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Some Items from a Tour for Bible Work in Japan.

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LLEFT Yokohama by rail on the 24th of April, and spent the first night at Shiznoka. This is a city of some 30,000 inhabitants, and is the home of the Shogun, who was deprived of his rank and power by the revolution of 1868. He now lives in seclusion and takes no part whatever in public affairs.

The workers in this field consist of the Canadian Methodists, Protestant Methodists and Reformed (or Presbyterian) Missions. There is reported to be a hopeful condition of things in all of the Churches. While there is no unusual interest there is growth and encouragement in all departments of Christian work.

I learned here that there is an effort being made to establish in that city and elsewhere in Japan a new religion. It is proposed to combine whatever is thought to be good in Buddhism, Shintoism and all other religions into one eclectic system of faith and worship, and in this way secure a large following and influence.

As a basis to this form of doctrine there is to be the teachings of the old Japanese cult which holds to the divine origin of the Mikado and the superiority of the Japanese people. On this account it has a considerable popularity and support among the officials and upper classes who always wish to show their loyalty to the emperor.

The whole scheme has not been fully elaborated, and is still in a somewhat undefined and chaotic state. The impression among many is that it is a mere project on the part of a few energetic and ambitious individuals to raise money and get into popular favor, and that it will soon come to an end. But it illustrates how the Japanese are unsettled in their religious views and are ambitious to get something that will be superior to anything that the world has yet known.

In the same line was the statement made to me by a prominent Christian pastor that the Christianity of Japan must be on new lines, with a theology and polity of their own, adapted to the peculiar conditions of the country and the characteristics of the Japanese people.

On the following day I reached Okazaki. The only Christian work being done in this town is in connection with the Southern Presbyterian Mission, and Rev. Mr. Fulton is the resident missionary.

He reports that there is a general and determined opposition on the part of the Buddhists to prevent the growth of Christianity.

Parents have been induced to take their children from the Sunday School, and if a person is seen to go to a Christian service he is stigmatized by the term "Yasu" (the word is employed as a contemptuous epithet for Christ) as an expression of derision and hatred. So universal and bitter is this spirit of opposition that the people are very generally deterred from holding any intercourse with the Christian workers or missionaries.

The Bible seller reports that if people buy the Scriptures they are urged not to read them, and the purchase of such books is strongly condemned. Many copies of the Bibles have been sold to the priests, who read them to find something that they can use as an argument against Christianity. Christ's words on the cross, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and the declaration that he came not to bring peace but a sword are two favorite passages which they use as a basis of their assaults upon Christianity.

At Nagoya there is also the same state of determined opposition. It is less violent now than some time ago, but is still quite general and decided. Rev. Mr. Morgan has been trying for some time to rent a place for religious services, but finds it almost impossible to do so.

One man said he was willing to rent his house, but must first get the consent of his neighbors. He subsequently reported that they were unanimous in their opposition, and were even willing to pay the rent themselves rather than have the place used for that object.

After much inquiry another house was found, and the rent paid for two months in advance. But when the friends and neighbors heard of it they tried by persuasion and threats to make the man give up the contract and return the money. But when they found that all such efforts were of no avail a public meeting was called, and the man denounced in the most bitter terms.

One speaker said that he ought to be put into a kettle of oil, and the oil set on fire. Another said he ought to be banished, or at least driven out of the city. Then another objected that it would be wrong to inflict on some other community such a very bad man.

No decision was reached, but a band of some thirty rude fellows (called "Soshi") went to the house and tried to find the owner, who had concealed himself where he could not be found, and thus escaped. He is still afraid to go out, and it is undecided how the matter will end.

A short time before one of the lady missionaries was hit on her head with a stone, and quite severely injured, as she came out of the service on Sunday evening.

Two of the missionaries recently went to a town at some distance in the interior on invitation of some young men who wanted to hear about the Christian religion. But when they reached there the inhabitants refused to allow any house to be used for Christian service. Even the landlord of the hotel objected to the gathering of any considerable number of persons at his place for religious purposes. And so the four young men who had invited them to come met at the room in the hotel and were instructed privately.

But when the presence and character of the foreigners became more fully known a large number expressed their desire to hear about this new doctrine. They were so urgent that after a while a room was secured, and more than two hundred people came and listened gladly for more than two hours to the old but ever new story of God's great love to men in giving His own Son to save them from their sins.

One thing is peculiar, that while the priests and lower classes are so active and bitter in their opposition the officials are usually kind and friendly, and seem disposed to help the missionaries. This is a matter of special importance and a source of great satisfaction.

A revival in Nagoya at the close of the week of prayer has been a great blessing to the laborers, and resulted in important accessions to all the Churches. What is especially to be noted is that while five denominations are now represented in that city the unity of spirit is perfect. In the face of such strong opposition it is a matter of special importance and a source of the greatest satisfaction that while the forces of God's army may have different names and methods of administration they present a united front to the foe.

One thing that is encouraging and hopeful is that the native pastors and workers as well as missionaries are neither frightened or disheartened by the opposition, but confident that the final issue is sure to be success. They have supreme faith in God and the triumph of His truth.

It is sometimes interesting to look back to the beginning of things and see how certain questions were then regarded. As long ago as in 1849 "The Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia," edited by J. R. Logan, F. G. S., vol. III, pp. 454-457 contains an article on "Is the Opium Trade to China one in which a Christian merchant can engage?" which concluded in this way:

"Every Christian who will take the trouble to examine into the matter will find that the opium trade to China cannot for one moment be defended on Christian principles, that by applying such a test it is at once disclosed to view in its true colours as a monster evil, which is devastating the East, and which if he have the courage to confess his faith he can no longer be conscientiously engaged in."