XXIII.

NOBUNAGA, THE PERSECUTOR OF THE BUDDHISTS.

In the province of Echizen, a few miles from Fukui, on the sea-coast, stands the mountain of Ochi, adorned with many a shrine and sacred portal, and at its foot lies the village of Ota. Tradition states that nearly a thousand years ago the pious bonze, Tai Chō, ascended and explored this mountain, which is now held sacred and resorted to by many a pilgrim. Here, in uninterrupted harmony, dwelt for centuries priests of both the native Shintō and Buddhist *cultus*, until 1868, when, in the purification, all Shintō shrines were purged of Buddhist symbolism and influences, as of a thing unclean. The priests were wont to make occasional journeys to Kiōto, the ecclesiastical centre of the country. Centuries before the troublous times of Ashikaga, and during the period of the Taira and Minamoto, one of the Shintō priests, while on his way through Ōmi, stopped at Tsuda, and lodged with the *nanushi*, or head-man of the village, and asked him for one of his sons for the priesthood. The host gave him his step-son, whom the priest named Ota Chikazané.

That boy was of Taira blood, the great-grandson of Kiyomori. His father, Sukémori, had been killed by the Minamoto, but his mother had fled to Ōmi, and the head-man of the village of Tsuda had married her.

The mother, though grieving for the loss of her son, doubtless, as a pious woman, rejoiced to see him in such excellent hands. The lad was returned to Ota, and lived in the village. He grew up, married as became a *kannushi* (custodian of a Shintō shrine), and founded a family of Shintō priests. He was the common ancestor of the famous hero of Echizen, Shibata Katsuiyé, and of the renowned Nobunaga, who deposed the Ashikaga, persecuted the Buddhists, encouraged the Jesuits, and restored, to a great extent, the supremacy of the mikado. In the "History of the Church," a portrait is given of Nobunaga, which is thus translated by Dr. Walter Dixon. He is described as "a prince of large stature, but of a weak and delicate complexion, with a

heart and soul that supplied all other wants; ambitious above all mankind; brave, generous, and bold, and not without many excellent moral virtues; inclined to justice, and an enemy to treason. With a quick and penetrating wit, he seemed cut out for business. Excelling in military discipline, he was esteemed the fittest to command an army, manage a siege, fortify a town, or mark out a camp, of any general in Japan, never using any heads but his own. If he asked advice, it was more to know their hearts than to profit by their advice. He sought to see into others, and to conceal his own counsel, being very secret in his designs. He laughed at the worship of the gods, convinced that the bonzes were impostors abusing the simplicity of the people, and screening their own debauches under the name of religion."

Nobunaga had four generals, whom the people in those days were wont to nickname, respectively, "Cotton," "Rice," "Attack," "Retreat." The one was so fertile of resources that he was like cotton, that can be put to a multitude of uses; the second was as absolutely necessary as rice, which, if the people be without for a day, they die; the third excelled in onset; the fourth, in skillful retreat. They were Hidéyoshi, Goroza, Shibata, and Ikéda. A fifth afterward joined him, whose name was Tokugawa Iyéyasŭ. These three names, Nobunaga, Hidéyoshi, and Iyéyasŭ, are the most renowned in Japan.

Nobunaga first appears on the scene in 1542. His father, after the fashion of the times, was a warrior, who, in the general scramble for land, was bent on securing a fair slice of territory. He died in 1549, leaving to his son his arms, his land, and his feuds. Nobunaga gained Suruga, Mino, Ōmi and Mikawa, Isé and Echizen, in succession. Having possession of Kiōto, he built the fine castle of Nijō, and took the side of Ashikaga Yoshiaki, who by his influence was made shōgun in 1558. Six years later, the two quarreled. Nobunaga arrested and deposed him, and the power of this family, which had lasted two hundred and thirty-eight years, came to an end. From this time there was no Sei-i Tai Shōgun, until Iyéyasŭ obtained the office, in 1604. By the aid of his commanders, Hidéyoshi and Iyéyasŭ, he brought large portions of the empire under his authority, and nominally that of the mikado, in whose name he governed. He became Naidaijin (inner great minister), but never shōgun. The reason of this, doubtless, was that the office of shōgun was by custom monopolized by the Minamoto family and descendants, whereas Nobunaga was of Taira descent. Like Yoritomo, he was a skillful and determined soldier, but was never able to subdue the great clans. Unlike him, he lacked ad-

ministrative power, and was never able to follow up in peace the victories gained in war.

He met his death in Kiōto, when in the fullness of his power and fame, in the following manner. Among his captains was Akéchi, a brave, proud man, who had taken mortal offense at his leader. One day, while in his palace, being in an unusually merry and familiar mood, Nobunaga put Akéchi's head under his arm, saying he would make a drum of it, struck it with his fan, like a drumstick, playing a tune. Akéchi did not relish the joke, and silently waited for revenge. His passion was doubtless nursed and kept warm by a previous desire to seize the place and power and riches of his chief.

In those days treachery was a common and trivial occurrence, and the adherent of to-day was the deserter of to-morrow. The opportunity did not delay. Nobunaga had sent so large a re-enforcement into the west, to Hidéyoshi, who was fighting with Mōri, that the garrison at the capital was reduced to a minimum. Akéchi was ordered to the Chiugoku, and pretended to march thither. Outside the city he disclosed his plan of killing Nobunaga, whom he denounced to his officers, and promised them rich booty. They returned to Kiōto, and surrounded the temple of Honnōji, where their victim was then residing. Hearing of the unexpected presence of so many soldiers in armor around his dwelling, he drew aside the window of his room to ascertain the cause. He was struck by an arrow, and instantly divined the situation, and that escape was impossible. He then set the temple on fire, and committed suicide. In a few minutes the body of the great hero was a charred crisp.

An uninscribed tomb of polygonal masonry, built in his honor, stands in the *ten-shiu*, or keep, of his most famous castle, Azuchi yama, on a high hill looking out upon the white walls of the fortress of Hikoné, the blue lake of Biwa, and the towering grandeur of Ibuki yama. He died at the age of forty-nine.

The position of Ota Nobunaga in Japanese history would be illy understood were the reader to regard him merely as a leader in clan fights, who by genius and vigor rose above the crowd of petty military adventurers, or even as one who wished to tranquilize and unify all Japan for the mikado. We must inquire why it is that no man has won more execration and anathemas from the Buddhists in Japan than he. They look upon him as an incarnate demon sent to destroy their faith.

The period of the Ashikaga was that in which the Buddhist priests

reached the acme of power. Their monasteries were often enormous stone-walled and moated fortresses. The bonzes kept armor and arsenals full of weapons to don and use themselves, or to equip the armies in their pay when it suited their pleasure to cope with or assist either of the changing sides, or to take spoil of both. Many bloody battles took place between rival sects, in which temples were burned down, villages fired, and hundreds on both sides killed. Part of what is now the immense castle of Ōzaka belonged to the Ikkō or Shin sect.

At Hiyeizan, on Lake Biwa, was the most extensive monastery in Japan. The grounds, adorned and beautified with the rarest art of the native landscape gardener, inclosed thirteen valleys and over five hundred temples, shrines, and priestly dwellings. Here thousands of monks were congregated. They chanted before gorgeous altars, celebrated their splendid ritual, reveled in luxury and licentiousness, drank their saké, eat the forbidden viands, and dallied with their concubines, or hatched plots to light or fan the flames of feudal war, so as to make the quarrels of the clans and chiefs redound to their aggrandizement. They trusted profoundly to their professedly sacred character to shield them from all danger.

For these bonzes Nobunaga had no respect. His early life among the priests had doubtless destroyed whatever reverence he might have had for their sanctity. His education as a Shintōist made him hate the Buddhists as enemies. The bonzes continually foiled his schemes, and he saw that, even if war between the clans ceased, the existence of these monasteries would jeopard the national peace. He resolved to destroy them.

In the Ninth month, 1571, says the *Nihon Guai Shi*, he encamped at Séta, and ordered his generals to set Hiyeizan on fire. The generals, surprised at the order, lost countenance, and exhorted him not to do it, saying, "Since Kuammu Tennō [782–806] built this monastery, nearly a thousand years ago, it has been esteemed the most vigilant against the devil. No one has yet dared to injure these temples; but now, do you intend to do so? How can it be possible?" To this Nobunaga answered: "I have put down the thieves against the emperor [*kokuzoku*, robbers of country]; why do you hinder me thus? I intend to tranquilize the whole land, and revive the declining power of the imperial Government. I continually make light of my life for the mikado's sake, and hence I have no rest for a single day. Last year I subdued Settsu, and both castles were about to be surrendered,

when Yoshikagé [Daimiō of Echizen] and Nagamasa [Daimiō of Ōmi] attacked my rear, and I was obliged to raise the siege and retrace my steps. My allowing the priests to remain on this mountain was in order that I might destroy them. I once dispatched a messenger to the priests, and set before them happiness and misery. The bonzes never obeyed my word, but stoutly assisted the wicked fellows, and so resisted the imperial army [*ōshi*, or *kuangun*]. Does this act not make them [*kokuzoku*] country-thieves? If I do not now take them away, this great trouble will continue forever. Moreover, I have heard that the priests violate their own rules; they eat fish and stinking vegetables [the five odorous plants prohibited by Buddhism—common and wild leek, garlic, onions, scallions], keep concubines, and roll up the sacred books [never untie them to read them or pray]. How can they be vigilant against evil, or preserve justice? Then surround their dwellings, burn them down, suffer no one to live."

The generals, incited by the speech of their commander, agreed. On the next day an awful scene of butchery and conflagration ensued. The soldiers set fire to the great shrines and temples; and while the stately edifices were in flames, plied sword, lance, and arrow. None were permitted to escape. Without discrimination of age or sex, the toothless dotard, abbot, and bonze, maid-servant and concubine and children, were speared or cut down without mercy. This was the first great blow at Buddhism.

In 1579, the two great sects of Nichiren and Jōdō held a great discussion upon religious subjects, which reached such a point of acrimony that the attention of the Government was called to it, and it was continued and finished before Nobunaga, at his castle at Azuchi yama, on the lands of which he had already allowed the Jesuits to build churches. A book called *Azuchi Ron*, still extant, contains the substance of the argument on both sides. One result of the wordy contest was the suppression of a sub-sect of Jōdō, whose doctrines were thought to be dangerous to the State.

The immense fortified temple and monastery called Honguanji, in Ōzaka, was the property of the Monto, or Shin sect of Buddhists, and the retreat and hiding-place of Nobunaga's enemies. The bonzes themselves were his most bitter haters, because he had so encouraged the Jesuits. They had taken the side of his enemies for over twelve years. At last, when some of his best captains had been killed by "grass-rebels," or ambuscaders, who fled into the monastery, he laid siege to it in earnest, with the intention of serving the inmates as he

did those of Hiyeizan. Within the enceinte, crowded in five connecting fortresses, were thousands of women and children, besides the warriors and priests. Another frightful massacre seemed imminent. The place was so surrounded that every attempt of the garrison to escape was cut off. On an intensely dark night, under cover of a storm then raging, several thousands of the people, of all sexes and ages, attempted to escape from one of the forts. They were overtaken and slaughtered. The main garrison shortly afterward learned the fate of their late comrades by seeing a junk, dispatched by the victors, laden with human ears and noses, approach the castle with its hideous cargo.

View of the Castle of Ōzaka (taken in 1861), from the Rice-fields.

Another outpost of the castle was surrendered. In the second month of the siege, a sortie in force was repelled by showers of arrows and matchlock balls; but, in the fighting, Nobunaga's best officers were slain. The besieging army finally occupied three of the five in the net-work of fortresses. Thousands ("twenty thousand") of the garrison had been killed by arrow and ball, or had perished in the flames, and the horrible stench of burning flesh filled the air for miles. The fate of the main body within the walls was soon to be decided.

The mikado, grieving over the shedding of so much blood, sent three court nobles and a priest of another sect to persuade the garri-

son to yield. A conference of the abbot and elders was called, and a surrender decided upon. The castle was turned over to Nobunaga, and from that day until the present has remained in the hands of the Government. Pardon was granted to the survivors, and the bonzes scattered to the other large monasteries of their sect. To this day, the great sects in Japan have never fully recovered from the blows dealt by Nobunaga. Subsequently, rulers were obliged to lay violent hands upon the strongholds of ecclesiastical power that threatened so frequently to disturb the peace of the country; but they were able to do it with comparative ease, because Nobunaga had begun the work with such unscrupulous vigor and thoroughness.

Nobunaga's Victims: Types of Buddhist Priesthood and Monastic Orders.