

**PUBLICATIONS PROHIBITED
UNDER THE SHOGUNATE**

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THE art of printing was highly developed during the Tokugawa period and many books were published, some of which were printed with ordinary type and others from wooden blocks, though the type was also of wood. A sharp eye was kept on all books to avert the appearance of anything calculated to disturb the existing order of things; and the policy adopted in this connection gives a very good idea of the inner thought of the government of the day.

The books of which publication was prohibited were of seven kinds: Books on Christianity; on the history of the Toyotomi family; on Foreign countries; on national topography; on the private life of any member of the Tokugawa family; on the Tokugawa shogunate by way of criticism; books likely to disturb the public peace; books detrimental to morals.

Books on Christianity were prohibited because the Bakufu authorities came to believe that the foreigners who represented this religion were bent on undoing the government of the country and having their own countries exercise power over Japan. The Tokugawa shoguns not only stopped the publication and circulation of Christian books but instituted a policy of severe persecution against Christians. Even books on astronomy and mathematics were banned if they contained references to the Christian religion. In 1665 a work was published entitled "The Eradication of Christianity," and it was promptly put under the ban and soon went out of print. This book did not attempt the propagation of religion: only a history of the Christian persecutions; yet it was rejected by the authorities, probably because it was thought the description of Christian endurance under persecution might inspire faith in others, and cause resentment against the authorities which enforced such cruel treatment.

Books on the Toyotomi family were naturally prohibited because the Tokugawa shoguns had overthrown the family and succeeded to its power and prestige. The public did not regard the Tokugawa treatment of the Toyotomi family as justified, and friends of the heirs of Hideyoshi long continued to exist among the Tokugawa followers. On these the shogun always kept a very watchful eye. No one was allowed to say anything good of the family that had been practically exterminated; and anyone writing on the subject was unmercifully punished. When the *Kojo Zoroi* was published in 1649 it was at once prohibited. It consisted of a collection of old letters,

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including one from Ieyasu, the first of the Tokugawa shoguns, to Hideyori, the son and heir of Hideyoshi, threatening him with an attack if he took sides with Ishida Mitsunari, and also a letter of Hideyori promising to act discreetly. As the letter from Ieyasu showed artful cunning, the Shogun feared its effect on the public, immediately ordered its suppression and promptly beheaded the

publisher, Nishimura Denbei of Osaka.

Another book that came under the ban was the *Taikoki*, a fictitious description of the life of Hideyoshi Toyotomi, which appeared in 1699. The novel was subsequently printed but each time it was at once suppressed and destroyed. In 1804 a book called *Yehon Taikoki*, giving an illustrated account of the Toyotomi family, was published, and the illustrator and printer were ordered to be put in handcuffs for thirty days, the work itself being confiscated. Jippensha Ikku, the famous author of the *Hizakurige*, was also fined and imprisoned for writing a book describing battles between ghosts, which clearly portrayed the struggle between the Tokugawa and the Toyotomi families. All this showed how uncertain of its tenure was the Tokugawa government as well as considerable guilt of conscience.

Books about foreign lands were prohibited in accordance with the shogun's policy of forbidding all communication with foreign countries concomitant with the prohibition against Christianity. Presumably it was thought that knowledge of foreign lands might weaken opposition to foreigners. In 1765 a book called *Komodan* was published, describing the manners and customs of Holland and explaining the European alphabet. This description of the foreign alphabet was regarded with mysterious awe, as it was supposed that from a knowledge of it anyone might be able to read Dutch and thus gain the information which the government had prohibited. A book entitled the *Sangoku Tsuran* by Rin Shihei was also placed under the ban because it described Korea, Luchu and Yezo.

It was perhaps only natural that the shogunate should prohibit books on the Tokugawa family, as an accurate account of its rise to power might well impair its dignity in the popular mind. In 1716 a book called the *Banpo Zenshu* was published, giving an appraisal of old pictures and illustrations, and containing examples of the calligraphy of some of the Tokugawa shoguns. It aroused the anger of the Bakufu authorities and was soon under the ban. A novel by Ryutei el Tanehiko drew illustrations freely from Tokugawa history, and was remarkably true to life. The Bakufu disapproved of this and had the author confined to his house for a certain period, until he died. It was said that his wonderfully accurate knowledge of the inside life of the Tokugawa family was obtained from a relative of his who had been a waiting maid in the Tokugawa family.

The Shogun's government had naturally many enemies and it was very difficult to keep down writings in criticism of its policy. Yet there were always patriots ready to take their lives in their hands and challenge the policy of the *Bakufu*. In 1687 Kumazawa Banzan wrote his *Daigaku Wakumon*, unreservedly pointing out the evils of the age and suggesting reforms to the existing administration. He even presented a copy to the shogun. The latter was indignant and ordered the author to be incarcerated. Soon after this a biography of Tanuma Okitsugu appeared, in which was given a description of the corrupt practices of certain Tokugawa officials. The book was banned and the author banished into exile. Great men like Yamaga Soko, Hirata Atsutane and Watanabe Kwazan were ordered into exile and finally to commit suicide because their books criticised the Tokugawa administration.

Some of the books prohibited on grounds of disturbing the public peace appear simply ridiculous or very funny to people of modern times. A book called *Dazaifu Tenman gu Kojitsu*, published in 1685, and giving an account of the life of the famous patriot Sugawara Michizane written by Kaibara Yekiken, contraverted the idea that this hero was a god. Such a heresy excited the wrath of the priests

of the shrine where the hero was worshipped and the government prohibited the book to preserve the peace. In 1769 a book was published entitled *Meiwa Gikan*, purporting to give an account of the lives of popular actors of the day, modeled after the books giving lists of the daimyos; which the authorities considered disrespectful to the daimyos, and so the publisher was sentenced to banishment. In 1805 a book appeared giving a somewhat spicy account of the life of a lawless priest named Enmei-in. It was put under the ban because it might cause strife in religious circles.

In the books prohibited because of their bad effect on national morals were included those of an obscene character either in print or picture. In 1722 books by Mara Saikaku, a famous novelist, were prohibited; but in regard to such books the authorities were hardly consistent and many works of a lewd character escaped detection or were connived at. Later the regulations were enforced with greater strictness and the authors were put under handcuffs for a period. Tamenaga Shunsui died under the suffering caused by this confinement, in 1841.