

MISSION FIELD.

JAPAN.

Under the title of "The Birthday of a Constitution" the Tokyo correspondent of *The Times* gave in that journal, on March 22nd and April 3rd, a graphic description of the ceremonies and rejoicings with which the promulgation of constitutional government for Japan was accompanied.

"Twenty-one years ago the young Emperor of Japan, restored to temporal power from the seclusion, well nigh amounting to entombment, which had been endured for some eight centuries by his ancient dynasty swore solemnly before the nobles and territorial princess of this Empire that, as one of the leading principles of his future away, the 'government should be conducted in accordance with public opinion and popular representation.' Of the earnestness of this assurance ample proof was afforded by the measures of the succeeding decade. * * * At length in 1861 the Emperor affirmed his original assurance by a rescript proclaiming that a complete parliamentary system should be carried into effect in the year 1890. During the interval that has passed since that declaration, as in the period preceding it, the whole course of Japan's polity and method of government has been directed to the new order of things that is destined to arise next year under the terms of the Sovereign's promise. In every step, every change, and every novelty that has been adopted from time to time as occasion required, the pilots of the Japanese ark of State have kept steadily before them as their goal the sound establishment of a constitutional monarchy as understood in Europe. That the task was no easy one none can doubt. It was, indeed, surrounded with grave difficulties and perils, amid which rashness might be irreparable and error fatal. Only by vigilance and foresight of the highest order could the knotty problem of enfranchising a people that had emerged but yesterday, as it were, from the shadow of feudalism be approached with any hope of success. * * * Yesterday (February 11th) was the anniversary of the birth of the Emperor Jimmu Tenno, the Sovereign from whom sprang this oldest of the world's dynasties, and who, according to the commonly received chronology, began to reign in the year 660 B.C. Yesterday, then, was chosen as an auspicious day on which the first Monarch's descendant, the Emperor Mutsuhito, might fitly ratify his Imperial vow and proclaim and give the new Constitution to his subjects. * * * Prior to yesterday's ceremony of promulgation the Emperor executed a solemn oath in the Palace Sanctuary, by which he swore, in the names of the great founder of his House and of his other Imperial ancestors, that he would maintain and secure from decline the ancient form of government, and would never fail to be an example to his subjects in the observance of the

new laws. Then, after a short speech, couched in stately and kingly language and uttered with great dignity, His Majesty publicly delivered the said laws to Count Kuroda, his Minister President of State. These are five in number, and are entitled respectively the Constitution of the Empire of Japan, the Imperial Ordinance concerning the House of Peers, the Law of the Houses, the Law of Election for the members of the House of Representatives, and the Law of Finance. In the first, one salient and interesting feature is the care taken to affirm with emphatic brevity the time-honored doctrines of the sanctity of the Emperor's title and the immutability of his dynasty. Thus, while the first article declares that his line shall run 'for ages eternal,' the second says simply 'The Emperor is sacred and inviolable.' Then follows a definition of the sovereign prerogatives, from which it appears that, while the Emperor is to remain the source of all laws, in that without Imperial approval no parliamentary measures can become law, the making of laws is to be the function of the Diet, and no law can be put into force without its assent, the one exception on the latter point being that the Emperor reserves the power of issuing ordinances in urgent cases, on behalf of the public safety or welfare, when the Diet is not sitting, but that such ordinances to remain law must be approved at next Parliamentary Session. In succeeding articles it is laid down that the Emperor determines the organization of every branch of the administration, appoints and dismisses all civil and military officers, and fixes their salaries; that he has the supreme command of the army and navy, and determines their organizations and peace standing; and that it is he who makes war or peace, concludes treaties, confers titles of nobility, rank, orders, and other marks of honor, and grants amnesties, pardons, and commutation of punishment. The rights and duties of subjects are next set forth. By these it is determined, among other things, that a Japanese subject, while amenable to taxation and to service in the army or navy, shall be free from all illegal arrest, detention, trial, or punishment; that, subject in every case to the provisions and limits of the laws, he shall have liberty of abode and of change of abode; that his house shall not be entered or searched against his will; that the secrecy of his letters and all his rights of property shall be inviolate; and that he shall enjoy freedom of religious belief, consistently with the duties of the subject and the preservation of peace and order, as well as liberty of speech, writing, publication, public meeting, and association."

The bearing of this great constitutional change upon missionary work is obvious both in what is expressed and in what is involved. The explicit provision that all Japanese subjects shall enjoy freedom of religious belief, as well as liberty of speech, writing, publication, public meeting, and association,

cannot but remove many difficulties, especially in remote districts, from the work of evangelization. The fact that the Emperor has made such a solemn declaration of his subjects' religious liberty will be almost as valuable as the liberty itself, as showing that the government no longer maintains the existing religions of Japan in their exclusive position.

What, however, is more impressive than any of the provisions in detail is the fact of the new Constitutions' existence.

(To be Continued).

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