

Extract from a letter from M. de Ventavon, missionary in Peking, dated November 25, 1784.

You will no doubt learn with consolation of the conversion of a person whom God will perhaps use to enlighten with the light of the Gospel a Kingdom where no missionary is known to have ever penetrated; this is the Korean peninsula situated to the east of China. Every year, the King of this region sends ambassadors to the Emperor of China, whom he keeps as a vassal. He loses nothing: if he makes considerable gifts to the Emperor, the Emperor makes even more considerable gifts to him.

Nearly a year ago, these Korean ambassadors and their retinue came to visit our church; we gave them books on religion. The son of one of these lords, 27 years old and a very good scholar, read them avidly; he saw the truth in them, and with grace acting on his heart, he resolved to embrace religion, after learning all about it. Before admitting him to Baptism, we asked him several questions, which he answered perfectly: among other things, we asked him what he was resolved to do, should the King disapprove of his action, and wish to force him to renounce his faith: he replied, without hesitation, that he would suffer all torments and death rather than abandon a Religion whose truth he had clearly known. We did not fail to warn him that the purity of the Evangelical Law did not permit the plurality of wives: he replied: I have only my lawful wife, and I shall never have another.

Finally, before his departure to return to Korea, he was admitted, with his father's consent, to the Baptism administered by Mr. de Grammont. He was given the name Pierre; his family name is Ly: he is said to be an ally of the Maison Royalè. He declared that on his return he wished to renounce human grandeur, and retire with his family to the countryside, to devote himself solely to his salvation. He promised to give us news of him every year. The Ambassadors also promised to propose to their Sovereign that he call Europeans to his States. The journey by land from Peking to the capital of Korea takes about three months. Besides, we can only talk to the Koreans in writing. Their characters and Chinese characters are the same in form and meaning; if there is any difference, it is slight; but their pronunciation is quite different. The Koreans wrote down what they wanted to say: when we saw the characters, we understood their meaning, and they also immediately understood the meaning of those we wrote in reply.

The eldest son of the Emperor of China appears to be well-disposed towards Europeans, whom he holds in high esteem. He is in his forty-first year, and governs the empire when the emperor is absent from the capital (he is often absent for three or four months). The Chinese generally believe that he is destined by his father to succeed him; but this is a secret which it would be dangerous to probe, and which should only be whispered. Last month, this prince came to our house with all his entourage; he visited the church, wanted to see the priestly ornaments, the Blessed Sacrament congregation, the observatory, and finally, the rooms of some private individuals. He left very satisfied. If he ever becomes master, we hope he will be favorable to religion, about which he has asked many questions on several occasions.

In several provinces of China, there is a large number of Mohammedans; they revolted, in that of Kan-siu, last spring, to the number of one hundred thousand. At first, they took a few towns, and defeated the ill-armed local soldiers. On hearing the news, the emperor quickly marched his Tartar, Chinese and other troops against them; the Mohammedans, squeezed on all sides, in arid places, forced by thirst to come to blows, were, in two or three battles, completely defeated, they, their families and their adherents: with the exception of

those who had not reached the age of fifteen, all perished by the iron of the victors. However, the Mohammedans, who have not stirred, have been left alone.

Today, all is at peace, and preparations are underway to celebrate, with magnificence, the fiftieth year of the reign of Kien-long, who, at the age of seventy-four, still governs his States with the same strength and application as in an earlier age. On this occasion, he must give a solemn meal to the distinguished people who have reached the age of sixty. European missionaries who have reached this age will also attend. The meal will be followed by gifts, which the emperor will distribute to all guests.

The Russian court was in correspondence with the Chinese court. Missionaries translate the letters of the Senate in Petersburg, and translate those of the Emperor into Latin. In Peking, the Muscovites have a church and a few Christians of their own ritual. It is served by an archimandrite and three or four monks, to whom are added five or six young men to learn the Tartar and Chinese languages. They are rotated every ten years. Moreover, they rarely receive news from European Muscovy, because of the distance. From Petersburg to Peking, it takes nearly a year to make the journey by land, and I think the cold and other inconveniences of this route are more unbearable than the heat of the line.

We live very well here with Messrs. Muscovites; however, we are obliged to use, on the outside, reservations, so as not to give umbrage to the court of Peking, which, through political fears, more than for any other reason, puts obstacles in the way of the progress of Christianity. As the Christian religion is not authorized in China by any edict of the emperor, neophytes in the provinces are sought out from time to time; the greed of the mandarins and the malice of the infidels often give rise to this; but it is more often the pretext for the searches made of certain prohibited sects, which are known by experience to be prone to revolt. When the mandarins of the places where persecution is ignited have relations in Peking, the missionaries of this city, by means of their acquaintances, find the means to appease them without noise; and some were thus appeased this year. Time does not permit me to go into detail.

I will only tell you something about the most considerable one, which was in the province of Chan-si, in the district of Lou-gan, a town of the first order. It originated in the wickedness of an unfaithful mother-in-law, who was determined to force her Christian daughter-in-law into acts of superstition. Unable to put an end to it with the worst possible treatment, she referred her, as a Christian, to the lower mandarin. The daughter-in-law and her relatives were arrested, followed by a number of other Christians, not only from the town where the affair had begun, but also from the town and district of Lou-gan, where the senior mandarin became aware of it. The latter cracked down on the Christians in a barbaric manner. He wanted to force them to trample on the crucifix, which he had broken. Some had the cowardice to apostatize; the others held firm, and the pious daughter-in-law in particular. So they were imprisoned and put in irons. The mandarin went even further, posting a notice in five or six towns under his authority that all Christians were to be handed over to him. Some wanted him to know that in Peking they were tolerated, and that Europeans had open churches where they could go freely. He replied, with an air of contempt, that he knew all that, but that he also knew that Europeans were not allowed to preach their religion in the provinces.

Several Christians, justifiably alarmed, ran to Peking to inform the missionaries. On finding out who the mandarin or governor of the city of Lou-gan was, and where he was from, it turned out that, within two days, the nephew of one of the general mandarins of the province of Chan-si was due to leave for that province. He was two days' drive from Peking: he was immediately sent some small curiosities from Europe, urging him to speak to his uncle on behalf of the persecuted Christians: he promised, and kept his word. As soon as he arrived, he spoke to his uncle. The latter, at his request, sent a letter to the mandarin of Lou-

gan, reproaching him for the hardships he had inflicted. The latter replied very modestly, and promised to release the prisoners as soon as possible. He had neither the merit nor the glory. Almost as soon as he was accused of some fault, he was dismissed by the emperor and stripped of his position. To make reparation for their crime, the apostate Christians had the courage to present a petition to the mandarin, appointed to govern on an interim basis, in which they declared their repentance for their apostasy, and made their profession of faith. At first, the mandarin said that he would have to wait for the arrival of the current mandarin to respond to their request and bring the matter to a close. But some time later, either on his own initiative or on the occasion of some recommendation, he said he no longer wished to meddle in such matters, and dismissed all the prisoners. As for the daughter-in-law, whose husband was also unfaithful, she returned to her father's house. I can't let you ignore her name; it's Marthe Ma.

That, Sir, is about all I have of interest to tell you. I beg you to communicate my letter to all your gentlemen, to whom I renew my protest of the most sincere attachment and deepest gratitude.

With these sentiments, I have the honor to be, in union with your holy sacrifices, Sir, your most humble and most obedient servant,

Signed, Ventavon, apostolic missionary.

Peking, November 25, 1784.