

JAPAN

(From the "Apostle of Mary," Dayton, Ohio. Translated from the French of Rev. Father Lignoul, Director of the Seminary at Tokyo, by A. W.)

Continued from page 3

is interesting to-day to study how they succeeded in concealing themselves, how they were organized among themselves to keep their faith, and with what fidelity they preserved it. (See "La Religion de J. C. au Japon," by Rev. Marnas.)

Moreover, those Christians had never lost hope that other missionaries would come to them sooner or later. Their former missionary Fathers had promised them this, and they patiently waited. Nor did they wait in vain. And what is more remarkable, the three principal signs by which they recognized the newcomers to be of the true church were, the worship of Mary, obedience to the Pope of Rome, and ecclesiastical celibacy.

The Church of Japan was found again. Notwithstanding the atrocity of a persecution lasting three centuries, notwithstanding the absence of priests for 180 years, thousands of Japanese, without altars, without public worship, remained faithful to their religion. This is one of the most wonderful examples of vitality to be found in the annals of the Apostolate.

A final trial was in store for this resurrected church. In spite of all the precautions taken, the secret could not be kept. A new persecution broke out. From 1868 till 1873, six or eight thousand Christians were deported, separated from their families, and subjected to all kinds of tortures. Nearly two thousand died in prison as a result of harsh treatment. The nations of Europe whose representatives were in Japan, were moved to action by these cruelties. The Protestant ambassadors were the first to complain with great energy. The Japanese government put an end to the persecution, set free the faithful who were prisoners for their faith, and, in fact, suppressed the edicts against the Christians after having them removed from public places and from the highways, under the pretext that, being posted up for so long a time, they were now known well enough. Exterioirly there was peace. The struggle henceforth was in the minds and hearts of the people, and there it still abides.

Availing themselves of the comparative tolerance accorded to them, the missionaries courageously set to work. On the 5th August, 1867, the new church in Tokyo, today the Archbishop's Cathedral, was solemnly blessed. A Japanese military band, graciously offered by the minister of war, furnished the music for the occasion. In 1880 three travelling missionaries, decorated with the title of "ambulant missionaries," could each, by means of passports, often renewed, travel through several provinces, and there sow the good seed of the gospel.

Little by little, the desire to figure among the civilized nations and to enjoy their privileges, at least in international affairs, took possession of the Japanese minds, and turned them completely from their traditions, and prejudices of the past. By a decree of 1884, the government removed from the religious sects of the country nearly all official character. Buddhism and Shintoism found themselves abandoned to their own strength before the zeal and rival propagation of Protestantism (German, English and American), Russian Schism and the Catholic Church. According to the terms of the law, there was no more any state religion. This was a great step towards liberty.

During the epoch from 1884 to 1892, the progress of the Catholic faith was the most rapid. Then all Japan was influenced by things foreign. Religion interested the Japanese as much as everything else. It was a great novelty for them to see foreigners travelling about under the protection of the government, preaching the Religion of Jesus Christ publicly, even in the presence of the police. This fact alone indicated that a revolution had taken place in the country, and in the minds of the people. Christianity was, therefore, not the infamous religion they thought it was. The most resolute embraced it with a sort of enthusiasm. From that epoch dates the largest number of conversions made outside the stronghold of the ancient Christians. This happy movement was also aided by an unexpected event. His Holiness Pope Leo XIII. spontaneously appointed Mgr. Osouf, then Vicar Apostolic, now Archbishop of Tokyo, to present a letter from His Holiness to H.I.M. the Emperor of Japan. This letter was presented in solemn audience on September 12, 1885. His Holiness

directly expressed to the Emperor how much he appreciated the noble aspirations of his government, and testified also the particular sentiments which animated him in regard to His August Person. H.M. the Emperor, in responding, expressed his great satisfaction at the kind and friendly act of the Sovereign Pontiff, and charged His Grace to offer to the Pope expressions of his thanks. He affirmed his desire to continue to follow the road of progress, and his will to grant his Christian subjects a protection equal to that shown to the others. Ever since that moment his solemn promise has never been broken by a single act. On the contrary, the Emperor and his government have rather shown themselves particularly kind on every occasion.

The Constitution of the Empire of Japan was solemnly promulgated on February 11, 1889. By Article 28 of this Constitution the Emperor "grants freedom of religious belief to all Japanese subjects, within limits not prejudicial to peace and order, and not antagonistic to their duties as subjects." It is impossible to express the general rejoicing that followed this proclamation, particularly in Tokyo. Nor did the Christians remain behind in this manifestation of general joy. Besides hailing, like others, an event looked forward to with impatience for years, they, too, at the same time rejoiced to see fall the legal barriers erected against the free exercise of their religion.

Ten years later, in 1899, a definitive era commenced for the Empire of the Rising Sun. As a crowning of her efforts and her progress, Japan was admitted into the concert of civilized nations, and thus the government and Japanese people have finally obtained their end. By the treaties of 1854 and the following years, concluded with the Christian powers, foreigners were not subject to Japanese jurisdiction, but remained amenable to their respective consuls. Such a clause deeply wounded the national pride of Japan, and for more than twenty years all possible means were employed and exhausted to do away with, and spare her, this humiliation. In 1899 Japanese legislation being altogether transformed, and the tribunals established on the model of those of Europe, all former treaties were revised and concluded on new bases. The new treaties went into effect for some nationalities on July 17th, and on the 4th of the following August for all the others. Then Japan was a country completely open. Passports are a thing of the past. Strangers, missionaries, merchants and tourists can circulate freely, and establish themselves at their liking. On the other hand, they are subjected to the laws and jurisdiction of Japan. In a country where personal considerations and money discreetly offered plays such an important role, foreigners may well hesitate before deciding whether they ought to congratulate themselves on this change or not.

With regard to the Christian religion in general, it may be said that, provided the common laws relating to furniture and real estate and to persons, be removed, the legislation takes no cognizance of Christianity. With regard to the Catholics in particular, be they Japanese or foreigners, they are treated as would be anybody else, without regard to religion. Concerning the missionaries, the Minister of the Interior has prescribed with great precision, the formalities to be complied with and the regulations to be observed with regard to themselves and their work of evangelization. These regulations in their minute details, placed in the hands of ill-disposed persons, could easily become an obstacle in the way of effective propaganda. But, fortunately, until the present moment nothing of the kind has happened. Apart from a few difficulties proceeding rather from the inexperience of the employees than from the malevolence of the government, we may say, in summing up, that ever since religious liberty has been granted by the Constitution, we cannot cite a single law nor a single act on the part of the government having for aim to withdraw, restrain or counteract this liberty. (See Catholic Review of Institutions and Law, June, 1904.)

(to be continued)

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