CHAPTER V

JAPAN BEFORE THE RESTORATION

For modern China, the most important foreign nation is Japan. In order to understand the part played by Japan, it is necessary to know something of that country, to which we must now turn our attention.

In reading the history of Japan, one of the most amazing things is the persistence of the same forces and the same beliefs throughout the centuries. Japanese history practically begins with a "Restoration" by no means unlike that of 1867-8. Buddhism was introduced into Japan from Korea in 552 A.D.[40] At the same time and from the same source Chinese civilization became much better known in Japan than it had been through the occasional intercourse of former centuries. Both novelties won favour. Two Japanese students (followed later by many others) went to China in 608 A.D., to master the civilization of that country. The Japanese are an experimental nation, and before adopting Buddhism nationally they ordered one or two prominent courtiers to adopt it, with a view to seeing whether they prospered more or less than the adherents of the traditional Shinto religion.[41] After some vicissitudes, the experiment was held to have favoured the foreign religion, which, as a Court religion, acquired more prestige than Shinto, although the latter was never ousted, and remained the chief religion of the peasantry until the thirteenth century. It is remarkable

to find that, as late as the sixteenth century, Hideyoshi, who was of peasant origin, had a much higher opinion of "the way of the gods" (which is what "Shinto" means) than of Buddhism.[42] Probably the revival of Shinto in modern times was facilitated by a continuing belief in that religion on the part of the less noisy sections of the population. But so far as the people mentioned in history are concerned, Buddhism plays a very much greater part than Shinto.

The object of the Restoration in 1867-8 was, at any rate in part, to restore the constitution of 645 A.D. The object of the constitution of 645 A.D. was to restore the form of government that had prevailed in the good old days. What the object was of those who established the government of the good old days, I do not profess to know. However that may be, the country before 645 A.D. was given over to feudalism and internal strife, while the power of the Mikado had sunk to a very low ebb. The Mikado had had the civil power, but had allowed great feudatories to acquire military control, so that the civil government fell into contempt. Contact with the superior civilization of China made intelligent people think that the Chinese constitution deserved imitation, along with the Chinese morals and religion. The Chinese Emperor was the Son of Heaven, so the Mikado came to be descended from the Sun Goddess. The Chinese Emperor, whenever he happened to be a vigorous man, was genuinely supreme, so the Mikado must be made so.

The similarity of the influence of China in producing the Restoration of 645 A.D. and that of Europe in producing the Restoration of 1867-8 is

set forth by Murdoch[43] as follows:--

> In the summer of 1863 a band of four Choshu youths were smuggled on board a British steamer by the aid of kind Scottish friends who sympathized with their endeavour to proceed to Europe for purposes of study. These, friends possibly did not know that some of the four had been protagonists in the burning down of the British Legation on Gotenyama a few months before, and they certainly could never have suspected that the real mission of the four youths was to master the secrets of Western civilization with a sole view of driving the Western barbarians from the sacred soil of Japan. Prince Ito and Marquis Inouye--for they were two of this venturesome quartette--have often told of their rapid disillusionment when they reached London, and saw these despised Western barbarians at home. On their return to Japan they at once became the apostles of a new doctrine, and their effective preaching has had much to do with the pride of place Dai Nippon now holds among the Great Powers of the world.

The two students who went to China in 608 A.D. "rendered even more illustrious service to their country perhaps than Ito and Inouye have done. For at the Revolution of 1868, the leaders of the movement harked back to the 645-650 A.D. period for a good deal of their inspiration, and the real men of political knowledge at that time were the two National Doctors."

Politically, what was done in 645 A.D. and the period immediately following was not unlike what was done in France by Louis XI and Richelieu--curbing of the great nobles and an exaltation of the sovereign, with a substitution of civil justice for military anarchy. The movement was represented by its promoters as a Restoration, probably with about the same amount of truth as in 1867. At the latter date, there was restoration so far as the power of the Mikado was concerned, but innovation as regards the introduction of Western ideas. Similarly, in 645 A.D., what was done about the Mikado was a return to the past, but what was done in the way of spreading Chinese civilization was just the opposite. There must have been, in both cases, the same curious mixture of antiquarian and reforming tendencies.

Throughout subsequent Japanese history, until the Restoration, one seems to see two opposite forces struggling for mastery over people's minds, namely the ideas of government, civilization and art derived from China on the one hand, and the native tendency to feudalism, clan government, and civil war on the other. The conflict is very analogous to that which went on in mediæval Europe between the Church, which represented ideas derived from Rome, and the turbulent barons, who were struggling to preserve the way of life of the ancient Teutons. Henry IV at Canossa, Henry II doing penance for Becket, represent the triumph of civilization over rude vigour; and something similar is to be seen at intervals in Japan.

After 645, the Mikado's Government had real power for some centuries,

but gradually it fell more and more under the sway of the soldiers. So long as it had wealth (which lasted long after it ceased to have power) it continued to represent what was most civilized in Japan: the study of Chinese literature, the patronage of art, and the attempt to preserve respect for something other than brute force. But the Court nobles (who remained throughout quite distinct from the military feudal chiefs) were so degenerate and feeble, so stereotyped and unprogressive, that it would have been quite impossible for the country to be governed by them and the system they represented. In this respect they differed greatly from the mediæval Church, which no one could accuse of lack of vigour, although the vigour of the feudal aristocracy may have been even greater. Accordingly, while the Church in Europe usually defeated the secular princes, the exact opposite happened in Japan, where the Mikado and his Court sank into greater and greater contempt down to the time of the Restoration.

The Japanese have a curious passion for separating the real and the nominal Governments, leaving the show to the latter and the substance of power to the former. First the Emperors took to resigning in favour of their infant sons, and continuing to govern in reality, often from some monastery, where they had become monks. Then the Shogun, who represented the military power, became supreme, but still governed in the name of the Emperor. The word "Shogun" merely means "General"; the full title of the people whom we call "Shogun" is "Sei-i-Tai Shogun," which means "Barbarian-subduing great General"; the barbarians in question being the Ainus, the Japanese aborigines. The first to hold this office in the

form which it had at most times until the Restoration was Minamoto Yoritomo, on whom the title was conferred by the Mikado in 1192. But before long the Shogun became nearly as much of a figure-head as the Mikado. Custom confined the Shogunate to the Minamoto family, and the actual power was wielded by Regents in the name of the Shogun. This lasted until near the end of the sixteenth century, when it happened that Iyeyasu, the supreme military commander of his day, belonged to the Minamoto family, and was therefore able to assume the office of Shogun himself. He and his descendants held the office until it was abolished at the Restoration. The Restoration, however, did not put an end to the practice of a real Government behind the nominal one. The Prime Minister and his Cabinet are presented to the world as the Japanese Government, but the real Government is the Genro, or Elder Statesmen, and their successors, of whom I shall have more to say in the next chapter.

What the Japanese made of Buddhism reminds one in many ways of what the Teutonic nations made of Christianity. Buddhism and Christianity, originally, were very similar in spirit. They were both religions aiming at the achievement of holiness by renunciation of the world. They both ignored politics and government and wealth, for which they substituted the future life as what was of real importance. They were both religions of peace, teaching gentleness and non-resistance. But both had to undergo great transformations in adapting themselves to the instincts of warlike barbarians. In Japan, a multitude of sects arose, teaching doctrines which differed in many ways from Mahayana orthodoxy. Buddhism became national and militaristic; the abbots of great monasteries became

important feudal chieftains, whose monks constituted an army which was ready to fight on the slightest provocation. Sieges of monasteries and battles with monks are of constant occurrence in Japanese history.

The Japanese, as every one knows, decided, after about 100 years' experience of Western missionaries and merchants, to close their country completely to foreigners, with the exception of a very restricted and closely supervised commerce with the Dutch. The first arrival of the Portuguese in Japan was in or about the year 1543, and their final expulsion was in the year 1639. What happened between these two dates is instructive for the understanding of Japan. The first Portuguese brought with them Christianity and fire-arms, of which the Japanese tolerated the former for the sake of the latter. At that time there was virtually no Central Government in the country, and the various Daimyo were engaged in constant wars with each other. The south-western island, Kyushu, was even more independent of such central authority as existed than were the other parts of Japan, and it was in this island (containing the port of Nagasaki) that the Portuguese first landed and were throughout chiefly active. They traded from Macao, bringing merchandise, match-locks and Jesuits, as well as artillery on their larger vessels. It was found that they attached importance to the spread of Christianity, and some of the Daimyo, in order to get their trade and their guns, allowed themselves to be baptized by the Jesuits. The Portuguese of those days seem to have been genuinely more anxious to make converts than to extend their trade; when, later on, the Japanese began to object to missionaries while still desiring trade, neither the

Portuguese nor the Spaniards could be induced to refrain from helping the Fathers. However, all might have gone well if the Portuguese had been able to retain the monopoly which had been granted to them by a Papal Bull. Their monopoly of trade was associated with a Jesuit monopoly of missionary activity. But from 1592 onward, the Spaniards from Manila competed with the Portuguese from Macao, and the Dominican and Franciscan missionaries, brought by the Spaniards, competed with the Jesuit missionaries brought by the Portuguese. They quarrelled furiously, even at times when they were suffering persecution; and the Japanese naturally believed the accusations that each side brought against the other. Moreover, when they were shown maps displaying the extent of the King of Spain's dominions, they became alarmed for their national independence. In the year 1596, a Spanish ship, the San Felipe, on its way from Manila to Acapulco, was becalmed off the coast of Japan. The local Daimyo insisted on sending men to tow it into his harbour, and gave them instructions to run it aground on a sandbank, which they did. He thereupon claimed the whole cargo, valued at 600,000 crowns. However, Hideyoshi, who was rapidly acquiring supreme power in Japan, thought this too large a windfall for a private citizen, and had the Spanish pilot interviewed by a man named Masuda. The pilot, after trying reason in vain, attempted intimidation.

> He produced a map of the world, and on it pointed out the vast extent of the dominions of Philip II. Thereupon Masuda asked him how it was so many countries had been brought to acknowledge the sway of a single man.... "Our Kings," said this outspoken seaman,

"begin by sending into the countries they wish to conquer religieux who induce the people to embrace our religion, and when they have made considerable progress, troops are sent who combine with the new Christians, and then our Kings have not much trouble in accomplishing the rest."[44]

As Spain and Portugal were at this time both subject to Philip II, the Portuguese also suffered from the suspicions engendered by this speech. Moreover, the Dutch, who were at war with Spain, began to trade with Japan, and to tell all they knew against Jesuits, Dominicans, Franciscans, and Papists generally. A breezy Elizabethan sea captain, Will Adams, was wrecked in Japan, and on being interrogated naturally gave a good British account of the authors of the Armada. As the Japanese had by this time mastered the use and manufacture of fire-arms, they began to think that they had nothing more to learn from Christian nations.

Meanwhile, a succession of three great men--Nobunaga, Hideyoshi, and Iyeyasu--had succeeded in unifying Japan, destroying the quasi-independence of the feudal nobles, and establishing that reign of internal peace which lasted until the Restoration--period of nearly two and a half centuries. It was possible, therefore, for the Central Government to enforce whatever policy it chose to adopt with regard to the foreigners and their religion. The Jesuits and the Friars between them had made a considerable number of converts in Japan, probably about 300,000. Most of these were in the island of Kyushu, the last region to

be subdued by Hideyoshi. They tended to disloyalty, not only on account of their Christianity, but also on account of their geographical position. It was in this region that the revolt against the Shogun began in 1867, and Satsuma, the chief clan in the island of Kyushu, has had great power in the Government ever since the Restoration, except during its rebellion of 1877. It is hard to disentangle what belongs to Christianity and what to mere hostility to the Central Government in the movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However that may be, Iyeyasu decided to persecute the Christians vigorously, if possible without losing the foreign trade. His successors were even more anti-Christian and less anxious for trade. After an abortive revolt in 1637, Christianity was stamped out, and foreign trade was prohibited in the most vigorous terms:--

> So long as the sun warms the earth, let no Christian be so bold as to come to Japan, and let all know that if King Philip himself, or even the very God of the Christians, or the great Shaka contravene this prohibition, they shall pay for it with their heads.[45]

The persecution of Christians, though it was ruthless and exceedingly cruel, was due, not to religious intolerance, but solely to political motives. There was reason to fear that the Christians might side with the King of Spain if he should attempt to conquer Japan; and even if no foreign power intervened, there was reason to fear rebellions of Christians against the newly established central power. Economic

exploitation, in the modern sense of the word, did not yet exist apart from political domination, and the Japanese would have welcomed trade if there had been no danger of conquest. They seem to have overrated the power of Spain, which certainly could not have conquered them. Japanese armies were, in those days, far larger than the armies of Europe; the Japanese had learnt the use of fire-arms; and their knowledge of strategy was very great. Kyoto, the capital, was one of the largest cities in the world, having about a million inhabitants. The population of Japan was probably greater than that of any European State. It would therefore have been possible, without much trouble, to resist any expedition that Europe could have sent against Japan. It would even have been easy to conquer Manila, as Hideyoshi at one time thought of doing. But we can well understand how terrifying would be a map of the world showing the whole of North and South America as belonging to Philip II. Moreover the Japanese Government sent pretended converts to Europe, where they became priests, had audience of the Pope, penetrated into the inmost councils of Spain, and mastered all the meditated villainies of European Imperialism. These spies, when they came home and laid their reports before the Government, naturally increased its fears. The Japanese, therefore, decided to have no further intercourse with the white men. And whatever may be said against this policy, I cannot feel convinced that it was unwise.

For over two hundred years, until the coming of Commodore Perry's squadron from the United States in 1853, Japan enjoyed complete peace and almost complete stagnation--the only period of either in Japanese

history, It then became necessary to learn fresh lessons in the use of fire-arms from Western nations, and to abandon the exclusive policy until they were learnt. When they have been learnt, perhaps we shall see another period of isolation.