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THE QUEEN'S
NEPHEW

SPILLMANN



Tales of Foreign Lands.

A Series of Stories for the Young.

COLLECTED BY

REV. JOSEPH SPILLMANN, S. J.

VOL. V.

THE QUEEN'S NEPHEW.

ST. LOUIS, MO. 1896.

Published by B. HERDER,

17 South Broadway.

THE
QUEEN'S NEPHEW.

An Historical Narration from the
Early Japanese Mission.

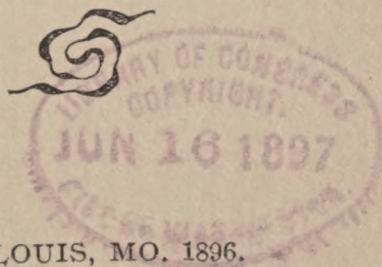
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The Queen's Nephew.

An Historical Narration from the Early
Japanese Mission.

THE most southernly of the four great Japanese islands is now called Kin-sin; but, at the time when St. Francis Xavier and his fellow laborers entered the far off insular kingdom of *the rising sun*, it was called Chimo or Skimo. In size it is very nearly equal to Switzerland and contains at the present time nearly five millions of inhabitants. How many people lived in the second half of the sixteenth century in the blissful regions of this glorious island when the events which we are about to relate took place, can no longer be ascertained with certitude. This much only is known from the reports of the venerable missionaries that, at that period as at present, the land was well cultivated, and that, hamlets,

villages, larger and smaller towns succeeded each other in one almost uninterrupted line, as is the case in the thickly populated parts of our own country.

Among the seven principalities into which Chimo was divided, the territory of Bungo, as much on account of its size as of its riches, held a prominent rank. And its ruler or king—the missionaries justly gave these almost independent vassals of the Emperor of Japan that name—had by force of arms brought the greater part of the neighboring provinces under subjection, so that his kingdom comprised very nearly the whole eastern half of Chimo. This powerful prince was no other than that Siwan who invited St. Francis Xavier to come to his capital city of Funai, and in whose presence that celebrated religious conference took place in the year 1551, in which the Apostle of Japan brilliantly defended the doctrine of Christ against the attacks of the Bonzes. The young king, at that time, solemnly acknowledged the saint's victory and encouraged his doctrine to the great annoyance of the Bonzes who called down the vengeance of their gods upon the king.

But, in spite of the affecting exhortations of the saint, the king could not resolve to accept the Christian faith. He feared the loss of his earthly kingdom and could not submit to bend his neck beneath the restrictions of the pure moral teaching of Christ. Nevertheless, he promised the apostle when the latter left Japan on the 20th of Nov. 1551, that he would protect the missionaries and their neophytes.

A quarter of a century had passed since then. Siwan had kept his promise to protect the Christians, whose number increased every year, but he himself remained a heathen. An event then occurred which led to a powerful struggle at the court of Bungo and, finally to a victory of grace over the heart of the aged king. We will relate the same a little more in detail than it appears in the ancient reports.

I.

The Blind Man and his Leader.

King Siwan had chosen for his favorite residence the agreeably situated palace of Usuki, built on a high hill which gently sloped towards a river a few miles south of Funai. He could scarcely have found a more lovely spot in all his charming territory, rich as it is in picturesque scenery. From the windows of the palace, and from the terraces in the gardens which surrounded it, the spectator had a most exquisite view. Usuki is bound on the south, west and north by the beautiful soaring range of mountains which stretch across the island of Kin-sin. The proud peak of Asojama in the south-west, in particular, is an object of attraction. It rises to the height of over 4500 feet and its summit is frequently hidden in dark clouds, and then again it is seen shining in the beautiful sunlight, clothed in azure blue. Dark thickets of fir surrounded by grey rocky walls cover the sides of the ridge of hills which gently undulate towards the

coast. It is a picturesque panorama full of change and life. Between wood and forest lie large tracks of well cultivated land; in the valleys, little streams and brooklets glisten in the sun, as also, here and there, artificial lakes which serve for the overflowing of the rice fields. Amidst orchards and gardens are to be seen dispersed at short distances from each other, farmhouses with thatched roofs. At the foot of the hill on which the king's palace was situated, a new city with broad streets and spacious squares extending along the sea coast, had been built within the last few years. But beautiful as was the view from the hill on which stood the castle, it was far surpassed by the enchanting picture which presented itself to the eye looking towards the nearly lying sea on the east. The glorious Bay of Usuki like a dark blue mirror was bordered north and south by far stretching promontories whose rocky walls formed secure break waters against the waves of the open sea. Numerous larger and smaller reefs and islands, the greater part of which were covered with beautiful green woods and thickets, rose up out of the waves. And in

the distant horizon is seen in clear weather the blue mountains of the opposite lying island of Sikoku separated from Kin-sin by the Straits of Bungo which at this spot are 30 miles broad.

On the bright day in March in the year 1576, on which our story begins, hundreds of boats and junks were gliding gently over the waves in the bay. A dense crowd of people was standing on the shore looking on at the embarkation of the troops. The sun glittered on the curved scimitar-like iron spears of the soldiers and reflected on the fantastically shaped helmets of the officers. Sharp words of command were heard, swords clanked against the bright shining metal of their coats-of-mail, when a fresh troop of sword-armed warriors sprang into the gently rocking boats, which amid the cry of the boatmen: "Midsu-no-Kami!" "Midsu-no-Kami!" (God of the waters!) quitted the shore.

Somewhat apart from the crowd of spectators, under the shade of an old, knotted cypress, which spread its dark green branches over the enclosure of the royal gardens, sat a meanly dressed elderly man.

The spot on which he was seated commanded a fine view of the crowd of people, and of the vessels in the bay, as well as of the road which led from the shore to the nearest palace gate. It is true, the old man did not profit much from the view for he was blind; but the boy who served as a guide to him, looked with bright eyes on the scene, full of life and color which was being enacted there. When the boatmen with loud cries invoked the protection of the god of the sea, he said to the blind man:

“Do you hear that, Uncle? they are calling upon Midsu-no-Kami. How can they dare to do that when their king was baptized only yesterday?”

“It is true, the King of Tosa became a Christian yesterday,” answered the blind man, “and I hope he will do honor to his name of Paul. But nevertheless his subjects are still heathens, and it would be difficult for him to compel them to renounce their gods. Besides, the soldiers are not even his subjects; they are the soldiers of our king Siwan, who only lends them to his brother-in-law that he may with their help recover his kingdom from which the treach-

erous Josagami expelled him. You must pray, Francis, that God may restore the throne to this prince who is the first that has openly acknowledged the true faith; it would be a great victory for the doctrine of Christ."

"I will certainly pray for that, Uncle, but I will pray still more earnestly that our king, who knows the truth of our faith so well, and who has long seen through the deceits of the Bonzes, may at length become a Christian. He permitted his son, our good Prince Sebastian, openly to receive baptism; he places his soldiers at the service of his Christian brother-in-law, the expelled King of Tosa; he is kind to Fr. Cabral and the other priests—what keeps him back then from becoming a Christian himself?"

"Do not forget, my son, that faith is a gift of God, and I fear Siwan has forfeited that grace for ever," said the blind man, and his countenance became deeply earnest. "I stood by when the great messenger of God, after his victory over the Bonzes, exhorted the young king to obey the voice of grace which, at that time, must have spoken powerfully to his soul. Do you not

know that the Savior, weeping over the city of Jerusalem said: 'If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace, but now they are hidden from thy eyes.' Jerusalem let the day of grace pass without profiting by it and was destroyed. I greatly fear it will be the same with Siwan. Only one thing permits me to hope, that is, he has faithfully kept the promise which he gave the saint on his departure from the island, for, during the twentyfive years which have elapsed since then, he has always afforded us his protection."

"And he is always kind to the missionaries and has built them a house, and given them a beautiful garden and permitted us to build the little chapel," said Francis. "I always think he would have become a Christian long ago if it had not been for his wicked queen."

"Francis!" said the blind man in a tone of reproof.

"Is she not wicked then?" said the boy. "Does she not hate the Christians? Would she not banish us all, or even burn us to death, the good fathers and the little church

included, if she could? Don't be angry, Uncle, but since Fr. Monti told us the history of Jezabel, we boys never call her anything else but the wicked Jezabel. I am afraid she will imbue the noble Sikatora with her hatred for us, for he went by yesterday quite proudly, whereas he always saluted us kindly before. But hark, how the gongs and fifes from the great ships sound over here! Now they are hoisting a great flag to the main mast; it is light blue and there is something written on it in gigantic letters—stay, I can read it: 'Kisin-Sossin' (God of the waters)—the idiots! And now they are drawing up a white flag; on that there is, 'Taira-ha' (peace.) Why do they do that when they are just going off to battle?"

"They hope by that to obtain a calm passage from the water-god," said his aged companion. "They will now dress an altar with green bamboo bushes on the main mast of the admiral's ship and place on it as the sacrificial offering, bread and fish, rice and *saki* (rice brandy.) They will most likely urge the king to take part in this sacrifice, but he will be obliged to keep the

promises which he made to God in holy baptism yesterday.”

“They are coming, they are coming!” cried the boy, “they are just coming out of the gate. How their armor glistens in the sunshine! There is King Paul coming along with our king; Prince Sebastian is following behind them with the queen’s nephew. Now King Paul is turning towards us. A cross, a gold cross is glittering on his helmet.—O Uncle, I wish you could see it!—They are approaching, kneel down, the two-swords men and all the people kneel down when they pass by.”



II.

A Heathen Prince and a Christian Prince.

The king's procession was, in fact, drawing near with great pomp. Two officers of the court, who carried, as a token of their dignity, long gilt-headed canes, walked in front of the procession. The crowd made way for them in the broad street and threw themselves down reverently on their hands and knees, according to the custom of the country, whilst the principal personages, at least remained standing and bowing low. Behind these court officials some attendants bore two by two, on high poles, gourd shaped lanterns and gilt fans. The court musicians followed next, and with their curiously shaped gongs, large and small tamtams, cymbals and triangles, bugle horns and reed pipes, made a wild, intermitting and peculiar kind of music. After the musicians, came again fan bearers, lance bearers and archers, followed by groups of the lower nobility; called sword nobles, on account

of the two swords which they constantly carry in their belts. Then came the court nobility in rich silk garments with the broad, stiff shoulder knot; next, heavily armed chieftains whose helmet viziers looked like hideous masks, and lastly, the group of princely personages followed by a troop of body guards. When the procession reached the shore, only the two kings, with the princes Sebastian and Sikatora stepped into the boat, ornamented with many-colored banners, in which they were to be conveyed on board the admiral's ship. This vessel was one of those clumsy junks whose richly decorated bow and stern stand high up out of the water, whilst the deck is occupied almost wholly by an elegant pavilion. Flags and banners ornament the corners of the same and at the base of the mast was, exactly as his young guide had described to the blind man, an altar set up to the god of the sea, around which the higher officers had formed a circle in the centre of which stood King Siwan with his retinue.

Siwan was, for a Japanese, a tall, well built man with a measured and dignified demeanor. The thin, slightly grey musta-

chio and the rather whitened hair, which could be seen from under the high mitre-looking head-dress, betrayed that he had already passed the prime of life; but the fire in his shrewd eyes, the firm expression of his mouth, and his erect figure, betokened his still unimpaired vigor. He cast a scrutinizing glance on his brother-in-law, and, when he perceived his displeasure at the sight of the idolatrous altar, a scornful smile played around his lips.—Then he said in a loud voice: “My brother of Tosa, as you perceive, you have not come in vain to our court for help. For the sake of your wife, my sister, and for your own sake, I have equipped these vessels and assembled these warriors that you may with their help reconquer your kingdom and throne from which the perfidious Josogami basely expelled you. Hearken, all my warriors! my princely brother of Tosa is from this time forth your leader, I command you to recover for him the kingdom of his ancestors. May Dsin-Mu, our great warrior and forefather, Hat-su-man, the mighty god of battles, and all the gods and spirits be with your banners!”

The warriors, shouting loudly and brandishing their weapons, joined heartily in the wishes of their king.

Siwan then said: "Let us now, according to the custom of our forefathers, offer up sacrifice to the god of the sea before weighing anchor."

At a signal from the king two closely shaven Bonzes came forward and offered on their knees to the two princes a large highly varnished tray, on which were placed elegant little porcelain dishes containing the sacrificial gifts—bread and fish, rice and *saki*.—Siwan took them and placed them before the statue. But the Prince of Tosa said, with a warding-off movement of his hand. "Eat and drink the same yourself, my good man, your gods will never be able to eat it." Then he turned towards Siwan and said: "You might have spared me this, brother, you know well that I am a Christian, and that I have solemnly renounced all belief in, and worship of false gods."

Loud murmurs arose, and the Bonzes said, scanning the prince with venomous looks: "Thy kingdom will not last! Even

as thou hast forsaken our gods, so will thy people forsake thee."

"Silence," commanded Siwan. "Brother, you may think what you like of Midsu-no-Kami and the other gods, but remember prudence counsels you not to express openly your contempt for the ancient customs. If you will not offer the sacrificial gifts in your own name, at least let them offer it in the name of your warriors who do believe in the power of our gods."

"I dare not, even if I never recover an inch of the kingdom of my forefathers," answered the Christian prince firmly.

"The heavenly crown will all the more surely be your eternal reward Paul," said Prince Sebastian, who had followed the scene in great suspense; and he seized the hand of the Prince of Tosa with these words: "I thank you for the beautiful example of Christian steadfastness which you have just afforded me. I also will gladly renounce the earthly crown to gain the heavenly one. Father," he continued, turning towards Siwan, "let it end thus. You have yourself offered the sacrifice and let your warriors be content with that."

“But *we* are not content,” cried the Bonzes. “Our gods hate this foreign God, who would bring our beautiful island-home piece by piece into the power of the cunning strangers who teach his new law. Every true Japanese who loves his country, curses him and his followers, and remains faithful to the ancient gods, who up to the present have saved our beautiful island of Japan from every danger. Prince of Tosa, do not expect us to be faithful to you, if you break faith with the gods! For the last time I call upon you to follow the custom of your ancestors!”

“I am ready and willing to draw my sword against every enemy for the greatness and freedom of Japan, and to shed my blood for the prosperity and freedom of my country,” answered the prince, “but, Japan will only be really great and happy when it is delivered from the tissue of falsehoods in which you and your followers ensnare its inhabitants, and when the light of truth and grace shines upon it which alone can bring true peace and happiness.”

“Enough and more than enough of this conversation,” said Siwan, interrupting the

zealous neophyte. "If I did not know that you were a true Japanese in spite of your belief in the new God whom the white men from the west preach, I should certainly not have placed my brave warriors at your disposal. But I gave you credit for more prudence than to have drawn upon yourself, for the sake of this mere ceremony, the displeasure of these pious men and brave soldiers, especially at the very beginning of your enterprise. Nevertheless, at my word and for my sake, they will fight as true vassals for your rights. — But you must keep your promise not to force the new religion on your subjects. Let each one, according to his conviction call upon Kami, or adore Buddha, or become a Christian, as I permit in my kingdom! But, on the day when I learn that you have destroyed a temple or a Bonze cloister, I will claim the kingdom of Tosa which my warriors have won back for you, and reward my wife's nephew, the noble Sikatora with it. And, now, Sikatora, my brave lad, place the offering on the altar!"

The prince whom he addressed, and on whom all eyes now turned, came forward.

He was a slim noble looking youth. One could not look upon his cheerful countenance with its open, true hearted expression without being drawn towards him. Bowing low, he said: "You have always been good to me, O king, and treated me as your nephew ever since Sikatondono adopted me as his child. But the favor which you hold out to me now, will never be mine. The kingdom of Tosa belongs to its hereditary prince, even although he has become a Christian.—As regards the sacrifice which I am to offer to the god of the sea, I must confess that much which I have heard and seen at your court has shaken my faith in our gods. But I do not as yet see clearly. If, later on, I should be convinced that the religion of the strangers is the true one, I should act as these two princes, your younger son and your brother-in-law have done. Till then I will follow your example, O king, and am ready therefore to offer the prescribed gifts according to custom to Midsuno-Kami."

Sikatora said these words with such modesty and yet firmness, that every one looked at him in amazement. Siwan was

pleased with the mental endowment which shone out of the boy's whole demeanor and secretly resolved to use them for the attainment of his far-reaching political plans. Scarcely had the youth placed his gifts upon the altar when the king took a somewhat cold farewell of the Prince of Tosa, and, accompanied by his son and Sikatora, left the admiral's ship and returned to his palace. The anchor was weighed, the sails unfurled, and the fleet of the Christian prince and his heathen warriors steered slowly out of the beautiful Bay of Usuki towards the opposite shore of Tosa.



III.

The Prince and the Page.

The sails of the fleet had gradually disappeared from the view of Sikatora who had watched them for a long time from a hill in the royal park, when, giving one more glance at the calm sea and the glorious landscape, he started to return to the palace. Deep in thought over the scene which he had witnessed on board the admiral's ship, the prince walked on through the carefully kept paths of the park bordered by lovely camellia bushes (of which Japan is the native soil) when one of the queen's pages came up to him.

"Prince, they are seeking you," said the boy bowing profoundly. "My mistress, the queen, is asking for you. She is in the new Kiosk on the Ossidori ponds with the princesses.

"Conduct me to her," said Sikatora, "for I still have a difficulty in finding my way in the intricacies of these large gardens. The Ossidori pond lies in the hollow on the

other side of the castle hill not far from the grove of the Bonzes. It must be half an hour's walk from here is it not?"

"I will take you there in half that time, for I know the park well. It is spacious and beautiful as befits a powerful monarch."

At a sign from Sikatora the boy, who was only a very little younger than his companion, went on in silence and soon turned into a side path which led through the dark shadows of a little cypress grove to a ravine in which, a noisy rivulet rushed over mossgrown rocks. Sikatora enjoyed the picturesque scenery; for the Japanese have, as a rule, great taste for beautiful landscapes, and even endeavor to imitate in their gardens, hill and vale, rock and grotto, wood and river. He had not seen this part of the park before, and he made up his mind he would often visit the ravine with its grand old trees in future. A quieter little spot amidst thickets of ferns on the borders of the brook, could not easily be imagined, and he found its peaceful situation all the more agreeable that it was so near to the palace and the exciting turmoil of a court life.

“The ravine seems as if it were made on purpose for a hermitage,” remarked Sikatora to his companion.

“It *was* that for a long time,” replied the page. “Do you see the small hut up yonder in the branches of that gigantic old yew tree? Up to a year ago, old Jervas lived there. He let down a rope every day and a disciple of the Bonzes fastened a dish containing rice to it—that was the only food of this wonderful penitent. It is said he never left the tree for a great number of years, in consequence of a vow which he had made to Kwannon whom the Buddhist teachers adore as lord of the atmosphere. From his elevated post, he could see over the tree tops and over the rocks, the little temple of his gods which we are now approaching.”

One could indeed see on a wooden platform which was supported by two strong horizontal boughs of the tree, half hidden by the dark green branches of the yew, a small hut made of bamboo which was not suitable as a dwelling place for a man, but still might be useful as a somewhat protected place of rest. Sikatora looked up at the

wonderful cloister and shook his head and asked his guide if it was still inhabited.

“No,” answered the page. “Old Jervas was the last of the Buddhist hermits who lived in the branches of the tree. Since his death, the Bonzes, who formerly related the fable that a god had planted the yew, now say it is accursed because the old penitent died a Christian.”

“A Christian!” exclaimed the prince in amazement. “Are you also a Christian?” he asked the page

“I am, Prince; my deceased parents were Christians and so I was baptized a Christian in my infancy, and received in baptism the beautiful name of Stephen, which means, a crown.”

“Strange that this foreign faith should take so powerfully here! Well, I am not so much surprised about you as I am about the old penitent. How was such a thing possible after he had spent his whole life in the service of Buddha?”

“God’s grace and mercy are infinite. Perhaps his severe penance, which he probably practised in good faith, gained for him the knowledge of the truth. He who humbly

and honestly seeks the truth will surely find it our priests tell us, for God would rather send an angel from Heaven to instruct him than let him perish. The story of his conversion is very singular. There is an old blind man living here of the name of Tobias, who was formerly a highly renowned teacher in a convent of the Bonzes in Funai.—”

“I think I know him. Has he not for his guide a pretty looking boy whom he calls by the foreign name of Francis?”

“Yes, that is his nephew, and he bears the name of Francis out of veneration for the great Messenger of the Faith, who twentyfive years ago first brought the doctrine of Jesus Christ to our island of Japan. Tobias attended at that time, the great conference which Francis Xavier held for five days with the most learned Bonzes before our King Siwan, in which he so victoriously defended the truths of the Christian religion. Tobias took an active part in that dispute, opposing the saintly stranger with the most difficult objections against Christianity of which he afterwards confessed that it was not he himself who found them, but that they were suggested

to him by the evil spirits. But Tobias was so honorable, that he admitted the victory of the foreigner and so ready to follow the call of grace, that he asked for baptism and received that sacrament from the hands of Francis Xavier. From that time the Bonzes hated and persecuted Tobias and more than once even attempted his life; but God's angel frustrated their evil designs; for he lives here still and helps the foreign teachers to instruct those who desire to become Christians. He has already prepared several hundreds for baptism, and he is particularly well fitted for that duty since none know so well as he the lies and subterfuges of the Bonzes.—”

“Boy, I am not a Christian,” said Sika-tora, interrupting him somewhat angrily.

“But you soon will be one,” answered the page, glancing confidently at the young prince. “For, you are seeking the truth and we are praying for you.—So the Bonzes hate the blind Tobias, and last year again, as they have often done before, they summoned him to a disputation on the faith, and in order that old Jervas on his yew tree might witness and take part in it, the

assembly took place in the ravine. But the Bonzes were resolved not to fight merely with words this time. By their witchcraft they had invoked the aid of the evil spirits who formerly haunted this hollow, and they intended to give over to them for cruel punishment the hated perjurer, as they called Tobias since he had ceased to belong to them. Tobias had a presentiment of their evil intention, but he would not allow himself to be frightened. Taking the hand of little Francis, he bravely entered the arena. There on that moss grown boulder he took his seat. The Bonzes closed round him in a circle and several persons belonging to the royal household crowded in between the trees, by the side of the stream and on the rocks. Up on the platform in front of his hut sat the grey haired Jervas, stroking his long white beard; behind him, almost hidden by the dark branches of the yew, two of the most notorious of the sorcerers had placed themselves ready to test their diabolical arts on the blind man.

The conference began and ended in the usual way. Tobias refuted the objections of his adversaries so strikingly, brought to

light so unmercifully the inconsistency of their teachings—pardon me, Prince, you will soon see that for yourself—and spoke so convincingly of the truths of the Christian religion, that loud murmurs arose amongst the audience against the Bonzes, who, instead of reasoning, only answered the blind man by abuse. Then the chief Bonze rose and summoned old Jevas, with a fearful imprecation, to give over this bold blasphemer of the gods to the fury of Kwannon whose faithful follower he had been for so many years. But the old man did not stand up to curse Tobias; he had heard the Christian religion proclaimed for the first time and his heart was deeply moved though he was not yet converted. A miracle was to bring him to a decision. The two sorcerers had begun their incantations; threatening voices resounded, and the branches of the yew shook as in a violent storm. The terrified spectators feared that the threats of the Bonzes were about to be verified against the blind man. Little Francis trembled and said: ‘Uncle, let us flee!’ But Tobias answered calmly: ‘They have no power to harm us! Make the sign of the

cross and pronounce the name of Jesus.' More and more dismally sounded meanwhile the howlings from the top of the tree, which the witnesses of this frightful scene attributed to demons; several persons even affirmed that they had seen with their bodily eyes, hideous forms which rushed at the blind man and encircled him. But Tobias stood undismayed in the midst of the awful noises, with his sightless eyes uplifted towards Heaven. He signed himself with the holy cross and pronounced the name of Jesus solemnly. And behold! the infernal powers at once receded from him and threw themselves upon those, who had invoked their aid against the Christian. They drove the two sorcerers down from the tree and chased them through the throng of spectators, who cried aloud from fear, to the feet of Tobias, where they fell down with their features all distorted, and writhing in agony, they implored him to have mercy on them and to deliver them from the evil spirits who were tormenting them so frightfully. Tobias made the sign of the cross over the two villains, who really deserved a longer

punishment, and immediately they were able to rise from the ground.

You can imagine, Prince, what an impression this scene made on all who witnessed it. Many of them renounced the false gods soon after and were converted to the Christian religion, whose holy sign had gained such a signal triumph over the powers of darkness. Amongst the converts was the venerable Jevan, who, at once descended from his tree and besought the blind Tobias to instruct him in the religion of Christ. Only the Bonzes, who had maliciously fought against the known truth, remained obdurate; they declared the whole event was a delusion which was to be ascribed to the satanic arts of the blind man, and, as Jevan soon after died suddenly on the day of his baptism, they said it was an obvious punishment from the offended gods, and they persisted all the more obstinately in their wickedness."

Sikatora listened with the greatest attention to this narration of his companion. As we see clearly from the letters of St. Francis Xavier and from the reports of his successors, from which source the above facts have been taken, persons possessed of the devil,

of which we read so many examples in the Gospels, were, at that time, by no means uncommon in Japan. Sikatora himself may have known such unhappy creatures, in whom was clearly visible the terrible slavery of the devil from which Jesus Christ delivered us. He may also have heard of the Christian teachers' extraordinary power over this fearful affliction. But here, he had for the first time a case of which he could himself examine the truth. He questioned the boy further on the subject and the latter named several men of rank belonging to the court as eye-witnesses of the miraculous occurrence, and the prince determined to find out whether it was true or not.

During this conversation the two youths, following the course of the stream, had arrived at the temple of the god Kwannon, and the prince cast a look upon the grotesque figure in which he, for the first time, betrayed a certain amount of contempt for it.

“Look at that hateful caricature!” said the page, crossing himself. “Those goggle eyes! that paunch! and that ridiculous number of arms, which make him look like

the spokes of a wheel, and in every one of them he holds another little god!"

"The thirtysix arms of Kwannon represent the thirtysix directions of the compass, which belong to him as the ruler of the atmosphere," said Sikatora. "I will not allow you to jeer at these images, which our ancestors adored, and of which you do not even understand the meaning. Besides you Christians also have images in your Pagoda, for I saw them myself some time ago."

"Yes, but we do not adore them; and then you must admit they are far more beautiful than these dev—. O prince, I do not wish to make you angry! Only let me ask of you one thing. Did you not see in our chapel the picture of a most beautiful woman, with a lovely child in her arms? — That is the Queen of Heaven and her name is Mary. We salute her as the Seat of Wisdom. Say every day from the bottom of your heart: 'Mary, help me to find wisdom!' For I know you are seeking the truth."



IV.

The Nephew and the Aunt.

The way now led through a beautiful green valley, past shrubberies and well laid-out flower beds, to the pond on which a number of gorgeous-feathered mandarin ducks were swimming. These handsomest of all swimming birds with their long tufts of white, purple and green feathers falling over their brownish orange colored backs, are natives of China and Japan, and are even there only found in the ponds of the rich nobles, for which reason they are called by Europeans, mandarin ducks; the Japanese call them Ossidori.

“Here we are now at the Ossidori pond,” said the page. “On yonder island you see the roof of the summer house where the queen is awaiting you. Listen! The princesses are singing, to the accompaniment of string instruments, one of those never-ending old songs with the innumerable names of gods. Shall I announce you, Prince.”

“It is unnecessary. You may wait here on the bridge and conduct me to the palace later on.” So saying, Sikatora passed on to the elegant little bridge which, in a slight arch, spanned the pond. When the ossidori caught sight of him they spread out their steel blue wings and skimming over the calm surface of the water, fluttered quite near the edge, for they knew the youth would throw them some little delicacy. He hastily threw them a few crumbs and passed over the bridge to the queen's summer-house.

This summer-house was a spacious Kiosk open on all sides; the richly gilded pillars supported a light roof on elegant carved beams. Trellis work made of bamboo took the place of side walls, and moveable silk screens richly embroidered afforded protection from the sun and from draught, and also from all inquisitive glances. As soon as Sikatora appeared on the steps which led from the grass plot to the Kiosk, the singing, at a signal from the queen, ceased and the three princesses rose to salute their cousin, the favorite of the whole court.

“What a pity I have interrupted your singing,” said he politely. “It was, if I mistake not, in praise of the wisdom and justice of Sinkawogus, the highly renowned widow of the fourteenth Mikado, under whose reign Japan passed happy and peaceful days. How much such a song must please my royal aunt, who is herself animated with a similar heroic spirit!”

“One can see you were brought up at the royal palace of Meako, nephew, and truly this polite speech does honor to your bringing-up!” said the queen, whilst for a moment a smile played over her haughty and by no means attractive features. “As a reward, bring him at once tea and cakes and game. Place the little table here at my feet ready for him, and then go and walk in the garden, for Sikatora and I have something of importance to discuss together.”

In a trice one of the little low tables stood by the queen, and, at a signal from her, Sikatora sat down on a mat to drink, from an elegant cup of finest porcelain, the fragrant beverage of his country.

“Take some of the pheasant,” said the queen. “It is your share of the game which

you brought home the day before yesterday.”

“I have to thank the noble falcon for it, which your Majesty gave me. I never saw a more magnificent bird; he rose up in the air like an arrow and fell upon the poor pheasant, who was just unconcernedly spreading out his many-colored feathers in the sun outside his nest.”

Whilst the prince partook of the refreshment, the queen regarded him with satisfaction. The proud woman thought to have found in the youth the tool through whom she hoped to attain her ends—to satisfy her indomitable ambition and her fierce hatred against the Christians.—Siwan, her royal husband, was not a decided enemy of the Christians; he had even fostered and protected them, and had more than once shown a desire to become a Christian himself. Therefore she hated him. Of her two sons, the younger and more capable had really embraced Christianity, consequently she hated him also and no longer looked upon him as her son. The elder brother was a drunkard and a mere cipher; she could not count on him for the attain-

ment of her ends. But she had a brother named Sikatondono, one of the richest and most powerful princes in Japan; she had centred all her hopes on him for a long time past. But he was a quiet and easy going man and besides he had no children; he was therefore equally unqualified to be the founder of a new dynasty, and that was a part of the plan which the ambitious woman had laid out. She had persuaded this brother, Sikatondono, to adopt, from amongst the highest court nobles, a boy whom he could assure her possessed talents which befitted him both for a warrior and a ruler.

The choice had fallen on our Sikatora and it appeared to be an especially fortunate one. The youth united in himself rich natural gifts both of body and mind. His slight and yet robust frame was well trained in all the exercises of chivalry to which the Japanese nobles attach great importance; his graceful and attractive manners; his open forehead, his bright, piercing eyes and his noble features, betokened a generous and ardent spirit and a brave and faithful heart. Sikatora was indeed capable of all

that was great and noble, and cherished in his mind the desire to shed his blood for the glory and prosperity of his native country. All this qualified him to play the part in the history of Japan which the ambition of his royal aunt destined for him. Only one point still remained doubtful to her, viz, how he would act with regard to the Christians. She saw plainly that he was just as eager for truth as for glory, and it was to be feared that he also might exchange the religion of his country for the creed of the stranger. The mere possibility put the queen in a fury; she resolved to prevent betimes a step which would frustrate all her plans, and she hoped to attain her end by offering to the ambition of Sikatora a picture seductive enough even to induce a Christian to apostatize, to say nothing of keeping a pagan from becoming a Christian. At least so *she* thought.

During the young man's repast the queen had addressed many a friendly word to him. But now that he had satisfied his appetite and put aside the costly porcelain dishes, she said, drawing back the heavy silk drapery which gently waved over the steps of the dais:

“Come and sit here on this step, nephew, and listen to the words of your aunt! I saw with pleasure how you offered up the customary sacrifice to Midsu-no-Kami instead of the Prince of Tosa, whom the gods will punish. May you ever preserve this pious disposition towards the faith of our country! For, believe me, foreign manners and a foreign creed constitute the greatest danger with which our beloved country is threatened. Not in vain has the Emperor of China, for the protection of his country shut out all foreigners by a great wall three thousand miles long; but our own country has been far better fortified by the gods themselves by the water wall of the immense ocean which surrounds it. Ah! they would have been impregnable had not our own princes made way for the hated foreigners. With the help of these princes, they have entered, and it is high time that we should drive them out if we would keep Japan for the Japanese. How stands it with this our glorious island of Chimo? The princes of Goto, of Arima, of Omura—May the gods annihilate them!—are Christians; so the whole of the west and the middle of

the island belongs already to the accursed strangers. They are even now laying the foundation for the new port of Nagasaki — a wide breach into the protecting water-wall! Here in the east is the kingdom of Bungo almost in their power; my own son has given himself over to them, and even Siwan, my royal consort, has more than once shown an inclination to adopt their accursed creed.”

Her eyes glittered with hatred, and her voice faltered as she said this. Sikatora was quite shocked when he looked at her features distorted by passion. Then she continued: “Up to the present I have succeeded in deterring him from becoming a Christian. If he were to take that step, by Dsin-Mu, the divine founder of our kingdom, it would end awfully! So you see the power of the stranger is great in our island. In the neighboring island of Sikok, they have already ensnared the King of Tosa — though after his open apostacy to go over to the belief of the stranger, it will be difficult for him to reconquer his realm. — But the worst of all is the fact that, at Nippon, the great main island, the all powerful Shôgun,

Nobunanga himself, is in favor of these foreigners — for this Shôgun, who is commander in chief of the army of the Mikado (the emperor,) who can trace back his sacred origin through the generations of more than two thousand years to the divine Dsin-Mu, and through him to the god of the sun himself — this Shôgun, I repeat, has so far betrayed his trust that, in league with the Christian princes, he has made the Mikado a mere cipher and usurped all power to himself. Is it not a fact, nephew?"

"It is indeed as you say, aunt. He has made himself sole monarch, no one cares for the Mikado any longer at the court of Meako; the foreign princes are everything with Nobunanga; I myself saw him, with the greatest courtesy, conduct them through all the apartments of his palace. His first wife adopted their religion; he treats the Bonzes with contempt, and he has already burned down several of their convents. But why do you speak to me of all this?"

"Why? Can you not guess why? It is you whom the gods are calling upon to take vengeance on these hated foreigners! — Hear me to the end before you answer. I know

what you are going to say, you are only a boy and not yet ripe for such an undertaking. You are right; but in three or four years you will be a man, and we shall need that time to make our preparations. Only you must engage in the cause from this day forth. The means at your disposal are great, my brother, Sikatondono, rules over thirty thousand two-sword men; within twelve months the kingdom of Tosa will be yours, and I will take care that the powerful kingdom of Bungo shall fall to you, and not to either of my sons. You will have command over one hundred thousand men. And that is not all; the Bonzes with their innumerable temple treasures; the people with their tenacious belief in our ancient gods; and the greater number of the princes will rally around you as soon as you raise the cry: 'For our gods and our Mikado! Curses on the traitorous Schôgun and his adherence to the foreign deceivers!' You will reinstate the Mikado in his sacred authority; you will be, in place of Nobunanga, a faithful general of the crown and the savior of Japan. For you will deliver your country from the threatened domination of the

stranger and all future patriots will do honor to the nephew of the Queen of Bungo in their songs of heroic deeds! What do you say, nephew? Does not your heart burn within you?"

The impassioned woman had proposed her seductive plan in such inflammatory words that they were not without effect on the heart of the young man which was, at all times, susceptible to bold and brave deeds. He was going to declare with enthusiasm his willingness to enter into her views, when there came into his mind, he himself did not know how, the words of the Christian page, and it appeared to him as if he saw before him the lovely picture of the Virgin and Child which he had seen in the chapel of the Christians. So he answered with a calmness the queen was far from expecting:

"I thank you, dear aunt. I will think over all you have said. At present I see only one obstacle which could possibly deter me from entering upon the heroic career you have placed before me in such glowing terms."

"And what may that be?"

“The knowledge that the Christian religion was the true one,” he answered.

The queen's countenance became white with passion, and she said in a tremulous voice: “Ah, if you also were to be capable of this treason. I would trample you under my feet!” She would have said more but one of the maids of honor drew near the Kiosk and said:

“My noble mistress, the king is coming!”



V.

Nature and Grace.

Several weeks had elapsed since Sikatora's conversation with the queen, and the young man still fluctuated in indecision between the picture of earthly glory, which like a brilliant meteor rose up before his eyes, and the voice of grace which spoke to his heart ever more and more distinctly.

One day soon after his memorable conversation with his aunt, as he was walking alone on the sea shore, he accidentally met the blind Tobias. Seating himself on a bench by his side, he asked him about the wonderful event that took place in the grove of Kwannon which the page had told him of. Tobias corroborated the fact in every detail, and, with much modesty, ascribed the miracle solely to the wonderful power of the sacred sign of the cross. In the course of the conversation about the Christian belief, the prince remarked that the idea of a God dying on a cross was absurd. But Tobias explained in most impressive

words how great the love of God must have been for him to take upon Himself our human nature in order to be able by His sufferings and death to satisfy the Divine justice. The prince could not deny the sublimity of this idea, although he was still far from believing in Christianity. But grace never ceased repeating in his heart: 'If it should be true? If a God should really have died on the cross for me? And if it were true, what ought I to do for the love of this God?'

Sikatora met Tobias frequently after this and discussed with him many other points of the Christian faith. That which made the greatest impression on him was the comparison between the Christian doctrine concerning the creation of the world, and the ridiculous fables of the Bonzes on the same subject. — They explain the formation of their island in the following manner; 'One day seven of the gods met together when one of them threw his sword up into the air; a drop of water settled on it, which falling down, hardened and thus formed the main island of Japan!' — Sikatora now began to examine the Christian religion more

earnestly; but the queen, hearing of his interviews with the blind man, took measures to prevent them. She overwhelmed the youth with flattery and kept him almost constantly at her side. She enkindled in him the fire of ambition by repeating again and again her enticing plans. The temptation was almost too strong for him; he often pictured himself as commander-in-chief of an immense army engaged in a fierce battle; then again, he saw himself as a victor entering the conquered capital at the head of the army, and bringing back the banished Mikado in triumph amidst the shouts and rejoicings of the populace, and he already looked upon himself as the savior of his beloved country for whose glory he so ardently longed. Pictures such as these had on his imagination the same effect as the sounding of trumpets has on a fiery war-horse longing for battle. He exercised himself more than ever in fencing and riding so that he soon became renowned and was considered a perfect master in all chivalrous arts. He excelled, even as a boy, in the use of the bow and arrow, and he now distinguished himself with the use of a rifle which

King Siwan had given him. Then again he sat brooding over the old pagan books which depicted the bloody feuds of hundreds of years' duration between the different Shôgun families Minamoto and Tairo, Gensi and Feike; extolled the hero Yoritomo and related the glorious victories over the Tartars. The youth's eyes glistened with the desire of achieving similar deeds of valor.

But there were also hours when grace knocked loudly at the door of his heart. The queen suspected that, and she resolved before it was too late, to call to her aid her brother Sikatondono by whose advice she had adopted Sikatora as her nephew. Amongst the provinces which were subject to this powerful prince, was the kingdom of Buigen, on the frontiers of Bungo. The queen invited Sikatondono on a visit to Usuki, and when he arrived with a princely retinue for a lengthened stay, she spoke to him of Sikatora's attraction to the Christian religion. Great was the anger of the Japanese who, in his arrogance and pride, could scarcely imagine a more shameful crime than that of abandoning the native gods for the foreign creed. He therefore ordered

Sikatora into his presence and threatened him with disinheritance, imprisonment and death, if he brought such a disgrace upon his name. He would not suffer the slightest word of explanation, and only allowed himself to be somewhat appeased when the young man assured him he had not yet seriously thought of becoming a Christian.

It will be easily understood that Sikatora, seeing the extreme displeasure of his adopted father to whom he was indebted for his position in life, closed his ears to the call of grace. But still more pernicious to him was the declaration of King Siwan, who overpowered him with marks of his favor, and whom he one day asked his opinion of the Christian religion.

“It is certainly a most wonderful doctrine,” said the king, who weighed everything calmly in the scales of political prudence, “and it is well worth our while to study it, as we ought also to make ourselves acquainted with the teaching of Confucius and other outlandish philosophers. The Christian moral law is pure, but so strict that I doubt whether it would be possible to live in accordance with it.

The teachers who preach it, and whom I have watched narrowly for five and twenty years, it is true, fulfil the law with astounding exactness: the Japanese also who adopt it appear to keep it faithfully. But I do not think it is suitable for Japan, our manners, are too widely opposed to its obligations. At all events the doctrine of our Bonzes is more convenient; they permit us every sin, as long as we pay them rich alms."

"But do not the great purity and holiness of the Christian religion evidently prove its truth?" asked Sikatora.

"Perhaps so," replied King Siwan, knitting his brows. "There was a time when I thought *that*, and almost resolved to become a Christian. I was very young then, not older than you are now, and at that age one is inclined to make rash resolutions. I heard the great Francis Xavier, in a five days' conference, refute the most learned of our Bonzes; I am astonished even now at the spirit and fire of his words. I could not do otherwise than acknowledge at the conclusion that the maxims of the Christian religion were good and in accordance with reason, but when the foreign teacher urged

me to renounce the Japanese gods and turn to his God, I told him, I could not possibly do so then without forfeiting my kingdom, but I promised him I would protect his co-religionists. — In reply, he said he would pray for me that I might not, for the sake of my earthly crown, suffer the loss of my Heavenly one. He then quitted our shores, and I heard soon after that he died forsaken and miserable on an island; how could his God, if He is the true one, reward His faithful servant thus?"

"The Christians would say, he has his reward in Heaven," replied the prince. Then he went on to say: "It cannot be denied that our Bonzes teach a host of absurd lies and fables!"

"Quite true — but who believes them?" said Siwan. "The Christians also teach much which appears nonsense to me. However, I have not decided on any religion as yet, and I will wait to see which succeeds the best. I think that is the wisest course and the most fitting for a clever prince. I advise you therefore to do the same. By far the greater number of Japanese princes and people still hold to the service of Buddha

or the ancient Kami; I am ready to stand by them also. Some few princes and about one hundred thousand Japanese have adopted the Christian faith, and Nobunanga himself it appears, openly favors it. Good, as soon as I see that Japan decides in favor of Jesus Christ, I also shall be ready to adopt the creed. One of my sons is a Christian, the other worships our gods — so the dominion of my house is secure whichever is most in favor, the foreign or our own native altars.”

The cold, heartless calculation which was apparent in this speech of the king, offended the noble mind of the youth. He felt that he could be far sooner influenced by the queen's ambitious plans than by the cold, calculating arguments of the king. But Siwan's words nevertheless helped to drown the voice of grace in his heart, ‘If Siwan, who heard the great Francis Xavier preach, and who has now for twenty five years had intercourse with the foreign teachers, is not yet fully convinced of the truth of their faith, it is useless for me to waste any more time in studying it.’ He did not consider that a bad will tends to darken the under-

standing, and that between knowing and believing there is a vast distinction, and that for faith, light and strength from above are requisite. So he almost decided to adhere steadily to the service of Kami, and devote his life to the Mikado who descended from the god of the sun. He conducted himself in accordance with these views in his conversations with the queen, who never wearied of inciting him, by flattery and brilliant promises, to the performance of her plans. First of all, he was, with her recommendation and that of his adopted father Sikatondono, to visit in the circle of various princes who were at enmity with the Shôgun, so as to open up a friendly connexion with them in all parts of the island. Nobody was more fitted for this enterprise than Sikatora whose courtly and attractive appearance gained all hearts. He was in this way, to raise step by step a noble escutcheon for the Mikado, so that at the right time, the strongest possible army might be assembled under the colors which Sikatora would unfurl.

The struggle in the young man's heart appeared to be ended; but the voice of

grace was not entirely stifled. Two boys were praying fervently in the Mission Chapel before the statue of the ever blessed Virgin for his conversion, and the hour of grace was nearer than they dared to hope.



VI.

The Page Stephen.

My young friends must not picture to themselves the palace of Usuki like Buckingham Palace or Windsor Castle, with balconies, towers, battlements and walls. It was a real Japanese palace comprising a vast number of separate far-stretching buildings connected by open colonnades which, by means of broad flights of steps and long terraces one above another, led, some up to the tops of the hills whilst others descended the slopes and sharp declivities into the neighboring valleys, and again others led down to the seashore. On the lowest hill range there were barracks large enough to accommodate two thousand men and horses; on the right of the central hill-range dwelt the royal lance bearers and archers and on the left various officials, court attendants and pages. To arrive at the principal entrance of the palace, one had first to pass through a gateway constantly guarded by two sentinels clad in

armor. Even the principal building was comprised of only two floors. It formed a kind of elongated quadrangle; on one of the smaller sides was a spacious hall, where officers of the body guard and other chief court officials were ordinarily in attendance. The long-stretching right wing, the windows of which afforded a glorious view over the bay, contained the apartments of the king and princes; in the corresponding left wing were the apartments of the queen and her household. The other smaller side of the quadrangle enclosed a gigantic hall of state. The palace was, according to the custom in the country, built entirely of wood, but of the most precious sorts. Paintings and richly gilded carved work, on which were represented scenes of the gods and hero legends of Japan, hung over the frescoes supported by slender columns. The walls were covered with silken hangings magnificently embroidered, and on the floors were elegant plaited mats and soft carpets.—

But the queen's apartments displayed far greater splendor; the eye was never weary of looking upon the costly furniture and the beautifully blended gay-colored tapestry on

the walls. The queen, surrounded by her attendant maids, was seated before her mirror busily engaged in hiding, by the aid of pencil and brush, the ravages which time had made on her once handsome features. The great ladies of Japan waste a great many hours before their mirror, putting rouge on their lips and pencilling their eyebrows. The queen was in a very bad temper that day and overwhelmed her maids with harsh words and pettish abuse whilst they were adorning her hair with gold and precious stones and ivory ornaments set up so as to form a new and ingenious head-dress. Then she threw the brush with which she colored her lips at the feet of the poor girls, and ordered them all out of the room, with the exception of one who stood there trembling.

“Well, Sima,” said the queen, “did I not tell you to have Sikatora watched? Has he been to the foreign Bonzes again?”

“No, your Majesty. The two warriors whom I pay with your money have watched him continually; he has not been to them, either at their house or at the Christian Pagoda. Neither have they visited him.

But the old blind sorcerer, who last year through his diabolical arts forced the spirit of Kwannon to injure our Bonzes, had a long conversation with him yesterday."

"May the gods punish him! Tell me all you know about it!"

"O, your Majesty, last night when the moon was shining, one of the two spies came and made a sign to me. He said, a boy had just come into the court-yard—it was the boy who leads the blind man—and had spoken with one of your pages who appeared to be waiting for him. Then the page —"

"Which one? Von Funai!"

"Your Majesty's sight is like that of the eagle! From the whole band of pages you have singled him out."

"I have long suspected him of being a secret Christian. Only wait! I will make him feel my vengeance and that of the gods! — Well, what more? — Go on!"

"Then the page Von Funai went with the blind man's boy to Prince Sikatora, and after a short time they were all seen going up the hill by the winding road. Our spies followed and saw them enter the blind man's

house. Whilst one remained, the other fetched me and, as I thought it might be useful to my mistress to know something of what they were talking about, I crept near and listened to what would not otherwise have concerned me.”

“And what did the impious creatures say?”

“O your Majesty, it was very terrible! I crouched down close to the open window on which the rays of the moon were falling—a camellia bush hid me from *their* view, but I was able to see all the parties present and hear every word that was said. There was only the blind man besides Prince Sikatora and the two boys in the room. As I came up, the blind man was blaspheming all our gods; he said, they were nothing but abominable devils.—I hope your Majesty will supply me with money to offer a sacrifice for having repeated such words.—But Prince Sikatora was not of the same opinion as the blind man and contradicted him. I cannot tell you all the clever arguments he brought forward, but I remember one of them; he told him his teaching undermined the foundations of Japan whose hereditary

rulers were the Mikados, because they descended from the god of the sun.”

“Bravo! Sikatora is not lost yet. And what did the blasphemmer answer?”

“Your Majesty, he spoke of a Child God who came to make all men true children of God, and of a magical bath in which they were born again, also of a magical bread which would give them eternal life. Yes, he had the audacity to say, he himself and the two boys had been made children of God in this bath, and he invited the prince to make use of the same means. But he must first of all renounce all the Japanese gods. Thereupon Prince Sikatora replied, that according to this doctrine every beggar could be a child of God, and there would then be no more authority. But the blind man said, the Christians submitted themselves to authority because it is the will of God, and he told a long story about how fifteen hundred years ago the Christians showed inviolable fidelity to wicked emperors in spite of cruel persecution.”

“We will put their obedience to the test. What more happened?”

“The blind man gave the prince a book,

and begged him to read it attentively. It contained the whole Christian doctrine, and if there was anything he did not understand he was to pray to God for light and ask the page — they call him Stephen or something like that — or, still better, he was to seek instruction from the Japanese helpers of the foreign Bonzes who have translated the book. He said he himself was to sail for Tosa to-day. King Paul had asked for him. In conclusion, he said he hoped he should find the prince a child of God on his return from Tosa. They then separated. That is all, your Majesty.”

“The blind beggar will be useful to the madman of Tosa,” said the queen scornfully. “It is well, Sima, now let Sikatora be summoned to my presence.”

“Your Majesty, the prince went off with the king and about thirty hunters very early this morning up into the hills to hunt. They are not expected to return before morning.”

“True, I had forgotten. But so much the better. Call the page Von Funai to me at once. Tell Ratiku to have one of his men in readiness.”

“O my mistress, you are not going to order him to be put to death?”

“What is that to you? Take care you do not draw my anger on yourself!”

The girl went out of the room, and in the course of a few minutes the boy stood before his mistress. He was rather pale, for the tone and manner in which Sima called him led him to expect a scene which he had already half in fear and half in joy anticipated. He had prepared himself for it by prayer and was even now breathing a silent prayer whilst his innocent eyes looked up questioningly at the countenance of the queen. Then he prostrated himself touching the carpet with his forehead and knelt down in obedience to a sign from the queen at a short distance from her.

“Your parents are dead, are they not?” she asked with assumed kindness.

“Yes, my mistress, they both died when your humble servant was very young. My father fell in the battle against Satsuma and my mother did not long survive him.”

“I will be your mother then, presuming that your behavior is deserving of such a favor. Go now to the Bonzes and bring

me one of the little gold *Kitsneh* (Foxes) for we will offer up a sacrifice together to Inari, the protecting god of the rice fields."

"O, your Majesty, I cannot, I dare not do that!"

"What do I hear? Bring the holy fox here immediately!"

"I dare not. I am a Christian and I dare not offer sacrifice to the gods," said the boy firmly.

"What! you defy me? You will not obey the command of your queen! Do you not know how I can punish a disobedient servant?"

"You can have me beaten," answered Stephen with tears in his eyes. "But my God was scourged and crucified for me."

"Nonsense! about a God who hung on a cross," cried the queen scornfully. "I will not only flog you, but will crucify you also like your God."

"Scourge me, crucify me if you will, but do not blaspheme the dear Savior, who died on the Cross for you as well as for me!" replied the boy as he sprang, in holy enthusiasm, from the floor where he was kneeling. With flashing eyes and hands uplifted, he

cried out: "I know you hate Him and His servants. But take care! He will one day come in the clouds down from Heaven with His holy Cross, in great power and majesty and condemn all His enemies to eternal death in the everlasting flames of hell!"

The queen turned pale, her features became distorted and deadly wrath shot forth from her eyes. She clapped her hands and cried: "Help! Sima, Oza and all of you! See," said she to her attendants who rushed into the room in a great fright, "see! It has gone so far as this with these Christians that a boy, not only refuses to obey the Queen of Bungo, but stands in front of her and threatens her with the flames of hell! You see how he dares to stand before his queen. Ah, I really believe he would like to kill me. Quick, Sima, call my eldest son, Joscimon to me and send Ratiku with his men into the ante-room."

The pages and several other servants came into the room on hearing the noise. At a signal from the queen, they seized the boy and tied his hands together. A few minutes later Prince Joscimon rushed in quite out of breath. The young man had very slight

intellectual gifts, as his silly look immediately betrayed. Besides his bad passions had weakened his will and left their mark unmistakably imprinted on his pale features.. “What is this?” cried he. “Mutiny? Mother, has your life been attempted? Who is it? Ah! this insolent fellow, who showed such disrespect to me, the other day when I, in honor of Inari, had drunk somewhat too freely of the sacred rice-brandy.”

“Joscimon, avenge your mother! He has refused to obey me, threatened me with death and blasphemed our gods,” cried the queen in a voice trembling with passion.

The poor page stood in the midst of the courtiers, between the queen and her son, like a lamb in the power of wolves. In vain he tried to raise his fettered hands to implore mercy, in vain his tearful eyes looked for pity, and when he wanted to defend himself, the brutal Joscimon struck him in the face with his fist, so that blood flowed from his mouth and nose. “What!” shrieked the prince, “you would make my mother a liar would you? Where is Ratiku? where are his bamboo rods? Here, make way! Here, before the eyes of the queen,

the fellow shall have his first reckoning. Ah, ah, he shall receive his first instalment!"

The executioner came forward and laid the page on his face flat to the ground. Then he and his men took their bamboo rods in their hands and looked to Joscimon for the sign to begin the fearful punishment.

"One moment," said the queen. "Boy, that you may know how good I am, I will remit your punishment provided you immediately deny the foreign faith and offer sacrifice to our gods."

"I would rather die," said Stephen.

"But you will at least obey my commands and fetch me the holy fox?"

"I dare not!"

"Strike!" cried both Joscimon and the queen. Instantly the bamboo rods fell upon the boy's back. Blow after blow whizzed through the air; a slight groan was the only answer. The boy writhed with pain, but he prayed for strength and steadfastness. He thought of his patron saint Stephen; then came from his heart and lips a sweet petition for his tormentors. 'Lord, forgive them; they know not what

they do!' Involuntarily the executioners stopped and looked at the queen.

"Will you fetch the Inari's fox now?" said she. But the boy only shook his head and went on praying. Then the bamboo rods whizzed through the air again and did not cease their cruel work till the prayers and moans of the little martyr all at once ceased.

"You are beating him to death," one of the court officials ventured at last to say. "Oh, no, he is only pretending," answered the brutal Joscimon. "But that will do for to-day; to-morrow when he is stronger again he shall die on the cross. Shut him up in the meantime in the soldiers' prison and take care he does not escape. There ought to have been an example made of one or two Christians a long time ago, either by crucifying them or roasting them over a slow fire, for they are rascals and traitors to the kingdom. My father is too good with this rabble, but, mother, we two will root them out! To prison with him!"



VII.

The Hunt.

Whilst Stephen lay senseless on a bundle of rice straw in the dark prison, Sikatora followed the royal hunting party full of life and spirits through wood and over hill. The day had begun with gay falconry. Even at the present time this way of hunting, similar to what we practised in the middle ages, is yet in use and much appreciated in Japan; but it was still more so in the sixteenth century when falconry formed a part of the education of princes and nobles: there is even at the present time a work in the Japanese language about falcon-breeding which contains no less than seventytwo volumes.

The hunting party rode first to a little lake the banks of which were surrounded by high reeds were numberless dwellers of the morass and water-fowl disported themselves. King Siwan, his guest Sikatondono, Sikatora and the principal gentlemen of the court drew rein at the edge of a little wood.

Between that and the reed-edge of the lake spread out a broad flat meadow where the hunt was to take place as soon as the drivers came over from the other bank in boats and scared the birds.

“Hold yourselves ready,” said the king. “When the boats disturb the outside reed-edge the signal will be given.”

The gentlemen took their falcons from the hands of their attendants, perching them on their left wrists. The birds pecked at the leathern gloves of their captors impatiently, and shook their heads which were covered with elegant little hoods. Sikatora's falcon was a particularly handsome and proud-looking bird: he ill-humoredly bristled up his reddish-brown black-bordered feathers. “Ah, Buz,” said the prince, stroking the feathers on his neck, “do you hear that cackling and cooing, whistling and calling in the reeds? That is a bittern and no prey for you! You must choose a royal bird. There are the wild ducks quacking—let them fly! But there—is not that an Ibis? Mark well the fellow with the red head and white tuft, and the long, arched, violet beak!”

Now a pair of wild ducks flew out and passed with out-stretched neck over the field and through the wood to a broader and higher swamp. A shrill whistle sounded immediately after from the lake. "The drivers are on the spot," said the king. "Now, Sikatora, let me have a proof of your skill." With these words he blew a little silver horn and the sound had not yet ceased when loud shouts came from the lake and at the same time the attendants pressed forward to the banks from right to left, letting the dogs loose in the bushes and making a fearful noise. A whole flock of birds rose screeching in the air. Undecided, they wavered in their flight over the reed bed; it seemed as if they wanted to fly over the heads of the drivers away across the lake; but the boatmen raised a loud cry and struck the water with their oars so that the birds were frightened and whirled round and took the same course over the fields and woods which the wild ducks had just taken. When the principal part of them were fluttering about in the middle of the field, the king gave a second signal and the riders rushed out from the wood where they

had been hidden. The birds had no sooner seen the new enemy than they wanted to go back again, but the yelping of the dogs and the shouting and beating of the drivers in the reeds, had the effect that they fluttered about undecided where to go. The confusion became still greater when a few of the hunters chanced to let their falcons up. When the bird on Sikatora's wrist heard the clear battle cry of his companions, he was scarcely to be held back; he beat his wings and shook his head so that the little bell in his cap rang loudly. "Be still, Buz," said Sikatora. "There is no booty yet which is worthy of you. — A couple of spoonbills and bitterns that your brothers are quarreling over, *that* you can get at any time. But look there! What is that going up out of the reed bed with slow, wide stretching wings flapping? The fellow sees you, Buz; see, how his white feathers glisten."

So saying he unhooked the falcon's little chain, took his cap off and threw him with a powerful swing into the air. For a moment the falcon soared gently, then his sparkling eyes fastened upon the ibis, who tried to

escape him by curving round and beating his wings rapidly. The falcon rose instantly; the ibis saw the enemy and rose also, and then they tried to out-do each other in turning their wings. But the falcon soon overtook and with a loud cry threw himself upon his prey. The ibis stretched out his long neck towards the enemy and tried to attack him with his sharp beak. One moment the two birds whirled round in the air; then the ibis turned over and fell down with his head all covered with blood. But before he reached the ground Sikatora was on the spot and caught the beautiful bird in his hand, — a feat which is considered very clever in the falcon hunter.

“Bravo!” cried the king. “You do Sikatondono, your teacher in the noble chase, honor. Just at the right moment you let your falcon fly and you have cleverly captured the booty. Look, there goes a pair of wild geese. Now show whether you are as sure with your arrow!”

“They are swan-geese,” said Sikatora, “properly speaking, only the Mikado should shoot them.”

“The Shôgun does it also,” cried Siwan.

“And what the Shôgun of Nippon does, that also may the King of Bungo permit himself in his kingdom.”

“So, in your name then,” said the prince and drew two arrows out of his quiver. He took one between his lips and laid the other on the ground. With a strong jerk he drew the cord and took aim. The bow sounded and sent the arrow into the breast of the male bird, so that it turned over and with out-spread wings fell to the earth. But even before it reached the ground, Sikatora took aim a second time and the female bird also fell, shot through the neck.

Loud applause from the hunting party followed this two-fold clever shot. The prince sprang from his horse, picked up the two heavy birds and brought them to the king together with the very uncommon bird, the ibis. “Prince,” said he, “permit your grateful servant to offer you these fruits of his success! it is to be hoped there will come a day when I may aim my arrows at your enemies instead of at defenceless birds. May they be equally successful then!”

Siwan was as agreeably surprised by the Prince's singular adroitness as by the grace-

ful way in which he brought his booty to him. He could not forbear contrasting the rough manners and the mean attainments of his first-born with the truly princely character of Sikatora, and a resolution, which he had often pondered over of late, came to a decision in his mind. But, at the moment, he only said: "I thank you. You shall ask of me, one of these days, some special favor, and this trophy shall be registered among the memorable events of the royal chase."

The hunt went on and afforded Sikatora more than one opportunity of proving his skill in horsemanship and archery. Thus he succeeded, shooting at full gallop, in killing with his arrow a grey fox which the shots of all his companions had failed to hit.

In the evening the company halted in a lovely valley where the king's portable hunting pavilion was pitched on the borders of a clear brook. At the repast, which Siwan, surrounded by the highest gentlemen of his court, partook of, he especially distinguished Sikatora. Then, in the course of conversation, he turned towards Yosihao, his chancellor — a kind man well skilled in

the Japanese laws — and asked him if the case had ever been known that a Japanese prince had given his kingdom to a stranger, to the exclusion of his next of kin. The courtiers listened eagerly whilst Yosihao replied that there were many such cases on record, and quoted a whole list of them. At length he added, that such a transfer was nevertheless only allowable when the heir, through moral or bodily defects was unfit to govern, but that it might then be even a sacred duty for the king to do so, as he ought to have the good of his people in view before all else.

After the repast the king dismissed all the company except Sikatondono and Sikatora. With these princes he seated himself in the pavilion under the shade of a gigantic plane, which spread its branches over the brook. “Brother,” he began, turning towards his royal guest, “your son Sikatora has given me great pleasure to-day. I wish now to lay before you a plan which has occupied my mind for some time past. Sikatora must not answer me now, but only listen and think the matter over in his own mind. It is my intention that my kingdom

shall devolve, not on Joscimon who is unworthy of it, nor on my second son who has become a Christian, but on Sikatora. The kingdom of Tosa shall also be his, and, as your own inheritance will likewise fall to him, he will be the most powerful prince of this glorious insular kingdom and hold the fate of Japan in his hands. There is only one condition you will have to agree to," said he, turning towards the prince, "which political prudence demands of you. You must not become a Christian at present."

"Fall down, my son, and thank the king for this overwhelming proof of his favor," exclaimed Sikatondono. — "He will never dare to be a Christian, never, never. — I would rather see him dead at my feet than kneeling before a crucifix!"

Sikatora knelt and kissed the hand of the king; but no word passed his lips. Later in the evening Siwan sent for him and said: "Understand me well! I did not say you must *never* be a Christian, but only that you must not become one *yet*. Probably later on when you once have the power in your own hands and possess the love of your subjects; *but not now*. It would be

the same with you as with my brother-in-law of Tosa who, certainly recovered his kingdom by the help of my troops, but, as soon as he practised the Christian religion, was robbed of it again by the Bonzes. I know you have thought of leaving the Japanese gods and I do not ask you to believe in them; I know the little book which you were reading a short time ago, and I grant that what it contains is more sensible than the teaching of our Bonzes; but state-policy to whose counsels a wise prince always listens, demands absolutely that you go no further *now*. You will therefore break off all communication with the blind man and also with the page Von Funai. — Go now to your tent and rest yourself. Look what a lovely sunset it is! What a glorious, what a rich country this is which the sun is now gilding with its setting rays! Look at the mountains and hills, the vast plain, the glistening bay — all that shall one day be yours! — Only be prudent! Good night, my son! You shall not give me your answer yet.”

Deeply moved, the youth went to his tent. How was it, that a paragraph in the blind man's little book, would not go out of his

mind the whole night? The words were: 'All these will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me.' But the temptation was too strong. "He only demands of me not to take the step now," said the youth to himself, and he resolved to agree to the condition, as towards morning he fell into a disturbed sleep. He dreamed he was hunting. The game he was following, at full gallop, over hill and dale, was a wonderful creature, half fox, half eagle. And when at length he got near it, it disappeared, and the page Stephen stood before him with the silken hat of the Shôgun in one hand, and a crown of thorns in the other. "Choose!" said the page to him. Laughing, he stretched out his hand to seize the Shôgun's hat, but, to his horror, got it entangled in the crown of thorns, and—woke. The dream was so vivid that he fancied he felt the pain still in his hand.



VIII.

Prince Sebastian.

When Stephen came to himself again after the cruel scourging, he was lying on a hard straw bed in the prison. It was some time before he could recall his thoughts. All was dark around him; he groped about and felt the rice straw and the wall, but when he tried to get up, he struck his head against the ceiling of the low and narrow dungeon. Every limb ached; but he was more especially tormented with a horrible thirst. At length he remembered what had happened the day before — the queen's order, his refusal, her anger and the cruel blows. He also had a vague idea that Josimon had sentenced him to death, but he could not clearly remember anything more. A sweet joy filled his heart; he thanked God that He had found him worthy to suffer for His name and prayed for strength to bear the last struggle.

His thirst at length compelled him to try to find out whether there was not a jug of

water placed somewhere for him and he succeeded in finding one. He had just raised it to his lips when the thought occurred to him whether it might be possible for the missionary to bring him Holy Communion before his death, and he put the jug down again. Then he listened and it seemed to him as if he heard footsteps outside and he called out. After a time the door was opened.

The gaoler, an old man, entered and through the half open door there came in sufficient daylight for him to see the prisoner if necessary. "Oh, oh," he began, "is the bird fledged again? Yes, yes, that's what becomes of the plovers when they are too bold! Whatever possessed you to defy Josimon and the queen? I advise you to beg for forgiveness at once when the prince comes, then perhaps he will remit your sentence. Or shall I bring you a sharp dagger that you may take your own life. As you are the son of a nobleman that would be more fitting for you than to die like a slave on a cross."

"Dear old Chusa, you don't know what you are saying. To take one's own life is a

crime, whereas to die on the cross is an honor for a Christian. But since I must die, will you promise to grant me a last favor? — Send your grandson to the foreign teachers and tell them: I beseech one of them to come to me and bring me the Bread of life.”

The gaoler at last consented to send a message to the missionary, but gave little hopes that Joscimon would let him enter the prison. He then placed a bowl of rice by the side of the boy's bed and locked the door again. Stephen waited hour after hour; but none of the priests came with the longed-for Bread of life.

Fr. Cabral had already on the previous day, as soon as the news of the event reached the Mission-house, assembled his brethren together and taken counsel with them as to what was to be done. It was the first case of open persecution in the kingdom of Bungo, and they resolved to make every effort to prevent the spark from breaking out into a conflagration which would mean ruin to the infant community. The missionaries therefore sent a swift messenger to prince Sebastian, who since his conversion

had withdrawn from the court and lived on an estate, which the king had made over to him, situated at about a day's distance from the palace. "I do not think King Siwan will break the promise which he gave to Francis Xavier, and allow the sentence of death to be accomplished," said Fr. Cabral. But I believe this Joscimon and his mother, who foster a really diabolical hatred against the Christians, to be capable of the very worst. It is to be hoped Prince Sebastian will succeed in keeping his unworthy brother in check till the king arrives. I will myself set out on the road by which the king is expected to return to-morrow, and remind him of his promise."

This plan was decided upon, and one of those couriers, who even up to the present day act as messengers with astounding celebrity in Japan, took a letter from Fr. Cabral to Prince Sebastian and by noon on the eighth day the prince, accompanied by only two attendants, arrived at the Mission-house. Almost at the same time, came from the castle the gaoler's grandson with Stephen's petition for Holy Communion to be brought to him. The boy also told them

that Joscimon had given orders for a cross to be erected on the sea-shore. "He has drunk a deal of holy Saki (rice brandy) and is in a furious temper," said the boy.

"You have not come a moment too soon then," said Fr. Cabral, turning to the prince. "It will be well for us to start at once for the palace. Through your intercession I shall be admitted into the prison, a favor for which I begged in vain yesterday evening. You will do your best to prevent the crime, and I will take Holy Communion with me for our brave Stephen."

Fr. Cabral went at once to the chapel and after a short prayer, opened the tabernacle and placed a sacred Host in the golden Pix which he secreted under his garment. Then the two men went towards the palace in perfect silence, adoring the invisible Godman which the priest was carrying under the species of bread. The sentinels at the first door were going to refuse admittance to the missionary, as they were expressly forbidden to let the foreign Bonzes in, but the prince took the responsibility upon himself, and so they went together up the broad

staircase and arrived without delay at the prison which was situated in a retired back court. Old Chusa ventured no protest when the prince asked for the prison door to be opened.

When they entered the dark room, they found the page very much exhausted. Half-fainting and his lips burning with fever, he had lain there for hours praying for the coming of the priest. The first word which he stammered out in a hoarse voice was: "O Father, have you brought me the Bread of Heaven?" and when the missionary answered in the affirmative, the boy lifted his poor wounded limbs with great effort from the bundle of straw, and threw himself down at the feet of the priest in adoration before the Savior whom he bore. "I am still fasting," said he. "I would not drink a drop of water so that I might be able to receive my Savior. Now I am willing to die."

At a signal from the priest, the prince drew back and Stephen made his confession. That was soon done. Then he received Holy Communion with great devotion. Prince Sebastian, who was deeply moved,

knelt down by the straw bed and said the Confiteor. After the solemn act, the two remained a short time longer with Stephen, who, filled with Heavenly consolation, offered his life a sacrifice to God. Tears of emotion flowed down the cheeks of the two men. Then Fr. Cabral remarked that it was time to go. Both asked the prayers of the boy, if the sacrifice which he had just offered to the Lord should be accepted. "I will pray for all," said he, — "for the king and the noble Sikatora, and even for Joscimon and his mother, that God may have mercy on them. But you, pray also for me. Father, give me your blessing! If I am not put to death, remember the petition which I laid before you a short time ago."

"I receive you already into our company," said Fr. Cabral, deeply moved. They then left the prison. The missionary hurried off with one of his companions to meet the king. Prince Sebastian next tried to persuade old Chusa to get ready, in his own house, a more comfortable bed for the prisoner and to call in a doctor to dress his wounds. The gaoler shook his head and would not hear of it at first; he said: it was

unheard of in Japan that such consideration should be shown to a condemned criminal, and what good would the doctor's services be when Ratiku had already prepared the cross for the stubborn page, who had been so obstinate with the queen? At last Chusa allowed himself to be won over by the persuasion of a gold piece and the promise that Prince Sebastian would take upon himself all responsibility with regard to Prince Joscimon, and he agreed to provide the page with, at least, a more airy prison, a softer couch, and better food. Then the prince had the executioner, Ratiku, summoned by Chusa's grandson. He came, after some hesitation; his surly countenance however gave reason to fear that he would be very unlikely to fall in with Sebastian's desires. He answered the question as to whether he had Joscimon's orders to put the boy to death, in the affirmative. "The cross is erected," said he sullenly, "and when the sun reaches the hills, the stubborn fellow must die."

"No, he must not die, at all events, not before my father, who is expected to return

from the hunt to-day, has arrived and ratified my brother's sentence."

Ratiku elevated his eye-brows and said: "Prince, your elder brother has given orders for this execution."

"But the sentence is most unjust, and Joscimon agreed to it when he was intoxicated!"

"Ratiku has nothing to do with that. He does what he is ordered. Since when in Japan, has a servant the right to judge his master? Besides the boy has blasphemed our gods and threatened the queen with death."

"Did he threaten her with death?"

"Yes, prince, and even with *eternal death*, and so it is only right and proper that he should die on the cross. I have put many a one far more innocent than he to death, and I was perfectly justified in doing so."

Prince Sebastian saw that he could not succeed with him by entreaties, so he offered him money to, at least, find means of putting off the execution of the sentence till the king came back. But the man, who hated the Christians, and had longed for some time past to exercise his horrible trade upon

them, was not to be persuaded. "The cross is erected," said he. "The spear which is to pierce the breast of the condemned criminal is sharpened; what more do you want? Speak to Joscimon. If Joscimon does not countermand the order the boy will die with the last rays of the setting sun!"

Sebastian resolved to seek his mother and brother, although he had little hope of bringing the drunkard to his senses. Ratiku cast an evil glance on the prince as he was leaving the prison and said: "Look out for yourself! If Joscimon ever comes to his father's throne your head won't be any firmer on your shoulders than any other Christian's. Ah, there'll be plenty of work then!"

With a heavy heart, Sebastian ascended the steps and entered the outer court of the royal palace. The officer of the body-guard met him with the words: "Prince, I advise you to leave the palace! Your brother is in such a furious temper that your life is not safe."

"My presence is only all the more necessary then. How long has the court of Bungo been a scene of such sanguinary caprice that

even a child of the house must flee? It is your duty to forcibly prevent my brother, who is not in a fit state to command, from carrying out his cruel intentions. I will take the whole responsibility upon myself. Can you rely on the body-guard?"

The officer shook his head and said: "I don't know. I fear not. The Bonzes have been here and demanded the life of the page in the name of Inaris."

"I must go to my mother then," said Prince Sebastian. Just then Joscimon, with a few of his drinking companions, came out of a side entrance which led to the queen's apartments. One glance at his brother's flushed countenance and dull watery eyes convinced Sebastian that it would be useless to waste words upon him. He was passing on; but the drunkard took him by the arm and shrieked out: "Oh, oh, little brother, are you here? Do you want to see how we crucify those Christian toads? Come on. I will tell that scamp of a Ratiku he shall not wait any longer, or my father will come in the end and spoil the sport."

"Joscimon, I come to ask you to wait till father returns. It may be bad for you if

you let a sentence of death be carried out in his absence.”

“What! threats! little brother, you also are one of those traitors! Take care least Inari, or Hatsiman or some other of our gods should demand your head. By the divine Dsin-mu, I should like to see you struck down this day!”

“I do not believe you are as bad as that, brother, let me go; I want to speak to mother.”

“Well, speak with mother as much as you please. I am going to look up Ratiku, and then the toad shall be crushed. Do you hear? Crushed, crushed!”



IX.

The Crisis.

Prince Sebastian was not graciously received. His mother hated him because he had left the Japanese religion for the Christian, and she hated him all the more bitterly because, before that happened, she had centred all those ambitious hopes on him, which she now looked to Sikatora to accomplish. She would not raise a finger to save the life of the page; it was Josci-mon's opportunity, for he was by law and custom the representative of the king in his absence. Besides, when had there ever before been in Japan such a commotion made about the life of a servant? At her father's court, very nearly every week one of them was hanged for lesser faults than this stiff-necked boy had committed, who had dishonored the gods and threatened his queen with death and hell. The Bonzes of Inari were quite right in demanding his death, which properly speaking, all those deserved who had denied the Japanese gods.

The queen cast a look of hatred on her son as she said these last words; she then rose and left the room. The prince could still hear the rustling of her silken garment, and he considered whether he should hasten after her and throw himself at her feet and implore her by the love which she once bore him, not to make herself an accomplice in such a cruel deed, nor endanger her salvation any longer by a passionate conflict against the doctrine of Christ. But he felt the uselessness of such a step and said to himself: "I should enrage her the more and cause her to commit still greater sin. Poor mother! It is you, who are to be pitied, not the good Stephen, who has gained the crown of martyrdom."

Truly all hope seemed to be over. Already the sun was declining over the Asojama, and the shore was thronged with a crowd of people, eager to witness the cruel spectacle, the news of which had become widely spread. Not far from the spot where we met the blind Tobias in the commencement of our story, stood the cross, made of rough planks. Two ladders were placed against it, one for the executioner and one for the

victim; it being customary in Japan, for the condemned to mount the cross whilst it was erect; the victim standing on the first rung, was compelled to spread out his arms which were then firmly fastened with cords to the crossbeam. Other bands were slung round the legs and the perpendicular beams. The victim was obliged to remain in this painful position, in sight of all the people; two executioners with sharp, broad, iron spears pierced the condemned through the breast. Thus died the twentysix holy martyrs of Nagasaki, whose feast the Church keeps on the 5th of February, amongst them were three boys—and thus also our Stephen was to die.

They were just leading him down the broad palace steps, leaning on the arm of Ratiku, for his bruised limbs could scarcely bear him. Joscimon also, who was in the midst of the armed troop which had conducted the condemned to the cross, staggered shamefully and was himself obliged to be supported; the saki had very nearly deprived him, not only of his senses, but also of the use of his limbs.

A great commotion arose in the crowd

when the boy became visible between the armed men. The Bonzes and their followers of fanatical worshippers of the gods, wanted to overwhelm him with opprobrious words, but the beginning found no hearty response. When the people saw the pale and yet joyful countenance of the boy, they were seized with astonishment and compassion; they had never before seen such a beautiful expression on the features of a condemned criminal on his way to the cross. Amongst the spectators there was also a group of Christians who pressed forward and called out to the boy words of farewell and encouragement, and when he asked for their prayers, they also begged his intercession at the throne of Grace. Many tears of deep emotion were shed, and that amazed silence, with which later on the heathens of Japan witnessed so many burnt-offerings of Christian martyrs, spread more and more widely amongst the crowd of spectators. In vain the Bonzes tried to incite the people to invectives; their voices found no response and died off gradually. A still more unfavorable impression was made by the words of the intoxicated Joscimon who, with stam-

mering speech, abused the page and blasphemed the God of the Christians.

“Ah, ah,” cried he, “a pretty god who allows himself to be crucified! We will crucify his adorers also. All of them — do you hear? There are a couple of thousands of them in the kingdom — and they shall all come to it — as soon as my father is dead — all, all! Ratiku, you must get a hundred helpmates and instruct them well in the art of crucifying; for, from here as far as Funai, crosses shall be erected side by side, and we will never cease crucifying and flaying and roasting till not a single Christian is left in the land. What sport it will be! And my brother, whom I see coming along behind, shall come to it too! Come along, brother, you shall see with your own eyes how you will be served one of these days. Only your cross must be three or four feet higher as becomes a prince of Bungo.”

Prince Sebastian had hastened away from the queen's apartments to the place of execution and reached the procession precisely as it ascended the little eminence on which the cross was erected. The group with the prisoner and the two, so thoroughly opposite

brothers, now became visible to the eyes of the multitude; everybody looked with intense interest on the latter to see and hear what would happen. Prince Sebastian did not take any notice of his drunken brother's abuse, but hastened to the side of the page, embraced him in sight of the whole multitude of by-standers and exclaimed: "I would far rather die with this noble youth than participate in your shame, wretched brother. What are you waiting for? Come forward, bind me also, crucify me with him. Publicly and solemnly I declare before you Bonzes, before the vassals and warriors of my father, and before all present, that I am guilty of the same deed as this boy. Like him, I adore Christ who, for the salvation of the world, died on the Cross, and I am ready likewise to die on the cross. Like him, I despise the false gods whose cheating inventors are here present."

A cry of rage from the Bonzes interrupted the words of Sebastian; they tried to rush through the ranks of armed men and throw themselves upon the hated Christian prince, but were prevented. At the same time Joscimon snatched a pike out of the hand

of a soldier and aimed, with unsteady hand a blow at the breast of his brother; the latter sprang involuntarily aside and the weapon struck the executioner, who was standing holding the page, so heavily that he fell down with a loud scream. The people thought Joscimon had killed his brother and pressed forward with loud cries of woe. A scene of the greatest confusion ensued, the consequences of which none could foresee; when, all at once, there arose a cry: "The king! make way, stand back, the king is coming!"

Every one looked round, the noise ceased, the roaring multitude divided and stood in the customary respectful attitude, bowing down to the dust. The princes reached the hill on which the cross was, and when the scene just described took place. Immediately behind Siwan, rode Sikatora and the chancellor Yosihao; the rest of the courtiers followed.

The missionary had met the royal party in a village, fully nine miles off, where they halted to take refreshment. Through Sikatora, he obtained admittance to the king, threw himself at the feet of Siwan and

reminded him of his promise to Francis Xavier, by virtue of which he had made it his duty to protect the Christians in his kingdom. Then he told him in touching words, how true the page had kept to his God and his creed, and of the cruelty of which he was now the victim. Siwan heard with indignation, and Sikatora with astonishment, the information which the missionary brought.

“What occasion had the boy to excite the queen’s anger by his obstinacy?” said the king. “But all the Christians are like that; political prudence is unknown amongst them. But, however, we will do what we can. Sikatora, let the horses be saddled immediately. Before sunset we will be in Usuki and save the boy out of Joscimon’s hands. You look very serious,” said he to Sikatora, when the horses were brought forward. “You seem even to admire this page.” The prince answered: “I marvel at and admire above all things, the manly courage which this religion enables a boy, a child even, to manifest. I knew this page casually and looked upon him as a meek, gentle creature who would tremble at

a harsh word, and whom I should have thought incapable of standing out before such a severe punishment — death on the cross. Rest assured then, Sire, it is not obstinacy, but a sense of duty which impels the page Von Funai to act thus.”

King Siwan made no reply; they mounted their horses and, going off at a sharp gallop, soon reached Usuki. Sikatondono had remained behind, when he heard that it was only a question of the life of a slave, he was in no hurry to depart. As they rounded the castle hill, they perceived the crowd, and over the people's heads they saw the cross and the group which had formed round it. It was at the precise moment when Prince Sebastian stopped the procession and was abused by his brother. All eyes were fixed on the two princes. Thus it happened that the king and his suite were able to be unobserved spectators of the scene which we have just described. It was not until Joscimon made the thrust with the pike, and the people, thinking the drunkard was murdering his brother, pressed forward screaming, that the attendants of the king

called out: "The king! make way, the king is coming!"

When the king arrived at the foot of the hill, he dismounted and threw the reins to one of his soldiers. Joscimon was terribly frightened when he saw his father's features; for, in spite of his intoxication, he remarked the anger which flamed forth from the king's eyes. He was going forward to meet his father, but the latter signed to him to remain where he was. Then the king said in a loud voice that all the people could hear:

"I heard the words which you have just spoken, in which you threatened my Christian subjects, ah, even your brother himself, with death on the cross, as soon as you are King of Bungo; and, although those words were spoken in a state of intoxication, still, none the less they reveal to me your wicked thoughts. I thank the gods for having clearly made known to me by this occasion what I have, for a long time past, suspected: which is that you are utterly unworthy of the crown! I therefore solemnly disinherit you; for I will not leave my beloved subjects at the mercy of a drunkard and a cowardly tyrant. The remainder of the punishment

which your behavior deserves, I will pronounce later on. Captain of the guard, Joscimon is your prisoner till further orders!"

The king then turned towards his second son and said: "The magnanimity you have just shown has filled my heart with joy and pride. You would be worthy to wear the crown and I believe would make my people happy. Only, on the day when you adopted the foreign religion, you solemnly renounced all prospect of reigning, and it would not be prudent to place a Christian at the head of a nation where the greatest part of the inhabitants sacrifice to the gods. But if you will return to our native gods, I will even now —"

"Not a word more, father," said Prince Sebastian. "You yourself would cease to respect me if I, for the sake of an earthly crown, were to sacrifice my convictions."

"There remains then nothing for me, but to seek a worthy heir to the throne amongst my relations," said the king firmly. "And, I believe he is already found. The noble Sikatora, the nephew of my wife is from this time forth my adopted son and heir."

Tumultuous applause made known to Siwan how welcome his choice was both to the court and people. But Sikatora was quite embarrassed, he saw before him the prince who, for the sake of an eternal crown, had just nobly refused the earthly one which was now offered to him; he saw the page who was ready to sacrifice his life cheerfully for the sake of an eternal life, and an interior voice said to him, 'the religion which gives the strength to make such sacrifices must be divine — *follow it therefore.*' The prince and the page suspecting the struggle which he was going through, both prayed for him; their prayers turned the scales of grace in his favor and he resolved to obey the voice from Heaven. "Instead of the Shôgun's hat, the crown of thorns," said he to himself, and going forward, he knelt down and kissed the hand of the king and would have explained publicly that he also was a Christian. But Siwan did not allow him time to speak.

"Later on," said he, "I have no time now to hear your thanks and your scruples. The page stands there bound. Loosen his bonds! Whatever obstinacy he may have been

guilty of, he has sufficiently expiated. You are free and may still be reckoned amongst my pages.”

Stephen was set free. He looked up at the cross, which was just reddened by the last rays of the setting sun, and said with tears in his eyes: “I must thank you, O king, and yet you have scarcely done me a service. A few minutes more and my blood would have been shed for Christ, but my soul would have gone forth from the cross into eternal glory.”



X.

Two Festivals.

A month had passed since the events just related. The page Stephen had begged to be dismissed from the king's service, and had been at once taken by Fr. Cabral as one of his catechists. Later on, when he has quite recovered from the effects of his cruel flagellation, he will be received into the novitiate of the Society of Jesus. Joscimon was banished by his father to a distant country-seat where he was treated as a prisoner, but consoled himself by indulging in still greater libations of saki. Prince Sebastian had again quitted his father's court, so Sikatora was the only prince in the royal palace of Usuki and was, as the acknowledged heir to the throne, overwhelmed with adulation from all sides. In vain had he, on the morning after that eventful day, informed the king of his firm resolution of becoming a Christian. Siwan only laughed and said: he could understand that sentiment after the scene of yesterday;

a youthful heart was so easily moved, and the outlandish fanaticism had something infectious about it. Sikatora was too agitated to fix on a decision of such far-reaching importance, and the opportunity of speaking did not occur to him again for twelve months. With such and similar words, the king put the prince off and took care that the enthusiast should find no time to indulge in his dreams.

Widely different was the way in which Sikatondono took the explanation of his adopted son. An extremely violent scene ensued, he even threatened the prince with death or perpetual imprisonment if he dared to take such a step and by so doing sacrifice his whole future. At the same time, he sent a messenger to Fr. Cabral to inform him, if he ventured to instruct Sikatora, or receive him in the Christian faith, he might expect to feel his royal vengeance, which would fall, not only on him, but, on the whole Christian community.

The mediation of King Siwan was required to moderate the prince's outburst of fury. The king begged his guest to leave Sikatora to him. From the very decided character

of the prince, he hoped to achieve more by distracting employments than by direct opposition.

With this view, Siwan commissioned his chancellor, Yosihao, to lead Sikatora into occasions of taking part in the affairs of state, and to make him conversant with the laws of his country. He was to take part in, and superintend the riding and shooting exercises of the warriors, and he was sent to Funai and the other principal towns so he might become acquainted with the Daimios, the officers of the crown, who represented the king in those places. And when he came back again to the Castle of Usuki, it was so contrived that either he went out hunting with the king, or the queen monopolized his time. In short, Siwan spared no pains to plunge the prince in a whirl of occupations and distractions, hoping to deter him by that means, rather than by threats, from the adoption of Christianity; for judging by the disposition of Sikatora, he rightly concluded that open opposition would only render him the more obdurate.

But the king's clever policy nevertheless did not have the desired effect. Enlightened

by grace, the prince had learnt under the cross destined for Stephen, the divinity of the Christian religion, and with the bravery which is inseparable from a noble heart, resolved at any price to become a Christian. He saw through Siwan's artifices and determined to waste no more words with the king, but to go calmly on in his own way.

The queen continued to have her nephew watched, and indeed, all the more narrowly that she could no longer reckon on Sikaton-dono's assistance, he having been called away to Buigen by urgent business. Sima was soon able to inform her that the prince had been to the foreign teacher's again and remained there still longer than before.

"He must have gone to see the page whom you ill-treated so cruelly," said her husband when she told him of this visit.

"No," answered the queen, "he is being instructed in the Christian faith and I would rather see him dead than he also should outrage our gods by his apostacy."

At these words, the king knitted his brows and said: "If the prince renders himself guilty of a false step, I reserve to myself his punishment. For every act of violence

which befalls him I shall hold you and your accomplices, whom I know, answerable. You will do well therefore to inform your two armed spies of what I have said."

The queen cast an evil glance on her husband, who withdrew after saying those words, and murmured: "Look to yourself, Siwan! If you take part in treason against our gods, you also may become a victim." The king called Yosihao, who was very much attached to Sikatora, and charged him to watch the prince closely and deter him from taking such a rash step.

The conversation took place on the eve of the Matsuri-feast. Meanwhile Sikatora was sitting with Stephen in the garden belonging to the Mission house and telling him that, at last, Fr. Cabral had consented to baptize him on the following morning whilst the Bonze festival would distract the attention of the court and people from him. Stephen, who had gradually recovered, rejoiced greatly at this good news. "Come to the chapel," said he. "We will go together and thank Our Blessed Lady who has obtained this grace for you. The blind Tobias, Prince Sebastian, little Francis, the

Fathers and myself have all prayed to her most fervently for you. What joy awaits you! You are now, notwithstanding your many noble gifts of nature, spiritually dead, but soon you will receive the supernatural life and be born again a child of God in the waters of baptism."

Sikatora stayed the night in the Mission house and prepared himself by prayer and meditation for the reception of the sacrament of baptism. The next morning Sima informed the queen that the prince had not returned all night from the foreign teachers' house, also that towards morning Prince Sebastian had gone there also. The chancellor had the same information to impart to the king. "We will talk about it after the festival," said the king impatiently. But the queen found time to send word to the two spies not to lose sight of the Mission house; she also sent off a few lines quickly to the chief of the Bonzes.

Meanwhile the fifes and deafening tam-tams proclaimed that the festival procession of Matsuri was setting out from the Bonze cloister. The Matsuri is half a feast of the gods and half the people's feast; the most

prominent part consists in a gigantic procession. The Bonzes preceded these processions riding in richly decorated chariots whereon were painted scenes from their heathen mythology and the fabulous history of Japan. Amongst all the different exhibitions, that of the Dsin-mu, the first progenitor of Japan which takes place every year, is by far the most renowned for its splendor. The streets were thronged with an eager crowd of spectators, so that the procession could only pass slowly along. First of all, came the indispensable Tenga, the messenger of the gods, arrayed in rich, gay-colored silken garments, wearing as herald of the heavenly powers, a pair of great wings glistening in all the colors of the rainbow. A scarlet mask with a huge nose completed this grotesque figure. With cunning winks and all sorts of comical gestures, he excited the hilarity of the spectators; but his intention in doing so was to drive away the evil spirits. Behind him followed musicians, banner-bearers and men carrying lamps representing every possible dragon and monstrosity next came a line of chariots, on which were painted, Japanese

heroes, Bonzes, hermits, and gods and goddesses. A procession of buffalos led by a troop of peasants brought wagons with agricultural implements and field fruits. Inari sat enthroned amongst his foxes. Gigantic caricatures were borne on the shoulders of from ten to twenty mask-wearers. A white elephant as high as a house, made of pasteboard, staggered along in the procession; in each of its enormous feet were hidden three men who carried the edifice along. Lastly, came the chariot of the divine Dsin-mu, the progenitor of the Mikado. Clad in shining armor and with glittering sword, he sat in the midst of his armed heroes whose helmet-masks were adorned with enormous mustachions made of horse hair. — Amongst all these chariots and groups, surged a mass of dancers, jugglers and Bonzes, springing, shrieking and skipping, and the whole people took a lively interest in these wild extravagances which had nothing whatever in common with the solemnity and dignity of a Catholic procession.

In the square before the great flight of steps which led up to the king's palace, the

procession halted, and the Dsin-mu's chariot took its place in the centre whilst the rest of the chariots were grouped round it in a half circle. The king, the queen and the members of the royal household seated on a raised platform, looked down at the dancing of the Bonzes, the clever tricks of the jugglers and the wrestling of the athletes. Lastly, he who represented the Dsin-mu clanked his weapons as a sign that he wished to make a speech to the king and people. After the Bonze had as usual related his history and spoken of the greatness of Japan, he raised his voice and began in the tone of a prophet to speak of the great evil, which stood before his people because his successor, the Mikado, was disgracefully betrayed, and Japan opened more and more to the foreigners, those deadly enemies of the gods. "Even now, at this moment," cried he, in a voice of thunder and waving his sword threateningly in the direction of the Missioner's house, "a son of my race on whom the gods had set great hopes, is about to commit a shameful treason. Woe to him! Woe to those who uphold him!"

Siwan cast an angry glance at his wife

and colored. Still he had sufficient control over himself to answer the Bonze's speech, which was intended to stir the people up to some violent act, by a joke and invite his "Dear ancestor," who appeared to be in rather a bad temper to-day, to partake of a lunch and some good wine. Then he withdrew quickly and gave the captain of the guard some orders in a low tone, on which the latter went off with a troop of armed men to the Missioner's house.

Whilst the Matsuri procession was going noisily through the streets and the Dsin-mu was making his threatening speech, quite a different scene was taking place in the chapel of the Mission house—it was the baptism of Sikatora. The little chapel was very prettily ornamented with flowers and green foliage; candles burnt before the statue of the Blessed Virgin and on the high altar; joy and consolation shone on every countenance. The prince came forth clad in white baptismal garments accompanied by his sponsors, Prince Sebastian and the page Stephen and, surrounded by the priests, went to the chapel. He prayed for faith; he renounced Satan, his pomps and all his works; he

received the sign of the cross; he was anointed with the holy oil of the catechumens, and, after he had solemnly made his act of faith, he was led to the font. Tears of emotion stood in the eyes of all when the waters of baptism were poured over the head of the prince and he rose up, born again of water and of the Holy Ghost, a child of God, an heir to the kingdom of Heaven. Fr. Cabral then went to the altar to offer up the Holy Sacrifice in thanksgiving.

Just as he was finishing the holy Mass, the sound of the clanking of arms reached his ears. Violent blows struck on the door imperiously demanded admittance. A few minutes later the captain stood in the chapel, the outer door of which was in the possession of armed men.

“Prince,” said he, “it is reported that you are on the point of renouncing the religion of our gods. The king therefore commands you to come at once to the palace and solemnly deny the report, because, otherwise an insurrection is imminent.”

“I *am* a Christian, thank God,” replied the newly-baptized prince calmly and firmly.

“So much the worse,” said the captain;

“for I am obliged then to arrest you in the king's name.”

The prince cast a loving look on the cross and on the statue of the Blessed Virgin and said, “Do your duty!—But you my brothers, pray for me!”



XI.

Trials.

It was not till night had come on and the streets had become somewhat clear of the bustle of the festival, that the captain led his prisoner back to the palace. The news that the prince had become a Christian soon spread, and the mob, incited by the Bonzes, would have stormed the Mission house and taken vengeance on the missionaries if they had not been hindered in their designs by the armed men whose number the king increased in the course of the day. Even then a division of pike-bearers had to watch the house, and the prince, on his way to the palace, had to hear many abusive and threatening speeches.

On arriving at the palace the prince was forthwith led to the king. "Set him free," said the latter, "and leave him alone with me!" Then he turned towards Sikatora, and said: "You have caused me much trouble to-day. Your thoughtless act very nearly led to an insurrection and now it is

impossible to tell what may be the consequences of it. You know how powerful the party for the Bonzes is, and how easily the people are excited by this Matsuri and the games and the quantity of Saki they drink, to deeds of bloodshed and open insurrection! And I cannot even rely on my courtiers and soldiers. Since I allowed my second son to become a Christian—it was a great mistake on my part—the queen has secretly become one of a party powerful enough to make me tremble for my throne and even for my life as soon as I do anything in favor of the Christian religion. And now you come, you whom I have loved as a son, whom I have publicly announced to be the heir to the throne, and adopt the Christian religion without having said a word to me about it.”

“I did tell you,” replied the prince calmly, “but you would not listen to me.”

“Nonsense! Of course I would not listen, and that must be answer enough for you. Besides I had no idea you seriously thought of carrying out this resolution — at least not yet.”

“I am sorry to have caused you trouble, but I must obey the voice of conscience.”

“You must obey the voice of common sense, and this must tell you that such a step must, with one blow cut off all prospect of a brilliant future, of crown and kingdom, of victory and renown! You ought to obey the voice of gratitude and this must tell you that that step grieves your benefactors; ah, even injures them seriously! You ought to have listened to the voice of prudence and that would have told you that your audacity would plunge not only you, but the foreign teachers and all the Christians into the greatest danger. Had I not sent the guard, the insurgents would have pulled both house and chapel down over your heads; it was only by having you brought here fettered that I could save your life. If it really grieves you, as you say, show that it does by your actions. Go with me to-morrow to the Pagoda and offer Dsin-mu, the venerable founder of our kingdom, the usual sacrifice.”

“Solemnly renounce the devil and all his works to-day, and go before the idols and

offer sacrifice to-morrow—a thousand times rather die!” cried the prince indignantly.

“Dsin-mu is not a devil; he is a hero, whom even a Japanese Christian may honor as the founder of the royal house. But if you think you cannot offer sacrifice, you can at least be present at the sacrifice. I demand this much most imperatively; it is a question of crown and kingdom.”

“What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?”

“Blind fanatic!—It is not a question only of your own, but probably of my—your benefactor’s fate!”

“I cannot, I dare not! I have sworn to be true to Christ and will keep my faith to him to my last breath.”

“Ungrateful, obstinate fellow!—not a word more! If you despise my goodness, you shall experience my severity!” The king then called the captain and gave him orders to lead the prince away into close confinement.

The prison to which Prince Simon—Sikatora having taken this name in holy baptism—we will henceforth call him thus—

was taken, was, it is true, not that narrow, dark dungeon in which the page Stephen had lain; but still it looked wretched enough. There were none of those costly carpets and gaily embroidered silk tapestries to which his eyes were accustomed — instead of every luxury, there were bare walls and hard boards. In place of the delicacies from the royal kitchen, a dish of rice and a jug of water were placed before him. But his heart was full of consolation; he was now a Christian and he had victoriously passed through his first trial. He thanked God fervently for the grace of baptism, renewed his baptismal vows over and over again; prayed for strength and courage, and did not forget Siwan and his enemies in his prayers. He extinguished the little lamp, laid himself down on the hard deal boards and soon fell into a peaceful sleep. But the trials of his baptismal day were not yet ended.

He had not been asleep an hour when the prison door was opened violently and the queen came in accompanied by Sima, who put the lamp down and retired. The queen looked on the sleeper for a moment, then slightly touching him with the point of her

foot, said: "Sikatora, nephew, wake up and listen to the words of your aunt!"

The prince rousing himself with difficulty from his heavy sleep, looked up and saw the queen standing beside him. She overwhelmed him at first with soft speeches and promises; she pictured to him over again in glowing colors the brilliant future which she had planned for him and, on the other side, the sad fate that awaited him if he would not make good the false step into which the magic of the foreign teachers had ensnared him. Her eloquence made no impression on the prince, for against all her pictures of earthly glory, he held the one text: "What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul!" The queen seeing that all her flatteries, promises and persuasions were of no avail, changed the kindness which she had at first shown into gall and bitterness. Threats, abuse and curses streamed from her lips, and at last pale with rage, she called down the vengeance of all the gods upon her nephew. "Die then in this prison!" said she, as she went out, "you

have chosen it and you shall never leave it again alive!"

After a few days Simon had a similar scene to go through with Sikatondono, who, on hearing of the baptism of the prince, came to Usuki foaming with rage. Simon really feared at first that the madman was going to strangle him and offered the sacrifice of his life to God. But he did not allow himself to be frightened into apostasy. "Disown me! Make me a beggar! Kill me—but I shall remain a faithful Christian."—Sikatondono was obliged to retire baffled.

Weeks now passed without any one appearing to trouble themselves about the prince. The gaoler took him in rice and water every day. Through the narrow iron-barred window, only a faint glimmer of light entered the bare and comfortless room. A broad-leaved Kiri tree, only a few paces from the window, shut out every view. The prince could just manage to see a little piece of blue sky. His only distractions were a few birds, which from time to time hopped about in the branches of the tree and then fluttered away again, thus reminding him of the sweets of freedom which he

was now deprived of. Then came the long, dark nights and the, to him unaccustomed, feeling of loneliness. He hoped every day that Prince Sebastian would visit him or that Stephen, or some other Christian would find means somehow to send him a word of consolation from Fr. Cabral. But Siwan and Sikatondono had chosen their gaolers well; no one could get to the prisoner whom the strictest isolation was to render more amenable to the king's wishes.

At length, one day the chancellor appeared at the prison — the chancellor Yosihao whom the prince had always liked and esteemed, and who was also doubtless sincerely devoted to the noble youth. He had been trying for a long time to find some means by which, it might still be possible to bring back his beloved prince to the throne and, at last, he thought he had succeeded in finding it. He represented to the prince the sad fate to which his adoption of the Christian religion had reduced the Christians and, in particular, the missionaries before whom stood the immediate prospect of an outbreak of persecution. He had therefore been to see Fr. Cabral and

consulted with him as to how such a misfortune could be avoided. He asked the missionary whether it would not, in order to avert so great an evil, be allowable for the prince to deny his faith; but Fr. Cabral would not hear of that. However, in the end, he consented to the following arrangement: the prince was to remain true to the faith in his own heart and to declare on oath his resolution of openly acknowledging his faith as soon as he was his own master; but in the meantime he might, in order to prevent the ruin of the Christians in Bungo, keep his faith secret, and outwardly conform to the will of his father and of the king.

The prince was greatly surprised at the construction put upon what appeared to him to be so clear a duty; but it never occurred to him to doubt the word of the chancellor whom he had always looked upon as an upright man, and the less so since he brought him, as a proof that he came from Fr. Cabral, a rosary and also a well written explanation from the missionary which he could show to his father and to the king. It is not to be wondered at therefore that

the prince allowed himself to be deceived, and after some hesitation declared himself ready to address a letter to his father and the king in which he, in general terms, begged forgiveness and promised to obey them in all things in future.

The chancellor at once took this explanation to Sikatondono and the king and there was great rejoicing over it. Scarcely half an hour afterwards, the king and the prince came personally and fetched Simon out of prison. All the court assembled at a festival of rejoicing — a banquet in honor of the prince was given, singers and play-actors fêted the victory of the gods, and the king's palace was full of life and pleasure. But the prince could not find any real pleasure in the banquet. The rice in his prison had tasted better to him than all the delicacies of the royal table, and he could not find that sleep on the soft bed, which he had enjoyed on the hard boards of his prison. An interior voice told him he had done wrong. He read it in the eyes of the Christians whom he met, and he felt he must know the truth. The chancellor had, of course, foreseen that his deception must soon be found out;

but he thought the prince would be only too glad to have found some means of turning back and, at any rate, would not choose the solitary prison a second time. He was mistaken!

As soon as Simon began to have doubts he wrote a letter to Fr. Cabral asking him whether he had really commissioned the chancellor and if not, how he was to act in future; at the same time, expressing his willingness to do everything he might command him to do. Some time passed before an opportunity occurred to send this letter to the missionary and receive an answer. At last the answer came wherein Fr. Cabral told him he had been deceived, and that it was his duty to ask for his written declaration back, and make a public acknowledgment of his faith let the consequences be what they might. When he had read this letter, he knelt down and prayed fervently for strength and courage. Then he rose and went with a firm step to the great hall in which King Siwan, his father, the chancellor and a great number of retainers were assembled to hold a council in which he also was invited to take part. The king sat on

a raised seat in the centre; on his right was Sikatondono, on his left a place was reserved for Simon. Then followed on both sides in a half-circle according to their rank, *Daimios* all dressed in silken garments. The prince entered the half circle and bowed to the king, but instead of going to his place, he said: "Before I venture to take part in this august crown-council, I owe to you, O king, to you, my father, to the assembled council and to myself a solemn explanation. The document which released me from prison was the result of a deception. I now revoke it. I am a Christian and will live according to my faith, and if necessary die for it!" Like a thunder bolt falling from a clear sky was the effect of this speech on the assembly. All rose from their seats, Sikatondono in his sudden rage, drew his sword and would have precipitated himself upon the prince, who signing himself with the holy cross awaited his death-blow, had not King Siwan caught him by the arm and assisted by other gentlemen of the court prevented this murderous act. Then followed a stream of threats and curses but the prince remained firm. At a sign from the

king he was at length taken back to prison. Sikatondono was beside himself with rage. He sent some two-sword men to Fr. Cabral to threaten him and all the missionaries with death if they did not immediately order the prince to return to the gods of Japan. They were guilty of the loss of his son, on whom he had built such great hopes. The missionary did not allow himself to be frightened. He said to the messengers: "Inform the prince that we are only sorry we have but one life to sacrifice in so noble a cause."

Sikatondono sent the prince that very same day to Tangawa, the capital of his kingdom of Buigen, so as to keep him a prisoner there away from all intercourse with Christians, till he could succeed in conquering his obstinacy and, in the end induce him to apostatize from Christianity.



XII.

The Victory.

Two years had passed since Prince Simon was taken to Tangawa — a long time to a prisoner, especially to a young man who doubly feels the ardent desire for liberty. By his father's orders he was for some months in a real prison, but when he was told that the prince's health was visibly suffering, he ameliorated in some measure his close confinement. He was permitted, on giving his word of honor not to escape, to roam about somewhat more freely in a fenced-in park. In addition to this he was given to understand from his father that only a word from him was needed to say that he would conform himself to his father's wishes, and he would at once be re-called to the court of Usuki and re-instated in all his honors and expectations. But the prince did not speak that word, however unbearable his fate sometimes was.

Only once during the whole of this long time did he receive a comforting message

from Fr. Cabral and that was through the blind Tobias. The old man, led by little Francis, had wandered through a series of towns in the kingdom of Buigen, till at last he found traces of the prince. Simon succeeded in giving the boy, whom he recognized amongst a troop of beggars at the palace gate, a note which appointed a meeting in an out-of-the-way spot in the park. At the appointed hour, the meeting took place. Tobias delivered a letter to the prince from Fr. Cabral in which he encouraged him to stand steadfast. Then Tobias told him about the edifying example of Christian steadfastness given by Paul, King of Tosa. After he had, with the help of Siwan's troops, re-conquered his whole kingdom, the Bonzes insisted on his renouncing the Christian faith, otherwise they would incite the mob to renew the insurrection which had just been subdued with so much difficulty. The king utterly refused this demand and, in addition, seized a few of the chief Bonzes and ringleaders and made them safe prisoners. Then the well prepared insurrection broke out and, as the troops from Bungo forsook the king, he lost all as far

as the little town of Nungusima in the hills, which remained faithful to him, and where he was beleaguered by the revolutionists.

“Happy man! said Simon, “Oh that I were beside him! He can fight for his kingdom and his faith, whilst I am doomed to waste my days idly as a prisoner.”

“As God wills, my young friend. Each one has his own cross which the Lord has laid upon him, and blessed is he on whom He imposes the heaviest. For, in proportion to our participation in the cross will our portion of eternal glory be measured to us.”

They continued talking for some time longer and the aged Tobias succeeded in wonderfully strengthening and comforting the young man. Simon had not yet made his first communion, so they spoke of the possibility of one of the missionaries dispensing that sacrament of love to him in this same place in the park. But, as they were discussing the details more fully, little Francis gave the sign that they were being watched and so they were obliged to separate. The meeting had, in fact, been observed, and the consequence was, that the prince from that time forth was only allowed to

walk in the park accompanied by guards. So he had to forego the consolation of a second conversation with Tobias and also the far greater one of which they had spoken; and now day after day passed with the prisoner in unbearable monotony.

In the meantime, an event happened at the court of Usuki which caused a sudden change. King Siwan, who through trouble had become prematurely old, thought seriously, during the long sleepless nights which the gout caused him, of death and the terrors of eternity — on which he had once heard St. Francis Xavier preach — and became more and more inclined to adopt Christianity. He had clearly seen for more than 30 years that its doctrine was much more conformable to reason than that of the Japanese Bonzes. But from this view to the acceptance of the Christian faith there is an infinitely wide gulf, which grace alone can bridge over. Unfortunately Siwan, who led by earthly prudence had so long resisted God's grace, was not very qualified to draw down greater and richer graces. That they were nevertheless vouchsafed to him, he owed to the free grace of God,

and also probably to the intercession of St. Francis Xavier and the noble example of so many recent converts, viz, the King of Tosa, the page Stephen and, in particular, our Simon. He enquired repeatedly of Sika-tondono about the behavior of his adopted son, and when he learnt that he would rather spend his whole life in prison than deny Christ, he interceded for the recall of the prince, and made known to Fr. Cabral that he himself wished to be prepared to receive [holy baptism.

Like wild fire the news spread at court and throughout the country, everywhere causing joy amongst the Christians and amazement and fury among the heathens. Only a few days later, a second and a third report was circulated through the kingdom; the first was, that the Prince of Satsuma had attacked the province of Finnga with a large army — the second that, King Siwan had imprisoned his wife for high treason. Both reports were true, only the imprisonment of the queen was not entirely on account of her invitation to the Prince of Satsuma to make war upon her husband who was false to the gods, but was equally

on account of the sad state of her mind. She had in fact fallen into a real madness, indeed the annals of the missionaries do not hesitate to say that she was possessed.

Things were thus altered in Usuki when Sikatondono, in accordance with the king's wishes, released his foster-son from prison and sent him back to Siwan's court. It can easily be imagined with what joy the prince received the news of his freedom, which pleased him all the more since it was conveyed to him by no other than Prince Sebastian who informed him at the same time that his father, King Siwan, was preparing himself for holy baptism. They united together in praising the mercy of God. Then they hastened, at the head of a troop of soldiers belonging to the kingdom of Buigen, which Simon had, by his father's order assembled, in a hurried march to Usuki. King Siwan and his court rode out to meet the two princes and welcomed them.

"I thank God," said Simon to the king, "that the opportunity now offers for me to prove my gratitude and loyalty. Now you shall see that amongst all your subjects the

Christians are the firmest supporters of the throne.”

An army of 40,000 men had drawn around Usuki and was to go out against the enemy on the morrow. Sikatondono was appointed general-in-chief; Simon was to have command of a division of cavalry. The streets of Usuki, the places about the palace and the park, resounded with the noise of weapons. In spite of the excitement and ceaseless activity which is inevitable during the last preparations for war, the prince found time to prepare himself to receive his first communion, for which he had so long been hoping. A part of the night which he regularly spent in the chapel of the missionaries, was set apart for this preparation and the day before the setting out of the army, he received with deep emotion, the nourishment of the Bread of Angels. At the same time, Prince Sebastian, the former page Stephen, the blind Tobias and his guide, approached the table of the Lord. He prayed fervently for a long time after receiving and knelt also before the statue of the Blessed Virgin, and prayed that from her pure hands, God might deign to accept the

sacrifice of his life for the extension of His Church in Japan.

The next morning, the noise of the beating of tamtams and the shrill notes of the fifes prevailed in the streets. With a great clanging of arms, the army passed the gate of the city. King Siwan witnessed the march past of his troops from his couch, for a fresh attack of gout prevented him going into the field of battle with them. When Simon appeared at the head of his troop of horse-soldiers, he made a sign to him to come forward, held out his hand to him and said: "Good-bye, my son! Forgive me, for all the severity I have permitted against you; it was done out of love, but, certainly, I must admit, blind love for you. I wished so much to make you a great earthly king and hero. Now I understand better and know that I owe much to your example and sacrifices. When you return I shall be a Christian."

"God be praised for His grace!" replied the prince. "I do not think I shall return; an interior voice tells me that I am nearing my end. My last and only request is:

‘Hesitate no longer but receive holy baptism and be a protector to the Christians!’”

King Siwan promised to do so, and shook hands with the prince with deep emotion. The young man then galloped off to the head of his troop. Once again Siwan looked on the helmet with the sun shining on its golden cross, then the glittering spears and the clouds of dust whirled up by the horses' hoofs, shut out the picture of the youthful hero from his view.

Sikatondono's army marched into the province of Finnga which borders Bungo on the south, and drove out the troops of the enemy, the Prince of Satsuma. A succession of fortified places were taken almost without a blow being struck; in several skirmishes Simon gave proofs of his rare bravery and great military capacity, so that his foster-father, in spite of the grudge which he still bore against the (traitor to the gods) was obliged to acknowledge his noble qualities, and a sort of reconciliation seemed likely to take place between them. Already a near and fortunate issue to the campaign appeared to be assured when an oversight on the part of the field-marshal

destroyed all their hard-earned advantages and changed the note of victory at the court of Usuki into one of mourning.

Sikatondono besieged a fortified place on the frontiers of Satsuma, the last which still checked the advancing of his army into the midst of the enemy's country. He ought to have remembered that the enemy would risk everything to prevent the fall of this fortress; but his victories had made him blind and presumptuous. He divided his army and sent on half of it, under the command of an incapable general, to meet the enemy who was advancing towards the relief of the fortress, whilst he himself, neglecting the most necessary foresight, went on to besiege the fortress. Simon considered it his duty to draw the attention of his foster-father to the danger which was imminent. But his warning only excited Sikatondono's anger. He would know much more about the art of war than a mere boy; besides he had, through the Bonzes, the sure prophecy of Ha-tsi-man, (god of war,) that he should be victorious as soon as the Christian traitors had left his army. He desired him therefore, with

the other followers of the cross, to keep away from him and his camp till after the fall of the fortress.

In truth the prince was obliged to leave the camp, that same day with all the Christians — over 1000 men. Night came on, the field-marshal with his officers sat down to a banquet in which they fêted the fall of the fortress beforehand. But when towards daybreak, in a state of semi-intoxication, they were about to return to their tents, hasty messengers from Simon announced that the enemy was drawing near with overpowering numbers in battle array. The Prince of Satsuma had succeeded in surrounding the army which was sent to meet him, and, if Simon with his Christian soldiers had not kept watch close to the camp, he would have succeeded in falling upon them entirely unobserved. Simon now held out with his troops against the enemy at least till Sikatondono could order and place his men; then he was obliged to withdraw from the overwhelming numbers and take refuge on a neighboring hill.

With a loud war-cry, Satsuma's army now threw themselves upon the ranks of

Bungo; arrows flew, spears glistened, weapons crashed under the heavy blows. Sikatondono tried to repair by personal bravery the fault he had committed as leader, and boldly pressed forward at the head of a picked troop into the enemy's ranks. It is true, they were repulsed for a moment; but they soon regained courage and succeeded in cutting off the field-marshal and his troop from the rest of his army and surrounding them; he defended himself like a lion, but in vain—the enemy encircled him closer and closer, he was already bleeding from several wounds and certain death awaited him—then came help from a quarter whence he least expected it. Simon had followed the whole of the battle, from the height to which he had retreated. He saw that the overthrow of the army of Bungo was inevitable unless he could succeed in bringing forward the other half of the army in time, whose position at the rear of the enemy he was aware of. He sent therefore a few of his best cavalry to seek these troops and resolved if possible to rush into the battle jointly with them. But when he saw the extreme danger in which Sikatondono

stood, his noble heart overcame all other considerations. "Who will volunteer to follow me to save Sikatondono!" cried he.

"O prince, you have not so much to thank him for that you should sacrifice your life for him," said one of his Christian companions in arms.

"Did Our Savior think that when He went to die on the cross for us?" replied the prince. "Forward, all who will follow me! Jesus and Mary!" Saying these words he made the sign of the cross, put spurs to his horse and rushed into the thick of the battle. His whole troop followed him. "Jesus and Mary!" resounded through the din of arms. The rush of the little troop was so powerful that it divided the ranks of the enemy like a wedge of which Simon formed the point. Nearer and nearer, the prince beat his blood-stained way to his father. Already the latter saw the golden cross on his helmet and comprehended the heroic deed of his foster son, who repaid him for so much evil with such devoted love; already the enemy's ranks were scattered, when, nearly at the same moment, both father and son sank down on the blood-besprinkled earth.

The Christian warriors drew Sikatondono, who was bleeding from numerous wounds, from under his dead horse and he lived and recovered. But Simon was dead; an enemy's spear had pierced his true and consecrated heart, and his soul went forth to God, Who in place of an earthly crown bestowed on him the far more precious crown of eternal glory.

Sikatondono was deeply moved by the noble bravery of his adopted son, nevertheless, he persisted in heathenism. But he never called the Christians traitors to their country again. Simon's foresight had enabled him to save, at least, a remnant of his army. King Siwan became a Christian and took in baptism the name of Francis in honor of the Apostle of Japan. He had the body of Simon brought to Usuki and buried with all due honors in the chapel in which the prince was baptized and received his first Holy Communion. The unhappy queen died in the same prison in which Simon had been confined, without having recovered from her sad state of madness. For the next 40 years, the Church in Bungo rejoiced in happier times, till, at length, the

malice of hell let loose that storm of persecution to which she, in accordance with God's unsearchable decrees, fell a victim after having sent to Heaven so many saints and martyrs, and left us a host of intercessors amongst whom the youth, whose history we have narrated, holds a place of honor.



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