

From **Atomic Quest** by Arthur Holly Compton

Some nine years later my business took me to Japan. As I walked into Tokyo's Imperial Hotel, weary from the long plane ride from Hawaii, I found waiting for me a group of news reporters. After the usual preliminaries, they asked me their first question: 'Why did you drop the atomic bomb on Japan?' This was a question that I had been asked in one form or another many times in the United States, Europe, and India. I knew, of course, that I should expect the question in Japan. But hardly so soon. In this setting it was especially poignant.

I replied with complete honesty and sincerity: 'It was our expectation that the shock of such a terrible new weapon would make it possible for the Japanese to resign with honor from a disastrous war. Thus, in spite of the great human damage that it would cause, we hoped and believed that it would result in the net saving of many lives, probably millions of lives, both Japanese and American.'

This was not at all the answer the newsmen wanted, as the story that appeared in the press the following morning clearly indicated. Apparently no answer would have been well received except that I was sorry that we had used the bomb. Having seen the fighting men suddenly released from the need to invade Japan's main islands returning joyfully to their homes after the two bombs were dropped, I could not say I was sorry.

A week later at a press conference in another Japanese city the same question was asked. This time I was better prepared: 'Would you have preferred,' I asked the questioner, 'that we should have let the war run its normal course without using the bomb?'

There followed a prolonged pause, after which the news reporter turned the questions into an entirely different field. After the interview he came to me and apologized. 'I am sorry that I asked you that question,' he said. 'Had it not been for the bomb, the fighting would have continued. We would have kept fighting until the bitter end. I would not, in that case, be here to ask you the question.'