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The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGLER



MOSAIC IN THE CHURCH OF SS. COSMAS AND DAMIAN AT ROME.

(See page 146.)

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THE LAST OF THE SHOGUNS.

BY ERNEST W. CLEMENT.

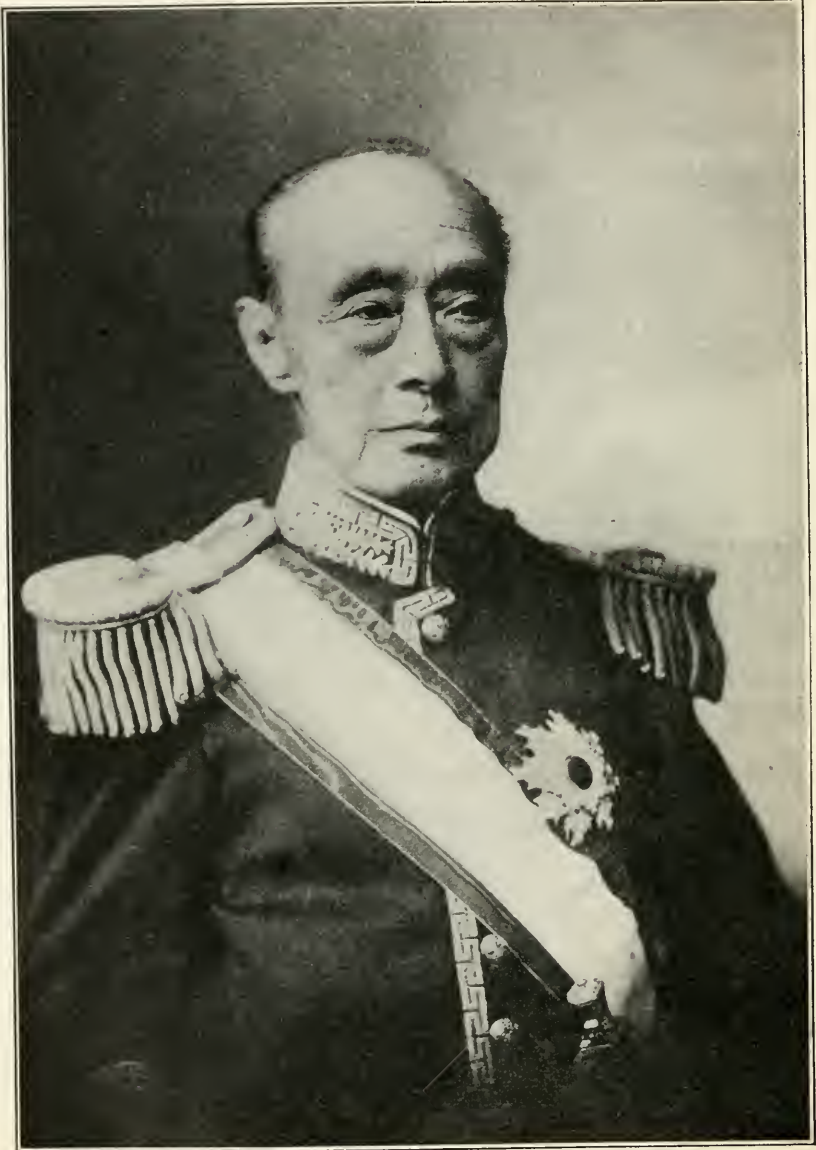
PRINCE Keiki Tokugawa, the last of the shoguns, who died last November in Tokyo, was a more distinguished personality than was really appreciated even in his own country. He was in more than one respect the ideal type of a modernized Japanese man, and he acted in a quiet and unassuming way even where his people did not yet recognize the change that was setting in.

The first of the shoguns was nominally one Watamaro, who, in 813 A. D., "was appointed *Sei-i-Tai-Shogun*, that is, Barbarian-Subduing Generalissimo," to wage war against the Ainu in the north of the empire.¹ After that, similar appointments were made from time to time. But the first of the shoguns was really Yoritomo, of the Minamoto family. He was appointed to that office in 1192 (in the days of Richard the Lion-Hearted and of Saladin); and he made himself the real administrator, the actual ruler, a Japanese mayor of the Palace, nominally under the authority of a puppet and *fainéant* emperor.

But the Minamoto family degenerated after the death of Yoritomo, so that in less than a century the real power was held by the Hojo regents of the effeminate shoguns of the *fainéant* emperors. Then the Hojo family was overthrown after 150 years, and the Ashikaga family of shoguns was established and wielded the power for over two centuries. The Ashikaga dynasty was overthrown by Nobunaga, who did not, however, receive the title of shogun. He was succeeded, after a few years, by Hideyoshi,

¹Some say that the title was first bestowed in the reign of Kwammu (782-805), on Tamura Maro.

who likewise did not receive that appellation, but under the title of Taiko (Great Prince) was the actual ruler of Japan for more



PRINCE KEIKI TOKUGAWA.

than a decade. Next came the great Ieyasu who, after defeating his rivals in the battle of Sekigahara in 1600, was made shogun

in 1603 and established the last, but not least, famous line of shoguns, the Tokugawa. This dynasty continued for over 250 years, until 1868, when Keiki, resigning his office, ended not only the Tokugawa dynasty but, once for all, the system of a shogunate. He truly was in the fullest sense "the last of the shoguns."

This famous individual was born in 1830 as the seventh and favorite son of Nariaki (Rekko), the well-known Prince of Mito, who was leader of the anti-foreign party in the troublous days after Perry's arrival in 1853. His given name was Yoshinobu. He was adopted into the Hitotsubashi family, so that he is often called by that name in the historical records of his time; but he seems to have been best known by the name Keiki.

He came first into public prominence in 1859, when he was strongly supported, "in consideration of his high abilities," for the position of shogun, in place of Iesada, deceased. But, in view of the necessity felt for concluding the treaties with foreign powers, a son of the anti-foreign leader was a kind of *persona non grata* with the great Regent, Ii Kamon no Kami, who obtained the position for a mere child, only 12 years of age, of the Kii family. And at that time the old Prince of Mito was condemned to perpetual confinement at Mito, and his son, Hitotsubashi, "for having desired the office of shogun," was forced into retirement.

But in 1862 he was released from his domiciliary confinement,² and a little later was appointed guardian of the shogun and then vice-shogun. The next year the emperor fixed upon a certain date for the expulsion of foreigners from Japan and proposed to visit a famous shrine of Hachiman (the god of war) near Kyoto and there deliver to the shogun "the sword emblematic of his authority to expel the barbarians." The shogun, however, was conveniently sick and sent Hitotsubashi as his representative. The latter, too, was "extremely embarrassed and, pretexting illness, descended from the shrine." This so incensed some ronins that they exclaimed, "Bah! this sluggard is not fit for the work." Fortunately, however, this hostile plan was afterwards overthrown.

A few months later Hitotsubashi addressed to the emperor the following letter: "I have been the unworthy recipient of your majesty's boundless favors and have received the office of guardian to the shogun. But I have been completely unsuccessful and feel most uneasy in mind. Your Majesty has also specially instructed me to arrange for the closing of the ports; but, though I have striven day and night to requite one ten-thousandth part of the

² Ii had been assassinated in 1860 by Mito ronins.

benefits I have received from Your Majesty, I have been unable to carry out that measure also. My guilt in accepting such a grave responsibility without duly appreciating the action of events and estimating my own capacity, is too great to escape unpunished. I pray Your Majesty, therefore, by an exercise of that great goodness which is Your Majesty's chief attribute, to release me from the office of guardian of the shogun." The emperor, however, refused to grant his request at that time; but in the following year that office was taken from him, and he was made "protector of the imperial palace and commander-in-chief of the maritime defences in the Bay of Osaka."

Near the end of 1865 when the ministers of the foreign powers went to Kobe to request the emperor to ratify the treaties which the shogun had made, Hitotsubashi was one who recognized the futility of further opposition or delay; and he, with others, presented a joint memorial to the court, as follows: "The foreigners have come up to the home provinces to request that Your Majesty will signify your consent to the treaties and to demand the opening of Hiogo. They say that they have come to arrange these matters directly with Your Majesty, as the *bakufu* [shogunate] is unable to settle them. Your servants will do all in their power to create delays, but unless the imperial consent to the treaties is given, the foreigners will not quit the Inland Sea. If we were lightly to use force against them we might be victorious for the moment, but a tiny piece of territory like this could not long withstand the combined armies of the universe. We are not so much concerned for the preservation of the *bakufu* as for the security of the throne. If the result be what we must anticipate, your people will be plunged into the depths of misery. Your Majesty's sacred wish of protecting and succoring your subjects will be rendered unavailing, and the *bakufu* will be unable to fulfil its mission, which is to govern the country happily. Your servants cannot find heart to obey Your Majesty's order to break off foreign relations, and humbly pray that Your Majesty, deigning to take these things into consideration, will at once give your consent."

Another writer adds the following: "At last, all the members of the *gorojuu* [council], the great *metsuke* [censors] and high officials of the Tycoon [shogun], with Hitotsubashi at their head, called on the Mikado and prostrated themselves at His Majesty's feet. The Mikado was moved; but messages containing threats were brought in every minute and the sacred emperor was still hesitating, when all the high officers declared they would die at once

should they not obtain what they were sent for. Hitotsubashi went so far as to take hold of the sleeve of the Mikado, respectfully swearing that he would not loose his hold until His Majesty sanctioned the treatise. Finally, the kwampaku, the first officer of the Mikado, was directed to bring the book of the irrevocable wills—and the sanction was given." Quite a dramatic scene, if real!

About this time the young shogun, Iemochi, "who felt severely the weight of domestic and foreign affairs," asked permission to resign in favor of Hitotsubashi, but was refused, although he made a plea of ill-health. This was probably a true reason, because it was not long before he died, right in the midst of civil commotions which had about reached their climax. Toward the end of 1866 Hitotsubashi was declared successor, and in January, 1867, was installed as shogun at the age of thirty-seven.

Although Hitotsubashi, or Keiki, as we shall hereafter call him, was judged by some to have been ambitious, yet he seems to have been truly reluctant to assume the shogunate at such a stormy period. During the time between his election and installation he made attempts to be relieved of the dangerous though honorable office; and he finally accepted on two conditions: "First, that the Mikado should give ear to his advice as that of a councilor who should by his office be brought into closer contact with foreigners than the great *daimios* [lords], and should give preference to his counsel; secondly, that all the *daimios* should not only approve of his appointment, but promise him their entire and unconditional support in carrying out the internal and foreign policy he might deem it necessary to pursue."

He then assumed the reins with great energy. We quote again from Mossman's *New Japan*: "It was acknowledged on all hands that he devoted to the public business of Japan at this transitional period an amount of intelligence, energy and earnestness, seldom, if ever, exhibited by the executive ruler of the realm. At the same time, while he conciliated the people, he was held in great esteem by his sovereign. The only dissentients were the *daimios*, who were jealous of his abilities and power." And we might add to these words of Mossman, that upon him seemed to fall, unfortunately and unjustly, all the accumulated obloquy felt toward the shogunate.

Soon after this the emperor suddenly died, and after an interregnum of eighty days was succeeded by the late emperor Mutsuhito, posthumously named Meiji Tenno. This change of imperial masters was most providential, as later events proved; and at that time it was thought to be most fortunate for the country, "that

such a man as Hitotsubashi [Keiki] was at the head of affairs." It could scarcely have been foreseen, but was indeed providential, that about the same time "the young Tycoon and the bigoted barbarian-hating Mikado" were removed, and their places taken by such liberal successors.

In May, 1867, the new shogun received the foreign ministers in official audience at Osaka in a manner that pleased them and reflected credit upon himself. The following is a description of him at that time: "The Tycoon is a man of ordinary stature, with a pleasant and very intelligent face, very bright, sparkling eyes and a voice of remarkable sweetness. His manner is most easy and refined. He had never sat down to European dinners before he did so on this occasion."

But this friendly and hospitable action on the part of the shogun and his negotiations with foreigners were the occasion of severe criticism by enemies of his own nationality. Some of the leading *daimyo* claimed that he should not have carried on negotiations alone and surrounded only by his own immediate officials, but that he should have made a display of imperial troops and armed retainers of *daimyo*. This would seem to have been an expression of jealousy on the part of those who, in the words of Mossman, "were not bidden to the feast."

It was in October of 1867 that the Prince of Tosa sent to the shogun his famous letter advising the latter to restore to the lawful hereditary sovereign his power in all its fulness. This letter ran somewhat as follows: "It appears to me that although government and the penal laws have been administered by the military class ever since the Middle Ages, yet since the arrival of foreigners we have been squabbling among ourselves, and much public discussion has been excited. The East and West have risen in arms against each other, and civil war has never ceased, the effect being to draw on us the insult of foreign nations. The cause of this lies in the fact that the administration proceeds from two centers, causing the empire's ears and eyes to be turned in two different directions. The march of events has brought about a revolution, and the old system can no longer be obstinately persevered in. You should restore the governing power into the hands of the sovereign, and so lay a foundation on which Japan may take its stand as the equal of all other countries. This is the most imperative duty of the present moment and is the heartfelt prayer of Yodo.³ Your Highness is wise enough to take this advice into consideration."

³ The personal name of the Prince of Tosa.

This recommendation was supported by other prominent *daimyo* and their retainers, so that Keiki, "yielding to the force of public opinion," as Griffis puts it, resigned his position as *Sei-i-Tai-Shogun*.

What followed is more or less confused, and therefore difficult to narrate in precisely logical or chronological order. It appears, however, that in some way or other the opponents of Tokugawa increasing in number and influence in Kyoto, were enabled to get possession of the young emperor's ear and person. The Aidzu troops, loyal to the shogun, were deprived of their position as guards at the palace gate; and their places were taken by troops of Satsuma, Tosa and other clans. The old Tokugawa officials were dismissed and superseded by men favorable to the "combination." In Yedo, too, there were disturbances: Satsuma men attacked the shogun's palace; and Tokugawa adherents in return burned down the Satsuma *yashiki* (mansion).

It would seem that the reforms in the administration of the government were interpreted by Keiki, whether rightly or wrongly, as amounting to the overthrow of Tokugawa and the establishment of an authority equivalent to that of the former shogunate, but in the interests of the Tokugawa enemies. There seems to have been no small reason to suspect the ambition of Satsuma. These suspicions Keiki stated to his councilors as follows: "Why has the policy of the court altered thus in the last few days? There must be some one who, in order to succeed in a plot, is misleading the young emperor." He therefore abandoned Kyoto and went to Osaka, because, in the opinion of his friends, "it was better to take possession of this, the neck (key) of Kyoto, than to fall into the trap that was being laid for them." But this was apparently "a fatal move," because the new men thus had it all their own way in Kyoto.

Now, however, the new administration was in financial straits. As the imperial councilors put it, "although the imperial family is now in possession of the government, it has no means of meeting its expenses. Tokugawa and other clans should be made to contribute." In order to render the *bakufu* revenues available, an attempt was made to conciliate Keiki. The princes of Owari and Echizen, both of the Tokugawa family, were sent to Osaka, to invite him to become one of the councilors of the new régime. He seemed willing to accept, but was persuaded by the advice of the warlike Aidzu and others to this effect: "The word of Bishiu [Owari] and Echizen cannot be relied upon; if you must go to Kyoto, we

will go with you, to die, if necessary, in your support." Another writer adds: "On this expedition, we will remove from the emperor his bad councilors, and try the issue with them by the sword."

Although the latter statement furnishes the pretext for this move, it was undoubtedly an unfortunate one. When the troops of the shogun marched on Kyoto, they were met at Fushimi by a large array, chiefly Satsuma and Choshu men, but with an imperial prince as commander-in-chief and the imperial gold brocade banner in the van. Thus the shogun's men became technically rebels or traitors. They, however, excused themselves as follows: "Our prince is going to court by order of the Mikado; and, if you venture to obstruct his passage, he will force his way through." In a hard-fought battle of three days, the imperial troops were finally victorious. Keiki and his followers fled first to Osaka, then to Kobe, and embarked thence on the "Kaiyo Maru," one of their own war-vessels, for Yedo.

At this point we quote from the reminiscences⁴ of one of Keiki's retainers: "Having been defeated at the battle of Fushimi, Keiki, with his prime minister, Itakura, and the princes of Aizu and Kuwana, took passage for Yedo. At this time, English war-ships seemed to act somewhat imprudently toward the ships of the *bakufu*. Therefore the refugees intended to change and get on a French war-vessel for protection. For this purpose a letter from the British minister (Sir Henry Parker) was delivered to them. But nothing happened during the voyage; the 'Kayo Maru,' war-vessel of the *bakufu*, brought the anxious passengers in safety to Yedo. The letter was afterwards read and found to run as follows: 'Please pity this poor ex-shogun.'"

The emperor now issued a proclamation by which Keiki and his followers were deprived of all their honors and dignities; and, according to one authority, the ex-shogun was ordered to commit *harakiri*. Griffis also states that one of Keiki's own ministers "earnestly begged him to commit *harakiri*, urging its necessity to preserve the honor of the Tokugawa clan. His exhortation being unsuccessful, the proposer solemnly opened his own bowels."

The emperor also sent to Yedo an army, named "army of chastisement," under an imperial prince, with not only the brocade banner but also a "sword of justice." Keiki, however, was now willing to follow the wise counsels of more peaceable advisers like Katsu and Okubo, and to give up entirely any further contest. He therefore accepted the terms of a lenient decree and retired to

⁴Taiyo, June, 1901.

private life, first in Mito, where he was said to be "busily employed in composing Japanese poetry." Later he was permitted at his own request to retire to Shizuoka, where he remained in strict seclusion till 1899, when he returned to his old capital, called no longer Yedo but Tokyo.

If we confine ourselves strictly to the limits of our subject we should stop here and have nothing to say about Keiki after he retired from the shogunate. But as we have written some about his career before he became shogun, so we may refer briefly to his career as ex-shogun. In fact, there is little to be said. He has been living in the utmost seclusion; even in Tokyo he has avoided society and lived very quietly. His chief sports have been hunting and riding a bicycle. He had audience once of the late emperor, to whom he, formerly the actual administrator of the empire, paid his respects as a loyal subject. The ex-shogun represented the old feudal Japan, which has passed away never to return; the late emperor represented the new constitutional Japan which is developing in the most wonderful manner. In 1902, at the annual "poem meeting" or poetical symposium held in the imperial palace, Prince Tokugawa, as he is now called, was the official reader. In short, he has been living the simple life.

It is interesting to note the conflicting opinions concerning the character of the last of the shoguns. As he was a son of the leader of the anti-foreign party, he was generally considered by the foreigners of that time to be, by heredity, "a determined opponent of foreign intercourse"; but he turned out to be "most friendly to foreigners," and, as we have already seen, was very active and earnest in persuading the emperor to give his sanction to the treaties with foreign powers. He has been condemned by Griffis in *The Mikado's Empire*, on the "testimony of his best friends," as being fickle; but he has also been vigorously defended from that very charge by Black, Reed, Mossman, and other writers of that day, who picture him as an able and energetic man.

Although from the Japanese point of view Keiki was severely condemned, yet by Occidental standards he should be highly praised for refusing to commit *harakiri* after his defeat. As Mossman puts it, "instead, therefore, of abandoning himself to the fatalism of his race, he exerted his political foresight to review the position of affairs, and saw that an inevitable change had revolutionized the governing classes of Japan, through the influence of foreign intercourse."

With reference to Keiki's general character, ability and pur-

poses, it may be profitable to consider the opinion of a man of that day, as stated in his own book, *Young Japan*, in which Black says: "I always contended, and I maintain the same opinion to this day [1881], that, had Hitotsubashi [or Keiki] been allowed to work out his plans in his own way, we should have seen by this time quite as great an advance as we see to-day; and it would have been more sound and solid. There would have been no sanguinary revolution; and yet the Mikado would have been restored to the fullest powers. This had already been reported as a portion of his scheme. There would have been, long ere now, a representative assembly; and, as the country would not have been put to the heavy expenses incurred in the civil strife of 1868 and the Formosan expedition, there would not have been all the financial trouble that has been, is being, and will be increasingly, experienced in the empire. There would have been no Saga, no Satsuma, rebellions. It is most likely that the *daimyo* would have retained their princely names and been an acknowledged hereditary nobility: but arrangements would have been made by which they would have been relieved of the old feudal duties and responsibilities; for a standing army was a part of the Tycoon's design; and this would have involved, necessarily, a modification of the old relations between the *daimyo* and the ruler with regard to revenues."

In another place, Black writes as follows: "It is now sometimes alleged against him, that he was inert and even cowardly in the latter days. But he had, as I have just related, distinctly said that he would resign, if he had not the requisite support. That he was not originally either inactive or cowardly we may infer from the fact that he, of all others, had been selected as the guardian of the young Tycoon: and it is evident that, in this capacity, he soon realized the unmistakable fact, that, whether the making of treaties was right or wrong; and whether the Tycoon Iesada, or his representative the Go-Tairo, had or had not legitimately the power to enter into them, the deed was done, and the treaties must be maintained. We have seen how prominent a part he took in obtaining the Mikado's sanction; and up to the very last he was most true to all the engagements they imposed upon Japan. He initiated many reforms for which the present government obtains the credit; and whatever advantages there may be—and undoubtedly there are many—in having the government in its present shape, he had foreseen them and declared his hope of gradually bringing it about. It is my sincere belief that, had he been permitted to work in his own way, we should have seen Japan make as rapid

progress as she has made, without all the horrors of revolution and repeated outbreaks of internal strife that have occurred.”

Now, these opinions of Black, who was a keen observer of that time, are entitled to some weight. At least, if the charge of fickleness is the worst that can be brought against Keiki, he was no more a sinner than most of his contemporaries. Even in ordinary, peaceful times, consistency is a jewel; and in revolutionary times, inconsistency is not a great crime. Keiki's mistake seems to have been the withdrawal of his resignation and his attempted return from Osaka to Kyoto. But he had reason to believe that Satsuma was working for the overthrow of Tokugawa and the establishment of a Satsuma dynasty of shoguns; while his own honest purpose was the abandonment of the whole system of a shogunate. In this complicated situation of affairs he was persuaded against his better judgment to pursue a course which placed him in a most unfortunate position and precipitated a civil war. But instead of condemning Keiki for one mistake, let us rather give all honor to the man who had the vision to see, and the wisdom to recognize, that he was the last of the shoguns.