

# WORSHIPPERS AT INARI.



WRITER tells in *Mission Studies* of what he saw in a heathen temple in Japan. He says:

"Recently it was my good fortune to spend some three hours near the small temple dedicated to Inari the God of rice, in Yamuda, Ise, Japan.

A man came under the Torii at the approach to the little temple and before going directly before the temple, took off his hat and mufflers and laid them on the ground at one side. He then threw a coin on the canvas spread before the temple, kneeled and placed his hands together as if for prayer. Another stood further off and clapped his hands, petitioning in an indistinct tone. Without kneeling he bowed and passed on his way. Several little children approached and jingled the little bells suspended in front of the spread for coins. They did this apparently in sport and can be called embryo worshippers, if at all. A braid of red and white twisted cord hangs below the bells within easy reach of all, and the real idea of the bell seems to be to awaken the attention of the God, as does also the clapping of hands. Some of the believers do up their offerings of small coin in bits of paper, so that little wads appear all over the spread, besides the coins lying exposed to view. There is apparently not the slightest fear on the part of the temple-keepers that the money will be stolen from the spread. It lies exposed to all classes of people all day long and theft would be easy.

A woman came, kneeled, and said in a mumbling tone, a lot of Japanese lore with no understanding of its meaning herself. Given in a musical tone it was not offensive, but one must indeed pity her thinking of the "Vain repetitions of the Gentiles."

A man came and beside her kneeled a moment silent, throwing in his rice (about one-tenth of a cent) and departing, a man who came with him standing aside until he was through with his devotions as if the worship was of no interest at all and a hoax.

A stone trough of water, as at almost all temples, is near, and wooden ladles are there for the worshipper's use. They dip into it the hands, washing either alternately, and then from the hand take enough water to rinse the mouth thoroughly. They thus show respect to Inari and feel prepared to go before the temple.

Two very elegantly dressed gentlemen, clad in silk and furs, came and disrobed carefully outside the enclosure, removing hats and overcoats, and then going before the object of worship, kneeled, folded their hands, threw in their money and clapped

hands. It seemed too bad to see such apparently well-to-do and intelligent looking men worshipping so devoutly in such an insignificant looking place, when they might be worshipping the God of Wisdom, and love revealed by Christ.

One could but pity them sincerely, just to see them, and yet when you learn that this is a shrine whither business men quite largely go in the hope their business projects will succeed, praying that they may make money, that fires may not destroy their houses, that robbers may not trouble them and that crops may be plentiful, one feels besides pity a burning desire to teach them the true God and to drive away their false conception of religion.

Perhaps the chief form of worship at the temple of Inari consists in gifts of rice, Inari being strictly the god of rice. The worshipper approaches the keepers of the temple and lays down 2 sen (1½ cents) for Gozen (rice.) The keepers open a book, write down the man's name, upon enquiring the same, and his place of residence, also the amount of money given.

One living in the city may come often and offer, but a man several hundred miles distant, pays 20 sen, 50 sen, or as his heart prompts him, and trusts the keepers to carry his rice before the temple even while he is at his home, 2 sen worth on regular days until the money has been used. He receives a small envelope of dried rice, that has already been offered, and this he carries home to eat when ill disposed or sick, for restoration, or to give to some sick one who has commissioned him to worship in his or her stead and secure the rice for its healing powers. The keepers bring out two little cones of red rice on a small Dai (plate of wood) and attaching a paper tag, with the worshipper's name written, carry it down to the benches before the temple.

Some days the ground in front is covered with these plates of rice, the benches not being sufficient to hold them. People near can come at night and carry home the rice that has been offered and they eat it with real faith in its virtues, having been devoutly offered to the god. But some of it is said to be left for foxes that come at night and eat it.

I learned that the *Kunushe* (Shinto priest) comes every morning early to the temple to worship himself, but the whole care of the temple seems to be left to the laymen. Two men each day guard the place and assist worshippers as they need and they are succeeded by two others on the following day, there being this year ten men chosen to alternate in keeping the temple. It reminds one of the changes of priests going up from Jericho to Jerusalem.

The keepers of the little Inari temple sat