

A GRAIN OF WHEAT

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By
TOYOHICO KAGAWA

Translated from the Japanese

By
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PREFACE

Kagawa is one of the most striking figures in the Far East. Son of a man of Cabinet rank and a geisha, giving up all in response to a mystic vision of the Cross of Christ, he plunged into the life of the slums, and through fifteen years' residence acquired an unequalled insight into the problems of the poor. From being the suspect of the police he has risen to be an adviser of Governments. For a time he served as head of the Social Service Bureau of the City of Tokyo.

He is a prolific writer; over one and a quarter million copies of his books have been sold. "A Grain of Wheat" has run through a hundred and fifty editions and has been put on stage and film.

Kagawa, student of the slums, labour leader, novelist, poet, city official and—Christian. The countryside of Japan, desperately poor, awake from the sleep of centuries, stretching out to new ideas, and—everywhere cramped for space. Eschewing a political career, Kagawa has given himself to the preaching of the Gospel, and that in its widest applications. To-day he is the outstanding figure in the Christian movement.

W. H. Murray Walton.

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INTRODUCTION

Is there any way to save Japan out of her despair? I have pondered this question as, conscious of the aching hearts of men, I have travelled about among the cities, the slums and the villages of Japan. There are those who say that in thirty years the population of Japan proper will reach one hundred million, and that oppressed on the one hand by Russia and on the other by China, she is on the verge of ruin. Is there no way out? With my mind full of these problems, I wrote this novel, "A Grain of Wheat," as a serial for the magazine *Yuben*.

For the past three years I have spent over half my time travelling all over Japan, from Hokkaido to Loo Choo, and I have been impressed with the fact that Japan is not awake, in the real meaning of the word. Denmark, when she was sunk in the depths of poverty, revived through a plan based on three principles: the love of the land, the love of one's neighbours, and the love of God. In this novel I have told the story of some young people who tried with their comrades to put these three forms of love into practice. It is four years since I organized my Peasant Gospel Schools. Over forty of my young comrades—for we live as comrades in these schools, and share the same food—are now scattered all over the country, each one striving to

become "a grain of wheat." And the young women who, though they keep in the background, are working with them, are carrying on with the same undaunted courage.

I believe that if only we have this love for the land, for one's neighbours, and for God, the mountains of Japan, eighty-five per cent. of her area, will become a source of food supply and a centre of mutual love. What we lack is a spirit of adventure which can surmount difficulties, and a fortitude which can persistently endure suffering. The Puritans, when they were driven out from England, endured many hardships, but they opened up the country of America; the Mormons, driven out of Boston, suffered the pangs of hunger, but they cultivated the desert. Ah! We do not have a love for God and a faith which conquers suffering!

It is my earnest desire that my readers will find in this story of life in the depths of the mountains of Japan the future for our country.

TOYOHICO KAGAWA.

December, 1930.

THE waters of the Toyo River are a deep, clear blue, as though they have been dyed with indigo. The mountains of Mikawa can be seen in the distance, wrapped in mist, while in the foreground the mulberry fields, seared with frost, and interspersed here and there with patches of small pines, have turned the surface of the land an ashy grey. The sky, of a gloomy leaden colour, overhangs the humid plain which surrounds Toyohashi.

It was Kakichi's work to break up the rafts which came floating down the Toyo River, and drag the logs up on to the banks, and a gallant task it was. He loved to go down to the river. Rather than loiter around at the lumber-yard, to be scolded by the foreman, Masakichi, he would sally down to the water's edge, and drag out an extra log or two. But the work Kakichi loved best of all was to join with his mates in hauling some huge log, two feet or more in diameter, up on to the river bank. As they tugged they sang together:

*"Heave ho! All together!
A long pull and a strong pull!
The mountains are snow-covered,
This year's a year of plenty.
Our house will prosper, with treasures heaping,
Filling the storehouse.
A long pull and a strong pull,
Heave ho! All together!"*

In Maruhachi's lumber-yard there were only two full-

time lumber-men, but when a big raft came down the river, seven or eight shoresmen would be called in to help. No matter how cold a winter day it might be, these men would plunge into the water, splashing and singing to each other in clear tones, like the warble of birds. Ushitaro, a fellow from Hamamatsu, as the head of the group, would lead off in the chant, and the others would join in, and so they would move the heavy logs inch by inch up on to the bank.

Kakichi had been engaged by this lumber company when he was fourteen, but he was treated as a rather dull-witted fellow, not of much use. He had, as a matter of fact, with great difficulty gone only as far as the middle of the fourth year of primary school; as it was, he couldn't write a letter easily. His father was a great drinker; from the time that Kakichi could remember, he had never known a day in which his father did not drink several glasses of wine at his evening meal. Of course, as might be expected, there was no money put by in the house, so that of the six children, the older four were put to work as soon as possible. Indeed, his father had been inclined to listen from the very beginning to any proposition for putting his children out, if there were a chance of making a little money by it. Kakichi's oldest sister, who was twenty-four, had been sold as a dancing-girl to a house in Nagoya, and the next sister, four years older than he, who was nearly as pretty, had been sold as a prostitute and sent off to somewhere in Korea. The brother next older than he had been placed out as an apprentice to an umbrella shop in Gifu, while Kakichi himself, though only ten, was sent to a lumber-camp far up in the mountains. Here he had to help with the meals, and run odd errands, for the sum of three yen¹ a month and his board. His younger brother, next to him, was a hunchback. The youngest sister, the last of the

¹ One yen = 100 sen = 2s. approximately.

children, was only two years old, and his mother had to tie this child on her back when she went out to work in the fields.

Kakichi had come to work at the Maruhachi Lumber Company in Toyohashi because of an introduction given him by the lumber-camp people. For four years he had worked as cook's boy at this camp in the woods of the Tenryu River; now for five years more he had gone back and forth between the lumber-yard and the banks of the Toyo River where the rafts were landed. There the reeds growing on the river brink rustled and murmured in the wind, while the wagtails left their shapely foot-prints on the sand by the riverside.

Wiping the sweat from his brow, Ushitaro would sing in his clear voice:

*"Heave ho! All together!
As you pass by in Yoshida,
They call to you from the second story;
I'll go and spend a night to-night
In Yoshida. (Heave ho, my lads!)
I'll go and spend the night."*

Kakichi joined in the chorus, and using his shoresman's hook with vigour, pulled the logs up the bank. One day, when a huge log had been pulled to the top of the bank, Ushitaro remarked to Chohachi:

"Eh, Chohachi! Kakichi seems to be getting very knowing these days. He's getting to be quite a man, and has begun to spend his nights out."

Kakichi, who, with his shoresman's hook in one hand, had just started down the bank again to the water's edge, heard this gibe, and flushed to the ears. A school of small carp were darting hither and thither in the clear water of the shallow current as they sought for food.

"Eh, Kakichi, they say you're quite free with your money these days. It's not the thing for you to keep

quiet about it. You are getting, little by little, to be quite a knowing young man." Chohachi shouted from the top of the bank at Kakichi, who was below him at the river's edge; and as he did so, he untied the towel which he wore around his head, and wiped off the sweat from his neck. As there were only a few scattered houses near by, and the air was very clear, his voice, reflected by the surface of the water, could be heard a long way off.

Kakichi was silent. He thought of the little amusement parlour at the entrance to the bad quarters, where you paid a penny or two for a shot at a target, and the stall where you tried your hand at catching a toy fish. For now that he was approaching manhood, lured on by passions he hardly understood, he had been going there almost every night for the past week. This meant passing through the section of the city called Fudagi, and loitering at the entrance of the licensed quarter of Toyohashi. It was this, of course, that Chohachi meant, as he teased him in his loud voice.

"A fellow who keeps still is the more likely to be up to mischief," said Ushitaro, as he leisurely descended the bank.

"Even Kakichi will be wanting a wife pretty soon," chimed in a man called Gonzo, a tall fellow of about forty years of age.

"Yes, for when you are nineteen or twenty is the time when you want the women most. I can remember that," murmured Chohachi, as if to himself.

Kakichi had thought that Ushitaro did not know of his having been out at night. As he reflected on the matter, there came to his mind the picture of the little shop, with its sign of red cloth hanging from the eaves, and the rows of cigarette-boxes, the cork bullets which you used in the shooting-parlour, and the fun of it all—and, too, the rather pretty face of the girl who kept the shop.