

The Farmer Sage of Japan

Ninomiya Sontoku, One of Japan's Reformers

EPWORTH LEAGUE MISSIONARY TOPIC FOR JULY.

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pletely won. He had seen an exhibition of Jesus' power which awed him, and an exhibition of His personal interest in himself which touched him. He is willing to leave all and follow Him. Jesus now gives him his commission, "Henceforth thou shalt catch men." His partners also are won to permanent discipleship. They had been witnesses of the miraculous draught of fishes, and had helped to haul it in, so that they, too, being amazed at the wonderful catch, are ready to surrender their lives. "And when they brought their boats to land, they left it all and followed Him."

IV. HINTS FOR SOUL-WINNERS.

1. Personal Work. Jesus recognized the importance of the individual and the necessity and high value of doing personal work with Him. The privilege of addressing the masses did not deter Him from seeking the individual. After a few minutes spent in addressing the crowd He dismissed them, and a much longer time was spent in going out into the open sea with Peter. It takes more time to do personal work than it does to address people in masses. Jesus was always ready to give the necessary time for personal work with an individual. It might be necessary for Him to go where the individuals were; to accompany them in their travels as in the case of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus; to go to their place of business as in the case of Levi the publican; to assist them in their work as He assisted Peter to catch fish; to go to their homes as in the case of Zaccheus; to mingle with them in their feasts as He frequently did; to suffer Himself to be interrupted as in the case of the woman that was a sinner who anointed His feet at the feast in Simon's house; to allow His rest hours to be interfered with as in the case of Nicodemus who came to Him by night; to neglect His dinner as in the case of the Samaritan woman. For the purpose of personal work, no time was counted too much, no difficulty too great, and no sacrifice too dear. What are we leaguers doing along this line?

2. Tact. Study the Master's tact in winning Peter. He made Peter His helper by obtaining the use of his boat. He secured his good-will; he showed His confidence in him, and His personal interest in his work.

3. Purpose. Jesus in His work had a purpose in view, and He always worked toward a definite end. The throng pressed Him and appealed to Him, but it could not prevent Him from going after Peter. Jesus' life was ruled by a dominating purpose—to win men for God.

4. Training Leaders. Jesus was in need of leaders, and He recognized in Peter the qualities that make for leadership. With all his angularities he was worth a hundred times as good as any of the crowd. This man was worth having at any cost. This man, born to lead, was now learning to follow. Jesus taught him to follow that he might learn how to lead.

A Bell Social

Cards announcing a bell social proclaimed that bells and belles were wanted on a certain date at a given place. Every one was requested to bring a bell, any kind of a bell—electric bell, cow bell, alarm bell, a large or a small bell—but certainly a bell. At the social each bell was expected to tell its experience. Some had travelled great distances, others had enjoyed the pleasures of romance. Songs and piano music bearing the titles of bells were rendered. Cake was served and ice cream that was moulded into the shape of bells in order to conform to the character of the meeting.—*Exchange.*

NINOMIYA SONTOKU, the Farmer Sage of Japan (born 1787, died 1856), is the most famous man Japan has given to the industrial world. He deserves a place not only among the great Japanese but among the great men of his age anywhere.

Ninomiya lived and died before Protestant missions had gained an entrance to the Mikado's kingdom. Commodore Perry had visited Japan in 1853, and in 1854 treaties with the United States and European countries were made. Japan had been preparing for her new day which was dawning while Ninomiya's life was closing. We cannot measure how much he contributed towards preparing Japan to receive the Light of the World and to take her place among the nations.

Ninomiya had a message for his fellow-countrymen, and he gave his whole life that he might show them how better they might live. Through his teachings, through the "Hotoku society," which he organized for social and moral betterment, and through the work he accomplished in bringing back to prosperity estates which had gone to ruin and in reclaiming lives which had become prodigal, he made his principles known and brought to many a new vision of patriotism, of industry, of a higher standard of life and of service for others.

Ninomiya was born within sight of the beautiful Mount Fuji. His grandfather had amassed great wealth, but although he lived in the days which had been compared to those preceding the French Revolution, the days of great luxury and extravagance on the part of the lords and gentry and of extreme poverty and bitter hardship among the peasantry, he gave practically all his fortune to the poor, and Ninomiya's father inherited nothing.

When Kinjiro, for that was Ninomiya's boyhood name, was born, the family was in hard circumstances, and when he was five years old, the Sa River overflowed its banks and washed away his father's land. Then they were poor indeed.

When Kinjiro was only fourteen years old his father died, and the boy became the head of the house and the support of his mother.

Many stories are told of his boyhood and of the brave attempts he made to become educated. When working for a farmer, he was so poor he could not afford pen and paper, but he filled a tray with sand and with a chopstick practised writing in the sand. He went sometimes on rainy days to the Buddhist Temple, where the priest gathered the poor boys to teach them to read. One day the boy next to him had brought a sheet of paper. Kinjiro asked him if he might write a few Chinese characters on it. The boy consented, and Kinjiro wrote, "Learn one character every day and in one year you will have three hundred and sixty-five characters, you young rascal." This has been called "The Three Hundred and Sixty-five Day Maxim."

Ninomiya's first public work for others was done when he was twelve years old. He planted a number of trees by the river so that in the year to come they would protect the bank and prevent the river from overflowing.

His mother died when he was sixteen and his home was broken up. His two younger brothers were adopted by a rela-

tive, and Ninomiya went to live with an uncle, who was well-to-do, but a miser, and begrudged the little drop of oil Ninomiya used when, after a hard and long day's work, he spent his evenings in study.

When Ninomiya was old enough to do for himself, he left his uncle's and went back to his old home, which was now almost in ruins. With the money he had earned at his uncle's, he put the whole house in repair. Here he lived alone, and by strict economy and hard work managed to save some money. In time he completely redeemed his father's estate.

Ninomiya's success in redeeming his father's estate brought him to the notice of a retainer of Okubo, the wise and clever Lord of Odawara. This retainer was in financial difficulty, and he sought Ninomiya's help, asking him to take charge of his estates and bring them back to prosperity. After several refusals, Ninomiya consented to redeem the place in five years.

Before undertaking the work, he said to Hattoria, the retainer, "You must leave the whole thing to me and must not even question my actions. You acknowledge your failure. Now you must depend on me to redeem your lost estate. You must not wear silk and must not have luxury in your home which must be very simply furnished." In short, he told his master that he must adopt the simple life.

After five years of faithful economy and hard work, he had paid all debts, brought the estate back to prosperity and had \$1500 to the good. When his master handed him back a third of the \$1500 in recognition of his services, Ninomiya called the servants and divided this amount among them as a reward for their co-operation and help in bringing prosperity once more to their master and his estates.

Lord Okubo, having heard of Ninomiya's success in helping his retainer, was anxious to take him into his own service, but Ninomiya was a farmer and would not be proud to accept of his retainers, yet he could amuse himself. However, Lord Okubo saw a way of adjustment, and, having secured Ninomiya's services, sent him to Sakuramachi, a village in Shimotsuke Province, to do a piece of work which several of his retainers had tried to do and failed.

For three years Ninomiya had refused to do this work, and when at last he accepted the commission, he made a close study of the whole situation and the conditions which prevailed. Lord Okubo had despatched both men and money to redeem the place, but the men sank to the level of the degraded surroundings and spent his money to no purpose. Ninomiya concluded that money was not necessary to accomplish the desired reform. He said, "If we would only develop the deserted wastes in human minds, we could then let the deserted fields look out for the degraded." Ninomiya told Lord Okubo that the people had degenerated through the misuse of money, that they valued it because it gave them a chance to gamble, and the more they had the more they gambled. They must earn the money in order to appreciate it. Ninomiya explained to Lord Okubo, "If the cultivator of one acre of waste land and raise only one koku and a half of rice (one koku is five bushels), the people will have none to