

The Inglenook

Signs of Times in Japan.

By William Imbrie, D.D.

Christianity in Japan is face to face with heathenism—and heathenism is simply godlessness—just as truly as it was in the Roman Empire during the early centuries of our era; and now, as then, the national religions are manifesting their powerlessness. Only a few months ago some hundreds of Buddhists met in the city of Tokio and organized a Buddhist Association, the purpose of which is to reform the faith and to fit it to meet the moral exigencies of the country. How much of promise there is in the movement may be judged by the principles adopted; loyalty to the emperor, a more intense devotion to things Japanese a reformation of the Buddhist priesthood. These are the watchwords. Nothing about God; no recognition even of his existence. Nothing about sin, or the suffering that follows it as the harvest follows the planting; and of course nothing about a redemption. These are things which it did not enter into the mind of the reformers to conceive of. On the other hand, it is becoming more and more widely known that Christianity has at least a message to the individual and the nation; that it brings peace and hope and a new life—that the gospel of Christ is not a thing to be ashamed of.

At the same time it is right to repeat what has been often said recently that the condition of affairs, from the evangelistic point of view, is not what it was some years ago. There is certainly a change. After the first period of patient waiting there came a time that has not had its match in the history of modern missions. Invitations to preach Christianity in towns and villages were so common that they ceased to cause surprise. Their consideration was a part of the mission routine. It was a matter of no difficulty to gather an audience of five hundred men and women to listen to the gospel. A little preparation and public notice would fill a large theatre for four or five hours to hear half a dozen speakers in succession. Christianity seemed to have a power of self-propagation. Those who witnessed these scenes will never forget them. In every three years the membership of the church doubled. Then came the change now so well known. It is not necessary to go into details, or to repeat the causes. No wonder that the tone of letters sent home was suddenly different. Men

who had been buoyant with hope were filled with sorrow and anxiety. The position of the missionary was not what it had been. The feelings of some were grievously wounded. It was hard for some to keep from growing soured. Young men who had heard a tale of wonderful success, and had looked for a place in a great Christian movement, came to Japan and found themselves standing in the market-place idle with no one to call them. Nor is it strange that some should still feel oppressed with disappointment, or even more than half suspect that the results would have been different had different methods been followed. The whole situation has been such as naturally to encourage criticism.

The truth is that the Church in Japan has passed through a history in many ways remarkably resembling that of the Church in the New Testament. It has seen the new joy, the new hope, the new enthusiasm, recorded in the earlier chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. It has seen believers scattered abroad preaching the word, and multitudes with one accord giving heed to the things that were spoken. If churches were established in Philippi, and Corinth, and Ephesus, and elsewhere, that also has had its parallel. And the mingled good and evil in those churches recorded in the epistles has been reproduced in the churches in Japan, sometimes with a startling exactness. But there came a change in the life of the Church in the New Testament, the change from the condition where the Lord added to the Church daily, to the condition underlying the letters to Timothy and Titus, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the messages to the seven churches in Asia. This is, in many respects, the condition of the Church in Japan to-day.

It has just been said that Japan is not so eager, or so curious to hear the gospel as it once was. But it is well worth while to correct some statements that appear from time to time in the home papers to the effect that it is now very difficult to find any who are willing to listen. A wider knowledge would give a more encouraging account.

Nobody seems to know what imperialism is; but everybody knows what justice is, and what fair play is. That is to say, everybody knows what these things are when people get near enough to one another and know each other well enough to put themselves each in the other's place.—The Christian Register.

Why She Trusted Him.

The lady of the house was standing in the vestibule, casting an anxious eye down the street.

"Are there no boys in sight?" asked a voice from within.

"Yes, plenty of boys on the street; but you know how particular I am about Pet. I should like to be sure that the boy who rides her will not be rough with her."

Just then a sturdy young fellow of ten came whizzing past on a bicycle. It was not his own, but one that its owner was generous enough to lend the boys who had none; and he was taking his turn, while the other boys lay on the grass and played jackstones, wishing, as he rode along, "My! if I only had a wheel for my trip to the farm!"

Just then he suddenly straightened himself up. "Ting-a-ling-ling!" rang out the bell of the bicycle, sharply; and, as he slowed up, the others boys half rose and looked wonderingly. They could see nothing to ring for.

"What was it, Dick?" they demanded.

"Oh, nothing but a sparrow. I was afraid I'd run over it, the little thing stood so still right in front of the wheel."

"Ho, ho! rings his bell for a sparrow!" sneered the other boys. "Mamma's itty, witty baby!"

I don't care how much you make fun of me," he replied good-naturedly, yet not without a red flush on his brow. "I guess I wouldn't run over a sparrow even, when I could help it by ringing or stopping."

"Come here, please, Dick," called a voice from the doorstep of one of the handsomest houses on the avenue. "You are the very boy I want to drive a pony to the country and back. It is out to the Darlington Boulevard. Would you like to go?"

"Why, yes, ma'am," quickly answered Dick. "I have an errand out there, and was just dreading the walk."

"Then I am glad you may ride. I was wondering, if I could trust one of those boys to be kind to Pet, when I overheard about the sparrow. That made me willing to trust you."

A man must not choose his neighbor; he must take this neighbor that God sends him. In him, whoever he be, lies hidden or revealed a beautiful brother. The neighbor is just the man who is next to you at the moment. The love of our neighbor is the only door of the dungeon of self.—Macdonald.

Love is the greatest thing that God can give us, for Himself is love, and it is the greatest thing we can give God, for it will give ourselves and carry with it all which is ours.—Jeremy Taylor.