



SILENCE

Shūsaku Endō

TRANSLATED FROM THE JAPANESE
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WITH A FOREWORD BY
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7.

Five days later, in the evening, he had his second meeting with Inoue, the Lord of Chikugo. The day had been deadly still; but now the leaves of the trees began to stir gently sending forth a fresh whisper in the evening breeze. And so he found himself face to face with Inoue. Apart from the interpreter, the magistrate had no companion. When the priest entered with his guard, the other, fondling a large bowl in his hands, was slowly sipping hot water.

'I'm afraid I have neglected you,' said Inoue, still holding the bowl in both hands while his great eyes stared curiously at the priest. 'I had business in Hirado.'

The magistrate ordered the interpreter to bring hot water to the priest; and all the time a smile played around his lips. Then he slowly began to speak about his journey to Hirado. 'You should go to Hirado if you get a chance, father.' He seemed to talk as if the priest were a free man. 'There is a castle of the Matsuura's on a mountain facing a tranquil inlet.'

'Yes, I have heard from the missionaries in Hirado that it is a beautiful town.'

'I would not say beautiful; I'd rather say interesting.' Inoue shook his head as he spoke. 'When I see that town I think of a story I heard long ago. It is about Takenobu Matsuura of Hirado

who had four concubines who constantly quarrelled out of jealousy. Takenobu, unable to bear it any longer, ended up by expelling all four from his castle. But perhaps this is not a suitable story for the ears of a celibate priest.'

'This Matsuura must have been a very wise man.' Since Inoue had become so frank, the priest also felt relaxed as he spoke.

'Do you really mean that? If you do, I feel happy. Hirado, and indeed our whole Japan, is just like Matsuura.' Twisting the bowl around in his hand, the Lord of Chikugo went on: 'Spain, Portugal, Holland, England and such-like women keep whispering jealous tales of slander into the ear of the man called Japan.'

As he listened to the interpreter's translation, the priest began to realize what Inoue was getting at. How often he had heard at Goa and Macao how the Protestant countries like England and Holland, and the Catholic countries like Spain and Portugal had come to Japan and, jealous of one another's progress, had spoken calumnies about one another to the Japanese. And the missionaries, too, out of rivalry had at one time strictly forbidden their Japanese converts to consort with the English and the Dutch.

'Father, if you think that Matsuura was wise, you surely realize that Japan's outlawing of Christianity is not unreasonable and foolish.'

As he spoke, the laugh never faded from those fat, full-blooded cheeks and the magistrate stared intently at the priest's face. For a Japanese, the eyes seemed strangely brown while the side-locks (were they perhaps dyed?) showed no trace of white.

'Our Church teaches monogamy. . . .' The priest deliberately chose a bantering turn of phrase. 'If a man has a lawful wife, I wonder if it is a wise thing to let himself be burdened with concubines. What if Japan were to choose one lawful wife from among these four?'

'And by this lawful wife you mean Portugal?'

'No, no! I mean our Church.'

As the interpreter unemotionally passed on this reply, Inoue's

face fell; and raising his voice he laughed. Considering his age, it was a high-pitched laugh; but there was no emotion in the eyes he now turned on the priest. His eyes were not laughing.

'Father, don't you think it is better for this man called Japan to stop thinking about women from foreign countries and to be united with a woman born in the same country, a woman who has sympathy for his way of thinking.'

The priest knew well what Inoue meant by the foreign woman; but since the other was carrying on the argument in this apparently frivolous way, he felt that he too must continue along the same lines. 'In the Church,' he said, 'the nationality of the woman is not important. What matters is her fidelity to her husband.'

'I see. And yet if love of husband and wife were based only on emotion no one would have to suffer from what we call the persistent love of an ugly woman.' The magistrate nodded his head as though satisfied with his own way of speaking. 'There are some men in the world who get upset by the persistent affection of an ugly woman.'

'You look upon missionary work as the forcing of love upon someone?'

'Yes, that's what it is—from our standpoint. And if you don't like the expression, let's put it this way. We call a woman who cannot bear children barren; and we think that such a woman has not the capacity to be a wife.'

'If our doctrine makes no progress here in Japan, this is not the fault of the Church. It is the fault of those who tear the Japanese Christians from the Church like a husband from his wife.'

The interpreter, searching for words, was momentarily silent. This was the time when the evening prayer ought to come floating from the Christians' prison; but today there was no sound. Suddenly the priest thought of the death sentence of five days before: a stillness that seemed to resemble this moment, but in reality so different. It was the time when the body of the one-eyed man lay prostrate on the ground in the flashing sun and the guard

unemotionally seizing one leg had dragged it off to the hole in the ground, leaving a trail of blood just like a great line that had been traced over the earth with a brush. Was it possible, reflected the priest, that the order for this execution had been given by the benevolent old man who sat before him?

'Father,' said the Lord of Chikugo, 'you and the other missionaries do not seem to know Japan.'

'And you, honorable magistrate,' answered the priest, 'you do not seem to know Christianity.'

At this they both laughed. 'And yet,' said Inoue, 'thirty years ago, when I was a retainer of Gamo, I asked for the guidance of the fathers.'

'And then?'

'My reasons for opposing Christianity are different from those of the people at large. I have never thought of Christianity as an evil religion.'

The interpreter listened to these words with astonishment on his face; and while he stammered and searched for words, the old man kept looking at the bowl in his hands with its little remaining hot water, all the time laughing.

'Father, I want you to think over two things this old man has told you. One is that the persistent affection of an ugly woman is an intolerable burden for a man; the other, that a barren woman should not become a wife.'

As the magistrate stood up to go, the interpreter bowed his head down to the ground, his hands joined in front of him. The guard, all flustered, set out the sandals into which the Lord of Chikugo slowly put his feet; and without so much as a backward glance he vanished into the darkness of the courtyard. At the door of the hut was a swarm of mosquitoes; outside could be heard the neighing of a horse.

Now it was night. Softly the rain began to fall making a sound like the pattering of pebbles in the trees at the back of the hut. Resting his head on the hard floor and listening to the sound of

the rain, the priest thought of a man who had been put on trial like himself. It was on the morning of April 7th that this emaciated man had been driven down the slope at Jerusalem. The rays of the dawn stretched out beyond the Dead Sea bathing the mountain range in golden white, the brook Cedron babbled on, ever giving forth its fresh sound. No one gave him any chance to rest. After the scribes and the elders had pronounced sentence of death, it was necessary to get the approval of Pilate, the Roman Governor. In his camp outside the town, not too far from the temple, Pilate had heard the news and now he should be waiting.

From childhood the priest had memorized every detail of that decisive morning of April 7th. This emaciated man was his perfect ideal. His eyes, like those of every victim, were filled with sorrowful resignation as he looked reproachfully at the crowd that ridiculed and spat at him. And in this crowd stood Judas. Why had Judas followed after? Was he incited by lust for revenge—to watch the final destruction of the man he had sold? Anyhow, whatever about that, this case was just like his own. He had been sold by Kichijirō as Christ had been sold by Judas; and like Christ he was now being judged by the powerful ones of this world. Yes, his fate and that of Christ were quite alike; and at this thought on that rainy night a tingling sensation of joy welled up within his breast. This was the joy of the Christian who relishes the truth that he is united to the Son of God.

On the other hand, he had tasted none of the physical suffering that Christ had known; and this thought made him uneasy. At the palace of Pilate, that man had been bound to a pillar two feet high to be scourged with a whip tipped with metal; and nails had been driven into his hands. But since his confinement in this prison, to his astonishment neither the officials nor the guards had so much as struck him. Whether or not this was the plan of Inoue or not, he did not know; but he felt that it was not impossible that from now on, day after day might pass without any physical molestation.

What was the reason for this? How often he had heard of countless missionaries captured in this country, and how they had been subjected to indescribable tortures and torments. There was Navarro who at Shimabara was roasted alive with fire; there were Carvalho and Gabriel who were immersed again and again in the boiling sulphur water at Unzen; there were those missionaries deprived of food in the prison of Omura until they died of starvation. Yet here he was in prison, permitted to pray, permitted to talk to the Christians, eating food which, though not precisely plentiful, was at least served up three times a day; and the officials and the magistrate, when they visited him, far from showing themselves severe, contented themselves with formalities and then went away. What could they possibly be aiming at?

The priest reflected on the days in the hut of Tomogi Mountain with Garrpe, and how they had talked about torture and whether they could endure it, if once it came their way. Of course the only thing was to pray for God's grace; but at that time he had felt in his heart that he could fight until death. In his wanderings through the mountains, too, he had entertained the strong conviction that, once captured, he would be subjected to physical torture. And he had felt (was it a sign of his tense emotion?) that whatever torment came his way, he could clench his teeth and bear it.

But now his resolution had somehow weakened. Rising from the floor and shaking his head, he asked himself if his courage had begun to crumble. And was it because of the life he was now leading? Then suddenly, from the depths of his heart, someone spoke to him: 'It is because your life here is so pleasant.'

Since coming to Japan, it was practically only in this prison that he had had the chance to live the life of a priest. In Tomogi he had lain in hiding; after this he had had contact with none of the peasants except Kichijirō. It was only since coming here that he had a chance to live with the people and to spend a great part of the day in prayer and meditation without suffering the pangs of hunger.

Like sand flowing through an hour glass, each day here passed quietly by. His feelings, formerly tense and taut like iron, now gradually relaxed. He began to feel that the torture and physical suffering he had believed inevitable might not fall to his lot after all. The officials and the guards were generous; the chubby-faced magistrate carried on his pleasant conversation about Hirado. Now that he had once tasted the tepid waters of peace and security, would he have the resolution again to wander through those mountains and conceal himself in a hut?

And then for the first time it came to him that the Japanese officials and their magistrates were making no move because, like a spider watching its prey caught in the web, they were waiting for his spirit to weaken. Bitterly he recalled the forced laugh of the Lord of Chikugo, and how the old man rubbed his hands together. Now he could see clearly why the magistrate had made such a gesture.

And in the background of all this fancy was the fact that from that time until yesterday the daily two meals had been increased to three. The good-natured guards, ignorant of what was involved, would show their gums as they laughed and said: 'Won't you eat up? Why, this is the wish of the magistrate. Not too many prisoners are treated like this.'

The priest, looking into the wooden bowl with its hard rice and dry fish, would shake his head and beg them to give it to the Christians. Already the flies were buzzing over the rice. When evening came, the guards brought two straw mats. Yes, the priest began slowly to realize what this change in treatment imported. It might simply mean that the day of his torture was at hand. His relaxed physique would be all the more weak in its resistance to pain. The officials were using this underhand means of slowly sapping his vitality, then suddenly the torture would come. Undoubtedly this was their plan.

The pit . . .

The word he had heard from the interpreter on that day of his

capture on the island now rose up in his memory. If Ferreira had apostatized, this was because, like himself, he had been well treated at first; and then, when he was weakened in body and spirit, quite suddenly this torture had been inflicted upon him. Otherwise it was unthinkable that such a great man would so suddenly renounce his faith. Yes, what diabolical means they devised!

'The Japanese are the most intelligent people we have met so far.' Reflecting on the words of Xavier he laughed cynically.

He had refused the proffered food; he had not used the straw mats at night; no doubt this had reached the ears of the officials and the magistrate through the guards; yet no word of censure had been uttered. It was impossible for him to know whether or not they realized that their plans had been thwarted.

One morning, ten days after the visit of the Lord of Chikugo, he was awakened by a disturbance in the courtyard. Putting his face to the barred window he saw the three Christians urged along by a samurai being brought away from the prison. In the mist of the morning, the guards dragged them along, their wrists chained together. The last of the three was the woman who had given him the cucumber.

'Father,' they shouted up to him as they passed his prison, 'we are going to forced labor.'

Pushing his hands through the bars, the priest blessed them one by one with the sign of the cross. His fingers barely touched the forehead of Monica as she, with a touch of sadness and smiling like a child, raised her face.

That whole day was quiet and still. Toward noon the temperature gradually rose, and the fierce rays of the sun pierced mercilessly through the bars of the prison. He asked the guards who brought the food when the three Christians would come back and received the answer that they would return by evening, if the work was finished. By order of the Lord of Chikugo, a number of temples were being built at Nagasaki so that the demand for workers was well-nigh limitless.

'Tonight is Urabon, father. I suppose you know what Urabon is?'

The guards explained that at Urabon the people of Nagasaki hung lanterns at the eaves of their houses and lit candles in them. The priest answered that in the West there was the feast of Hallowe'en in which the people did something similar.

Far in the distance he could hear the chanting voices of children, and straining his ears, the words were carried to him:

'O lantern, bye-bye-bye
If you throw a stone at it, your hand withers away
O lantern, bye-bye-bye
If you throw a stone at it, your hand withers away.'

Somehow there was a plaintive note in the children's broken song.

It was evening. On the crape myrtle a cicada had settled and was singing. Even that voice faded away in the calm of the evening—but the three Christians had not returned. As he ate his supper beneath the oil lamp, he could hear the faint voices of the children in the distance. At dead of night the rays of the moon flowed brightly through the bars, wakening him from sleep. The festival was over; the darkness was thick and deep; but whether or not the Christians had returned he did not know.

The next morning he was wakened by the guards and told to put on his clothes and come out immediately.

'What is all this about?' he asked.

In answer to his question as to where they were going, the guards replied that they themselves did not know. This early hour of the morning had been chosen, however, to avoid the crowds of curious onlookers who would certainly gather to stare at the foreign Christian priest.

Three samurai were waiting for him. They, too, gave the simple explanation that this was the wish of the magistrate and then,

placing themselves in front and behind with their captive in the middle, they started off in silence along the morning road.

In the morning mist the merchants' houses of straw and thatch with their doors shut looked just like melancholy old men. On both sides of the roads stretched rice paddies; timber was piled up everywhere. The fresh fragrance of the wood, mingled with the smell of the mist, was wafted to their nostrils. The roads of Nagasaki were still in course of construction. In the shade of the new constructions, beggars and outcasts lay sleeping with straw mats thrown over them.

'So this is your first time in Nagasaki.' It was one of the samurai who spoke with a laugh. 'Lots of hills, aren't there?'

Indeed there were lots of hills. On some of them were clustered little thatched huts. A cock announced the dawn of day; below the eaves faded lanterns lay strewn on the ground like remnants of the feast of the previous night. Just below the hill was the sea all around the long peninsula. Filled with reeds it stretched out into the distance like a milk-white lake. As the mist gave way to a clear sky, there appeared in the background a number of low hills.

Near the sea was a pine grove where a number of baskets were placed; while four or five bare-footed samurai squatted eating something. As their mouths moved, their eyes, blazing with curiosity, were fixed upon the priest.

Within the grove a white curtain was stretched out and a number of stools were placed there. One of the samurai pointed to a stool and told the priest to sit down. To the priest, who had been waiting for a cross-examination, his gesture came as something of a surprise.

The gray sand stretched out, gently continuing on to the inlet, while the overcast sky gave a brown appearance to the lazy sea. The monotonous sound of the waves biting at the shore reminded the priest of the death of Mokichi and Ichizo. On that day, too, the misty rain had fallen ceaselessly on the sea, and on

that rainy day the seagulls had flown in near the stakes. The sea was silent as if exhausted; and God, too, continued to be silent. To this problem that kept flitting across his mind he had as yet no answer.

'Father!'

A voice sounded from behind. Looking back he saw a man with long hair flowing down his neck smiling as he played with a fan. He was stout and square-faced.

'Ah!' It was the voice rather than the face that told the priest that this was the interpreter with whom he had conversed in the hut on the island.

'Do you remember? How many days have passed since our last meeting? But what a pleasure to see you again! The prison you are now in is newly built. It's not so bad to live in. Before it was set up, the Christian missionaries were almost always confined in the prison of Suzuda in Omura. On rainy days the water leaked in; on windy days the breeze broke in; the prisoners really had a tough time there.'

'Will the magistrate come soon?' To stop the other's babbling the priest changed the subject, but his companion clapped his fan against the palm of his hand and went on: 'Oh no. The Lord of Chikugo will not come. But what do you think of him? What do you think of the magistrate?'

'He treated me kindly. I got food three times a day; I was even provided with covering for my bed. I'm beginning to think that because of this kind of life my body has betrayed my heart. I suppose that's what you are waiting for.'

The interpreter absent-mindedly turned his eyes away. 'As a matter of fact,' he said, 'there is a plan from the magistrate's office to have you meet someone who will soon arrive here. He is Portuguese like yourself. You'll have a lot to talk about, I suppose.'

The priest looked intently at the yellow eyes of the interpreter, from whose face the smile was quickly fading. The name

of Ferreira rose up in his mind. So this was it! These fellows had at last brought along Ferreira as a means to make him apostatize. For a long time he had felt almost no hatred for Ferreira, nothing but the pity that a superior person feels for the wretched. But now that the moment for confronting him seemed to have arrived, a terrible uneasiness overtook him, and his heart pounded with confusion. Why this should be, he himself did not know.

'Do you know who this person is?', asked the interpreter.

'Yes, I know.'

'I see.'

The interpreter, a faint smile playing around his lips, waved his fan as he looked intently at the gray shore. And there, far in the distance, appeared the tiny figures of a group of men moving toward them.

'He's in that group.'

The priest did not want to show his agitation, but unconsciously he rose from the stool on which he was sitting. Bit by bit the group drew near the pine grove and now he was able to distinguish individuals one from another. Two samurai, acting as guards, were walking in front. Behind them followed three prisoners bound to one another by chains. Then Monica, reeling and stumbling. And behind the three the priest saw the figure of his companion Garrpe.

'Aha!' shouted the interpreter with an air of triumph. 'Is that what you expected, father?'

The priest's eyes followed Garrpe, taking in every detail. Probably Garrpe did not know who awaited him in this grove. Like himself he was wearing peasant clothing; like himself from the knees down his white legs protruded awkwardly; stretching out his legs as best he could and breathing deeply, he walked behind the others.

It was no surprise to the priest to find that his old friend had

been captured. From the time of their landing at the shore of Tomogi, they had both been convinced that the day of their apprehension would come. What the priest wanted to know was where Garrpe was taken and what were his thoughts now in captivity.

'I would like to talk to Garrpe,' he said.

'You would, would you? But the day is long. It's still morning. No need to hurry.'

As if to tantalize the priest, the interpreter deliberately yawned and began to cool his face with his fan.

'By the way, father, when I spoke to you on the island there was something I forgot to ask. Tell me. This mercy that the Christians talk about—what is it?'

'You're like a cat that teases a little animal,' murmured the priest, looking at the other with his sunken eyes. 'This is a despicable delight you take in talking to me. Tell me, where was Garrpe captured, and how?'

'Without reason we are not allowed to reveal to prisoners the business of the magistrate's office.'

But now, suddenly the procession had stopped on the gray sand. The officials were unloading a pile of straw mats from the animal at the rear.

'Ah!' The interpreter looked at the scene with a smile of delight. 'Do you know what they are going to use those mats for?'

The officials began to roll the mats around the bodies of the prisoners, only Garrpe being left free. Soon, with only their heads protruding from the matting they looked just like basket worms.

'Now they'll be put on boats and rowed out into the shoals. In this inlet the water is so deep you can't see the bottom.'

The sluggish waters made the same monotonous sound as they gnawed at the shore. Clouds covered the leaden sky which hung down low over the earth and sea.

'Look! One of the officials is talking to Father Garrpe.' The interpreter seemed to be singing, such was his glee. 'What is he

saying? Probably he is saying something like this: "If you are a father possessed of true Christian mercy, you ought to have pity for these three unfortunates wrapped around with straw coats. You shouldn't stand by idle and see them killed."

Now the priest understood only too well what the interpreter was getting at; and anger shook his whole body like a gust of wind. Were he not a priest, he would wring the fellow's neck.

'And the magistrate. He says that if Father Garrpe apostatizes—well, in a word, all three lives will be spared. In any case, these three have already apostatized. Yesterday, at the magistrate's office they trampled on the *fumie*.'

'They trampled . . . and yet this cruelty . . . even now.' The priest stammered as he spoke, but words did not come.

'The people we want to apostatize are not these small fry. In the islands off the coast there are still lots and lots of peasants who are secretly faithful to Christianity. It is to get them that we want the fathers to apostatize.'

'Warn praesta puram, iter para tutum.' The priest tried to recite the *Ave Maris Stella* but instead of the words of the prayer there arose vividly in his mind the picture of the cicada singing in the crape myrtle, the trail of red-black blood on the ground of the courtyard beneath the blazing sun. He had come to this country to lay down his life for other men, but instead of that the Japanese were laying down their lives one by one for him. What was he to do? According to the doctrine he had learnt until now, it was possible to pass judgment on certain actions distinguishing right from wrong and good from evil. If Garrpe shook his head in refusal, these three Christians would sink like stones in the bay. If he gave in to the solicitations of the officials, this would mean the betrayal of his whole life. What was he to do?

'What answer will this Garrpe give? I have been told that in Christianity the first thing is mercy and that God is Mercy itself . . . Oh! Look at the boat.'

Suddenly two of the Christians, all wrapped up as they were,

stumbled forward as if to run away. But from behind, the officials pushed them, sending them flying forward so that they fell prostrate in the sand. Only Monica, looking like a basket worm, remained staring at the sluggish sea. In the priest's heart there arose the taste of that cucumber she had taken from her breast for him, and her laughing voice.

'Apostatize! Apostatize!' He shouted out the words in his heart to Garrpe who was listening to the officials, his back turned toward the priest.

'Apostatize! You must apostatize.' Feeling the perspiration trickle down his forehead he closed his eyes and then, cowardly though it might be, turned away from the scene that would meet his eyes.

You are silent. Even in this moment are you silent? When he opened his eyes the three basket worms, goaded on by the officials, were already facing the boat.

I would apostatize. I would apostatize. The words rose up even to his throat, but clenching his teeth he tried to stop himself from uttering the words aloud. Now two officials with lances followed the prisoners and, rolling up their kimonos to the waist, clambered into the boat which, rocked by the waves, began to leave the shore. There is still time! Do not impute all this to Garrpe and to me. This responsibility you yourself must bear. But now Garrpe had rushed forward and, raising both arms, had plunged from the shore into the sea. Sending up clouds of spray he was approaching the boat and, as he swam, he was shouting something.

'Lord, hear our prayer . . .!'

In that voice there was no tone of censure, nothing of anger, and it would fade out as the black head sank down between the waves. 'Lord, hear our prayer . . .!' Leaning over the side of the boat, the officials showed their white teeth as they laughed. One of them, passing his lance from one hand to the other, mocked Garrpe as he tried to get near the boat. But now the head was lost in the sea and the voice was still. But then, all at once, it appeared again like

a piece of black dust, buffeted about by the waves. The voice was feebler than before, but again and again it kept shouting something.

Now an official set up one of the Christians at the side of the ship and pushed him vigorously with the tip of his lance. Just like a puppet the figure of straw fell into the sea and disappeared from sight. Then with dramatic speed the next went under. Finally Monica was swallowed up by the sea. Only the head of Garrpe, like a piece of wood from a shipwrecked boat, floated for some time on the water until the waves from the boat covered it over.

'This is a horrible business. No matter how many times one sees it, it's horrible,' said the interpreter getting up from his stool. Then suddenly reeling on the priest with hatred in his eyes he said: 'Father, have you thought of the suffering you have inflicted on so many peasants just because of your dream, just because you want to impose your selfish dream upon Japan. Look! Blood is flowing again. The blood of those ignorant people is flowing again.'

Then, as if to spit out the words, 'At least Garrpe was clean. But you . . . you . . . you are the most weak-willed. You don't deserve the name of "father".'

'O lantern, bye-bye-bye
If you throw a stone at it, your hand withers away
O lantern, bye-bye-bye
If you throw a stone at it, your hand withers away.'

The *bon* festival was over; but still far in the distance the children chanted their song. In the houses of Nagasaki they were now giving the beggars and outcasts all kinds of vegetables to comfort the spirits of the dead. The crape myrtle showed no change; the cicada continued its daily song; but gradually this voice was losing its power.

'How is he?' It was one of the officials who spoke in the course of his daily round.

'No change. He just sits staring at the wall all day long.' Answering in a low voice, the guard pointed to the room in which the priest was confined.

The official looked through the barred window at the priest sitting on the floor in the rays of the sun, his back to the window. All day long, facing the wall, he watched the dark sea and the little black head of Garrpe floating on its surface. Now the three Christians, all rolled up, sank like pebbles.

When he shook his head, the vision would disappear; but when he closed his eyes it would come stubbornly up again behind his eyelids.

'You're weak-willed,' the interpreter had said, rising from his stool. 'You're not worthy to be called "father".'

He had not been able to save the Christians; nor like Garrpe had he been able to sink beneath the waves in pursuit of them. His pity for them had been overwhelming; but pity was not action. It was not love. Pity, like passion, was no more than a kind of instinct. Long ago he had learnt this, sitting on the hard benches of the seminary; but it had only been bookish knowledge at that time.

'Look! Look! For you blood is flowing; the blood of peasants is flowing out over the ground.'

Then in the garden of the sun-drenched prison the trail of blood went on and on. The interpreter had said that it was the selfish dream of the missionaries that trailed out this line of blood. The Lord of Chikugo had compared this selfish dream to the excessive love of an ugly woman. The persistent love of an ugly woman was an insupportable burden for a man, he had said.

'And yet'—before his eyes floated the laughing face of the interpreter and the rich, fleshy face of the Lord of Chikugo, one superimposed upon the other—'you came to this country to lay down your life for them. But in fact they are laying down their lives for you.'

The contemptuous laughing voice opened the priest's wounds, piercing them like a needle. He shook his head weakly. No, it was

not for him that the peasants had been dying for so long. They had chosen death for themselves—because they had faith; but this answer had no longer power to heal his wounds.

And so the days passed by, one by one. In the crape myrtle, the lifeless voice of the cicada went on as ever.

‘How is he?’ It was one of the officials who spoke in the course of his daily round.

‘No change. He sits staring at the wall all day long.’ The guard pointed to the room as he answered in a low voice.

‘I got instructions from the magistrate to come and see how things are going. Everything is proceeding according to the Lord of Chikugo’s plan.’ The official removed his face from the bars and a smile of satisfaction played about his lips, like that of a doctor inspecting the progress of a patient.

Now the *obon* is over. The streets of Nagasaki are quiet. At the end of the month a thanksgiving day is held, and the village heads from Nagasaki and Urakami contribute chests of early ripened rice to the magistrate’s office. On August 1st every official and representative of each town has to present himself in white ceremonial robes to the magistrate.

Slowly the full moon comes. In the grove behind the prison the owl and the turtledove answer each other, singing in the night. Above the grove the moon, completely round, is bathed in an eerie red color as it comes out from the dark clouds and then is hidden again. The old men whisper ominously that this coming year may bring something untoward.

It is August 13th. In the houses of Nagasaki, people make fish salads and cook sweet potatoes and beans. On that day the offi-

cials working at the magistrate's office offer fish and cakes to the magistrate who in turn gives the officials sake, soup and dumplings.

That night the guards drank sake until it was late. The raucous voices and the clinking of the cups were brought constantly to his ears. The priest squatted on the ground, his hunched shoulders bathed in the silver moonlight that pierced the bars of his prison. His wasted form was reflected on the wall; sometimes he gave a start as a cockroach chirruped in the trees. Closing his sunken eyes, he relished the thick darkness that enveloped him. On this night when all those whom he knew were fast asleep, a thrust of poignant pain passed through his breast; and he thought of yet another night. Yes, crouching on the ashen earth of a Gethsemane that had imbibed all the heat of the day, alone and separated from his sleeping disciples, a man had said: 'My soul is sorrowful even unto death.' And his sweat had become like drops of blood. This was the face that was now before his eyes. Hundreds and hundreds of times it had appeared in his dreams; but why was it that only now did the suffering, perspiring face seem so far away? Yet tonight he focused all his attention on the emaciated expression on those cheeks.

On that night had that man, too, felt the silence of God? Had he, too, shuddered with fear? The priest did not want to think so. Yet this thought suddenly arose within his breast, and he tried not to hear the voice that told him so, and he wildly shook his head two or three times. The rainy sea into which Mokichi and Ichizo had sunk, fastened to stakes! The sea on which the black head of Garrpe, chasing after the little boat, had struggled wildly and then floated like a piece of drifting wood! The sea into which those bodies wrapped in straw matting had dropped straight down! This sea stretched out endlessly, sadly; and all this time, over the sea, God simply maintained his unrelenting silence. 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!' With the memory of the leaden sea, these words suddenly burst into his consciousness. 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!' It is three o'clock on that Friday; and from the cross

this voice rings out to a sky covered with darkness. The priest had always thought that these words were that man's prayer, not that they issued from terror at the silence of God.

Did God really exist? If not, how ludicrous was half of his life spent traversing the limitless seas to come and plant the tiny seed in this barren island! How ludicrous the life of the one-eyed man executed while the cicadas sang in the full light of day! How ludicrous was the life of Garrpe, swimming in pursuit of the Christians in that little boat! Facing the wall, the priest laughed aloud.

'Father, what's the joke?' The raucous voices of the drunken guards had ceased; and one passing by the door asked the question.

And yet when morning came and the strong rays of the sun once more pierced through the bars, the priest regained some of his spirit and recovered from the loneliness of the previous night. Stretching out both feet and resting his head against the wall he whispered words from the psalms in a sorrowful voice: 'My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast! I will sing and make melody! Awake my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn.' In childhood these words had always risen in his mind when he watched the wind blow over the blue sky and through the trees; but that was a time when God was not as now an object of fear and perplexity but one who was near to the earth, giving harmony and living joy.

Sometimes the officials and the guards would look at him through the bars, eyes alight with curiosity; but the priest no longer gave them so much as a glance. Sometimes he did not even touch the food offered to him three times each day.

Now it was September. One afternoon, when the air was already tinged with a certain freshness, he was suddenly paid a visit by the interpreter.

'Today I want you to meet someone.' The interpreter spoke in

his usual jesting manner, playing with his fan. 'No, no. Not the magistrate, not the officials. A person I think you want to meet.'

The priest remained silent, his lifeless eyes fixed on the other. He had a clear recollection of the words the interpreter had cast at him on another occasion, but strangely enough he could not hate the fellow nor even be angry with him. He felt too weary even to hate.

'I hear you don't eat much.' The interpreter spoke with his usual thin smile. 'It would be better not to brood so much.'

With these words he cocked his head on one side, then went out, then came in again, going out and coming in several times.

'What's keeping that palanquin,' he said. 'It's time it was here.'

But by now the priest had no interest in whom he was going to meet. His listless eyes simply fixed themselves on the relentless figure of the interpreter, who kept running out and in.

But now the voices of the palanquin-carriers could be heard at the entrance. Next they were engaged in conversation with the interpreter.

'Father, let's go.'

Without a word the priest stood up, and slowly and sluggishly made his way out. The blinding rays of the sun cut his eyes, blood-shot and yellow with exhaustion. Two carriers, wearing only loincloths, stood there with the palanquin on their shoulders and stared intently at him. 'He is heavy! He's big and fat,' they grumbled as the priest clambered in.

They had closed down the blind to avoid the idle curiosity of passers-by, so that he could see nothing of what was going on outside. Only all sorts of sounds and noises came to his ears. The shrieking of children; the bells of the bonzes; the noise of construction. Here and there the evening sun piercing through the blind struck his face. But not only was there noise; there were also smells of all kinds wafted to where he sat. The smell of trees and of mud; the smell of hens, of cows and of horses. Closing his eyes for a moment, the priest drew deep down into his bosom the life of

these people who surrounded him. Then suddenly there rose up within him a longing to talk to others, to be like other people, to hear the words of other men, to plunge into the daily life of men. Yes, he had had enough of this—of this hiding in that charcoal hut, of the roaming through the mountains in terror of his pursuers, of the sight of Christians massacred daily before his very eyes. He no longer had the strength to put up with all this. And yet . . . 'With thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, with thy whole mind, with thy whole strength.' He had become a priest in order to aim at one thing, and one thing alone.

The sounds alone told him that now they had entered the town. Before it had been the clucking of hens and the mooing of cattle, but now it was the restless shuffling of feet that pierced the blind to where he was sitting—shrill voices buying and selling, the wheels of carts and voices raised in altercation.

Where he was going, and whom he would meet—these things were not important to him now. No matter who it was, the same old questions would be put, the same cross-examination of his work would go on. The questioning was all a formality. Like Herod when he faced Christ, these people put questions without any interest in the answer. Besides, why had the Lord of Chikugo refused to kill him alone and, without acquitting him, left him alive? But anyhow, to go into all this business was only troublesome and disturbing.

'We're here!'

Wiping away the sweat with his hand, the interpreter stopped the palanquin and raised the blind. Getting out, the priest's eyes were suddenly struck by the evening sun, and he saw before him the guard who had looked after him in prison. Probably they had brought along this man for fear that he might break loose and try to escape during the journey.

Above a flight of stairs stood a two-storied gate, behind which was a small temple bathed in the light of the evening sun and with brown mountains and cliffs stretching out behind. In the dull

and dim temple two or three cocks strutted arrogantly around. A young bonze came out; looking up at the priest with eyes that flashed hostility he disappeared from sight without so much as a word of greeting—even to the interpreter.

‘The bonzes don’t like you priests,’ said the interpreter, a note of delight in his voice as he squatted down on the floor and looked out at the garden. ‘Sitting alone all day long looking at the wall and brooding is poison for you,’ he went on. ‘Stop this nonsense; it doesn’t help anybody to cause useless trouble.’

But the priest, as usual, was paying no attention to his teasing. What distracted him just now was that in this temple compound with its smell of incense and Japanese food, somehow his nostrils suddenly picked up on an alien smell in the midst of it all. It was the smell of meat. It was meat—from which he had been forced to abstain for so long that he had become sensitive to the slightest smell of it.

Then far away he heard the sound of footsteps. Someone was approaching along the lengthy corridor.

‘Who are you going to meet? Have you guessed yet?’

This time the priest’s face stiffened; and for the first time he nodded. He felt his knees tremble involuntarily. Yes, he had known that someday he must meet this man; but never had he thought that it would be in a place like this.

‘Well, it’s time for you to meet him.’ The interpreter spoke in high delight, watching the trembling figure of the priest. ‘This is the magistrate’s order.’

‘Inoue?’

‘Yes. And the other person, he would like to meet you too.’

Following on the heels of an old monk walked Ferreira in a black kimono, his eyes cast down. The stocky little monk self-confidently puffing out his chest emphasized the servility of the tall Ferreira who, with lowered eyes, looked just like a big animal which, with a rope around its neck, is trailed reluctantly along.

The old monk came to a halt, and Ferreira without a word

glanced at the priest and then sat down in a corner of the floor lightened by the setting sun. For some time there was a deathly silence.

'Father!' At last Rodrigues spoke in a trembling voice. 'Father!'

Raising his bowed head a little, Ferreira glanced at the priest. For an instant there flashed into his eyes a servile smile and momentary shame; but then wide-eyed he looked down at the other deliberately and challengingly.

But Rodrigues, conscious of his priesthood, was at a loss for words. His heart was too full to speak; anything he said would be like a lie; nor did he wish to incite even more the condescending curiosity of the bonze and the interpreter who were gazing steadily at him. Nostalgia, anger, sadness, hatred—all kinds of conflicting emotions simmered within his breast. Why do you put on such a face?, he cried out in his heart. I did not come here to condemn you. I am not here as your judge. I am no better than you. He tried to force a smile to his lips; but instead of a smile a white tear fell from his eye and flowed slowly down his cheek.

'Father, so long since we have met . . .' At last the trembling voice of Rodrigues broke the silence. Even as he spoke he was aware how foolish and silly the words sounded; but nothing else would come to his lips.

And yet Ferreira remained silent, the challenging smile still lingering on his lips. The priest understood very well how the weak and servile smile could give place to this challenging expression. And it was precisely because he understood, that he felt he would like to collapse on the spot like a withered tree.

'Please . . . say . . . something.' Rodrigues was almost panting as he spoke. 'If you have pity for me . . . please . . . say . . . something.'

Suddenly he knew what he himself wanted to say; and strange words seemed to rise in his throat. You have shaved off your beard, was what he wanted to say. But he himself could not understand why such strange sentiments should come into his mind. Only that in the old days the Ferreira whom he and Garpe had known had

had such a well-groomed beard. It was something that had given to his whole appearance an air of kindness combined with gravity. But now the chin and upper lip were smooth and clean shaven. The priest felt his eyes drawn to this part of Ferreira's face. Somehow it reflected a terrible sensuality.

'What can I say to you on such an occasion?', said Ferreira.

'You're deceiving yourself.'

'Deceiving myself? How can I explain the part of me that is not all self-deception?'

The interpreter was now getting up on his knees to make sure that he missed nothing of the Portuguese. Two or three chickens jumped up from the ground onto the veranda and fluttered their wings.

'Have you been living here for long?'

'About a year, I suppose.'

'What is this place?'

'It is a temple called Saishoji.'

Hearing the word 'Saishoji' from the lips of Ferreira, the old monk who had been staring in front of him like a Buddha in stone turned his face toward them.

'I also am in a prison somewhere in Nagasaki. Where precisely it is I do not know myself.'

'I know it. It is in the outskirts of the city.'

'What are you doing all day, Ferreira?'

A flash of pain crossed Ferreira's face as he put his hand on the well-shaven chin.

'The honorable Sawano spends his day writing.' This time it was the interpreter who broke in, speaking in Ferreira's stead.

'At the magistrate's order I am translating a book on astronomy.' Ferreira spoke out the words rapidly as if he wanted to shut the mouth of the interpreter. 'Yes, that's what I'm doing. And I am of some use. I am of some use to the people of this country. The Japanese already have knowledge and learning of all kinds, but in the line of astronomy and medicine a Westerner like myself

can still help them. Of course in this country there is an outstanding knowledge of medicine learnt from China; but it is by no means useless to add to it our knowledge of surgery. The same is true of astronomy. For that reason I have asked the Dutch commander to be kind enough to lend us lenses and telescopes. So I am not useless in this country. I can perform some service. I can!

The priest stared at this Ferreira who kept persistently talking on and on. He could not understand why the man had suddenly become so eloquent. And yet he somehow felt he could understand the other's psychology in the constant emphasizing that he was of some use to this country. Ferreira was not only talking to him. The interpreter and the bonze were there too; and Ferreira wanted them to hear. Besides, he kept prattling to justify his existence in his own eyes: 'I am useful to this country!'

The priest blinked his eyes sorrowfully as he looked at Ferreira. Yes, to be useful to others, to help others, this was the one wish and the only dream of one who had dedicated himself to the priesthood. The solitude of the priestly life was only when one was useless to others. The priest realized that even now, after his apostasy, Ferreira had not been able to escape from the old psychological orientation that had motivated him. Ferreira seemed to be relying on his old dream of helping others like a crazy woman who offers her breast to a baby.

'Are you happy?', murmured Rodrigues.

'Who?'

'You!'

A flame again flashed into the challenging eyes of Ferreira. 'There are all kinds of subjective factors in the concept of happiness,' he said.

That's not what you used to say—were the words that rose to the priest's lips, only to be suppressed. After all, he was not here to censure Ferreira for his apostasy and betrayal of his disciples. He had no desire to irritate that deep wound that lay beneath the surface of the other's mind and which he tried to conceal.

'That's so. He is helping us Japanese. He even has a Japanese name: Sawano Chuan.' It was the interpreter who spoke from his position between the two, leering into both faces. 'And he's writing another book,' he went on. 'It's a book to refute the teaching of Deus and to show the errors of Christianity. *Gengiroku* it is called.'

This time Ferreira had not been quick enough to stop the mouth of the interpreter. For an instant he turned his gaze to the fluttering chickens, trying to look as if he had not heard what the other had said.

'The magistrate has read his manuscript,' went on the interpreter. 'He praises it. He says it is well done. You should have a look at it yourself: you have plenty of time in prison.'

Now the priest saw clearly why Ferreira had spoken so rapidly and hastily about his translation of astronomy. Ferreira—the man who, at the bidding of the Lord of Chikugo, had to sit at his desk every day. Ferreira—who was writing that this Christianity to which he had devoted his life was false. The priest felt he could almost see the bent back of Ferreira as he plied his quill.

'Cruel!' said Rodrigues.

'What is cruel?'

'Cruel! Worse than any torture! I can't think of anything more dastardly.'

Suddenly, as Ferreira tried to turn his face away, the priest saw a white tear glistening in his eye. The black Japanese kimono! The chestnut hair bound back in Japanese style! The name: Sawano Chuan! And yet this man is still alive! Lord, you are still silent. You still maintain your deep silence in a life like this!

'Sawano Chuan, we did not bring this father here today just for a lengthy discussion.' It was the interpreter who now spoke and, turning toward the old bonze who, like a stone Buddha, was squatting on the floor bright with the rays of the western sun, 'Come!' he said. 'The bonze is busy too. Get your work done quickly.'

Now Ferreira seemed to lose his former fighting spirit. On his eyelash the white tear still glistened, but the priest felt that the man's stature had suddenly shrunk so that he looked quite small.

'I've been told to get you to apostatize,' said Ferreira in a tired voice. 'Look at this!' And he pointed quietly to behind his ear where there was a scar. It was a brown scar like that left after a burn.

'It's called the pit. You've probably heard about it. They bind you in such a way that you can move neither hands nor feet; and then they hang you upside down in a pit.'

The interpreter extended both hands in a gesture of dread, as though he himself shuddered at the very thought of it. He said: 'These little openings are made behind the ears so that you won't die immediately. The blood trickles out drop by drop. It's a torture invented by the Magistrate Inoue.'

Before the priest's mind there floated the picture of Inoue: the big ears, the rich complexion, the fleshy face. There before him was that face as it had appeared when Inoue slowly played with the bowl, turning it in his hands while sipping the hot water. This was the face upon which had played the smile of assent when the priest argued in his own defence. When yet another man was being tortured, it was said that Herod had sat down to dine at a table decorated with flowers.

'Think it over,' went on the interpreter. 'You're the only Christian priest left in this country. Now you're captured and there's no one left to teach the peasants and spread your doctrine. Aren't you useless?' But now the interpreter's eyes narrowed and his voice quite suddenly assumed a kind and gentle tone: 'You heard what Chuan said. He's translating books of astronomy and medicine; he's helping the sick; he's working for other people. Think of this too: as the old bonze keeps reminding Chuan, the path of mercy means simply that you abandon self. Nobody should worry about getting others into his religious sect. To help others is the way of the Buddha and the teaching of Christianity—in this point the two religions are the same. What matters is whether

or not you walk the path of truth. Sawano is writing this in his *Gengiroku*.'

When he had finished speaking, the interpreter looked toward Ferreira for support.

The full light of the evening sun flowed down upon the thin back of the aging Ferreira clad in Japanese-garments. Staring at that thin back, the priest sought in vain for the Ferreira who had won his respect at the seminary in Lisbon long ago. Yet now, strange to say, no sentiments of contempt filled his mind. He simply felt his breast swell with the pity one feels for a living being that has lost its life and its spirit.

'For twenty years . . .' Lowering his eyes Ferreira whispered weakly. 'For twenty years I have labored in this country. I know it better than you.'

'During those twenty years as Superior you did marvellous work,' said the priest, raising his voice in an attempt to encourage the other. 'I read with great respect the letters you sent to the headquarters of the Society.'

'Well, before your eyes stands the figure of an old missionary defeated by missionary work.'

'No one can be defeated by missionary work. When you and I are dead yet another missionary will board a junk at Macao and secretly come ashore somewhere in this country.'

'He will certainly be captured.' This time it was the interpreter who quickly interrupted. 'And whenever one is captured it is Japanese blood that will flow. How many times have I told you that it is the Japanese who have to die for your selfish dream. It is time to leave us in peace.'

'For twenty years I labored in the mission.' With emotionless voice Ferreira repeated the same words. 'The one thing I know is that our religion does not take root in this country.'

'It is not that it does not take root,' cried Rodrigues in a loud voice, shaking his head. 'It's that the roots are torn up.'

At the loud cry of the priest, Ferreira did not so much as raise

his head. Eyes lowered he answered like a puppet without emotion: 'This country is a swamp. In time you will come to see that for yourself. This country is a more terrible swamp than you can imagine. Whenever you plant a sapling in this swamp the roots begin to rot; the leaves grow yellow and wither. And we have planted the sapling of Christianity in this swamp.'

'There was a time when the sapling grew and sent forth leaves.'

'When?' For the first time Ferreira gazed directly at the priest, while around the sunken cheeks played the faint smile of one who pities a youngster with no knowledge of the world.

'When you first came to this country churches were built everywhere, faith was fragrant like the fresh flowers of the morning, and many Japanese vied with one another to receive baptism like the Jews who gathered at the Jordan.'

'And supposing the God whom those Japanese believed in was not the God of Christian teaching . . .' Ferreira murmured these words slowly, the smile of pity still lingering on his lips.

Feeling an incomprehensible anger rising up from the depth of his heart, the priest unconsciously clenched his fists. 'Be reasonable,' he told himself desperately. 'Don't be deceived by this sophistry. The defeated man uses any self-deception whatsoever to defend himself.'

'You are denying the undeniable,' he said aloud.

'Not at all. What the Japanese of that time believed in was not our God. It was their own gods. For a long time we failed to realize this and firmly believed that they had become Christians.' Ferreira sat down on the floor with a gesture of tiredness. The bottom of his kimono fell open exposing dirty bare legs, thin like poles. 'I am saying this neither to defend myself nor to convince you. I suppose that no one will believe what I am saying. Not only you but the missionaries in Goa and Macao and all the European priests will refuse to believe me. And yet, after twenty years of labor here I knew the Japanese. I saw that little by little, almost imperceptibly, the roots of the sapling we had planted decayed.'

'Saint Francis Xavier . . .' Rodrigues, unable to contain himself any longer, interrupted the other with a gesture. 'Saint Francis Xavier, when he was in Japan, did not have that idea.'

'Even that saint,' Ferreira nodded, 'failed to notice this. But his very word "Deus" the Japanese freely changed into "Dainichi" (The Great Sun). To the Japanese who adored the sun the pronunciation of "Deus" and "Dainichi" was almost the same. Have you not read the letter in which Xavier speaks of that mistake?'

'If Xavier had had a good interpreter such a strange and trifling error would never have arisen.'

'By no means. You don't understand what I'm saying.' For the first time nervous irritation appeared around his temples as Ferreira answered. 'You understand nothing. And the crowd that comes for sightseeing to this country from the monasteries of Goa and Macao calling themselves apostles—they understand nothing either. From the beginning those same Japanese who confused "Deus" and "Dainichi" twisted and changed our God and began to create something different. Even when the confusion of vocabulary disappeared the twisting and changing secretly continued. Even in the glorious missionary period you mentioned the Japanese did not believe in the Christian God but in their own distortion.'

'They twisted and changed our God and made something different!' The priest slowly bit the words with his teeth. 'Isn't even that our Deus?'

'No! In the minds of the Japanese the Christian God was completely changed.'

'What are you saying?' At the priest's loud cry the chicken that had been quietly nibbling food on the bare floor fluttered off into a corner.

'What I say is simple. You and those like you are only looking at the externals of missionary work. You're not considering the kernel. It is true, as you say, that in my twenty years of labor in Kyoto, in Kyushu, in Chugoku, in Sendai and the rest churches

were built; in Arima and Azuchi seminaries were established; and the Japanese vied with one another to become Christians. You have just said that there were 200,000 Christians, but even that figure is conservative. There was a time when we had 400,000.'

'That is something to be proud of.'

'Proud? Yes, if the Japanese had come to believe in the God we taught. But in the churches we built throughout this country the Japanese were not praying to the Christian God. They twisted God to their own way of thinking in a way we can never imagine. If you call that God . . .' Ferreira lowered his eyes and moved his lips as though something had occurred to him. 'No. That is not God. It is like a butterfly caught in a spider's web. At first it is certainly a butterfly, but the next day only the externals, the wings and the trunk, are those of a butterfly; it has lost its true reality and has become a skeleton. In Japan our God is just like that butterfly caught in the spider's web: only the exterior form of God remains, but it has already become a skeleton.'

'Nothing of the sort! I don't want to listen to your nonsensical talk. I have not been in Japan as long as you, but with these very eyes I have seen the martyrs.' The priest covered his face with his hands and his voice penetrated through his fingers. 'With my own eyes. I have seen them die, burning with faith.' The memory of the rain-drenched sea with the two black stakes floating on its surface arose painfully before his mind's eye. Nor could he forget the one-eyed man killed in plain daylight; while indelibly imprinted on his mind was the picture of the woman who had given him a cucumber: she had been trussed into a basket and drowned in the sea. If these people had not died for their faith what a blasphemy to man! Ferreira is lying.

'They did not believe in the Christian God.' Ferreira spoke clearly and with self-confidence, deliberately emphasizing every word. 'The Japanese till this day have never had the concept of God; and they never will.'

These words descended on the priest's heart like the weight

of a huge, immovable rock and with something of that power that had been there when as a child he first heard about the existence of God.

'The Japanese are not able to think of God completely divorced from man; the Japanese cannot think of an existence that transcends the human.'

'Christianity and the Church are truths that transcend all countries and territories. If not, what meaning is there in our missionary work?'

'The Japanese imagine a beautiful, exalted man—and this they call God. They call by the name of God something which has the same kind of existence as man. But that is not the Church's God.'

'Is that the only thing you have learnt from your twenty years in this country?'

'Only that.' Ferreira nodded in a lonely way. 'And so the mission lost its meaning for me. The sapling I brought quickly decayed to its roots in this swamp. For a long time I neither knew nor noticed this.'

At the last words of Ferreira the priest was overcome with an uncontrollable sense of bitter resignation. The evening light began to lose its power; the shadows little by little stole over the floor. Far in the distance the priest could hear the monotonous sound of the wooden drum and the voice of the bonzes chanting the sad sutras. 'You,' the priest whispered facing Ferreira, 'you are not the Ferreira I knew.'

'True. I am not Ferreira. I am a man who has received from the magistrate the name of Sawano Chuan,' answered Ferreira lowering his eyes. 'And not only the name. I have received the wife and children of the executed man.'

It is the hour of the boar. Once again in the palanquin, escorted by officials and guards, he is on the road. It is now dead of night; no need to worry about casual passers-by peering into the palan-

quin. The officials had given the priest permission to raise the blind. If he wanted he could have escaped, but he no longer felt like doing so. The road was terribly narrow and twisted; and though the guards told him that they were already within the town, there were still clusters of farmhouses that looked like huts; but when they passed beyond them they found here and there the long fences of temples and groves of trees: Nagasaki had not yet taken on the shape of a city. The moon rose up beyond the dark trees and together with the palanquin seemed to move ever toward the west.

'You feel better now?' The official who rode along beside him spoke kindly.

Arriving at the prison the priest uttered a word of gratitude to the guards and the officials, and then went inside. He heard the dull sound of the bolt being shot. It had been a long time since he had been here, and now at last he was back. It seemed such an age since he had heard the intermittent singing of the turtledove in the grove. In comparison with his ten days in prison this one day had been long and painful.

That he had at last met Ferreira was scarcely a reason for surprise. And the changed features and manner of the old man—now he came to think of it, this was something he had expected since coming to this country. The emaciated figure of Ferreira as he came tottering along that corridor from afar was not so terrifying. Now it did not matter. It did not matter. But to what extent was all he had said true?

The priest sat staring at the blank wall while the rays of the moon pierced through the bars bathing his back with light. Hadn't Ferreira talked in this way just to defend his own wrong and weakness? Yes, that was it. Of course it was so. One part of him kept insisting on this; but then quite suddenly a gust of fear would seize him and he would wonder if what Ferreira said were not perhaps true. Ferreira had said that this Japan was a bottomless

swamp. The sapling decayed at its roots and withered. Christianity was like this sapling: quite unperceived it had withered and died.

'It's not because of any prohibition nor because of persecution that Christianity has perished. There's something in this country that completely stifles the growth of Christianity.' The words of Ferreira, uttered slowly syllable by syllable, pierced the priest's ears. 'The Christianity they believe in is like the skeleton of a butterfly caught in a spider's web: it contains only the external form; the blood and the flesh are gone.' So Ferreira had gone on with blazing eyes. And somehow in his words there was a certain sincerity unlike the self-deception of a defeated man.

Now the footsteps of the guards could be heard in the distance. When they faded out, the only sound was the hoarse rasping of insects in the blackness of the night.

'It cannot be true. No, no. It is impossible.' Rodrigues did not have enough missionary experience to refute Ferreira; but to accept the other's word was to lose everything for which he had come to this country. Banging his head against the wall he kept murmuring monotonously: 'It cannot be so. It is impossible.'

Yes, it is impossible, impossible. How could anyone sacrifice himself for a false faith? With his own eyes he had seen those peasants, poverty-stricken martyrs. If they had not had a true belief in salvation, how could they sink like stones in the mist-covered sea? On any account they were strong Christians. Even if their belief was simple and crude, it breathed a conviction that had been implanted in Japan not by these officials nor by Buddhism, but by the Christian Church.

The priest recalled Ferreira's sadness. In the course of their conversation Ferreira had said not one word about the poor Japanese martyrs. Of course he had deliberately avoided this issue; he had tried to avoid any thought of people who were stronger than himself, people who had heroically endured torture and the

pit. Ferreira was trying to increase, even by one, the number of weaklings like himself—to share with others his cowardice and loneliness.

In the darkness he asked himself if now Ferreira was sleeping. No, he could not be asleep. The old man, in some part of the same city, was sitting in the darkness like himself, his eyes open, staring in front of him, biting at the depths of his solitude. And this loneliness was much colder, much more terrible than that which he endured in this prison cell. In order to pile weakness upon weakness he was trying to drag others along the path that he himself had walked. Lord, will you not save him? Turning to Judas you said, 'What thou dost, do quickly.' Will you number this man, too, among the abandoned sheep?

And so, comparing his own loneliness and sadness with that of Ferreira, he felt for the first time some self-respect and satisfaction—and he was able quietly to laugh. Then, lying down on the hard, bare floor, he waited for the onrush of sleep.