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EDITORIALS

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History, Art, and a Congress, Met in Tokyo

Thought of the rapidly approaching Centennial Congress floods the mind with rich recollections from history and from past congresses. Since both history and congresses are essentially accounts of the sums of the activities of many who have contributed to a humane understanding and reaction to leprosy, it is perhaps of interest to recall a delightful occasion when congress and history combined with art.

It was in November of 1958 that the Seventh International Congress was delightfully hosted by the Japanese in Tokyo. This bustling metropolis is well-known for its entertainment potential, but the entertainment that was provided for congress members on the evening of November 13th, when they were guests of the Ministry of Health and Welfare at an operetta given at the Toho Theater by the renowned all-girl Takarazuka Troupe of performers, was unique. The staging was magnificent, as were the performances. Of greatest meaning to the congress members, however, was the presentation of a specially produced operetta centered around the human-heartedness of the Empress Komyo with respect to those who, suffering from leprosy, she strove to help. Unfortunately there is no account of this performance in either the transactions of that congress or

in the pages of this JOURNAL. Fearing that this might be lost to the historical annals of leprosy we have recently searched our files and sought in Japan for photographs of that performance and for the script of the presentation. These efforts have thus far been unsuccessful, but the effort has brought to us a synopsis of the operetta and a brief account of also the Empress Teimei whose sympathy for those afflicted with this disease fell in a similar mold.¹ These we now record in lieu of the missing records.

Synopsis of the musical drama "Empress Komyo." One of the brilliant eras of Japanese history was that known as the "Tempyo" (729-768 A.D.). The capital of the country was Nara where many Buddhist temples were rising in competing splendor and the entrancing imperial palace, located in the center of the city, was the nucleus of the area's beauty. During this period a number of images of Buddha were created which are now regarded as masterpieces, and temples and other Buddhist edifices proliferated, for this was the period contemporary with the T'ang Dynasty (619-907 A.D.) in China, when Bud-

¹ Kindly provided by Dr. Yoshio Yoshie, Director, National Institute for Leprosy Research, Higashi-murayamashi, Tokyo, Japan.

dhism was brought to Japan from China. Personating these developments were the Emperor Shomu and Empress Komyo.

The drama played out the various hardships and sufferings endured by the Empress Komyo during her adolescence, how these trials led to her deep religious faith, and how she eventually embarked on a program of succor for those who were destitute, as well as being engaged in acts of religious devotion such as the construction of the famous Great Image of Buddha in Nara and other cultural enterprises.

Beneath the brilliant cultural flowering of the period there were, however, ugly machinations and maneuverings by politicians intent on utilizing the imperial prestige in the service of their own power ambitions. The Fujiwara family was eminent among these schemers, but within the family itself there were complex machinations. Michiyo, wife of Fubito Fujiwara, was wet nurse to the Crown Prince Tokyosakura who was later to become the Emperor Shomu, and she worked to wed her daughter, Asukabe-hime (a younger half-sister of the mother of the Crown Prince), to the Crown Prince. Ironically, Prince Nagaya of another prominent family which stood in opposition to the machinations of the Fujiwara family and whose father was murdered by the Fujiwaras, himself fell in love with Asukabe-hime. Their romance, however, was destined to fail and at a court banquet the clever, beautiful and tenderhearted Asukabe-hime was selected to be the consort of the Crown Prince, despite her attraction to Prince Nagaya. Thus, amid the unanimous felicitations of the courtiers, the broken-hearted maiden became the Empress Komyo, her name meaning "gloriously beautiful empress."

Despite her name, the position of the Empress Komyo was anything but rosy. The political ambitions of her family, complicated by the opposition of Prince Nagaya, were of great distress to her. This climaxed when the Fujiwara family murdered the Imperial Prince, her own son. When informed of this, the Empress sank into deep sorrow and, while in the abyss of agony, she found consolation and salvation in faith in the teachings of Buddha. Thenceforth

she extended a warm hand of comfort and succor to all who were destitute and in misery. Among these were those who suffered from leprosy. For them she set up special clinics where she personally attended and cared for the sick.²

Believing that a religious faith provides salvation and that the construction of a great image of Buddha would provide an image of mercy and consolation for posterity, Empress Komyo persuaded Emperor Shomu to permit the construction of the Great Image of Buddha and a huge edifice to house it. She played an active role in seeing the project to completion and the Fujiwara Clan was induced to contribute the necessary funds.

The image of the bronze Buddha, cast by order of Empress Komyo remains intact in Nara. The Garan, a high structure housing the image, is said to be the largest existent wooden building in the world.

Empress Teimei (1884-1951 A.D.) extends the tradition. Her Imperial Majesty, the Empress Teimei, was the consort of the Emperor Taisho and mother of Japan's Emperor Hirohito. In 1915 she first evinced her growing sympathy toward those with leprosy by presenting a gift of money from her

² It is of interest that it was during this period that Chinese medicine was first introduced to Japan. In 608 A.D., the Japanese visitors Enichi, Fukuin and others arrived in China and remained there for fifteen years. On their return home they took along many Chinese medical books which came to have a marked influence on Japanese medicine. By the 9th century Chinese medicine had supplanted indigenous Japanese medicine and had also replaced the medicine of Korea. The Empress Komyo may have been a strong influence in this change. In 754 A.D., during the reign of the Empress Wu of the T'ang Dynasty in China, a Buddhist monk, Chien Chen, was sent to Japan to preach the Sutra. This monk became a very influential figure for her, he also was a famous physician and repeatedly was called to the court to treat, successfully, Empress Komyo. He entered her confidence, for in 758 A.D., when she founded the first hospital of any importance at Nara he was placed in charge. Chien Chen spent most of his active life in Japan where he is known by the name Kanjin. Kanjin thus played a great role, by the royal patronage he received, in disseminating both Buddhism and Chinese medicine. Available records do not indicate whether or not he played a role in caring for those with leprosy. In view of his own religious motivation and the fact of his association with the Empress, who had such a strong interest in those suffering from leprosy, it is likely that he was one of the first physicians to be so engaged.



The "Daibutsu" at Nara constructed under the aegis of Empress Komyo.¹

privy purse to the Kaishun Missionary Leprosy Hospital. This little event somehow came to set a precedent following which gifts were given almost every year to leprosaria.

In November 1930, Empress Teimei gave a large sum from the privy purse to the working people in leprosaria operated by private organizations. The gift came out of gradual savings that she had accomplished by cutting down on her expenses for several years, and she gave in order that the workers might be encouraged in their service and to the effect that those isolated in leprosaria would be comforted. This benevolent act became the direct stimulus for the establishment of the Leprosy Prevention Society in 1931.

June 25 was the birthday of Empress Teimei. Therefore this day was settled on as "Leprosy Prevention Day" and a nationwide campaign for education in the prevention of leprosy was initiated.

On November 10, 1932, at a poetry party held at the Omiya Palace, the residence of



Her Imperial Majesty the
Empress Teimei

¹ Reproduced with permission from the Japan Travel Service.

the Empress, she presented the following poem of her own composition.:

Comfort them as our true friends
 On my behalf I beseech you
 In their day by day living
 As my presence with them
 May not always be possible.

This poem was sung, immediately after the 7th Congress had been officially declared open by H.I.H. Prince Takamatus, by the Toiwa-kai Chorus Group of girls.

In 1933, Empress Teimei sent maple seeds to the Fukusei Leprosy Hospital requesting that they be planted in commemoration of the birthday of H.I.M. the Empress Dowager Shokun, mother of Emperor Taisho. Later, maple saplings were accompanied by further verse by the Empress which carried the following thoughts:

May these seeds convey my heart-felt
 solace to each
 May they be cultivated with care so that
 they will grow fast and before long
 become strong
 As you wait and watch the trees grow
 tall, may your long life become more
 pleasant.

Each year the general meeting of the directors of leprosaria was held in Tokyo. At these meetings the Empress Teimei asked questions about conditions in the leprosaria and listened eagerly to discussions about the status of the patients since her concern for them was great.

The death of H.I.M. the Empress Teimei was announced on May 17, 1951. In October of that year a campaign was begun to collect funds for the relief of leprosy in memory of the Empress. At this time the name of the Japanese Leprosy Foundation was changed to "Tofu-Kyokai." This name was achieved by taking the seal character "To" for "wisteria" of the Empress Teimei and combining it with the seal character "Fu" for "maple" of the Empress Dowager Shoken.

Human-heartedness and art did indeed meet in Tokyo and were there shared by friends from many lands, gathered in Congress.

—OLAF K. SKINSNES