

The Life of Toyohiko Kagawa

Toyohiko Kagawa was born on the 10th of July, 1888 (the 21st year of Meiji) in Kobe. When he was four years old, his parents died in succession; he came to be taken care of by his father's family, which was located in a village in Naruto City, Tokushima Prefecture.

The Kagawas were such an old family they were village heads during the Edo Period.

Toyohiko entered a local elementary school (the second Horie Elementary School), and entered into Tokushima Junior High School, which is now called Jonan Senior High School.

During his days in Junior High School, he went to church so that he could study English. Before long he happened to meet two American missionary teachers; Drs. Harry W. Myers and Charles A. Logan. Under the influence of them, he gradually became attracted by the teachings of Christianity. Then, he also became an avid reader. In those days his elder brother had already taken control of the shipping trade his father had long run. However, the conditions of trade grew worse, and eventually they went bankrupt. After that, the property of the Kagawas in Tokushima Prefecture was dispossessed.

Toyohiko, having no house to live in, began to reside at his uncle's, whose name was Rokuro Mori. At the age of 16 years old he underwent a baptism into Christianity, and he revealed his idea that he would like to go to theological college to his uncle. But Rokuro was furious about what his nephew said, and refused to pay for tuition or other school expenses. As soon as he learned of Toyohiko's situation, Dr. Myers offered the poor boy help, and the boy was able to go to Meiji Gakuin College. Entering a preparatory course in the theology department of Meiji Gakuin College, he devoted himself to reading all of the books in the college library.

But due to overreading books and stress, his already feeble body was slowly eaten up by tuberculosis.

When he transferred to Kobe Theological College, he nearly died from vomiting blood up, but was still left in critical condition for some time.

The doctor had no idea whether he would recover his health or not. Toyohiko had already been in an extremely desperate situation because of various hardships. However, he was greatly impressed and encouraged by pastor Nagao's resolution to devote himself to suffering people. He said to himself, 'Yes, now that I cannot avoid death, I have made up my mind to help the poor, and suffering people'. Soon Toyohiko, who was still weak from illness, threw himself into the slums in Kobe City, and volunteered to help suffering people. There he desperately started many different relief activities; the missions of Christianity, education for children, and a free medical office. Some people began to assist him in helping the poor. Among them there was a woman who was very moved by Toyohiko's deeds. Later this young lady, whose name was Haru Shiba, made a good wife to him.

Haru was said to have suffered from trachoma, and had lost one of her eyes because of charity work. But she resolved to keep on walking with her husband by doing her best for the poor. It was through his wife's help that Toyohiko was able to avoid the worst even though the doctor had given up him.

He soon he realized that he would not discover permanent ways to salvage or redeem the poor living in the slums, so he left the development activities to the various charities. Then he went to Princeton University and theological college and discovered both theories of the poor and needy

problems, and theories of cooperatives (or co-ops). At the same time, he happened to see many workers marching in New York City, and learned from research on labor movements. After returning to his mother land, he was looked upon as a leader of labor movements in the Western part of Japan.

Thus his experiences in the United States enabled him to take the initiative in carrying out all of his plans and projects. Throughout the course of his life, on the basis of Christianity, Toyohiko would adhere to pacifism and completely denounce acts of violence.

In the course of time, he started to focus his thinking on how to prevent poverty; from the relief of the poor to prevention of being poor. This principle has been continuously influencing the movements of farmers' unions and of cooperatives (or co-ops) since then. In addition, this great pastor was invited to the United States of America by President Roosevelt. As a distinguished theoretician of cooperatives he made many addresses on the theories of co-ops.

Moreover, in Europe he advocated that 'Brotherhood Economics' based on the theory of co-ops, could prevent war and would be the only road to peace.

As you know today this proposal has been realized as the European Union.

His autobiography, which was a trilogy written from 1920 to 1924, and was translated into 'Before the Dawn', was well-known to the world.

This novel dealt with his experiences and thinking on his deeds in the slums in Kobe City. About 4,000,000 copies were sold. As a result he became a millionaire, and the amount of money was estimated at 10 billion yen. All the money was spent on labor unions and social services.

During his life Toyohiko wrote over 300 books, and what is more, was nominated for the Nobel Prize for literature two times.

People all over the world sympathized with Kagawa's thinking in his works. During World War II Japan had been isolated, but many leaders of other countries had faith in him and tried listening to him because he had been earnestly advocating world peace. Song Meiling, the wife of President Chiang Kai-shek, was one of them. At that time her country was being attacked by Japanese armies. After the fall of Nanking Castle, she informed Chinese people of Kagawa's principles by radio.

After the most miserable war, which caused extensive damage to the world, he increasingly dedicated his life to the movements of world peace.

Many leaders in the world also invited Kagawa to their countries, and even though he was in poor health he strenuously made addresses on world peace in many cities both in North America and in Europe.

It was thanks to his accomplishments that he was nominated for the Nobel Prize for peace four times.

Though he passed away at the age of 71, wishing for the happiness of all people on earth, stressing 'Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Peace', Kagawa has been alive in the hearts of people throughout the world since then.