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A GLIMPSE OF CHRISTIANITY IN JAPAN.

FROM TWO JAPANESE CHRISTIANS AT THE LATE WORLD'S PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS.

MR. Nobuta Kishimoto, in his interesting address on "The Future of Religion in Japan," expressed his hope for the ultimate triumph of Christianity, although he showed that the religious impulses of the people are divided between Shintoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. He said: –

"The prevailing attitude of the educated classes toward any religion is one of cold indifference, if not strong antagonism. Among them the agnosticism of Spencer, the materialism of Comte and the pessimism of Schopenhauer and Hartmann are most influential. To them, God is either the product of our own imagination or, at most, unknowable. To them, religion is nothing but superstition; to them, the universe is a chancework and has no end or meaning. Again, to them, men are nothing but lower animals in disguise, without the image of God in them and without a bright future before them."

He reports a Christian population of 100,000, of which the Roman Catholic is the strongest in membership; then the Protestant, which is represented by thirty-one different denominations; and, finally, the Greek Catholic. But which is to triumph? That is the question, to which he replies: –

"We do not want Catholic Christianity, nor do we want Protestant Christianity. We want the Christianity of the Bible....We do not want the Christianity of England, nor the Christianity of America: we want the Christianity of Japan....We Japanese want the Christianity of the Christ. We want the truth of Christianity; nay, we want the truth, pure and simple. We want

the spirit of the Bible. at least in spirit, if not in form. But we Japanese Christians are hoping more: we are ambitious to present to the world one new and unique interpretation of Christianity as it is in our Bible, which knows no sectarian controversy and which knows no heresy hunting. Indeed, the time is coming, and ought to come, when God shall be worshiped, not by rites and ceremonies, but in spirit and in truth."

Mr. Harmchi Kozaki, president of Doshisha University, Japan, presented a paper on "Christianity in Japan; Its Present Condition and Future Prospects," in which he said: –

"The progress of Christianity in Japan is quite remarkable. It is only thirty-four years since the first Protestant missionary put his foot on its shore. And it is scarcely twenty years since the first Protestant church was organized in Japan. Yet now there are more Christians there than in Turkey, where missionaries have been working more than seventy years; and there are more self-supporting churches there than in China, where a double or triple number of missionaries have been working nearly a century. In Japan, Christian papers and magazines are all edited by the natives, not only in name but in reality. Christian books, which have been most influential, have nearly all been written or translated [R1596 : page 360] by them, while in other countries it is very rare to find the native Christians writing Christian books or editing papers. Only recently *The Christian*, the most influential Christian paper in Japan, had a Symposium to name fifteen books which are most useful in leading men to Christianity, instructing Christians and giving good counsel to young people; and it is interesting to see that most of the books named are those written or translated by Japanese Christians.

"Christianity in Japan has already reached a stage that no other missionary fields have ever attained. Their native

Christians not only take part in all discussions, but they are in fact leading all kinds of discussion, theological as well as practical. They are leading, not only all kinds of Christian work, literary and evangelistic, educational and charitable, but they are also leading Christian thought in Japan. Let me relate one or two instances.

"Some six or seven years ago, when we were contemplating the union of the Itochi and Kumiai denominations, the two most powerful Christian bodies in Japan, among twenty members of a joint committee appointed by the Synod of one and the General Council of the other, there were only four missionaries. When, a few years ago, the Kumiai denomination adopted a new confession of faith, the missionaries took almost no part. This confession was drawn up by a committee, consisting entirely of Japanese, and adopted in the General Council, in which missionaries took very little or no part. In Japan, missionaries are really "helpers," and I should say to their credit they, in most cases, willingly take secondary positions in all Christian works. All this, I say, is not to disparage the work of **[R1596 : page 361]** missionaries, but only to show the progress of Christianity among the natives of Japan.

"There are many peculiar features in Japanese Christianity which are seldom seen in other countries....For instance, while in most of the churches in this country female members are almost two to one in proportion to male members, it is quite otherwise in Japan. There female members in relation to male members are nearly three to four. This is almost in inverse ratio to their proportions in the United States. Another is the predominance of young people in our churches. You may step into any of our churches in any city or village and you will be struck by the great preponderance of young faces. We have not yet taken statistics of members as to their age, but any one who has experience in Christian work there notes this peculiarity....

"One more point is the predominance of the Shizoku or military class. They have been and still are the very brains of the Japanese people. Though they are not usually well off in material wealth, they are superior intellectually and morally. Christians in other missionary fields are usually from the lower classes. In India the Brahmins rarely become Christians, neither do the literary class in China. But in Japan the Shizoku class take a lead.

"These peculiarities in the constituency of the membership of Christian churches in Japan may be accounted for by the simple fact that the males, the young and the Shizoku classes are most accessible. The Shizoku class, as a body, has had hitherto almost no religion, and they have been mostly Confucianists. By the last revolution they lost their profession as well as their means of support, and thus they are all unsettled in life, and so accessible to every kind of new influence and truth. Young people have also no settled opinions and are open to new influences and thus accessible to new truth. And so it is with men as compared with women. They are generally more progressive, and hence more accessible....

"As the Japanese Christian population is of such a constituency, the native Christians are more progressive, more active, more able to stand on their own feet, and more capable of establishing self-supporting churches. But this strength is also their weakness. They are more liable to be drifted, more apt to be changed and more disposed to be flippant.

"The next peculiar feature of Japanese Christianity is lack of sectarian or denominational spirit. About thirty different denominations of Protestant churches, represented by about an equal number of missionary boards, are on the field, each teaching its own peculiar tenets. But they are making very little impression on our Christians....We have been having, at first annually, but lately once in three years, what was called "Dai

Shin Baku Kwai," which was afterward changed into the Evangelical Alliance, the meeting of all Christians in Japan, irrespective of denominations or churches – the most popular and interesting we have. Again, Japanese Christians did not know any distinction of denominations or churches. But when they found out that there are many different folds, and that one belongs to his denomination, not by his own choice, but simply by chance or circumstance which could in no way be controlled, there is no wonder that these Christians begin to ask: Why should not we, all Christians, unite in one church?

"The union movement in Japan rose at first in some such way. Though we have now lost much of this simple spirit, still, Japanese Christians are essentially undenominational. You may see that the church which adopted Presbyterian forms of government refused to be called 'Presbyterians' or 'Reformed,' and adopted the broad name 'Itschi,' the 'United;' but, not content even with this broad name, it has recently changed it to a still broader name, 'Nippon Kinisuto Kio Kwai,' – 'The Church of Christ in Japan.'

"The church which has adopted an Episcopal form of government lately dropped the name Episcopacy and adopted instead the name of 'The Holy Church of Japan.' Kumiai churches for a long time had no name except this: 'A Church of Christ.' When it was found out that it was necessary to adopt some name to distinguish itself from other churches, its Christians reluctantly adopted the name of 'Kumiai,' which means 'associated;' for at that time they happened to form an association of churches which were until then independent of each other. They always refused to be called the 'Congregational churches,' although they have adopted mostly Congregational policy of church government.

"The third distinctive feature of Japanese Christianity is the prevalence of a liberal spirit in doctrinal matters. While missionaries are both preaching and teaching the orthodox doctrines, Japanese Christians are eagerly studying the most liberal theology. Not only are they studying, but they are diffusing these liberal thoughts with zeal and diligence, and so I believe that, with a small exception, most of Japanese pastors and evangelists are more or less liberal in their theology.... [R1596 : page 362]

"While the American Board of Foreign Missions is strenuously on the watch to send no missionary who has any inclination toward the Andover Theology, the pastors and evangelists of the Kumiai churches, which are in close connection with the same board, are advocating and preaching theology perhaps more liberal than the Andover Theology. Just to illustrate: Some years ago, in one of our councils, when we were going to install a pastor, he expressed the orthodox belief on future life, which was a great surprise to all. Then members of the council pressed hard questions to him so as to force him to adopt the doctrine of future probation, as though it were the only doctrine which is tenable.

"Only recently, when a bishop of a certain church was visiting Japan, he was surprised to find that a young Japanese professor in the seminary connected with his own church was teaching quite a liberal theology, and he gave him a strong warning.

"As to the creeds: when 'The Church of Christ in Japan' was organized, it adopted the Presbyterian and the Reformed standards; namely, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the Canon of Dort and the Heidelberg Confession of Faith. But Christians of the same church found them too stiff, one-sided and conservative, and thus they have lately dropped these standards

as their creed altogether. They have now the 'Apostles' Creed' with a short preface attached to it.

"When the Kumiai church was first organized, it adopted the Nine Articles of the Basis of the Evangelical Alliance as its creed. But Christians of the same denomination became soon dissatisfied with its narrowness, and so in 1890 they made their own creed, which is far simpler and broader. But even this creed is not understood as binding to all, but only as a common expression of religious belief prevailing among them in general.

"Though Japanese Christians are largely on the side of liberal theology, they are not in any way in favor of Unitarianism or even Universalism. ...The most of our educated classes have no religion. Though they favor certain kinds of Christian ethical teachings, they have no faith in any religion or supernatural truth. Christ, and are all to be characterized as evangelical....

"There was a time when Christianity was making such a stride in its progress that, in one year, it gained 40 or 50 per cent increase. This was between 1882 and 1888. These years may be regarded as a flowery era in the annals of Japan. It was in 1883 that, when we were having the 'Dai Shin Boku Kwai' in Tokyo, perhaps the most interesting meeting in its history, one of the delegates expressed his firm belief that in ten years Japan would become a Christian country. This excited quite an applause; and no one felt it as too extravagant to cherish such a hope, for such was the firm belief at that time. Since then, progress in our churches has not been such as was expected. Not only have members not increased in such a proportion as in years before, but in some cases there can be seen a decline of religious **[R1597 : page 362]** zeal and of the self-sacrificing spirit. And so in these last few years the cry heard most frequently among our churches has been 'Awake, awake as in the days past!'

"To show the decline of that religious enthusiasm, I may take an illustration from statistics of the Kumiai churches as to its amount of contribution. In 1882 this amount was \$6.72 per Christian; in 1888 this amount ran down to \$2.15, and in the last year there has been still more decline, coming down to \$1.95. In amount of increase of membership there has been a proportional decline. Why there was such a decline is not hard to see. Among various causes I may mention three principal ones.

"Public sentiment in Japan has been always fluctuating from one side to another. It is like a pendulum, now going to one extreme and then to another. This movement of public sentiment, within the last fifteen or twenty years, can easily be pointed out. From 1877 to 1882 I may regard as a period of reaction that of revival of the antiforeign spirit. During this period the cry, 'Repel foreigners,' which was on the lips of every Japanese at the time of the revolution, and since then unheard, was again heard. It was at this time that Confucial teaching was revived in all the public schools; and the Emperor issued a proclamation that the western ethical principles were not suitable to the Japanese, and were not to be taught in our public schools.

"Then the pendulum went to the other side. And now another era came in. This was a period of western ideas, which covers the years between 1882 and 1888. This was the age of great interest in everything that came from abroad. Not only was English eagerly taught, but all sorts of foreign manners and customs were busily introduced. Foreign costumes, not only of gentlemen but of ladies, foreign diet, as well as foreign liquors, became most popular among all classes. Every newspaper, almost without exception, advocated the adoption of everything foreign, so that Japan [R1597 : page 363] seemed as if it would be no longer an oriental nation, but would become occidentalized. It was at this time that such a paper as *Jiji Shimpō* advocated adoption of Christianity as the national

religion of Japan. It was no wonder that people poured into Christian churches, and that the latter made unprecedented strides in progress.

"But the pendulum swung to its extreme, and now another movement came in. The sign of reactionary and antiforeign spirit might be seen in everything – in costumes, in sentiments, as well as in opinions. Then the cry 'Japan for the Japanese' became heard in all corners of the empire. Everything that has flavor of foreign countries has been stigmatized as unworthy of adoption by the Japanese, and, instead of it, everything native is praised as superior or worthy of preservation. Buddhism, which has been regarded for years as a religion of the ignorant and inferior classes, is now praised as a superior religion, much superior to Christianity; and many who once favored adoption of Christianity as the national religion are seen publicly in Buddhistic ceremonies. Christianity is denounced as antagonistic to the growth of our national spirit, in conflict with our best morality, and also as against the intent of the imperial edict which was issued two years ago as the code of morals in all our schools. Conflict between Christianity and national education has become the most popular theme among certain classes of the people. Strong sense of national feeling has been aroused among all classes of people, and now it is not strange that Christians also feel its influence.

"And thus the doors to Christianity seem to have been closed, and we have a great decline in its growth. But now, again, the pendulum has reached another end, and there are signs that another era is ushering in. 'Every movement has rhythm,' says Herbert Spencer, and this is true in the progress of Christianity in Japan.

"One word as to the prospect in the future. That Japan will not become a Christian nation in a few years is a plain fact. But

that it will become one in the course of time is almost above doubt, and it is only a question of time. Still, 'Rome was not built in a day,' and so it will take time to Christianize Japan. That there are strong obstacles and great hindrances can easily be seen. It may be easy to show the reasonableness of Christianity, but to instil true Christian spirit into the heart of the people is not an easy task. We can show them more easily the folly of other religions, but to build up a true Christian church requires a long time....I am not at all anxious about the future of Christianity in Japan, as far as its final victory is concerned. But there are many difficult problems pressing us hard for their solution. I shall here simply state these problems in a few words.

(1) "The first problem that comes under our notice is that of relation between Christianity and our nationality, namely, our national habit and spirit. Professor Inonge and others have been raising their voices against Christianity, claiming it is in conflict with our national spirit. And this cry against Christianity has become so popular among Buddhists, Shintoists and Reactionists that they make it the only weapon of their attack against Christianity. But in my belief this problem is not so hard as it looks. What outsiders think to be the real conflict seems to us only shadow and vapor.

(2) "Relation between missionaries and native Christians is another problem. How must they be related? In other countries, such as India or China, such a question, perhaps, may never arise; but in Japan it is entirely different. Japanese Christians will never be satisfied under missionary auspices. To be useful to our country the missionaries must either co-operate with or join native churches and become like one of the native workers.

(3) "Problem of denominations and church government is another difficulty. Of course we shall not entirely dispense with denominations and sects. But it seems rather foolish to have all

denominations, which are peculiar to some countries and which have certain peculiar histories attached to them, introduced into Japan where no such history exists and where circumstances are entirely different. And so we think we can reduce the number of denominations. But how to begin is a hard problem.

"So also with the form of church government. It is needless to say that we need not, or ought not, to copy in any way the exact forms of church governments which are in vogue in the United States or in any other countries. But to formulate a form of government that suits our country the best, and at the same time works well elsewhere, is quite a difficult task.

(4) "Whether we need any written creed, and, if so, what kind of creed is best to have, is also a question. In all teachings of missionaries and others there is always more or less of husks mixed with genuine truth. And at the same time every form of Christianity has some excellent truth in it. And it is hard [R1597 : page 364] to make distinction between essentials and non-essentials, between creed and husks. This is a hard problem for Japanese theologians to solve. [DAWN will solve it for you as it has for others!]

"Japanese Christians must solve all these problems by themselves. I believe there is a grand mission for Japanese Christians. I believe that it is our mission to solve all these problems which have been, and are still, stumbling blocks in all lands; and it is also our mission to give to all the oriental nations and the rest of the world a guide to true progress and a realization of the glorious Gospel which is in Jesus Christ....Our prayer is and always must be: "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth."
