

A Strange People, These Japanese!

By KIMPEI SHEBA

Tokio.

THE HIGH PRIEST of Zojoji, one of the greatest and most imposing temples in Japan, if not in the world, received me in his private chapel. I called to ask about a religious ceremony of appeasement for having eaten fish and meat.

● This is a Buddhist mass called *kuyo* and is held not only for fish and animals but for all animate and inanimate objects which have been sacrificed to make it possible for mankind to live more happily. It is held for animals killed for vivisection, for mosquitoes one slaps to death, and even for needles which housewives and tailors unintentionally break, as well as for cattle and fish killed for food.

● Such masses have been increasing in recent years as the Japanese people find one object after another to appease. Whereas *kuyos* were formerly attended by only a few persons, nowadays it is not unusual for several hundred persons to participate in them.

● What is the reason for the sudden increase in *kuyos*? Of what does the ceremony consist? Can the priests bring life anew to the objects that have been killed? These were some of the questions I wanted the high priest to answer.

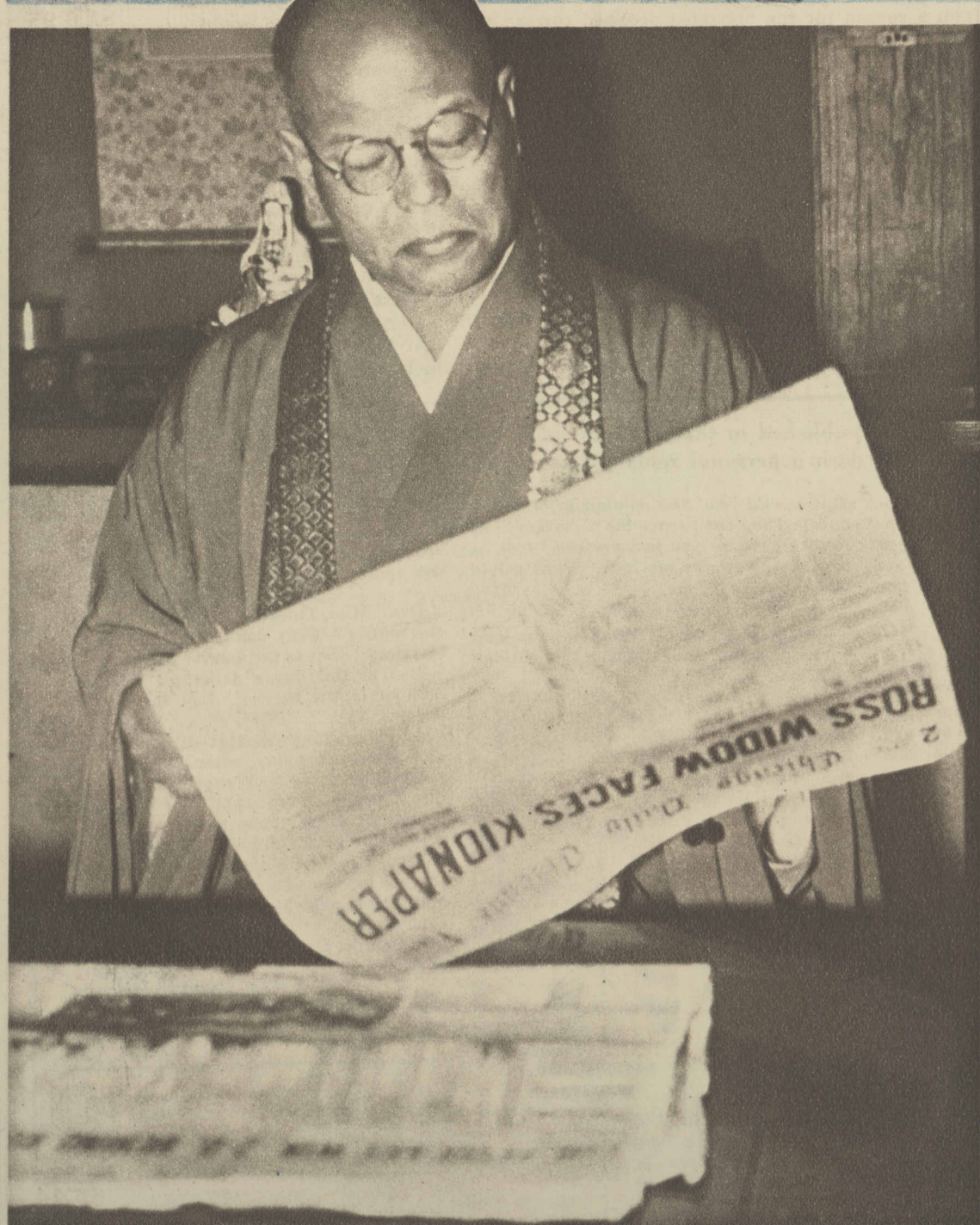
● I was ushered into a room that was in semi-darkness. There was a tiny altar on one side. The high priest rose to greet me. He bowed slowly and motioned me to be seated on a thick black silk cushion.

● "Buddha," the priest began, "teaches that it is sinful to take life. He particularly admonishes against killing animals. Cows are sacred in India, the birthplace of Buddha. Likewise they were sacred in Japan up to eighty-five years ago when the country was opened to the world by Commodore Perry.

● "When Japan decided to imitate the west, for better or for worse, it took no half-way measures. The younger people particularly, in violation of Buddhist precepts, started eating beef, pork, and the flesh of any and all creatures whose meat is edible.

● "On the face of it it may appear that there can be no reconciliation between Buddhism and people who disobey its tenets. That is not so. We no longer interpret Buddha's teaching in the narrow sense. Modern Buddhists believe that if it is essential for people to do things which run counter to the instructions of the great teacher they should be permitted to conduct themselves according to their desires. But we hold that such people should at the same time seek appeasement. That is the origin of *kuyo*."

● So the Japanese blandly go on slaughtering and eating cattle and hold *kuyos* in the conviction that Buddha understands and forgives. The people of the west as well as those of some countries in the east may find it difficult to reconcile themselves to such logic, but this does not worry the Japanese in the slightest degree. (Continued on page seven.)



(Courtesy Art Institute of Chicago.)

Above: Most Japanese are married according to the rites of Shinto, the religion of ancestor worship. Japanese women, such as the one pictured here from a famous print by Torii Gengen, however, usually are, like their menfolk, followers of Buddhism.

(Photo from Sheba.)

At left: The high priest Yoshiwara of Zojoji temple reads a copy of The Chicago Tribune. He is highly educated and frequently delivers lectures on religion at the universities.

(Courtesy Art Institute of Chicago.)

At right: Zojoji temple, one of the greatest and most imposing Buddhist edifices in all Japan, if not in the whole world, as pictured in a celebrated print by Kawase Hasui.

