

In 1857 an attempt was made by certain Frenchmen, a Mons. Lambert being the chief conspirator, to gain over the prince to Roman Catholicism, and to engage him in a rebellion against the authority of his mother, with the design of making Madagascar a second Tahiti. The design did not meet with acceptance, and, while the Frenchmen had to fly, a large number of innocent Christians suffered. This was the last great persecution that the Christians of Madagascar were called to endure, and three years afterwards, in 1860, the queen died.

Radama II. at once proclaimed religious toleration. He allowed, and even ordered many idols to be burned, restored lands to such of the sufferers as had been deprived of them, and outwardly professed Christianity. But he was not a converted man. His government was unwise, and free-trade in ardent spirits and similar commodities did much to injure him and his people. The Church now had rest. For twenty-six years the Christian religion had been sternly repressed. Ten thousand persons had suffered in various ways for the cause of Christ; yet this, far from narrowing the bounds of the Church, greatly enlarged them. Before the persecution, the disciples numbered a thousand and the communicants two hundred; at its close, the former numbered seven thousand and the latter one thousand.

The Bishop of Mauritius visited Madagascar with Mr. Ellis, and it was arranged that no clashing of sects should take place, where it could be avoided, by the missionary societies which they represented. Accordingly, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and the Church Missionary Society occupy the east coast. The French missionaries made many attempts to gain a foothold in the island, and resorted to some of their old Jesuit tricks, such as were witnessed in the wilds of this country about a century and a half ago. Among other absurd arts, was the sprinkling of Radama's crown with holy water, and performing a coronation ceremony at a private interview, much to the king's astonishment. Some oppositor from bigoted individuals among the people, and from the priests, had still to be endured. The cause, however, steadily gained ground, new labourers arrived on the field from England, and besides the Sabbath services, weekly prayer meetings were instituted with encouraging results.

On the 12th of May, 1864, Radama II. was assassinated by his officers, and a large number of his ministers banished or put to death, some of them being Christians of irreproachable life. The widow of Radama, named Rasoherina, succeeded him, having made a promise to govern constitutionally. She remained an idolatress, but allowed perfect religious liberty, even recognizing the Christian element in the state, which none of her predecessors had done. A treaty was concluded with Great Britain, in which Victoria asked as a special favour of her sister that she would not allow her Malagasy subjects to be persecuted on account of their religion. Before the queen's death, which took place in 1868, the building of several memorial churches at the expense of the London Missionary Society, upon the sites of martyrdom, had been commenced; and the first of them was completed in 1869, and opened amid great rejoicing.

The successor of Rasoherina is her younger sister, who takes the name of Ranavalona II. She is a very different woman from her namesake. From the first she took a decided Christian stand. At the annual festival of the Malagasy new year, in January, 1869, she told her people that she had brought her kingdom to lean upon God, and that she expected them to walk in the ways of God, and on the 21st of February, with the prime minister, she was publicly baptized in the large court in front of the palace.