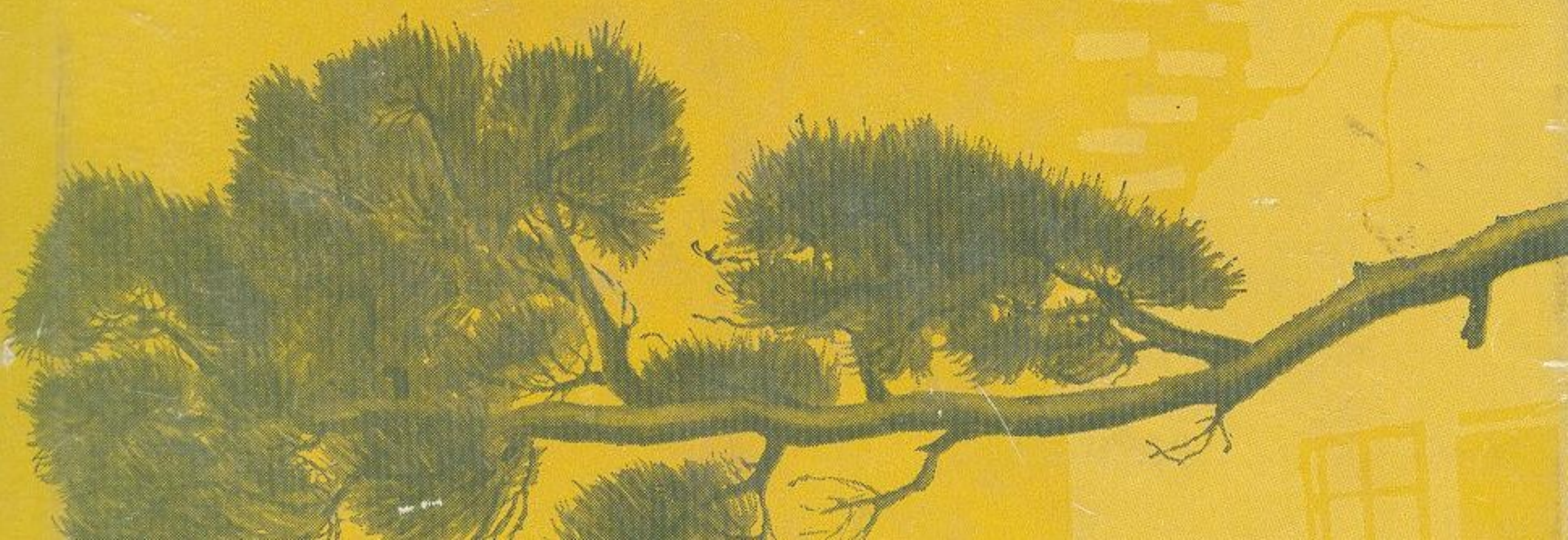


CYRIL J. DAVEY

KAGAWA
of JAPAN

賀川豊彦



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CHAPTER SIX

'Across the Death-line'

THINGS HAD changed while Toyohiko was away from Kobe. They had changed in his own family. Michi, his stepmother, cared for with true Japanese filial piety and Christian love, had died. Haru, free of the hut in the slums and working in the Bible School, had achieved all she had longed for as a girl, and graduated alongside students much junior to her. Things had changed in Japan itself, for the country, involved in the war on the British and American side, was extending its industry and drawing more and more workers into the factories, docks and ship-yards.

Back in Shinkawa, where he immediately returned with his wife, Toyohiko found that the slums themselves were unaltered. On the other hand, to his deep distress, he soon saw that some of the things for which he had laboured so hard were already lost. The mission-hut was still there, and services were continuing, led by his friends and supporters from the town churches and the mission—but something had happened to the people. Without his personal interference on the side of righteousness the young people had failed to withstand the forces of evil. Three of the girls had been sold as prostitutes, and forty of the boys were in prison for theft and other crimes.

But if there were changes in the land and people, Toyohiko Kagawa himself had changed too. He was still comparatively young, not quite thirty, but his knowledge was

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greater, his judgement more shrewd and his horizons greatly widened. Up to the time he left for America, he had been content to preach a gospel of love and practise it in helping individuals. Now, he was aware that the problem of poverty itself would have to be tackled.

His quiet voice growing shrill with eagerness, he talked incessantly to his wife and his Japanese and American friends about what he had seen and what he longed to do. His tumbling sentences were interpreted and his points emphasized by sweeping gestures and stabbing movements of his thin hands.

'There are two and a half million people on the Japanese labour-roll. Did you know that?' He never paused for an answer in those long dissertations. 'They're in transport, docks, factories, mines and the Public Works Department. They're underpaid and overworked.'

'Well?'

'If they were in Britain or America they could stand up for themselves, organize themselves to fight for their own rights. Here in our country they would be imprisoned if they attempted anything of the kind. You may sell your daughter to a brothel and no one takes any notice; try to form a Trades Union and you will be punished more harshly than if you knock an old woman down and rob her.'

'But what can we do to stop it?' His friends seemed always to make the same answer without seeing the obvious solution. 'It happens because men are too poor to support their families.'

Kagawa's finger stabbed the air again. 'Exactly. We must get rid of poverty . . . force the Government to acknowledge the workers' right to form unions . . . sweep away the slums.'

'We?' The reply was sharp. 'Who do you mean by "we?"'

'The Church. Christian people who care. You pastors

and your congregations outside the slums. My wife and myself.'

At first he was astonished at the glances which his listeners exchanged with each other. There was embarrassment, anger and hostility in them. 'No, Kagawa *San*. Live in the slums if that's your way. Try and lift people up by preaching the gospel. But don't involve yourself in politics. It's a dirty business and it's dangerous. It will bring the Church into disrepute. You know we're only a small group, we Christians. It wouldn't be difficult for the Government to restrict our work. You mustn't risk it.'

The young reformer sighed, lifting his hands and then dropping them helplessly. Talk about political action or economic schemes and the reply was always the same. 'It isn't the job of the Church.'

Kagawa saw that his future was bound up with three demands. He must show that Christianity was not a pietistic way of life, remote from the joyful and dirty business of living; it involved the Church's sharing in life as much as her Master had done. This must be demonstrated by his continuing to live in the limiting, sordid environment of Shinkawa. But alongside his practical compassion, he must go out in the name of Christ and try to find some solution to the labour problem of Japan. It was already clear that, in doing this, he would alienate many of his fellow-Christians as well as expose himself to Government wrath.

Partly to make plain his close association with the Church, and partly because he felt God called him to fulfil the vow he had postponed, Kagawa was ordained into the Christian Ministry in 1917. One of the ministers who shared in the service had been amongst his attackers a dozen years earlier at the High School in Tokyo. The fact was illustrative of the way in which critics joined the ranks of his supporters as the years passed. Refusing to take over the

pastorate of a city church, he continued to exercise his ministry in Shinkawa.

Some little time previously, in Tokyo, an enthusiastic friend of the workers, Bunji Suzuki, had organized the *Yuai Kai*, the 'Labourers' Benefit Society'. A kind of co-operative organization, it could hardly be outlawed by the Government. Now Suzuki was going farther, and beginning a Japanese Federation of Labour. The trouble was that so few labourers had the ability to deal with such administrative work, and no one but labourers and a few high-minded citizens were likely to assist the project. Least of all would help have been sought in the respectable ranks of the Church. In Kobe, however, it was from the Church that the most effective leadership emerged. Toyohiko Kagawa, the Christian minister, to the horror of not a few fellow-workers, became the founder of the Kobe branch and began to build up its membership amongst the labourers on the docks. Soon afterwards he became the National Secretary of the Federation. He was nominated as the Japanese representative to the International Labour Office, but turned down the honour to deal with matters closer at hand.

Officialdom watched him and did not like what it saw. It was already clear to the magistrates and police of Kobe that, if the growing mood of insurgence amongst the dock-workers burst into open trouble, the young Christian minister would be somewhere in the middle of it. He was far from being a national figure, except in Christian circles, but in Kobe his name was becoming familiar. One afternoon a reporter set out to exploit this new interest.

Wandering through Shinkawa, protecting his Western clothes from the filth in the lanes and the wet washing hanging across the alleys, the journalist found his way to Kagawa's hut. The preacher was out and so was his wife.

One or two old people, lying in the preaching-room which was also a hostel, greeted him without much interest. Strangers were always seeking Kagawa *San* these days. They waved him into the Kagawa's private room—a privacy guaranteed, as the journalist soon saw, only by a flimsy door and papered bamboo walls. Though it lacked many things, the room had character. It was clean and uncrowded. On a bookshelf made from a wooden crate stood piles of books. Their titles were astonishing, and in some cases unreadable to the visitor, for they were the classic volumes in Japanese, English and German, on modern economics and sociology.

On top of the bookshelf stood a pile of manuscript. The journalist took it up casually, flicked over the pages, and began to read. Astonishment deepened on his solemn face. Here was something better than material for an article on a politically-minded Christian minister. Here, surely, was the man himself, burning through the long pages of a novel.

In his hut, as the noises of the streets died away, Kagawa had taken out the book he had written in the fishing-village of Gamagori. He knew now what the publisher had meant when he had talked about 'more experience of life'. Sitting cross-legged, or kneeling by the low table in the centre of the tiny hut, he had re-written the story of Eiichi, the bombastic young idealist. Home, college, tea-house, municipal office, lodging-house, the country and the slums were the background of the story he had told. It was a relief and a release from the growing demands of the labourers. When at last it was finished, he had laid it on the top of his book-shelves.

'A man came to see you,' said one of the 'lodgers' in the big hut when Kagawa returned. 'He came from a newspaper.'

'He took something away,' added another, not bothering to get up. 'And he said he had left a letter for you.'

The letter lay where the manuscript had been. Kagawa opened it and stood for a long time, holding it in trembling hands after he had read it. There was a receipt for the manuscript and a promise on behalf of the editor to pay him twelve hundred and fifty *yen*—two hundred and fifty pounds—for the first serial rights. He could not believe his own eyes, and set off to interview the newspaper-man. But it was quite true. The novel from which he had hoped so much was translated into English and serialized in the *Japan Chronicle* of Kobe, the leading English language newspaper in the country, edited by Robert Young.

As a serial it raised some interest without causing any great stir. A year or two later it would do much more. But, from Kagawa's point of view, its immediate results were of tremendous value. It provided funds to help in work amongst labourers. It made it possible to open a free clinic in Shinkawa, in 1918, with a nurse in attendance, and to begin a night-school for labourers in Osaka. The following year the Shinkawa clinic was extended, and a full-time doctor was employed.

No one really quite knew what to make of Kagawa. He was a phenomenon without parallel in Japan, though part of the inspiration for the ministry he exercised had come from men who acted in much the same way in other countries. He fitted into no pattern. He was a minister without a church, a doctor in philosophy with qualifications for teaching in a university who chose to run high-school classes for common labourers, a Christian who was openly critical of respectable Japanese Christianity, a pacifist who was prepared to stir up trouble. The hostility of the Church mounted, and continued to do so for many years. Christian leaders sincerely believed he was wrong to

involve the Church in politics when its real task was saving souls. The result was that Kagawa's own profound and mystical faith has not always been recognized, simply because he himself had to stand so firmly by his belief that, in William Temple's phrase, Christianity was the most materialistic of all religions. In fact, few Christians of his day—and perhaps none in the East—so faithfully united in their religious philosophy the mystical and practical elements of the faith.

To the officials of Kobe, who knew little about Christianity except that the Church was suspicious of the young man in the slums, the problem was clear. Toyohiko Kagawa was merely another agitator, active at a time when Trades Unionists and Communists were becoming too common, and he would have to be restrained. The chance to restrain him appeared to be given them by Kagawa himself.

In 1919 he published a book called *The Adoration of the Labourer*. It was just what Kobe officialdom had waited for. Even the title was an offence. Kagawa was arrested, taken to court and charged with seditious intentions. The court found him awkward, not because he ranted at them as they hoped and expected, but because he refused to be put out of temper. For the first time the magistrates faced a Christian pacifist who really believed that even law-courts and magistrates could be won over by love. The court records indicate the way he behaved: 'He *appears* moderate, temperate and sound.'

What the officials actually thought lies in the next sentence. 'He is really crafty, sly, subtle, insidious, designing, treacherous and double-faced; and though advancing radical theories gives the impression of cherishing revolutionary ideas.' They would have imprisoned him if they had been able, but in fact there was nothing for which they could hold him, and they had to let him go. He went home, to

what he described as his 'six-foot shack in the slums'. He hated it more than ever, not for himself but because of all it symbolized of the degradation around him.

*I can see
No hope
For the slums
Because that
First of all
This thing
Is wrong—
That men
Should crowd
Thus in the dearth,
And dark,
And dirt—
Should crowd and throng . . .*

His mind was beating about the problem of poverty more urgently. For him it had, at that moment, two special aspects. Both must be dealt with. The first was the problem of the slums themselves. While they existed they would always be a cess-pit from which vice, crime and evil would crawl to pollute the country. They ought to be swept away. Reformers were beginning to agree about this, but the generality of the population were as untouched by their existence as those to whom he had addressed his first violent poem in *Songs From the Slums*. How could people be made aware of this running sore on the fair body of Japan? The second problem was that, even if the slums were somehow swept out of existence, so long as labourers were not paid a living wage and were forbidden to negotiate or strike under penalty of imprisonment, they would inevitably recreate the slums all over again.

These two problems were focused sharply in the public

eye, and set on the way to solution, in 1920 and 1921.

A publisher had read the serialized version of Kagawa's novel in the *Japan Chronicle*, and feeling it deserved a wider public, he approached the author. 'Will you re-edit it and lengthen it?' he asked. 'Make it about half as long again as its present size. Concentrate in the new part on the slums.' Kagawa did so, working feverishly in the intervals of superintending the clinics, teaching at night-schools in Osaka and Kobe, preaching in his mission-hall and out of doors, and attending to the growing demands of the Federation of Labour. He brought Eiichi, his hero, into the slums, and the miseries and Christian courage of his characters matched those he himself had known. The publisher believed he had a novel of genius, and advertised it as such. Japan is a highly literate country, and books were widely bought. The name of Toyohiko Kagawa was becoming known as a labour leader. But none of this prepared either author or publisher for the success that came to them.

Across the Death-line, published in 1920, created a phenomenal stir hardly ever known before in Japanese publishing history. Its first edition was sold out immediately, and printing after printing was required to meet the public demand. As an author, Kagawa's fame was nation-wide. For some time it sold at the rate of a hundred thousand copies a year. To him it was more important that the attention of the whole country was turned to the existence of the slums.

The following year his name leaped into the headlines once more. This time, however, it was notoriety rather than fame that he achieved.

Towards the middle of 1921, thirty thousand labourers in the Mitsubishi and Kawasaki dockyards of Kobe determined to go on strike. Knowing that Kagawa was in sympathy with them, they surged down the Shinkawa alleys

and out to the Labour Federation's office in Kobe, carrying banners, spades, picks, and yelling at the tops of their shrill voices.

'Lead us, Kagawa! Lead us, Kagawa!' Banners and shouts carried the same message.

Addressing the swollen crowd of angry men, Kagawa promised to lead them if they would refrain from violence. They must unite—and they must not go back to work. The news was sent out all over the country. Kagawa, the famous pacifist-author from the slums, had called the dock-labourers out on strike and formed a Trades Union. He had defied the Government and broken the law. But in spite of his illegal activities, the police had to admit that the strikers were remarkably peaceful. Kagawa visited them daily as they sat outside the docks, in the manner of strikers all over the world, watching their work but refusing to do it. He opened consumers' co-operatives which sold food and clothing at prices they could afford. He went day by day to the managers and ship-owners pleading the cause of the workers. Not unnaturally they refused to admit that there was any justice in his cause. The law was on their side and they intended to stand by it. Strikes were illegal. So were Unions. This was Japan, not America. If he persisted in going on they would have him arrested as an agitator.

This last was far from easy. He was preaching non-violence, not riot. There was a growing movement towards the organization of labour throughout the country, and both sides had to be temperate in their actions if they were not to alienate public opinion, which was quite undecided about these new industrial issues.

'Labourers are human beings,' proclaimed Kagawa in a manifesto. 'They are not to be bought and sold. . . . They are not machines. In order to develop our own personalities, to secure a social order which will produce

true culture and give security, we demand the right to organize and regulate our own affairs.'

This was revolutionary. Common men had never spoken in this way before. It was clear that they had a leader of whom the country would have to take notice, now and in the future. The power of his leadership was seen in his ability to control the strikers as much as in his readiness to speak for them. When police and soldiers were called in to drive them back to work, there was real danger of a full-scale riot. Kagawa, small, slim and quiet, dealt with the police and quelled the agitators in his own ranks.

Foolishly, as it turned out, the police decided to end the strike by arresting its leader. Kagawa was followed by detectives. His hut and the labour headquarters were raided, and finally he himself was dragged away to the police-station, his clothes almost torn from his body and his face and back beaten with a policeman's sabre. Violence is an unwise weapon to use against a pacifist. Kagawa asked for an apology—and got it. Handcuffed, without shoes, he was thrust before the magistrate—who had no option but temporarily to hold him for investigation but spoke in high terms of his character. In the prison, his gentleness made a great impression both on warders and prisoners alike. To avoid the uneasiness of guarding a highly popular prisoner, he was transferred to the women's prison, but the women prisoners set about mending his clothes, and he was finally committed to a solitary cell. Even here, his spirit was unconfined.

*Around my prison
Runs a high stockade;
And from my wrists
Chains dangle;
But no power
Can lock my eyes.*

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*Dragging my chains,
I climb
To the tall window-ledge;
And though
My body cannot crawl
Between those grim iron rods,
Still can I
Laugh as my spirit flies
Into the purple skies!
Northward and Northward,
Up and up,
Up to the world of light
I go bounding;
Farewell, O Earth, farewell,
What need I now of your freedom?
Fearless, I fly and fly,
On through the heavenly sky;
Breaking all prison bars,
My soul sleeps with the stars!*

In his mind, with only scraps of paper and some charcoal for material, he worked out the plot of a new novel, *Listening to the Voice in the Wall*.

Outside, his wife Haru had taken full charge of the two dispensaries, provided meals for the dozen or more 'lodgers' still living with them, read hundreds of letters which dealt with her husband's many activities, dictated replies, and consulted with the labour leaders day by day. Outside, too, other things were happening less in line with Kagawa's hopes. Communist elements in the docks were trying to gain control of the new union and planning a mass demonstration in which irreparable damage would be done to the shipyards. *That*, they insisted, would teach the ship-owners who were the real masters.

After thirteen days, news leaked out that Kagawa was to be released. A thousand labourers gathered at the prison gate in the early evening, carrying banners of welcome and lighted lanterns hitched on the end of long poles. Fearing that the demonstration might result in their hero being kept in prison, the leaders urged the men to disperse, but they refused to go farther than the courtyard of a local temple, and there they waited until Kagawa did, indeed, emerge from the prison gates. Then, with a tumultuous welcome, they escorted him back home to Shinkawa.

The welcome was deceptive. Kagawa hoped it meant that the workers were prepared to abstain from violence. Instead, the following morning, he heard that a mass of labourers was marching to the ship-yards, led by the Communist agitators, with the hope of destroying the machinery, breaking up the ships and damaging the cargoes. Rushing from the house, he ran as fast as he could towards the docks. There was only one place at which they might be halted—a narrow bridge which they must cross to reach the docks. For all he knew, they might already have passed it. Panting and almost doubled up with the tearing pain in his lungs, Kagawa reached the bridge and held on to it for support. In the distance he could hear the shouts of the marching army.

'O God, let there be peace!' He had neither energy nor coherent thought for more than that short prayer. Then, while he still struggled for breath, the strikers were on him. He held up his hand, and they stopped. A sick man, weakened by a fortnight on prison rations, dressed in the same seven-and-sixpenny labourer's suit which the strikers themselves habitually wore, he talked to them of peace and negotiation. Slowly, swayed by the power of his personality rather than his words, the men at the back moved away. Others joined them, until the stream became a river.

Deserting their Communist leaders and cheering Kagawa, the strikers dispersed.

Nothing could more effectively have proved his case with the employers. Peaceful negotiations were initiated. The existence of the Trades Union was admitted and accepted. New conditions of labour were agreed. Toyohiko Kagawa was a name known all over Japan. But as he spoke to the labourers, he left them in no doubt of his own position. 'Unions are necessary—but labour problems can only be solved by a change in the heart of the labourer himself!'