

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENCE.

TORII-ZAKA AZABU TOKYO, Japan, Dec. 28th, 1898.

Dear Palm Branch Friends:

When meeting with Mission Bands in various places during my stay at home last year, I was frequently asked about Sunday school work in Japan and how it was carried on in that country. So, thinking that it might prove a subject of common interest to the Bands and Circles, I will try to-day to give you some glimpses at one or two of the little Sunday schools, or children's meetings, as we call them here, held among the very poor in the district near our Girls' school. We have three such meetings each Sunday afternoon, to which nine of our Christian girls go as teachers, and upwards of 200 children are enrolled at the three places.

The first five minutes' walk from the school takes you through busy streets, lined with shops on either side, for Sunday is not yet a Sabbath in Japan. Then, turning from this street we pass along a wider one, where there are many wealthy Japanese homes, among these some nobles' residences, and you might wonder why we have a poor school in such a neighborhood; but in a few minutes we turn off from that into a narrow alley lined on either side with low one-story houses, the homes of the very poor, where each family has but one room for the household, a closet at the back holding the bedding during the day, and the little mud-floored entrance answering as kitchen. Two rooms such as this we are able to rent in each district at five sen each a Sunday, and in one of these little places, about 12 x 15 feet, we sometimes have as many as sixty children, seated close together on the mats, and you can imagine that the girls who do the teaching have need of long patience and genuine love to children, in order to control and teach such a company of restless little untrained mortals as gather around them from Sunday to Sunday. There is much to offend the senses both in the ill-smelling drains about and the unkempt persons of the children, but the girls seem to disregard all such minor matters, and to enter thoroughly into the spirit of the work.

The children begin to gather around us as we go along the street, and the girls often stop at some door to call children whom they do not see outside, and sometimes on rainy days even come carrying one of the little ones over muddy places, or leading some by their little grimy hands. Many of the children come "double," number 2, strapped on the back, being sometimes a tiny baby brother or sister only a few weeks old—in other cases, so large and strong looking, and so near the size of the elder one, that one feels like telling the one on the back to get down and take a turn at carrying number 1. They step out of their shoes at the door, and by the time fifty or so are in, you wonder how each will be able to claim his own property again from

the heterogeneous mass of wooden shoes of all sizes and all stages of dilapidation that crowd the entrance, but there is seldom any mistake made when they come to step into them again.

Sunday school proceeds with hymns and prayer and lesson story, such as in our own land, and considering the crowded room, and the dozen or more wriggling babies to add to the stir, I think there is less confusion and noise than there would be in a similar company of small folks gathered in from our streets at home. I marvel sometimes at the regularity with which these children attend the Sunday school and the interest which they show in the lessons, and we know from various little signs that their lives are being influenced for good, and through them something of the truth is gradually finding its way into the homes from which they come.

On a recent rainy Sunday I could not but admire the persistency of one of the little boys of seven or eight years, who comes so regularly with a tiny brother of two or three months on his back. For greater safety in walking in the slippery mud he had come in his bare feet, and so could not step on the mats with the others, but he was not going to lose his Sunday school for that. He stood patiently at the door through the whole hour, occasionally shaking the baby up and down when it would begin to cry, and chanting to it mournful little snatches of the songs being taught inside. When the baby refused to be any longer lulled by these means, a woman standing near told him that the baby was hungry and he had better take it home, but the little fellow replied that he wanted to stay till the tickets were given out, whereupon another brother emerged from the mass of children in the room, and after a little search in the ample sleeve of the baby's kimono, produced a wee hand belonging to the tot, and carefully inserted the small thumb in the baby's mouth as a comforter evidently, and then looking well pleased at his happy way of settling the difficulty, he squeezed himself back into his place in the class. The baby accepted the poor substitute for his supper with a good grace for a few minutes, and then raised his voice again in protest against the fraud, and by that time I thought it time to interfere, and as the lesson was ended procured a ticket of attendance for the patient little nurse and sent him home. I wonder how many of our Mission Band boys and girls would continue to attend Sunday school under such circumstances as these?

With greeting to each and all who may read these pages,

Yours very sincerely,

M. ABBIE VEAZEY.

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