appreciations of the spirit and the work of the convention. A full page was given to the farewell message from Patrons' Association. These courtesies were well responded to by the Executive Committee of the Sunday School Association.

The following are typical examples of these exchanges of expressions of friendly feeling and mutual appreciation:

A Farewell Message.

The members of the Japan Patrons' Association of the Eighth World's Sunday School Convention, in bidding farewell to the delegates to the convention, express their appreciation for the splendid service rendered mankind for the brotherhood of man.

In such gatherings as this, held in the name of humanity, which will promote a mutual understanding among the peoples of the world, and will maintain and strengthen the international friendship now existing.

You leave Japan with our best wishes, and with our sincere hope that the pleasant friendships made during your stay may last through the years to come.

(Committee) Marquis S. Okuma, President; Viscount Shibusawa, Vice-President; Viscount Tajiri, Mayor of Tokyo, Vice-President; Baron Sakatani, Vice-President; Mr. R. Fujiyama, President, Tokyo Chamber of Commerce, Vice-President; Baron Sakatani, Chairman, Executive Committee; S. Kinoshita, Honorable Secretary.

Sayonara.

We, the citizens of Tokyo, appreciate your coming to our capital city, for you came here for the sake of humanity and Christianity. Please accept our sincerest wishes. What we have done for you while you were here is only a symbol of our friendship and good will. We trust that you have enjoyed your visit to the fullest extent; and it is our sincere hope that you will look back upon it with genuine pleasure and that the friendships resulting from your stay in Japan may continue through future years.

Viscount Tajiri,
Mayor of the Capital City of Tokyo.

To the Good People of Japan, Especially Our Hosts in Tokyo:

The Executive Committee of the World's Sunday School Association desires to express in this public way a most hearty thank you—

For the unusual courtesies extended to us by the Imperial household;

For the elaborate entertainment given by the Mayor and the city of Tokyo;

For the interest shown and sympathy expressed by many officials of high rank;

For the delightful entertainment that has been accorded us everywhere;

For the elaborate and most complete plans made for the entertainment of the guests, and the carrying

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