

GROWTH OF SUNDAY OBSERVANCE IN CHINA

By way of appendix to what I have written on 'New China and Christianity,' it may be of interest to deal with the question of Sunday observance in present-day China (writes the Rev. M. Kennelly, S.J., in *America*). Before the advent of Christianity into the country the people knew nothing of Sunday and the hallowed remembrances that cling to its celebration in Western lands. Pagan worship had its festivals, but these were limited to a certain number of days throughout the year, and in nowise approached our regular Sunday worship in Christian countries. All over China,

New Year's Day

has been kept as a general holiday and religious festival. The Government offices were closed to business and trade was suspended for a week or more. In cities, towns, and hamlets the local pagodas were frequented and incense and prayer offered to the gods. In civil life, visits and salutations were exchanged between families, relatives, and friends. Within doors—the cold season being then extreme and Chinese cities and towns having no public parks—a regular round of feasting, merry-making, and amusements was kept up as a necessary adjunct of the festival. The travellers who then reached the open ports or journeyed far into the interior saw China at her best and returned home highly impressed with the people and the land.

As months rolled on other festivals were celebrated, at times by Confucianists and now and again by Buddhists and Taoists, all vieing with each other in this respect and exhibiting no scruples to share in combined services. This attitude of the Chinaman's soul has ever perplexed the Western mind, but it is easily explained on the ground that holding to no fixed truth, external practices are considered not to be the logical expression of belief, but of tradition and custom, to which he has been taught to conform from childhood.

To mention but a few of these festivals, a kind of 'All Souls' Day' is held on the eighth of the third month—the early part of April or thereabouts. Sacrifices are then offered to the souls of the departed and graves are cleaned and set in order for the rest of the year. The fifth of the fifth month has its 'Dragon-boat festival,' and on the twenty-seventh of the eighth month Confucianists celebrate the birth of China's great philosopher.

At times the Court celebrated its own festivals, offering sacrifices to heaven at the equinoxes and begging the river-gods to graciously protect the people from floods. When these divinities were obedient to the imperial commands, they were thanked, and sticks of incense were officially burnt in their honor.

Cities and towns had also their feasts and annual processions in honor of the local gods and goddesses, of deified spring and autumn, and in many cases of glorified heroes raised by the people to the ranks of the gods. Thus did China's literati, merchants, townsfolk, and peasants enjoy a bit of a holiday, thank the gods and make merry during the passing hour.

With the Advent of Christianity,

Sunday and its weekly observance were introduced into the country. Catholics call it the 'Lord's day'—*Chu jih*, in Chinese—and number the other days of the week the second, third, and fourth, respectively, down to the seventh. Protestants, to show their dissent from Catholics in this as in all other matters, call Sunday the 'day of ceremonial worship'—*Li-pai-jih* in Chinese. Thus the very terminology in things religious will disclose to you at once whether a person is a Catholic or a Protestant. Moreover, the Catholic religion is styled in Chinese 'the religion of the Lord of Heaven'—*Tien-chu Kiao*—while the Protestants' religion is known and propagated as 'the religion of Jesus'—*Yeh-su Kiao*.

In the open ports where foreigners reside, Sunday is kept as in the homelands. All business ceases, shops are closed, and the departure of vessels is postponed till the next day. Chinese in such places generally conform to foreign customs. Catholic converts, in all

places where there is a church and a resident priest, recite morning prayers, attend at Mass, listen to the instruction, and have Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Even if there be no priest available, they still keep the Sunday holy, repairing generally to the neighboring chapel and there reciting together the prayers at Mass and the Rosary, and making the 'Way of the Cross' or any other devotional practices. In the busy season or in cases of poverty they may be dispensed from servile works and can attend to business for part of the day. Protestants, according to their own reports, have never been able to secure any great observance of the latter part of the precept among their followers. The great mass of the people, the petted shopkeeper and farmer, the workman with a family, are all intent upon filling their coffers or meeting the hard calls of life with a few cents more. To them enforced rest is an ideal almost unattainable. The custom of keeping

Sunday as a Holiday

and refraining from servile work both among Catholic and Protestant converts has little by little filtered into the country and influenced even the Government. The fashion of conforming with the Christian custom began in the Government offices of the capital. From Peking it extended to the provinces and gradually invaded the army and the schools. With regard to the latter a rather interesting version of the determining cause of the holiday may be mentioned. Even before the late revolution, when changes began already to take place, the schools had their rest-day on Sunday. The story goes that after the regular annual programme was copied from Western countries, it was found it would not cover the whole twelve months unless a day per week were omitted. The Educational Committee, therefore, decided to omit Sunday and declare it a holiday. However this may be, it is quite inadequate to account for the change that has taken place throughout the whole land. Other and various factors have brought about the desired result. Principal among these, it must be admitted, is the Christian custom of keeping Sunday holy. The presence of Christian professors in many Government schools and the influence of Chinese educated abroad have likewise contributed to introduce the new observance. At any rate, at the present time, it is the custom for Government institutions and schools throughout the greater part of the country to close to official business and regular class-work on all Sundays throughout the year.

The new republic has thereby shown once again its Christian tendencies and practically proved its sympathy with Christian customs and observances. Example in China is contagious, and this attitude once taken in high places will doubtless extend downwards and gradually attain the masses. It would be too much in such a large and populous country to expect a too rapid change, but in about five or ten years more the people will have largely accepted the Christian custom of observing the Lord's Day.

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