The sky grew dark; clouds moved slowly over the mountain tops and down over the fields. This was the open plain of Chizukano. Here and there clusters of shrubs seemed to be crawling over the earth; but everywhere else only the black-brown ground stretched out endlessly. The samurai were engaged in earnest discussion; and when they had finished they gave the order for the priest to be taken down from his horse. The long period of sitting on horseback with hands tightly bound had taken its toll; and when he stood up on the ground, a searing pain shot through his thighs. So he crouched down to the ground.

One of the samurai was smoking tobacco with a long pipe. This was the first time since coming to Japan that the priest had seen tobacco. The samurai took two or three pulls, belched out the smoke and then passed on the pipe to his companion. Meanwhile the officials looked on enviously.

For a long time, now standing, now sitting on a rock, they all stood looking toward the south. Some of them relieved themselves in the shadow of the rock. The northern sky was still clear in spots, but toward the south heavy, evening clouds were already gathering. Sometimes the priest would look back over the road along which they had come, but there was no sign of Kichijirō—he
must have been delayed on the way. Probably he had got tired of
crawling after them and had dropped away.

‘They’re here! They’re here!’ yelled the guards, pointing toward
the south; and from that direction there slowly approached a band
of samurai and their attendants, similar to the ones here waiting.
Immediately the samurai with the pipe jumped astride his horse
and galloped with all speed toward the oncoming crowd. Still on
horseback he greeted the newcomers with a bow which was sol­
emnly answered. Now the priest knew that he was going to be
handed over to a new escort.

When the exchange of greetings had come to an end and the
band that had escorted him from Omura turned their horses and
vanished off along the road to the north where the sun’s rays still
fell gently, the priest was surrounded by the group that had come
for him from Nagasaki. Once again he was put up on the bare­
backed horse.

The prison was on the slope of a hill, surrounded by trees.
Only just built, it looked like a kind of storehouse; inside, it was
slightly raised from the ground. Light entered through a little
barred window and a small grating, fixed with a sliding wooden
door through which a plate could barely be passed. Here food was
pushed in to him once each day. After arriving, he had been
brought out twice for investigation, and this gave him a chance
to see what the place looked like outside—a bamboo fence faced
threateningly inwards, while further outside were the thatch­
roofed houses in which dwelt the guards.

When he was thrown in here there were no other prisoners
except himself. All day long he sat silently and pensively in the
darkness listening to the voices of the guards; it was not unlike
his previous stay in that hut on the island. Sometimes the guards
would talk to him, anxious as they were to while away the time;
and so he learnt that he was just outside Nagasaki, but he could
not find out what his position was in relation to the center of the
city. Only during the day he could hear far in the distance the
loud cries of working men, the sound of trees being hewn down, of nails being driven in; and this made him guess that this region was being newly developed. When night fell, he could hear the song of the turtledove amidst the trees.

In spite of everything his prison life was filled with a strange tranquillity and peace. The tension and anguish of those days of wandering through the mountains now seemed like a dream from a past life. He could not guess what the next day might bring, but he felt almost no fear. He got some strong Japanese paper and string from the guards, and with this he made a rosary with which almost all day long he prayed, biting at the sacred words. At night as he lay in bed with his eyes closed listening to the song of the turtledove in the trees, behind his closed eyelids he would pass through every scene in the life of Christ. From childhood the face of Christ had been for him the fulfillment of his every dream and ideal. The face of Christ as he preached to the crowd the Sermon on the Mount. The face of Christ as he passed over the Lake of Galilee at dusk. Even in its moments of terrible torture this face had never lost its beauty. Those soft, clear eyes which pierced to the very core of a man's being were now fixed upon him. The face that could do no wrong, utter no word of insult. When the vision of this face came before him, fear and trembling seemed to vanish like the tiny ripples that are quietly sucked up by the sand of the seashore.

This was the first time since coming to Japan that he had been able to pass day after day in peaceful tranquillity. He began to wonder if the continuation of this unbroken peace was a proof that his death was not far away. So gently did these quiet days flow through his heart.

But on the ninth day he was suddenly dragged out of his prison. Accustomed to a cell with no ray of light, the brightness of the sun seared his hollow eyes cutting them like a sword. The cry of cicadas was cascading from the trees like a waterfall, while behind the guards' hut was a resplendent view of bright red
flowers. Now he felt more keenly than ever what a vagabond he was, his hair and beard grown long, the flesh hanging loose around his bones, his arms thin like needles. He wondered if he was being brought out for cross-examination, but he was led straight to the guards' room and put into a cell. Why he was brought here he did not know.

Only the next day did he discover the reason. Suddenly the silence was broken by the angry barking voices of the guards, and he could hear the confused scuffling of several men and women being dragged out from the prison gate into the courtyard. Until the previous day these prisoners had been enclosed in a pitch-black prison like his own.

‘If you carry on this way, you’ll be punished.’ The guards shouted raising angry voices; and the prisoners resisted with equal anger.

‘Stop this rampaging. Stop!’ And so the angry dispute between guards and prisoners continued for some time. Then all became quiet again. When evening came, suddenly from out of the prison came the sound of voices raised in prayer: ‘Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. They Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen.’

In the mist of the evening their voices rose up like a fountain and then died away. ‘Lead us not into temptation.’ In those praying voices was there not a note of pathos? a plaintive tone? Blinking his sunken eyes the priest moved his lips in unison with that prayer. ‘Yet you never break the silence,’ he said. ‘You should not be silent for ever.’

The next day the priest asked the guards if he might visit the prisoners, who were being forced to work in the fields under heavy guard. This being granted he went out to where five or six men and women were lifelessly moving hoes. As they looked up at him
with astonishment, he remembered who they were. He also re­
membered the tattered peasant clothing. But it was their faces—
those faces that they turned up at him. Was it from the constant
deprivation of light in the prison cell that the men looked like
this, with their long beards and long hair, while the women’s faces
were deadly white.

‘Oh!’ cried one of the women, ‘it’s father. I would never have
recognized him.’

It was the woman who on that day had given him the cucum­
ber taken from her bosom. And beside her, looking like a beg­
gar, was the one-eyed fellow showing his decaying yellow teeth
and laughing with a touch of nostalgia.

From this day on he got permission from the guards; and every
morning and evening, twice each day, he went into the Chris­
tians’ prison. The guards knew that the prisoners would repay
their generosity by creating no disturbance at this time. Having
no bread and wine, the priest could not offer Mass; but at least
he could recite with them the Credo, Pater Noster and Ave Maria;
and he had a chance to hear their confessions.

‘Put not your trust in princes: in the children of men, in whom
there is no salvation. His spirit shall go forth, and he shall return
into his earth: in that day all their thoughts shall perish. Blessed
is he who hath the God of Jacob for his helper, whose hope is in
the Lord his God: who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all
things that are in them.’

As the priest uttered these words of the psalmist, not one of
the prisoners so much as coughed, but all strained their ears in
fervent attention. Even the guards were listening. This was a text
of Scripture he had read time and again; but it had never come to
his lips with such a wealth of meaning both for himself and for
the Christians. Each word seemed to sink into his heart with new
significance and new richness.

‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. From henceforth
now . . .’
'You will not meet with greater suffering than this,' said the priest in a voice filled with earnest fervor. 'The Lord will not abandon you forever. He it is who washes our wounds; his is the hand that wipes away our blood. The Lord will not be silent forever.'

When evening came, he administered the sacrament of penance to the Christians; but since he had no confessional, he put his ear to the hole through which the food was passed and the penitent whispered his sins in a low voice. And so he heard the confession. While this was going on, the others huddled together in a corner, trying as far as possible not to make things difficult for the penitent. Here in the prison, for the first time since the days of Tomogi, he was able to exercise his faculties as a priest; and the realization of this made him pray secretly that such a life might continue forever.

After hearing the confessions, he got the paper he had received from the officials, made himself a quill from a chicken's wing which had fallen in the courtyard, and began to write down all his reminiscences since coming to Japan. He did not know, of course, if what he wrote would ever reach Portugal; but there was the possibility that some Christian might hand it to a Chinese in Nagasaki. And with this faint hope he pushed his quill over the pages.

At night, as he sat in the dark listening to the sound of the turtledove in the trees, he felt the face of Christ looking intently at him. The clear blue eyes were gentle with compassion; the features were tranquil; it was a face filled with trust. 'Lord, you will not cast us away any longer,' he whispered, his eyes fixed upon that face. And then the answer seemed to come to his ears: 'I will not abandon you.' Bowing his head he strained his ears for the sound of that voice again; but the only thing he could hear was the singing of the turtledove. The darkness was thick and black. Yet the priest felt that for one instant his heart had been purified.

One day he heard the sound of the bolt; and a guard put in his head at the door. 'Change your clothes,' he shouted, as he
threw some heavy garments on the floor. ‘Look! You have red clothes, and underwear of jittoku and cotton. Take them all. They’re yours.’ The guard went on to explain that jittoku was the material worn by Buddhist monks.

‘Thanks very much,’ answered the priest, a smile on his sunken face, ‘but please take them away. I don’t want them.’

‘You won’t take them? You won’t take them?’ The guard shook his head like a child and looked longingly at the garment. ‘But they are a gift from the officials at the magistrate’s office.’

Comparing his own hemp clothing with these completely new garments, he asked himself why the officials had presented him with the clothing of a bonze. Was it a gesture of pity toward a prisoner? or was it one more trap to ensnare him? He could not make out which it might be. But anyhow, with this clothing, he reflected that from now his connection with the magistrate’s office had begun.

‘Quickly! Quickly!’ urged the guard. ‘The officials will soon be here.’

He had not thought that his cross-examination would come so quickly. In his imagination every day he had dramatically pictured the scene as being like the meeting of Pilate and Christ—the crowd howling, Pilate perplexed, Christ standing silent. But here the only sound was the cry of the cicadas inviting him to sleep. The prison of the Christians was wrapped in its usual afternoon silence.

Getting hot water from the guard he washed himself and then slowly put on the cotton clothes, passing his arms slowly through the sleeves. The cloth was not pleasing to the touch, and at the same time he felt with a shudder of humiliation that by wearing this clothing he was making a pact with the magistrate’s office.

In the courtyard a number of chairs were arranged in a single row; and one by one they cast a dark shadow on the ground. Forced to squat on the right of the gate with his hands on his knees, he waited and waited. Unaccustomed to this posture as he was, he perspired profusely at the pain in his knees; but he did
not want the officials to see his agony. Reflecting earnestly on how Christ must have looked at the time of the scourging he endeavoured to distract his mind from the pain in his knees.

After a time came the sound of a retinue and of horses’ hooves, and the guards all together squatted down bowing their heads low. Into the courtyard with haughty step came a number of samurai, fans in hand. Talking together they passed by without so much as a glance in the direction of Rodrigues and then languidly sat down on the chairs. The guards, still bowed down, brought them cups and they slowly sipped the hot water.

After a brief interval, the samurai on the extreme right called to the guards; and the priest, flinching from the pain in his aching knees, was dragged before the five chairs.

From the tree behind, a cicada continued to sing. Perspiration flowed down his back, and he was acutely conscious of a great number of eyes fixed on him from behind; for the Christians from their prison were undoubtedly listening intently to every question and answer that passed between him and his interlocutors. Now he understood why Inoue and the officials had deliberately chosen this place of questioning: they wanted to show him cornered and defeated to the peasants. ‘Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto’—he closed his sunken eyes and forced a smile to his face, but he himself realized that his countenance was only hardening like a mask.

‘The Governor of Chikugo is anxious about your perplexity,’ said the samurai on the extreme right earnestly in Portuguese. ‘If you are in difficulties, please say so.’

The priest bowed his head in silence. Then raising it his eyes met those of the old man who was sitting in the middle chair of the five. A kind smile playing on his lips, the old man watched the priest with the curiosity of a child who has been given a new toy. Then a statement was read:

‘Native country: Portugal. Name: Rodrigues. Said to have come from Macao to Japan. Is that correct?’
The Samurai on the extreme right said in a voice charged with emotion: ‘Father, we are deeply moved by the strength of your determination in coming here from thousands of miles away through all kinds of hardships. Undoubtedly you have suffered deeply.’

There was a gentle tone in his words, and this very gentleness pierced the priest’s heart, giving him pain.

‘Precisely because we know this, our duty of investigation is painful for us.’

At the solicitous words of the official his strained emotion seemed to yield. ‘Were it not for the barriers of country and politics, could we not clasp hands and talk?’—such was the sentiment that suddenly filled his heart. Yet he immediately felt that it was dangerous to give way to such sentimentality.

‘Father, we are not disputing about the right and wrong of your doctrine. In Spain and Portugal and such countries it may be true. The reason we have outlawed Christianity in Japan is that, after deep and earnest consideration, we find its teaching of no value for the Japan of today.’

The interpreter immediately came to the heart of the discussion. The old man in front with the big ears kept looking down on the priest sympathetically.

‘According to our way of thinking, truth is universal,’ said the priest, at last returning the smile of the old man. ‘A moment ago you officials expressed sympathy for the suffering I have passed through. One of you spoke words of warm consolation for my travelling thousands of miles of sea over such a long period to come to your country. If we did not believe that truth is universal, why should so many missionaries endure these hardships? It is precisely because truth is common to all countries and all times that we call it truth. If a true doctrine were not true alike in Portugal and Japan we could not call it “true”.

Here and there the interpreter was stuck for words; yet with a face expressionless like a puppet he conveyed the meaning to the other four.
Only the old man straight in front of him kept nodding his head as though in complete agreement with what the priest was saying; and while nodding he slowly began to pass his left hand over his right, as though rubbing them together.

‘All the fathers keep saying the same thing. And yet . . .’ The interpreter slowly translated the words of yet another samurai. ‘A tree which flourisheth in one kind of soil may wither if the soil is changed. As for the tree of Christianity, in a foreign country its leaves may grow thick and the buds may be rich, while in Japan the leaves wither and no bud appears. Father, have you never thought of the difference in the soil, the difference in the water?’

‘The leaves should not wither; the buds should appear,’ said the priest raising his voice. ‘Do you think I know nothing? In Europe, to say nothing of Macao where I resided for some time, people are familiar with the work of the missionaries; and it is well known that when many landowners gave permission for evangelization the number of Christians reached three hundred thousand.’

The old man constantly kept nodding, all the time rubbing his hands together. While the other officials with tense expression were listening to the words of the interpreter, only the old man seemed completely on the side of the priest.

‘If the leaves do not grow and the flowers do not blossom, that is only when no fertilizer is applied.’

The voice of the cicada was no longer heard; but the afternoon sun became even more severe. The officials were silent as though at a loss what to say. The priest, sensing that the Christians in prison behind him were straining their ears to hear what was being said, felt that he was winning in the controversy. A pleasant sensation rose slowly within his breast.

‘Why did you begin this process of persuasion?’ The priest lowering his eyes spoke quietly. ‘No matter what I say you will not change your minds. And I also have no intention of altering my way of thinking.’
Even as he spoke he felt a sudden onrush of emotion. The more conscious he became of being watched by the Christians from behind the more he went on making himself a hero. ‘No matter what I say I will be punished,’ he exclaimed.

The interpreter translated the words mechanically to the others. The rays of the sun made that flat face seem even more flat. Now for the first time the old man’s hands stopped moving, and shaking his head he looked at the priest as though he were soothing a naughty child. ‘We will not punish the fathers without reason,’ he said.

‘That is not the idea of Inoue. If you were Inoue you would punish me instantly.’

At these words the officials laughed heartily as though they had been told a joke.

‘What are you laughing at?’

‘Father, this is Inoue, the Governor of Chikugo. He is here in front of you.’

Stupefied he gazed at the old man who, naive as a child, returned his glance still rubbing his hands. How could he have recognized one who so utterly betrayed all his expectations? The man whom Valignano had called a devil, who had made the missionaries apostatize one by one—until now he had envisaged the face of this man as pale and crafty. But here before his very eyes sat this understanding, seemingly good, meek man.

Whispering a word or two to the samurai beside him Inoue, the Governor of Chikugo, stood up from his chair with some difficulty. The other officials followed after him, one by one, and going out through the door by which they had entered disappeared from sight. The cicada cried; the afternoon light flashed; the deserted chairs cast an even blacker shadow on the ground.

Then without reason a violent emotion arose within the priest’s breast and tears welled up in his eyes. It was like the emotion one feels after accomplishing something great. The prison had been silent; but now quite suddenly someone began to sing:
We're on our way, we're on our way,
We're on our way to the temple of Paradise,
To the temple of Paradise. . . .
To the great Temple. . . .

The song continued long after the guard had let him back to the bare floor of his room. At least he had not confused the Christians; he had done nothing to disturb their faith; his conduct had not been base and cowardly. Such were his thoughts.

The rays of the moon fell through the prison bars, forming on the wall a shadow that reminded the priest of the man of Galilee. The eyes were lowered, but they looked toward him. On this shadow face the priest put contours: he drew in the eyes and the mouth. Today he had done well, he reflected; and he glowed with pride like a child.

From the courtyard came the sound of clappers. The guards were making their round of the prison. Every night they did this.

The third day. The guards chose three men from among the Christians and had them dig three holes in the middle of the courtyard. From his prison window the priest could see in the brilliant rays of the sun the figure of the one-eyed man (wasn’t Juan his name?) wielding his spade with the others, shovelling mud into a basket and carrying it away. Because of the intense heat, he wore only a loincloth, and the perspiration on his back glistened like steel.

Why were they digging holes, he asked one of the guards; and he was told that they were making a privy. The Christians were then deep down in the hole they had dug unsuspectingly throwing up mud.

In the process of digging, one man fell sick from sun-stroke. The guards yelled at him and struck him; but he crouched down, unable to move. Juan and the other Christians took him up in their arms and brought him into the prison.
After some time one of the guards came to call the priest. The condition of the sick man had undergone a sudden change, and the Christians kept asking for the priest. Running to the prison in haste, he found Juan and Monica and the others standing around the sick man who lay in the dark, ashen like a stone.

'Won't you take something to drink?' asked Monica, holding to his lips some water in a broken cup. But the water only dribbled down from his mouth onto his throat.

'Your suffering is terrible. Can you keep going?', she asked.

When night came, the sick man began to struggle for breath. It had been impossible to perform such labor with a weakened body, sustained only by a little millet. The priest knelt by his side and prepared to administer the sacrament of the sick; but when he made the sign of the cross the sick man heaved his breast. This was the end. The guards gave orders to the Christians to burn the body; but they all protested that such a course of action was contrary to Christian teaching—with Christians burial in the earth was the customary tradition. And so the next day the man was buried in the copse at the rear of the prison.

'Hisagoro is now happy,' murmured one of the Christians enviously. 'His suffering is over. He has entered eternal rest.'

The other men and women listened vacantly to these words.

Now it is afternoon. The heavy hot air begins to stir. And then the rain begins to fall. It makes a monotonous and melancholy sound as it patters on the wooden roof of the prison and on the grove where they have buried the dead man. Clasping his knees, the priest continues to ask himself how long the authorities intend to let him lead a life like this. Not that everything is going perfectly in this prison life, but provided no stir is created the guards tacitly agree to the prayers of the Christians; they allow the priest to visit them and to write his letters. He wonders why they permit all this. It seems so strange.
Through the bars of his window he caught sight of a man wearing a cape who was being angrily upbraided by the guards. The cape prevented him from seeing who it was; but obviously it was not one of the crowd in the prison. The person seemed to be pleading for something; but the guards shook their heads and drove him away without listening to what he was saying.

‘If you carry on like this, you’ll be beaten,’ shouted one of the guards brandishing a big stick; and the fellow scuttled away in the direction of the gate like a wild dog.

But the next moment he was back again in the courtyard, standing there in the rain, staring intently in front of him.

When night came, the priest looked out through the bars of his cell, and there he was still, the man in the cape, standing obstinately without moving, drenched by the rain. No guard came out of the hut. They seemed to have given up the attempt to chase him away.

When the man looked toward the priest, their eyes met. It was Kichijirō. For a moment a spasm of fear crossed that face and Kichijirō retreated backwards a few steps.

‘Father!’ His voice was like the whining of a dog. ‘Father! Listen to me!’

The priest withdrew his face from the window and tried to block his ears against the sound of that voice. How could he ever forget the dried fish, the burning thirst in his throat. Even if he tried to forgive the fellow, he could not drive from his memory the hatred and anger that lurked there.

‘Father! Father!’ The entreatying voice continued like that of a child pleading with its mother.

‘Won’t you listen to me, father! I’ve kept deceiving you. Since you rebuked me I began to hate you and all the Christians. Yes, it is true that I trod on the holy image. Mokichi and Ichizo were strong. I can’t be strong like them.’

The guards, unable to bear it any longer, came out with sticks; and Kichijirō fled away, screaming as he ran.
'But I have my cause to plead! One who has trod on the sacred image has his say too. Do you think I trampled on it willingly? My feet ached with the pain. God asks me to imitate the strong, even though he made me weak. Isn't this unreasonable?'

Sometimes there would be a lull; then angry voices and the pleading cry and tears.

'Father, what can I do, a weak person like me? I didn't betray you for money. I was threatened by the officials.'

'Get out of here quickly,' shouted the guards, putting their heads out of the lodge. 'Don't presume on our kindness.'

'Father, listen to me. I have done something for which I can never make amends. And you officials! I am a Christian. Put me in prison.'

The priest closed his eyes and began to recite the Credo. He felt a sense of joy in being able to abandon this whimpering fellow in the rain. Even though Christ prayed, Judas had hanged himself in the field of blood—and had Christ prayed for Judas? There was nothing about that in the Scriptures; and even if there was, he could not put himself into such a frame of mind as to be able to do likewise. In any case, to what extent could the fellow be trusted? He was looking for pardon; but this perhaps was no more than a passing moment of excitement.

Bit by bit, the voice of Kichijirō quietened and then died out. Looking through the bars, he saw the guards pushing the fellow roughly in the back, dragging him to the prison.

With night the rain ceased. A ball of rice and some salted fish were pushed in to him. The fish was already rotten and inedible. As always he could hear the voices of the Christians raised in prayer. Receiving permission from the guards, he went to visit them in prison; and there was Kichijirō pushed into a corner all by himself, separated from the others. The Christians refused to be associated with him.

'Be careful of this fellow,' they whispered to the priest in a low
voice. 'The officials often make use of apostates; perhaps they want to trap us.'

It was true that the magistrate sometimes put fallen Christians in with the others in order to foment trouble and urge them to renounce their faith. It could be that Kichijirō had again received money to do precisely this. But anyhow it was impossible for the priest to trust Kichijirō anymore.

'Father, father!' Seeing that the priest had come to the prison, Kichijirō was again pleading in the darkness. 'Let me confess my sins and repent!'

The priest had no right to refuse the sacrament of penance to anyone. If a person asked for the sacrament, it was not for him to concede or refuse according to his own feelings. He raised his hand in blessing, uttered dutifully the prescribed prayer and put his ear close to the other. As the foul breath was wafted into his face, there in the darkness the vision of the yellow teeth and the crafty look floated before his eyes.

'Listen to me, father,' Kichijirō whimpered in a voice that the other Christians could hear. 'I am an apostate; but if I had died ten years ago I might have gone to paradise as a good Christian, not despised as an apostate. Merely because I live in a time of persecution . . . I am sorry.'

'But do you still believe?', asked the priest, doing his best to put up with the foul stench of the other's breath. 'I will give you absolution, but I cannot trust you. I cannot understand why you have come here.'

Heaving a deep sigh and searching for words of explanation, Kichijirō shifted and shuffled. The stench of his filth and sweat was wafted toward the priest. Could it be possible that Christ loved and searched after this dirtiest of men? In evil there remained that strength and beauty of evil; but this Kichijirō was not even worthy to be called evil. He was thin and dirty like the tattered rags he wore. Suppressing his disgust, the priest recited
the final words of absolution, and then, following the established custom, he whispered, ‘Go in peace.’ With all possible speed getting away from the stench of that mouth and that body, he returned to where the Christians were.

No, no. Our Lord had searched out the ragged and the dirty. Thus he reflected as he lay in bed. Among the people who appeared in the pages of the Scripture, those whom Christ had searched after in love were the woman of Capharnaum with the issue of blood, the woman taken in adultery whom men had wanted to stone—people with no attraction, no beauty. Anyone could be attracted by the beautiful and the charming. But could such attraction be called love? True love was to accept humanity when wasted like rags and tatters. Theoretically the priest knew all this; but still he could not forgive Kichijirō. Once again near his face came the face of Christ, wet with tears. When the gentle eyes looked straight into his, the priest was filled with shame.

The "fumie" had begun. The Christians stood herded together in a line like asses cast out from the city. This time they were confronted not by the same officials as the other day, but by a younger group of subordinates who sat on stools, arms folded. The guards, holding poles, kept watch. Today, too, the cicadas sang with bracing voice; the sky was clear and blue; the air was bright and refreshing. It would not be long, however, until the oppressive heat would come again. The only one not dragged out into the courtyard was the priest himself; and he, pressing to the bars a face on which the flesh hung limply, stared at the "fumie" spectacle which was now to begin.

‘The sooner you get through with it, the sooner you’ll get out of here,’ roared one of the officials. ‘I’m not telling you to trample with sincerity and conviction. This is only a formality. Just putting your foot on the thing won’t hurt your convictions.’

The officials kept insisting to the Christians that to trample
on the fumie was no more than a formality. All you had to do was to put your foot on it. If you did that, nobody cared what you believed. In accordance with orders from the magistrate, you were asked to put your foot lightly on the fumie; and then you would immediately be released.

The four men and women listened to the harangue with expressionless faces. As for the priest, his face pressed to the bars, he could not make out what the fellows were getting at. And the four bloated Christian faces, with protruding cheekbones ghastly and pallid from deprivation of sunshine—they were like puppets with no will of their own.

What was to come had come. This he well understood; but he could not feel convinced that his own fate and that of the Christians would soon be sealed. The officials were talking to the Christians as though asking a favor. The peasants were shaking their heads; and then the officials with worried faces all drew back some distance.

Next the guards placed on the ground between the peasants and the stools on which the officials were now sitting a fumie wrapped in a cloth. Then they returned to their places.

Going down the list, one of the officials called out the names: ‘Ikitsukijima, Kubo-no-ura, Tobei.’ The four Christians sat there vacantly. Getting excited, a guard struck with his stick the fellow on the extreme left, but he did not stir. Two or three times he was pushed in the back; he fell forward and crouched to the ground, but he made no effort to move from the place where he had fallen.

‘Kubo-no-ura, Chokichi.’

The one-eyed fellow shook his head two or three times. What a child he looked!

‘Kubo-no-ura, Haru.’

The woman who had given the priest the cucumber bent her back and hung her head. In this position she was pushed on by the guard, but she did not so much as raise her eyes.
Finally the old man, Mataichi, was called. But he, too, clung to the earth where he stood.

But now the officials raised no angry voices and uttered no reproof. One would think that they had been expecting this from the beginning, the way they remained seated on their stools whispering to one another in low voices. Then suddenly they arose and withdrew to the guards’ hut.

The sun stood directly over the prison; and its rays beat down upon the four Christians left behind. Their squatting figures threw black shadows on the ground, while the cicadas again began to sing as though disrupting the glistening air. The guards and the Christians even began to talk and joke with one another as though the previous relationship of cross-examining and cross-examined had vanished. But then from the hut one of the officials called out that all could return to the prison except the one-eyed man, Chokichi.

Relaxing his hands from the bars they had been clutching, the priest sat down on the floor. What would happen next he did not know. But, at any rate, today had passed peacefully, and this thought filled him with a deep sense of relief. If today passed by well, that was enough: tomorrow would look after itself. If tomorrow he were alive . . .

‘Isn’t it a pity to throw it away?’, one voice was saying. And the other answered: ‘Yes, it’s an awful pity.’ What precisely the conversation was all about he could not make out; but at any rate the wind blew toward him an easy-going conversation between the guard and the one-eyed fellow. A fly jumped down from the bars and began to buzz around the priest’s head—the sound of its wings was almost soporific.

Suddenly someone ran across the courtyard. Then the swish of a sharp sound. Then a thud. Already, as the priest clutched the bars, the official was sheathing his sharp, glittering sword: the execution was over. The dead body of the one-eyed man lay prostrate on the ground. Grabbing it by the feet, one of the guards
began to drag it slowly toward the hole the Christians had dug. The black blood flowing from it lay all around like the sash of a garment.

Suddenly, from out of the prison came the high-pitched scream of a woman, her voice going on and on as though she was singing a hymn. Then it faded out, and the air around became deadly calm. Only the hands of the priest as they clutched the bars trembled as though cramped and paralyzed.

‘Look to it,’ shouted another official, facing the prison and with his back to the priest. ‘This is what happens when you make light of life. It’s a tiring business; but the sooner you go through with it, the sooner you get out of here. I’m not telling you to trample out of conviction. If you just go through with the formality, it won’t hurt your beliefs.’

Shouting in a loud voice, a guard next brought out Kichijirō. Wearing only a loincloth and trembling from head to foot, he came before the officials, bowing again and again. Then raising his thin, wasted foot he placed it on the fumie.

‘Quickly! Get out!’ shouted one of the officials, pointing to the gate; and Kichijirō, tumbling over himself in haste, disappeared from sight. Not once did he look back toward the hut where the priest was. But for the priest, what the fellow did was no longer of any importance.

The white rays of the sun beat down dazzlingly on the open courtyard. Beneath its merciless rays there lay on the ground the black dye which was the blood from the body of the one-eyed man.

Just as before, the cicadas kept on singing their song, dry and hoarse. There was not a breath of wind. Just as before, a fly kept buzzing around the priest’s face. In the world outside there was no change. A man had died; but there was no change.

‘So it has come to this. . . .’ He shivered as he clutched the bars. ‘So it has come to this. . . .’

Yet his perplexity did not come from the event that had hap-
pened so suddenly. What he could not understand was the stillness of the courtyard, the voice of the cicadas, the whirling wings of the flies. A man had died. Yet the outside world went on as if nothing had happened. Could anything be more crazy? Was this martyrdom? Why are you silent? Here this one-eyed man has died—and for you. You ought to know. Why does this stillness continue? This noonday stillness. The sound of the flies—this crazy thing, this cruel business. And you avert your face as though indifferent. This . . . this I cannot bear.

Kyrie Eleison! Lord, have mercy! His trembling lips moved a while in prayer, but the words faded from his lips. Lord, do not abandon me anymore! Do not abandon me in this mysterious way. Is this prayer? For a long time I have believed that prayer is uttered to praise and glorify you; but when I speak to you it seems as though I only blaspheme. On the day of my death, too, will the world go relentlessly on its way, indifferent just as now? After I am murdered, will the cicadas sing and the flies whirl their wings inducing sleep? Do I want to be as heroic as that? And yet, am I looking for the true, hidden martyrdom or just for a glorious death? Is it that I want to be honored, to be prayed to, to be called a saint?

Clasping his knees, he sat on the floor looking straight in front of him. 'It was almost noon. Until the third hour darkness covered the whole earth.' When that man had died on the cross, from within the temple had issued three bugle calls, one long, one short, and then one long again. Preparations for the ceremony of the Pasch had begun. In blue, flowing robes the high priest had ascended the stairway of the temple and, standing before the altar on which lay the sacrificial victim, had blown the trumpet. At that time, the sky had darkened and behind the clouds the sun had faded. 'Darkness fell. The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top even to the bottom.' This was the image of martyrdom he had long entertained; but the martyrdom of these peasants, enacted before his very eyes—how wretched it was, miserable like the huts they lived in, like the rags in which they were clothed.