

CHAPTER VIII

THE BEGINNING OF THE PRESENT ERA

The origins of the newspapers now in existence may be traced back to 1872, in which year the Tokyo Nichi-Nichi and the Yubin Hochi, the father of the Hochi Shimbun of to-day, were established. Two years before, the Yokohama Mainichi Shimbun was started in Yokohama and was noted for its up-to-date equipment. Although many papers were issued between 1868 and 1872, none of them now remains. So it can safely be said that the present-day journalism had its origin in 1872, the fifth year of the Meiji era, identified with the birth of the Tokyo Nichi-Nichi.

In the same year many improvements were effected in this country. The solar calendar came to be used, the railway line between Tokyo and Yokohama was opened, the Body Guards were inaugurated, the date of the assumption of the Throne by the first Emperor of Japan was decided as the greatest national fete, to celebrate the foundation of the empire. A number of Provincial papers was born. They were the Nagoya Shimbun, the Osaka Shimbun, the Kyochu Shimbun (Yamanashi Prefecture), the Kaku Jitsu Shimbun (Kyoto), the Shin-Pi Shimbun (Matsumoto), the Yamanashi Nichi-Nichi Shimbun (Kofu), the Ibaraki Shimpo (Ibaraki).

The appearance of the Nisshin Shinjishi, edited by Mr. J. R. Black, must be mentioned here. The newspapers in this country owed a great deal to this paper for their progress. It is regrettable that the paper was short-lived but the work it achieved and the stimulus it gave to the Japanese press was great.

What with the development of

printing and the establishment of post offices, as well as by Government encouragement, the newspapers made rapid progress in those years. The people began to realize the importance of papers more and more and to consider that they could not well do without them. The financial opinions of Yeichi Shibusawa and Kaoru Inouye were published in the papers in 1873. The following year, papers printed the view of Taisuke Itagaki, Shojiro Goto, and Taneomi Soyejima, advocating the opening of the Imperial Diet. Thus, papers were increasing in importance and even those who, out of prejudice, were accustomed to regard newspapermen as low class, could not but become subscribers to the papers.

Hisomu Mayejima was the first Minister of Communications and was the founder of the Yubin Hochi Shimbun. Mayejima issued postal regulations which provided for free carriage for newspaper MSS and a reduction in postage for newspapers sent by mail.

All important papers at that time were under the protection of the authorities. The Yokohama Mainichi was patronised by Governor Iseki of Kanagawa Prefecture, the Shimbun Zasshi was what was issued under the auspices of Koin Kido, one of the most important persons of that day, who rendered meritorious services in the Imperial Restoration, and the Nisshin Shinjishi, "Black's paper", according to the common nomenclature, was also a Government organ. The Yubin Hochi was inaugurated by Minister Mayejima as already mentioned. The Tokyo

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Nichi-Nichi was a strong supporter of the Government.

The fact that great progress was made by newspapers on account of the Government protection is interesting to note. The Government has since been regarded as a leader of the majority of the people. It has tried every possible means to get all opposing elements under its control, but the people are not so docile always. Although newspapers made rapid progress in their early days through the Government protection, they naturally became independent when grown up. The Tokyo Nichi-Nichi and other leading papers of to-day are all independent and there are no important papers at present among those subsidised by the Government. The people have now come to direct the Government and the latter cannot do anything without the people's agreement. The people's candid views are reflected in the press. The Japanese Government used to be criticised as militaristic but the people were always pacific. Even when Japan was isolated and was under the pressure of foreign Powers, the people opposed the Government scheme of the Army and Navy increase. Now the people, more pacific than any other nation, have their Government under their leadership.

Gen-ichiro Fukuchi, one of the greatest journalists of that day, became editor-in-chief of the Tokyo Nichi-Nichi, being invited by the proprietors on his return from a trip to Europe in 1874. He devoted all his energy to the paper, carrying out many new plans. It was he who first started writing editorials. He wrote signed editorials, holding himself responsible for his views. They were naturally welcomed by the reading public. The importance of papers

was thus increasing day by day.

The example set by Fukuchi in taking up the pen for the press was followed by other great writers. They were, one by one, entering the journalistic field. Among them were Kencho Suyematsu, who later became a Minister of State, and is known as the translator of the Story of Genji; Joun Kurimoto, who was a famous literary man, Fumio Yano, now one of the directors of the Osaka Mainichi and the Tokyo Nichi-Nichi, Mokichi Fujita, who was the journalist of journalists, Seiran Ouchi, who was a noted Buddhist writer, Tetcho Suye-hiro, who was one of the first novelists of the Meiji period, Ryuhoku Narushima, who was both editor and poet, Ki Inukai, now the leader of a political party, the Kakushin Club, and others.

As editor of the Tokyo Nichi-Nichi, which was a strong supporter of the Government, Gen-ichiro Fukuchi was a Conservative, even as the Government was. In regard to the question of the opening of the Imperial Diet, Fukuchi held the view that it ought to be postponed. However, most of the other papers were strong in advocating an early opening of the Diet. In the newspaper world, this question was the main topic on which public opinion was divided, one being for an immediate opening and the other for postponement. The voices for an early opening of the Diet were stronger. Papers severely attacked the Government and the Satsuma and Choshu clans, which held a dominating power in the political world. The Satsuma and Choshu clans distinguished themselves in the Meiji Restoration but, when the Tokugawa Government had fallen, they began to seize the political power and to control the situation themselves. So certain critics said that the Meiji Restoration placed these two clans exactly in the same position as main-

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tained by the Tokugawa Government in the past.

The Meiji Government could scarcely withstand these criticisms and issued rigorous press regulations and put under ban the expression of all

views which were in opposition to the Government policies, especially regarding the question of the opening of the Diet. The Government sent famous editors and newspapermen to prison. A reign of terror obtained.