CHAPTER XIII

THE KOREAN AND JAPANESE MISSIONS

It will be remembered that in 1827 Leo XII entrusted Korea to the Paris Foreign Missions, but so many gaps were made in their ranks by the Revolution and the Empire that the first party could not set out until 1832 and it was composed of only two priests, both volunteers, Frs Bruguière (with the title of vicar apostolic) and Maubant. The former died on the way, near the Korean frontier. Maubant succeeded in crossing the latter, disguised as a mourner. At the beginning of 1836 he arrived in Seoul where an eminent convert gave him hiding. Another volunteer, Fr Chastan, joined him and later in 1838, the new vicar apostolic, Mgr Imbert. In the following year, a maladroit convert fell into a trap and revealed the hiding-place of the bishop who gave himself up so as not to expose his hosts to legal proceedings. Frs Chastan and Maubant could not be found in spite of the tortures inflicted on the Christians in order to persuade them to denounce them. Mgr Imbert then began to experience scruples. Believing that if his missionaries as well as he himself were sacrificed, the persecution would cease, he wrote to tell them to give themselves up as befitted "the good shepherd on behalf of his sheep". He was immediately obeyed. His hopes were not realized. On September 21st, the first three missionaries to Korea were beheaded after suffering terrible tortures.

Once again, the Church of Korea was without priests. Three

came to its aid in 1845. Two were French, Mgr Ferréol and Fr Daveluy, and one a Korean, Andrew Kim, who had acted as their guide in the midst of the gravest dangers. He was martyred on September 16th, 1846. A slight easing of the situation gradually followed and lasted for some ten years. Then the interventions of Europe in the Far East caused a serious reversal. The party opposed to all contact with the West won the day and a violent persecution once again broke out. Two vicars apostolic and seven French priests were martyred and eight thousand Christians perished. The three missionaries who had escaped the massacres were obliged to move into China.

One of these fugitives had been appointed vicar apostolic. He did not wait for more peaceful times before exercising his ministry (1876). Two other missionaries succeeded in joining him, but, in 1878, he was imprisoned with one of his priests. They would probably have suffered the same fate as their predecessors had not the French Government intervened. It was only in 1886 that a treaty, negotiated by the French representative, obtained from Seoul freedom to profess their religion for those under French jurisdiction.

When the Korean vicariate was established in 1831, Propaganda asked the Paris Foreign Missions to undertake the evangelization of Japan at the same time. It was the expression of a wish and not an order. Japan had not withdrawn the edict closing her gates against all foreign influence. While waiting for them to reopen, the missionaries could do nothing except hold themselves in readiness, devote themselves to prayer and the study of the Japanese language. In 1848, Fr Fourcade settled at Nara, the capital of the chief island of the Riu-Kiu group situated between China and Japan. In 1850, Propaganda appointed him vicar apostolic, and a missionary from the Society came to join him. Two years later, they had baptized two converts.

Yet, after 1851, Japan, like China, had signed treaties on

the model of that of Whampou, with a series of countries, the United States, England, Holland and Russia. France also obtained permission for her nationals to enter the ports of Yokohama, Kobe, Nagasaki, Hakodate and Niigata as well as the towns of Yedo and Osaka. The missionaries arrived in 1859. One of them, Fr Petitjean, built a church at Nagasaki on the Oura hill and dedicated it to the twenty-six martyrs of 1597. We may imagine his deep emotion when, on March 17th, 1865, he found himself in the presence of a group of some twelve Christians descended from the converts of the sixteenth century. They were the vanguard of the secret Church of Japan, which had been miraculously kept in being by the fervour of the catechists who, from generation to generation, had handed on the essential prayers and the formula for baptism. It numbered about ten thousand Christians. When the Government heard of its existence, it once more put into operation (1868) the edicts proscribing Christianity. Everything was tried, imprisonment, deportation, threats and promises, in order to transform these exemplary Christians into apostates. Two thousand of them died. In 1875, the intervention of Western diplomats brought about the withdrawal of the edicts. By the end of this same year, the Christian body numbered 15,000 converts, evangelized by twenty-nine missionaries. It had therefore been increased by half during the persecutions.

The new spirit of toleration allowed the young Church to be openly organized. In 1876, the Holy See established two vicariates, Tokyo and Nagasaki. Churches were built. Japan, eager for scientific knowledge and material progress, and strongly inclined also towards secularism, followed in the footsteps of the West more boldly than did China, to the extent of promulgating a law in 1884 separating the Japanese State from the two traditional religions, Shintoism and Buddhism. Henceforward, Catholicism, hitherto only tolerated, was in possession of its freedom. The missionaries were able to organize an educational system. After 1887 Marianists made available the wealth of Western culture in three establish-

ments: the "Morning Star" at Tokyo, the "Star of the Sea" at Nagasaki, "The Bright Star" at Osaka. Institutes of religious women arrived: the Dames de Saint-Maur, the Sisters of Chauffailles and Saint-Paul of Chartres. In 1919, the Jesuits established at Tokyo their "High School of Wisdom" with its three departments—Letters, Philosophy, Advanced Commercial Studies. At the same time, the Dames de Saint-Maur organized secondary schools open to all young people.

In missionary work properly so called, the Paris Foreign Missions were helped by Spanish Dominicans, German and Spanish Jesuits, Franciscans, Fathers of the Divine Word and Salesians from Italy. Already before the 1914 War, this influx, so international in character, showed the Church under her true, universal aspect. This mark of universality became still more evident after the arrival of American missionaries and contemplative orders of both men and women.

The liberty granted in 1884 determined Leo XIII to write a letter in his own hand to the emperor in 1885. It was handed to the latter by Mgr Ozouf. The pope also decided to establish the hierarchy (1891). Tokyo was raised to the status of an archbishopric with three suffragan sees at Nagasaki, Osaka and Hakodate.

In spite of all this, the progress of Catholicism remained slow. In 1891, there were 45,000 Catholics and this figure had not yet doubled by 1914. The fact is that the separation of the State from the traditional religions had not prevented the birth of a pragmatic form of Shintoism based on loyalty to the imperial family and an unconditional devotion to the motherland. This creed was influential enough to make men believe that its requirements and Catholicism were incompatible. Yet, those persons who were able to override this specious objection generally became ardent converts. Japan is not the country for half-measures. Those of her people who have assimilated the words of Christ are capable of scaling by leaps and bounds the heights of spirituality.