

THE MISSION OF A HYMN.

Once upon a time, in a far-away island, there was a little girl with black, black hair, and eyes that slanted and always looked as though she had just got up and they were still heavy with sleep. She was never sent to school, for her parents thought that girls did not need to learn to read, but only to cook and sew, that they might be good housekeepers.

By and by she was married, and left her own home to live in another. Here she had to use all the lessons she had learned, in trying to please her husband and mother-in-law.

When her little girls came, they were not sent to school either; but only learned at home to sew and cook, as she had done. Finally, they grew up and were married.

By that time she was an *obasan* (old woman). Her husband and mother-in-law were dead, and she was her own mistress, and could do just what she pleased.

One day, as she was walking along the street on low, wooden clogs, for the roads were quite nice and dry, she heard strange music coming from a plain little building near her. The door was open, so she looked in. A great many people were inside. They were standing and singing a new song, such a queer song it seemed to her, for she had never heard anything like it before. A woman was playing on a box, which was very much larger than a *koto* and did not sound at all like it.

She stood looking and listening so intently that a man near the door bowed politely and invited her to come in. This abashed her and, bowing her thanks, she hastily moved on.

But one clause of the hymn, the last one to fill the air as she turned, went with her: "*Iesu Kimi no hoka ni.*" *Iesu!* The very name! Only a few days before, her son, who had gone to the *Hokkaido* to get work, had sent word to her that he had become a believer in *Iesu*. How it had disturbed her to be told that she, too, must give up her idols and ancestral shrine to worship *Iesu* only! But now, with the words of that hymn in her mind, it seemed different.

"*Iesu Kimi no hoka ni!*"

What if there were no other! What if "nothing but the blood of Jesus" could "wash away her sins"!

Anyway, she would go to that meeting-place again. And she did go!

At first it troubled her to remember the times of the meetings. But a kind neighbor, who always went, offered to call for her. Then a Bible-woman came to see her, and took her to a woman's meeting.

She could not understand many of the speeches, and the songs were not always plain. But when they sang "Nothing but the blood of Jesus," she understood quite well. Sometimes it sent a little thrill through her heart, as if she would like very much to have Jesus wash away her sins.

She was very glad one day when a young girl, who sat near showed her that hymn in her book and pointed out the characters as she sang. The girl was pleased at her interest, and often after that pointed out hymns for her. She saw that some of the characters were alike, and was really, though unconsciously, taking her first reading lessons.

So rapidly did her interest increase, that it was not long before she asked the Bible-woman to get her a hymn book. It cost her eight *sen*, but she did not begrudge the money; for now, if someone kindly found the place, she could follow the characters in a hymn herself.

It was a slow way of learning to read, and long before she had mastered the hymnal she had learned to sing from her heart, "*Iesu Kimi no hoka ni.*" She had been baptized and was now a member of the church.

Still the Bible was a sealed book to her. It had always looked so difficult; not written in simple characters like the hymnal, but in mysterious ones, such as she had always seen but had never understood.

One day, however, she discovered along the margin, made very small, the same simple signs she had learned to read in her hymnal. She pronounced them as slowly as spelling, and they made words! Then her delight knew no bounds. To think that she, who had never been to school, could read both hymnal and Bible! So the light came to both her soul and mind because God blessed the singing of the hymn: "*Iesu Kimi no hoka ni.*"

God has to no small extent put in our power the happiness of those about us. It lies with us to say whether their days shall be dark or sunny. By words and acts of brotherly kindness we can rift the darkness of many a cloud, can make the flowers of peace and joy spring up in many a desert place in life. Let us seek chances to do good.—*Sci.*