

# The Baptist Missionary Society in Japan

**T**HE STORY of the attempt of the Baptist Missionary Society to establish work in Japan is worth recalling. It was made in the eleven years from 1879 to 1890 when Japan was going through a period of rapid political and social change and when the prospect for Protestant missions seemed very bright. It came to an end partly because the Society was unable to provide the support necessary in finance and personnel, and partly because in Japan there was a marked reaction against the spread of the Christian faith.

The pioneer missionary was Rev. W. J. White who had prepared for his task at the Pastors' College (Spurgeon's). He was well fitted for the responsibility for he had lived for eight years in Japan, could speak the language fluently and understood something of the manners and customs of the people. He knew of the revolutionary changes which had taken place in the country. The old feudal system had broken down: the rule of the shogunate had come to an end. The emperor had moved his residence from Kyoto to Yedo, the administrative centre of the shoguns; and that city, now undoubtedly the capital of the country, had been renamed Tokyo. Mr. White had been in Japan when the edicts against Christians had been removed in 1873. He had observed the entry into the country of a growing number of missionaries from the U.S.A. The American Presbyterians had indeed established a church (the first Protestant church) in the capital. It is quite probable that he had come into contact with Jonathan Gobles and Nathan Brown, pioneer missionaries of the American Baptist Missionary Union, who had established work in Yokohama in 1873.

Impressed by the opportunities in rapidly changing Japan, and being convinced that God had called him to be a missionary, he had returned to England to enter the Pastors' College. He was accepted by the B.M.S. He and his wife were valedicted at a service at Brockhurst, Hampshire in September, 1878, and that month set sail for Yokohama.

It was in Tokyo that he had began his activities. The city then had a population of just over one million but was rapidly growing. Of its religious life we have this picture:

"All over Tokyo there are temples and shrines. In almost every house are little shrines before which saucers of oil with burning wicks are placed every night. In unexpected places, along narrow streets, one happens upon tiny temples where passers-by continually turn in, cast their coin into the open coffer, and bend in the attitude of worship, repeating at the same time a rapid incantation to the resident deities, whose attention has recently been called by ringing a bell.

Ascend any of the hills commanding Tokyo and all around you see the city dotted with the heavy and picturesque roofs of these same temples; and you may mentally picture the scene in each one, of an endless procession of devotees casting their gifts into the treasury, and seeking aid from the great Buddha or from long departed heroes."

Within six months the first two converts had been baptized. They, together with Mr. and Mrs. White and a teacher, Mr. Baur, formed themselves into a church. One of the converts became a medical student in the American Presbyterian hospital; the other was put in charge of a tract and Bible depot. There was a great deal of suffering in the city and its environs for there was a severe earthquake and an outbreak of cholera which claimed thousands of victims. Mr. White wrote home: "Forty-five people have died in three days, and within about a stone's throw of our house." There were also serious riots, symptoms of general unrest. By the end of the first year, however, five converts had been baptized, two were under instruction as candidates accepted for baptism, and there were three inquirers. The Whites had been encouraged by an article which had appeared in a local newspaper, *Akebono Shinbu*, advocating the removal from Christians of all restrictions as to preaching, burials, and so on.

The second year began with much optimism. "The work is wonderfully opening up on all sides," reported Mr. White. He made a most earnest appeal to the Society to send out a colleague. "I am working as hard as I can; but what is one among so many?" A Sunday-School was opened with three children attending and within a year the number had increased to seventeen. As a means of encouraging regular attendance, the teacher distributed cakes as soon as the lessons were over. The lessons consisted of a Bible story, a portion of a Baptist catechism (compiled in the U.S.A.), the recitation of a scripture text, and a short address. The Sunday-School met in the morning. In the afternoon there was a Bible class for adults, and in the evening a service with increasing congregations.

One of those baptized during the year was a native of Mito, a province some fifty miles from Tokyo. Mr. White thought this to be most significant because that province had become notorious for the persecution of Christian converts, its inhabitants considered to be among the most violent haters of Christianity. This particular young man had settled in Tokyo near to the preaching place. He had been attracted to Christian teaching through reading Martin's *Evidences of Christianity* in Chinese. He arrived one day at White's house in tears asking for further instruction as he wished to tell his fellow countrymen. After instruction he proposed to return to Mito.

In Tokyo generally there had been a remarkable Christian demonstration. At the close of 1880 the members of the various churches in the city, believing that the time had come when they should make a more than ordinary open and public profession of their faith, arranged for a series of great meetings in the public park, when large crowds of about 4,000 listened attentively to some sixteen native

preachers. Mr. White estimated that more than 10,000 of the people of Tokyo heard the story of the Cross.

Then followed a year of disappointments and personal tragedy. The Sunday-School gained only six new scholars. It was not possible to start the proposed day-school for which a grant had been received because the teacher appointed had had to return unexpectedly to his home village because of the sudden death of his father. The meetings at the several preaching places which had been established were well attended, Sunday congregations numbering on average one hundred and on weekdays two hundred and forty. A chapel had been erected in the Honjo district at the cost of £30 and an appeal made to the British churches for an harmonium. Seven new members were added by baptism, but one name was removed from the church roll.

On June 20th, 1881, Mrs. White died shortly after giving birth to a baby boy, their third child. Her courage and hope on her death-bed made a profound impression on the new Japanese Christians. Mr. White was faced with a serious problem. There were three little children to be cared for, but he could not have a Japanese woman in his house without causing scandal. He thought that the only course open to him was to return home, leaving the work in the care of Mr. Rees of the American Baptist Mission. But a local family offered help, and Mr. White and his children moved to occupy a set of rooms adjoining their house, the mother of the family taking the children into her charge.

Within two years he had married again. His second wife had been in Japan for three years as a missionary of the American Baptist Missionary Union on the staff of a boarding school for girls in Tokyo. She now began to organize work among women, holding weekly meetings in the home of Mr. Koboyashi a deacon of the church, whose wife played the harmonium at Sunday services. Apart from this there seems to have been little progress. There was but one applicant for baptism during the year and four or five inquirers. Mr. White again made an earnest appeal for more help and in particular asked for the services of a young man, near to 25, full of love and zeal for the Lord. Within a few months the committee in London were able to inform him that they hoped to send out Rev. George Eaves, a student at the Bristol Baptist College.

The Whites continued patiently in their work though there was little growth in the church. Two colporteurs were appointed to distribute tracts and portions of the scriptures. A number of preaching places were established outside the city. Mrs. White began a day-school for children. They both felt that it was a mistake that the work was so feebly manned. Again there was personal tragedy: one of the children died. One achievement of this period deserves mentioning. Mr. White, at the request of the Religious Tract Society, translated *Pilgrim's Progress* into Japanese and completed and carried through the press the major part of a new edition of the New Testament.

When George Eaves arrived in 1885 the Whites were greatly en-

couraged though they informed the home Committee there was need for at least three more men, if the mission were to be placed upon anything like a reasonable basis. There were now three sub-stations as well as the main centre in Tokyo. The congregations at all the preaching places were large and attentive. There were many inquirers and several candidates for baptism. Mr. White could write home: "The outlook is decidedly cheering, and we are greatly encouraged by the whole prospect of our work."

In the following year there was marked expansion. A chain of six stations extending over a route of one hundred and fifty miles was established. Each end could be conveniently reached by rail. These stations were in the small towns of Moka, Ishihoji, Hwanomiyah, Nishinudzushiro, Tochigi, and Ishiuchi. Four Japanese evangelists shared in the work.

It was two evangelists, Sunaga and Ishiwara, who started the work at Moka. They happened to arrive there to sell scripture-portions and tracts at the time of one of the large fairs. In response to their preaching there were three inquirers who were later baptized in the little river that flows through the town. One of these converts used to visit Ishiuchi regularly on business. On becoming a Christian he felt he must tell others. When he made his weekly visit he called some of the folk together, and sitting down on the mats with them told them the good news of salvation. Later he invited the evangelist to visit the town, and as a result there were ten applications for baptism. At Huanomiyah the one believer was the son of a well-to-do silk merchant, a devout Buddhist, who had disinherited his son and turned him and his wife into the streets because he would not renounce his Christian faith. At Tomita, a village just outside Nishinudzushiro, the headmaster of a large provincial school was baptized. He was a keen student of geometry and was highly delighted when Mr. White gave him a volume on conic sections.

At Ishiuchi eight men and two women had professed faith as a result of the preaching of the evangelist Suzuki. One evening a small stream feeding the irrigation of the paddy fields was temporarily dammed to make a baptistry, an old door used to protect feet from the mud; and the ten were baptized by the glimmering light of a large number of Japanese lanterns. A month later three more were baptized; and following this service the thirteen converts together with a member of the Guch Church "who was an intelligent believer in Christ when he received the ordinance from that body", gathered round the table for the Lord's Supper.

The work in Tokyo itself was making good progress. The church at Honjo was becoming self-supporting and the day-school in Kobiki Cho was in a very satisfactory condition under a schoolmaster who was both a good teacher and a good preacher.

The Committee of the Society at its annual meeting in 1886 expressed the view that no part of the vast mission field presented more inviting prospects than Japan. There was evidently a widespread spirit

of inquiry abroad, and far less opposition to the proclamation of the Gospel than in many other lands. "Very gladly would the Committee reinforce the mission in Japan if the finances of the Society permitted such a step."

For three years the work progressed steadily. Clearly the added support of George Eaves was having its effect. He now seems to have become the spokesman for the mission and makes repeated appeals to the home Committee to provide more resources. He admits that proportionately there are probably more evangelical missionaries in Japan than in some other countries but calls attention to the strategic position of the country, perhaps as a base for the evangelization of China, and to its rapidly increasing population. He makes the point again and again that the victory for Christ had by no means been won in Japan. The number of sub-stations increased from six to fourteen. There is an interesting description in one report of a meeting in an upper room at the town of Tomita crowded with an audience of three hundred and fifty people, all intelligent and attentive listeners. The newly formed church at Tochigi was growing rapidly. In the first year it had increased to fifty-three members; and the first deacon was a leading barrister in the town. A place of worship had been established in the principal street of the town by converting a house into a chapel to seat three hundred. The missionaries had been busy on translation work—completing *Kind Questions on Speaking the Truth in Love* by Mr. Stalker, late of Southport; *The Necessity for a Revelation from God* (R.T.S.); *Foes of Christianity*; *Introduction to the Book of Genesis*; and *Expository Lectures on Genesis 1-5*.

Further encouragement came in February 1889 when the Emperor promulgated a new constitution guaranteeing freedom of religion. To that date there were one hundred and seventy-five baptized church members, two day-schools and two Sunday-Schools. But it was noticeable that progress in Tokyo itself was slow; the most interesting and successful work was in the small towns and villages.

In less than two years the situation appeared entirely different. There had been only eight converts in three years. The missionaries reported that the fall-off of interest was general throughout Japan. They attributed it to three causes: (1) growing political activity and interest; (2) Buddhist activity; (3) the spread of materialism and agnosticism as the works of Tom Paine, Ingersoll, Huxley and Spencer were widely circulated and read (copies could be found even in remote villages).

Rev. W. J. White continued his literary work. He revised the Japanese version of *Pilgrim's Progress* and a draft translation of *The Baptist Manual* and published two new tracts. But then came a severe blow. George Eaves became ill and left Japan to settle at Denver, Colorado, U.S.A.; and Mr. White had ruefully to report: "Half the mission went with him". The church building at Shimodate was destroyed during a typhoon. The Society at home was in difficulties. There had been a considerable deficit at the end of the last financial

year and special prayer meetings were being called throughout the British Isles. An economic depression was having its effects in South Wales, Lancashire, Yorkshire and in the industrial belt of Scotland. The Committee felt it was quite unable to contemplate increasing the staff in Tokyo. So W. J. White resigned and joined the staff of the Religious Tract Society. The remaining work and responsibilities were transferred to the American Baptist Missionary Union whose missionaries were entering Japan in increasing numbers. By the end of 1890 the attempt of the B.M.S. had come to an end.

A. S. CLEMENT

---

*The Story of Andover Baptist Church, 1824-1974*, Barrington White and Walter Fancutt, published by Holmes & Sons (Printers) Ltd., Andover, 1974, 33 pp 25p.

I have no idea how many histories of local Baptist churches have been published recently. Certainly, however, I have been fortunate in that several very good ones have come my way. They include the present booklet.

This is a co-operative venture by two former ministers of the Andover church. Consequently, its authors have more than an academic interest in the story of the church. One hundred and fifty years of Baptist church life are packed into these 33 pages. The first half century was one of almost continual struggle and heartbreak, the turning point being the pastorate of Joseph Hasler. Hasler not only led the church for 24 years, from 1871 till 1895, but also served the Southern Association as its secretary, from 1876 till 1922.

I welcome this book for several reasons. For one thing, as the authors themselves point out, there have been few accounts of the life of a mid-19th century Baptist congregation. The insights this one gives into the life of such a congregation both in the mid-19th century and later are welcome.

I am grateful, too, that the authors have not confined themselves to words. The interest and value of the book have been enhanced by the inclusion of photographs and graphs. The latter show changes in membership and in the strength of children's and youth work between 1881 and 1973.

A further reason for welcoming this short history is that it set me thinking about questions which go beyond the scope of this review. I could not help wondering, for instance, how Christians could allow a difference in viewpoint about the use of fermented wine at Communion to develop into a bitter controversy lasting six years. I wondered, also, how many churches, in introducing individual communion glasses, solemnly debated details of administration, and how much time they spent doing so.

This little book deserves to be read more widely than just by those interested in the Andover church, and I hope it will be.

ERNEST F. CLIPSHAM