

# PLEASANT HOURS

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## SCENES IN JAPAN.

BY REV. S. P. ROSE, D. D.

### II.

From a reference to the morals of the people of Japan the transition is natural and easy to a consideration of missionary toils and successes. This, however, may possibly be prefaced by a brief review of the native systems of Japanese religion.

Shintoism, as the reader will know, is the primitive religion of Japan. Its myths and legends all cluster around Ise, to whose honour shrines and temples are erected.

"This was a pastoral religion. The aboriginal hunters and tillers of the soil offered up the fruits of their toil to the unknown powers that controlled nature. Into this religion has become welded the doctrine of the divinity of the Mikado. Pure Shintoism is not idolatry. It was the worship of the invisible by a simple pastoral community. It had no code of morality, no literature expounding doctrines relating to pure life, and no teachings that can compare with the teachings of other great religions. But its great weakness is that, while it recognizes the fact that men should be good, it utterly neglects to tell them how to be good. It fails to give a single commandment or evolve a single principle of morality. If you believe the Mikado to be of divine descent and obey him, you can't fail to be a good Shintoist. It must always fall as a religion."

Shintoism is manifestly a religion of the past, and Christianity need fear little from its opposition. There is nothing to hope or dread from this primitive faith.

### "BUDDHISM,"

writes Dr. Erastus Wentworth, "has accumulated a legendary history, a traditional lore that rivals that of the Jews, whose Talmuds bury Moses out of sight, and that of Rome, which has heaped mountains of creeds and rituals upon the simple words and worship of Jesus Christ." It has greatly changed from the days of its founder, Sakya Muni, "a young prince, handsome, strong, heroic, surrounded by pleasures, and tempted by the most brilliant worldly prospects." He becomes greatly affected by the view of the miseries of human life, "becomes

a changed man, forsakes his father's palace for a hermit's cell, practises and then teaches a rigid asceticism, and dies at eighty, after a long career, occupied partly with the instruction of a numerous band of disciples, and partly with ecstatic contemplation. He is deified at the moment of his death," and it is declared by his disciples that "he has entered the Nirvana, or extinction."

"The Buddhists are the champion monastery-builders of the world." Their love for nature, which is a characteristic idea of Buddhism, was prominently seen in the choice of sites for their monasteries. The central thought of their teaching, received from Sakya himself, is that of mercy. "Carrying this idea into practice, he formed a law to the effect that no creature animated with life should be killed. This, he thought, would prevent homicide and the needless slaying of dumb animals." The other great doctrine of Buddhism is the idea "that for man to live above the miseries of this life and to obtain an exemption from miseries hereafter, it was necessary for him to eliminate from his mind all thoughts and desires whatsoever, to make his mind a void and to keep it in that condition until utter mental abstraction had been attained." Hence annihilation is the heaven of Buddhism, existence is a curse, Nirvana perfect benediction.

But, as with the system of monastery

life afterward obtaining in the Roman Church and in Europe, no ultimate good for the nation grew out of the monasteries of Buddhism. The monks began, alas! to live unholy lives. The few who were good among them were unable to stem the tide of corruption, and so it has come to pass that Buddhism stands forth a confessed failure as a regenerating force in Japan. "The teachings of Sakya are a wild dream, an ingenious hypothesis of a sincere and noble soul blindly groping for some principle that should explain the mysteries of life and death."

Such were the religions of the people when Christianity came to the rescue of this wonderful empire.

### THE SPANISH JESUITS

were the first Christian missionaries who went to Japan. They began their labours in 1549, and in half a century counted their nominal converts by the thousands. But the mischief-making propensity of this sect soon manifested itself. Through interfering with things temporal, intriguing and conspiracy, the Jesuits brought banishment on themselves and so aroused public indignation against Christianity that, in 1587, a decree for the extermination of all Christians was published, a decree which, a few years ago, was found by Protestant missionaries upon every public place in the empire.

With slight exceptions Japan remained a closed country to all the world from the end of the sixteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth. In 1853, two treaty-ports were opened to American trade, and in 1858 six treaty-ports became open to foreigners, to whom liberty to reside at these ports was given.

Under these conditions, Protestant Christianity began its labours in the "Flowery Kingdom." The Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States sent its first missionary in 1859. In 1867 the number of missionaries increased and the people, beginning to distinguish between Romanism and Protestantism, gave more reverent attention to the truth. In 1873 the grand influx of all denominations occurred, new stations were formed, and a brighter day dawned for Japan.

It was in 1873 that our own church sent its first heralds to this distant field, the opening of which has been of such large blessing to the work at home.

No missionary field offers larger opportunities for faithful toil. Men and money will be needed in much more liberal supply than hitherto furnished, if, as a church, we are to do our work as we should; and failure to "go forward" in the Master's name is to merit the condemnation of God and the contempt of our fellows.

### THE CASTLES OF JAPAN

well deserve a visit. Writing under date of July 17, 1874, from Hiroasaki, of one of these castles, Mr. Maclay says:

"There is something very inspiring in the lively notes of the bugle that make the entire place vocal in the morning, at noon, and at sundown. It contains a garrison of about a thousand men. They are dressed in blue uniform trimmed with yellow, and are armed with Sayder and Sharpe rifles. These soldiers come from the provinces. They are small men, but very plucky and hardy. They are kept under excellent discipline. It is a rare thing to find one of them drunk."

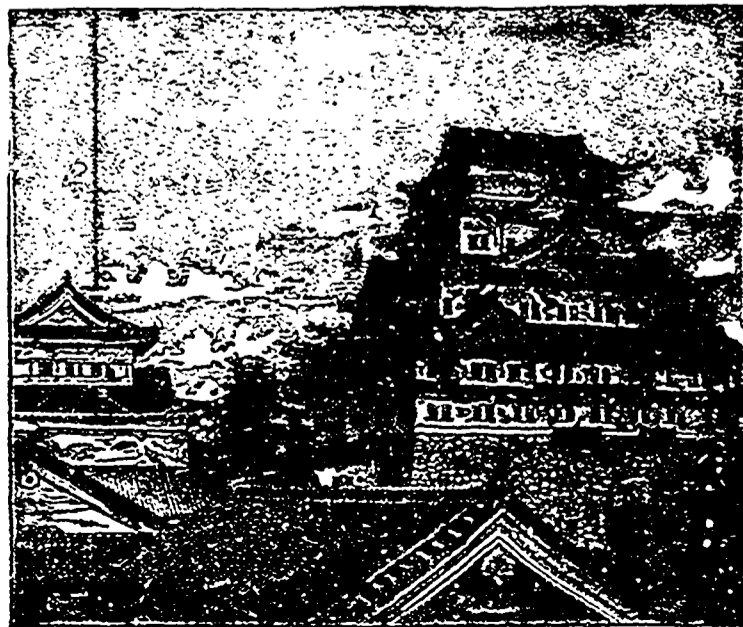
As there are about one hundred and fifty of these castles scattered throughout Japan, some hint as to their construction, which is always on the same general plan, may prove of interest. We quote from Mr. Maclay:



A QUIET CORNER IN A BUDDHIST CEMETERY.



THIRD MOAT OF THE TOKYO CASTLE.



THE CITADEL OF OWARI CASTLE.