Reviews


This book was first published in two separate volumes in 1909, precisely fifty years after the beginnings of organized Protestant work in Japan. The present publication is a reprinting of the original, now bound together in a single volume. The reprint has been made at least in part as the result of requests from many libraries which had over the years lost one or both volumes of the original publication. There is, however, an intrinsic quality and value to the book which merits its serious reconsideration even after the many years since its original appearance.

For one thing, in the present state of documentation on the history of Christianity in Japan, Cary's book at some points constitutes an original source, or at least the account closest to the original source available. This is particularly true with reference to the activities of the Orthodox mission and church. Incidentally, Cary was quite aware that the Orthodox mission in Japan was of Russian origin, but in the context of general Protestant knowledge of Eastern Orthodoxy at the time, he felt that the term Greek Orthodox would serve better to denote the whole. Actually, Cary's account of the events of the early years of the Orthodox movement in Japan has yet to be surpassed, to this reviewer's knowledge, even by Japanese historians. One reason is the fact that the Orthodox Church in Japan in recent years has not been as active in scholarly production as it once was. But, most significantly, Cary gives an account of events and data which in some cases are not known from other sources, and he tells the story of Orthodoxy in Japan with a warmth of appreciation and skill in narration which make the tale as interesting as it is significant.

Cary himself confesses that in his narration of Protestant work in Japan he may have given an undue amount of space to treatment of his own mission, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (The Congregational Church). Yet Cary manifests a remarkably irenic spirit, indeed an ecumenical breadth of understand-
ing long before that adjective was widely used in Western Christi-
anity. As he writes in one of his two prefaces, "If we belong to the
Church Universal, we must recognise some degree of fellowship with
all followers of Christ and must acknowledge their work for Him as a
part of that in which we are engaged." Even though he confesses
that "certain doctrines and practices of the Roman and Greek Chur-
ches seem to me gravely erroneous," his accounts of the personages
and work of those churches very rarely betray any bias or prejudice.
Indeed, the consistent impression given the reader is one of warm
appreciation of the high quality of the work as well as of the dedication
of the workers in both those communions. The fact that he said little
of the miracles ascribed to Francis Xavier and his successors in Japan
was clearly owing more to his own temper of mind and belief than to
anti-Catholic bias. It may be worthy to note that this reviewer, in
his own A history of Christianity in Japan (Eerdmans, 1971), felt that
though careful discrimination is needed, the spirituality of the early
Roman Catholic workers, both Japanese and foreign, deserves more
attention than most academic historians have given it.

Cary saw his role as an historian to lie primarily in the creation of a
simple narration of events with a minimum of comment or "philoso-
phising." This means that there is little theological reflection upon,
for example, the nature of the Christian mission or upon what lessons,
if any, could be learned from the mistakes as well as heroic efforts
of both foreign missionaries and Japanese Christians. Given, how-
ever, the almost universal mentality among Western Christians of the
time, it would be unreasonable to expect from Cary the kind of inci-
sive critical reflection on the Christian world mission that is possible
at present, following the two world wars of this century and the pas-
sing of the older forms of Western colonialism.

One final point may be made. Cary's narrative focuses on the
work of the foreign missionaries and missions, in the case of all three
major Christian traditions, and treats with less completeness the activ-
ity of Japanese Christians. This procedure was perhaps inevitable
at the time, even in the case of a person as knowledgeable in the Japa-
nese language as Cary was. For one thing, much of the basic research
which has since been made available through critical biographies
of early and subsequent Japanese Christian leaders, such as Uemura
Masahisa, Honda Yoichi, Yamamura Gumpci, Uchimura Kanzo,
and Kagawa Toyohiko, had not yet been done in Cary's time. And
no one man was able to do all this. For example, the great work on 
Uemura and his era, *Uemura Masahisa to sono jidai*, was written by 
Saba Wataru and published in seven volumes from 1937 to 1944. 

All in all, however, the publishers are to be warmly commended 
for making generally available once more this classic account of the 
early history of Christianity in Japan.

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