

## JAPAN

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

This is why, without preparation and without transition, they took up contemporary civilization at the point it had reached elsewhere, and transplanted it in its entirety to their own country. Sciences, arts, industry, political systems, legislation, instruction, strategy—they took from every country of the world what was most suitable to them; not always the best, but the most renowned or the most recent. They made themselves masters of everything with an astonishing power of assimilation, and, to-day, though they are more Japanese than ever, yet ignorant of nothing that is known elsewhere, and supplied with weapons the most formidable, they have taken a place among the civilized nations, and in the present war against Russia, they do not hesitate to say that it is they that represent civilization against barbarism. In this war the entire Japanese people are making an immense effort to show what they are and what they can do, and it is, therefore, in every sense of the word a national war, and differs from what very often happens elsewhere, where the army and the government alone carry on the war. This scarcely credible enterprise and the successes thus far obtained are altogether the result of the national qualities of the Japanese, of their tradition, and of the education they have received during these thirty years.

In the meantime what has become of the Christian religion? Had the horrible persecution of the Tokugawas succeeded in destroying it? The beautiful Church of Japan, so flourishing in the beginning, and so full of hope for the future, has it perished entirely, drowned in the blood of its children? Notwithstanding a silence of more than two centuries, an invincible hope remained with some. Secret presentiments told Catholics that they still had brothers in Japan. The heart refused to believe in the final destruction of this Church which had given such energetic proofs of vitality. A great number of letters received from missionaries during the first forty years of the nineteenth century are, as it were, an echo of these preoccupations.

In 1846, Gregory XVI. re-established the Vicariate Apostolic of Japan and confided it to the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris. Two missionaries, Rev. Forcade, who died Archbishop of Aix, and Rev. Leturdu, who died prefect Apostolic of Canton, established themselves at first in the islands of Ryukyu; but after two years of fruitless attempts, they were obliged to abandon the post.

In the month of February, 1854, Commodore Perry of America, having forced the ports of Japan, commercial treaties were concluded with European nations, and especially with France in 1857. But it was only in 1861 that the missionaries could find a footing in the empire. Their position, however, was extremely precarious. Strictly confined to the two open ports, they saw themselves watched by a vigilant police, and it was almost impossible for them to approach the natives with any hope of success. Besides, the old edicts against the "Infamous Religion" still existed, and it was certain death for any Japanese who dared approach these strangers doubly suspected as Europeans and as priests. So they could do nothing but to wait the moment decreed by Almighty God and prepare for the future; and this is what the missionaries did with complete abnegation. Subsequent events have well justified their patient waiting, for at last the hour of resurrection sounded for this Church which seemed to be sleeping the sleep of death. In 1862 Pius IX. solemnly celebrated at Rome the canonization of the first martyrs of Japan, "the twenty-six" crucified at Nagasaki, February 5, 1597.

At Nagasaki, the missionaries, naturally, had been very eager to erect a church to God under the title of the "Twenty-six Martyrs," and, notwithstanding the efforts of the police, visitors came in crowds, urged on by curiosity. On Friday, the 17th of March, 1865, at about half past twelve, a group of twelve or fifteen persons, women and children, were standing at the entrance of the church, in a manner which showed something more than a mere vulgar curiosity. Mgr. Petit Jean, first Vicar Apostolic, tells us how, no doubt inspired by his guardian angel, he went to meet them. As the door of the chapel was closed, he opened it, and followed by the visitors, advanced towards the sanctuary. On reaching the tabernacle he fell on



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his knees and prayed God to inspire him with words to touch the hearts of the natives. But hardly had he finished reciting one Our Father, when three women, from fifty to sixty years of age came forward and fell on their knees beside him. One of them, with hand on her breast and in a low voice, as if she feared that the walls might hear her words, said: "The hearts of all of us here present are like yours." "Indeed," answered the priest, "but where do you come from?" "We all come from Urakami (a village four or five miles from Nagasaki) At Urakami nearly everybody has the same heart as we." And immediately the woman asked him: "Where is the image of Sancta Maria?" At this mention of the Holy Name of Sancta Maria, Mgr. Petit Jean no longer doubted that he was in the presence of the descendants of the ancient Christians of Japan. He was unable for a time to find words in which to thank God for the happiness that filled his soul. Surrounded by these Christians, but yesterday unknown, and urged by them as by children who have again found their father, he leads them to the altar of the Blessed Virgin. Following his example they all kneel down and try to pray, but joy carries them away.

"Yes, it is truly Sancta Maria!" cry they at the sight of the statue of Our Lady. "See in her arms her august Son Jesus!" From the moment that they made themselves known, the confidence they showed contrasted strangely with the manners of their pagan brothers. I had to answer all their questions, speak to them of God, 'Deus sama,' of Jesus sama, of Sancta Maria sama. ('Sama', lord, master, Mr., Mrs., etc.) The sight of Our Lady with the Infant Jesus reminded them of Christmas, which they celebrated on the 25th day of the eleventh month (old calendar). That day was just the 17th day of Lent. They also spoke of St. Joseph, the foster father of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Suddenly, in the midst of these questions and answers, a noise was heard. Some other Japanese entered the church. In an instant those who surrounded the missionary dispersed in all directions, but immediately afterwards they return to him smiling at their fright. "We have nothing to fear from those," say they; "they are people from our village; they have the same heart as we." Ere long, informed by those of Urakami, the Christians of other villages came also and made themselves known. It

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