

Theme for the New Year's Poetry Reading (2020) : NOZOMI (HOPE)

His Majesty the Emperor

When I hear the cheerful voices of children
Resounding through their classrooms
I hope from the bottom of my heart
They have a bright and beautiful future

(Background of the poem)

Since their time as Crown Prince and Crown Princess, Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress have often visited schools and institutions for children. In June of 2019, Their Majesties visited Azabu Kindergarten in Minato Ward, Tokyo, and enjoyed meeting the lively children at play. Also, in November, Their Majesties visited the school festival of Gakushuin Girls' Junior and Senior High School where their daughter Her Imperial Highness Princess Aiko studies, and relished watching the cheerful activities of junior and senior high school students. His Majesty the Emperor composed this poem, expressing his earnest hope for the children's bright future, a hope that he has every time he meets children on such occasions.

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Her Majesty the Empress

The power of youth
Brings hope
To those who strive
To rise up from the calamity they suffer.

(Background of the poem)

Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress visit disaster affected regions almost every year to express their heartfelt sympathy and encourage the disaster victims in person. In 2018, Their Majesties visited and comforted the people in the city of Asakura in Fukuoka Prefecture which was devastated by torrential rain in the previous year. In December of 2019 they visited and comforted the residents of Marumori in Miyagi Prefecture and Motomiya in Fukushima Prefecture which were affected by typhoon Hagibis and other natural calamities in October. This waka poem was composed to describe Her Majesty's feeling that though she is saddened by the damage caused by natural disasters, she is always encouraged to find young people such as high school students gathering at disaster-hit areas to work as dedicated volunteers cleaning, restoring, and tidying up the site, thus heartening the disaster victims.

His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino

Together with my Grandfather the Emperor
I gazed up, from a high place in Nasu,
and my heart leapt at the sight
of the glistening Milky Way.

(Background of the poem)

It was during a visit by His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino with his family to the Nasu Imperial Villa, where they went to pay their respects to Emperor Showa and Empress Kojun. Emperor Showa invited him up to the roof. The roof was pitch dark, but when he gazed up he could see innumerable stars. In this poem he recalls the excitement he felt upon viewing the night sky, so much more beautiful than the sky over Tokyo at that time.

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Her Imperial Highness Crown Princess Akishino

I gaze up at the stairway
leading to the higher ground
where the schoolhouses have been moved;
on the steps are sunflowers
that the children have brought to bloom.

(Background of the poem)

In the fall of last year Their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince and Crown Princess Akishino visited Kamaishi City in Iwate Prefecture. The city had suffered heavy destruction in the Great East Japan Earthquake. Their Imperial Highnesses observed the reconstruction following the earthquake, and attended the Rugby World Cup 2019 Japan tournament, which was held in the city. As they looked up at the long staircase which led to the elementary and junior high school buildings that had been moved to higher ground following the earthquake, they had an opportunity to view the flowerpots on the steps that were filled with sunflowers. The sunflowers had been planted and grown by the schoolchildren. In this poem the Crown Princess recalls her bright feelings upon being greeted by the sunflowers.