

THE NICHIREN SECT OF BUDDHISM.

BY T. J. KINVABARA.

[Among the Buddhist sects in Japan the adherents of Nichiren have a great following and are distinguished by their zeal and missionary propaganda. Some time ago we received an artistic illustrated volume telling in Japanese the story of the saint and the development of his movement. It is written by Mr. Tanaka Chigaku, the editor of the *Myoshu* and of the *Nichirenshugi*,



THE SAISHOKAKU.

and the founder of a university at Miho in the Suruga province. Since we are unable to read the text we applied to the Japanese friend to whose courtesy we owe Mr. Tanaka's book, and we take pleasure in publishing the information he forwards us together with his explanation of the pictures.

The frontispiece of the book is Nichiren, the saint himself. His vigorous

features remind us very vividly of Luther, and his teaching too presents more than one similarity to the teachings of the Reformation. He believed in the infallibility of the scriptures just as Luther replaces the infallibility of the pope by that of the Bible. Nichiren also insists on faith as the only means of salvation, and that prayer if uttered in faith will set us most effectively into communion with God. Good works ought to result from this disposition of mind and amount to nothing if they are not an expression of faith.

In the religious art of China long ear lobes are a symbol of virtue. Thus Lao-tze's by-name is "the long-lobed one" and it will be noticed that the lobes of Nichiren greatly exceed the natural size.

The picture reproduced from the book which we call "A Buddhist St. Sebastian" exhibits a strange similarity between the religious art of Buddhism and Christianity. The two stories originated independently but here we have a Buddhist scene of martyrdom which might serve as well for an illustration of the Christian legend.

The questions we asked Mr. Kinvabara, who is connected with the University of Miho, to which the accompanying article is a reply, are as follows:

1. "How do you differ from the other Buddhist sects? For instance, can Nichirenite priests marry? What is the sect's regulation of diet? Do the believers abstain from flesh and fish? Do they practise fasting? What do they believe about the soul? Do they believe in the *anatman* doctrine that there is no self? If there is no *atman*, no self, what do they think of reincarnation? How would they explain immortality? What is the condition of final salvation or deliverance from evil? What are the methods of deliverance, and finally can you describe the nature of the Buddha of Bliss, the omnipresent Buddha, and what relation has the historical Buddha and Sankhara to the omnipresent Buddha?"

2. "Please also explain some of the illustrations. I take the frontispiece of Nichiren himself to be very old. Is there anything known about the artist and whether it was a portrait made during his life so that we can take it as a faithful portrayal of his face?"

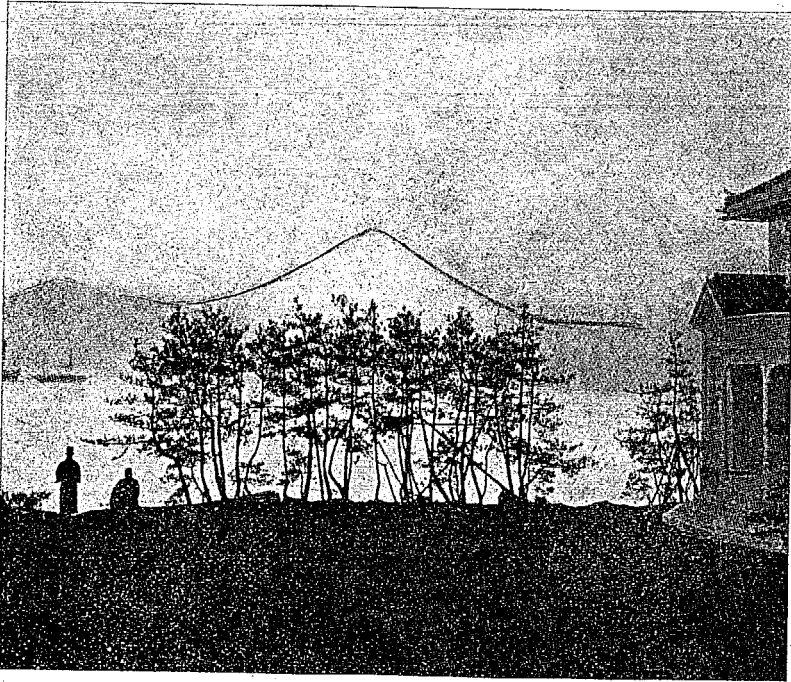
"The picture facing page 554 is of special interest because it looks very much like Christian pictures of St. Sebastian who suffered martyrdom by being shot with arrows. Will you please explain this picture."

"The next picture on page 556 looks like a confession. Does it represent a scene from the life of Nichiren? The picture facing page 558 looks like an apparition, and I would like to know what it means. What is the nature of the excitement on the picture facing page 562? Has the inscription on the right-hand side of the gate any special meaning? An explanation of the picture facing page 564 would also be welcome. It would be interesting for the readers of *The Open Court* to know something about these pictures."

3. "Is your university building at Miho in the Suruga province, and can you tell me anything about the courses of study pursued at that place, the number of students, and the number of professors with their specialties? Should the place not be rather called a seminary preparing boys for priesthood than a university? By university we would understand such an institution as the Imperial University at Tokyo, while a place where young men are especially prepared for priesthood would be called a seminary. Does *Saisho-kaku* mean the university? Is it the name of the university or the place where the university stands?"—Ed.]

WE [of the university] are not as yet ready to give any precise information with regard to the Nichiren sect, since we are in no way connected with that sect. We are a lay movement, and we keep apart from Nichirenite priests.

The Buddhist priests of Japan, no matter to what sect they belong, all marry and eat meat and fish on the pretext that the law of the country allows them to do so, but of course these practices are against the teachings of Buddha.



MT. FUJI FROM THE SAISHOKAKU.

As regards the soul problem, the popular Buddhist belief is that the soul does and can exist apart from body and mind, and this common belief is much adhered to in the teachings of Nichiren as means of arousing the faith of the people. But the only true and original soul, according to the Saddharma-pundarika-sutra, which is the basis of Nichiren's teaching, is the omnipresent Buddha, and until a person realizes a oneness with Buddha, he may be said to be soulless; an unbelieving person may have a soul, but the nature of that soul being subject to the influence of Karma is impermanent,

and may in the evolution of the aeons of ages, turn into a grass or a stone.

I may classify the ideas of ego in Buddhism as (1) ego, (2)



ST. NICHIREN.
(Frontispiece of book.)

non-ego, (3) super-ego, (4) ultimate ego (which is the Omnipresent Buddha). The super-ego, in the successive periods of reincarnation, carries in it a part of the ultimate ego, but it does not count as



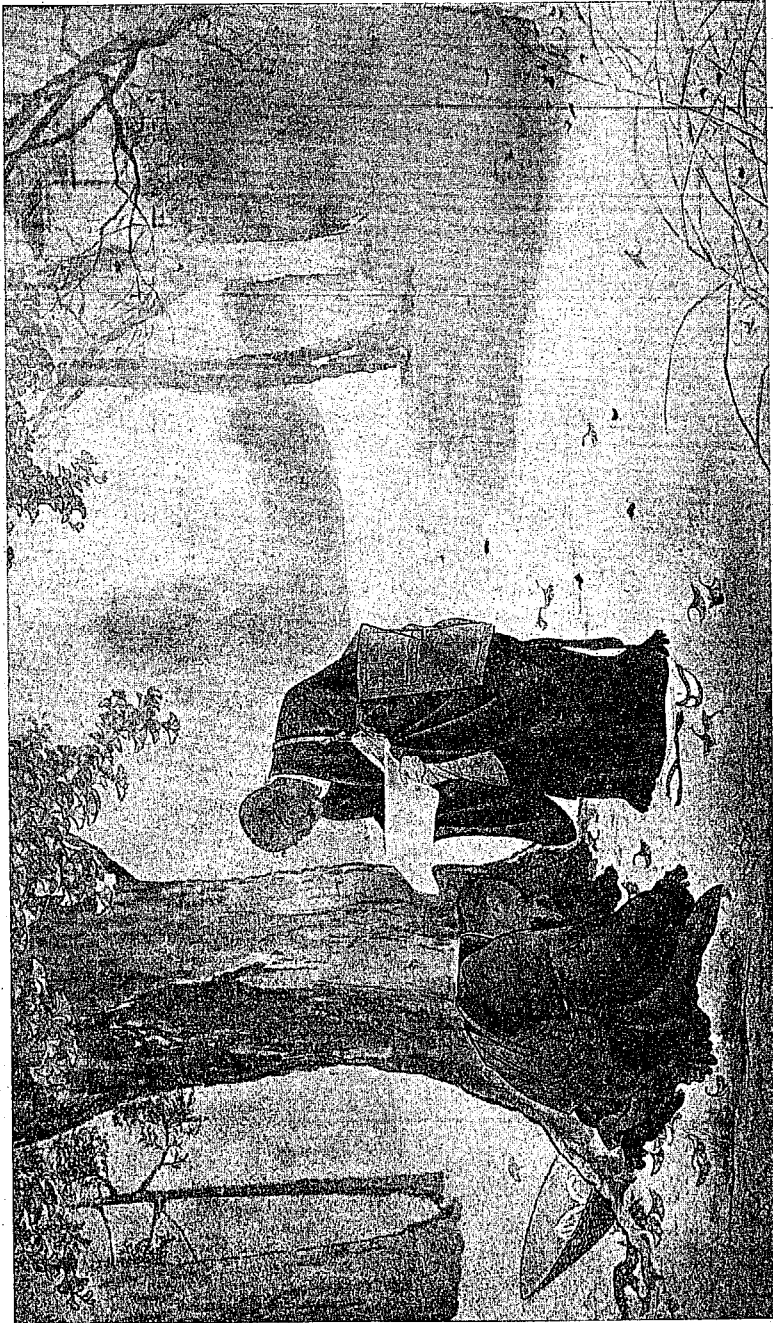
A BUDDHIST ST. SEBASTIAN (P. 554).

an ego unless the person attains to Buddhahood. The Buddhist thoughts on immortality may be considered under the three categories of personal immortality, social immortality and cosmical immortality. The fact that a person has once lived, however insignificant he may be, will leave an indelible mark in the spiritual and material life of mankind; whatever he has done or thought will exercise a permanent influence in the evolution of human society, nay, even in the evolution of the universe itself. Cosmical immortality is that immortality which a person attains by devotion or faith; he identifies himself with the Omnipresent Buddha by the merits of devotional work, and he becomes immortal not only in the life beyond, but in the present life also. These remarks are only a general exposition of Buddha's teaching on immortality.

Saint Nichiren's idea of deliverance from evil is that one should not try to oppose or overcome evil, but should learn to "utilize" it. In the teaching of Nichiren the utilization of evil means final salvation. In the solution of the problem of evil, utilization is more effective than opposition or subjection, and the way of utilizing evil is to believe in the teaching of Buddha as set forth in the Saddharma-pundarika-sutra, and to repeat the incantation of "*Nam-myō-hō-renge-kyō*" ("Nama to the Saddharma-pundarika-sutra"). Nichiren taught that a mere repetition of this formula is more meritorious than the deepest contemplation of the Dharma. In Nichiren philosophy, things, thought and language are considered as one thing and to be embodied in "name." In his writings he often remarks that "the name is the thing itself."

The relation between the Omnipresent Buddha and the historical Buddha constitutes the most important study in Buddhism to which even the Buddhist scholars of note of the present time in Japan seem utterly indifferent. Nichiren said that any Buddhist priest who is indifferent to this study is worse than a beast morally, intellectually and practically. In the chapter on the limitless duration of Buddha's life, Sakyamuni taught that he (the historical Buddha) himself is the Omnipresent Buddha, that the personal Sakyamuni does not perish, and that the salvation of the world solely depends on the realization, by men themselves, of the oneness of men, the historical Buddha, and the Omnipresent Buddha. The omnipresence and omnipotence of the historical Buddha form the principal teaching of Saint Nichiren.

Nichiren was born in Awa-province, 691 years ago (1222) in the era of Jo-o in the reign of Emperor Gohorikawa. In the whole range of Buddhist history we find no person who may be compared



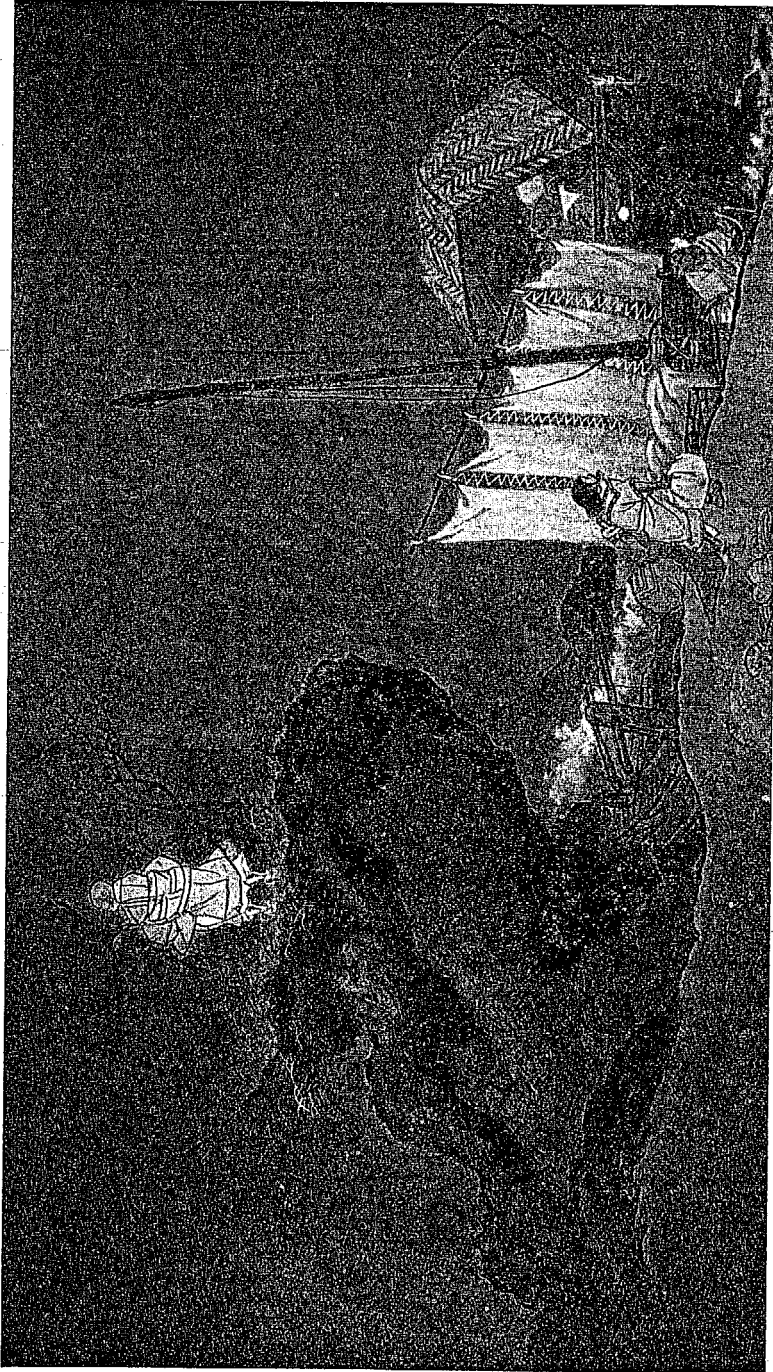
THE PENANCE OF NITCHO (P. 556).

to Nichiren as patriot, reformer and prophet. His eventful life is full of interest and presents studies of deep significance. There are many characteristic details in Nichiren's life that may be cited, but the most important of them are his repeating the "*Nam-myō-ho-ren-ge-kyō*," worshiping the morning sun as an opening ceremony of the proclamation of his religious principles, preaching on the streets, and his utmost exertion to convert the state. Nichiren declared that he wished neither to found a sect nor to establish a denomination, but in his time Buddhism, after passing successive periods of free and unhindered development, ramified in so many inconceivable ways, and the time was ripe for a reformer like Nichiren to appear and give it unity, spirit and harmonious activity. The teaching of Nichiren is distinguishable from that of other sects in that it is intellectual (or rational), ethical, and bears a deep nationalistic color. In some passage in his writings he says that "unless a man be a person of great intellect he will not be able to appreciate my teaching." In his opinion, any Buddhist whether he be a priest, a monk, or a layman, who failed to understand or willfully ignored the real nature of Sakyamuni, the historical Buddha, was not a righteous man; and he repeatedly declared that he was "the master, teacher, father to the emperor," and that he only "fostered the spirit of great loyalty" within him. In Nichiren's eyes there are two Japans, the small Japan and the great Japan; and while the small Japan is destined to collapse, the great spiritual Japan is to be the principal power in the movement to create a heaven upon earth.

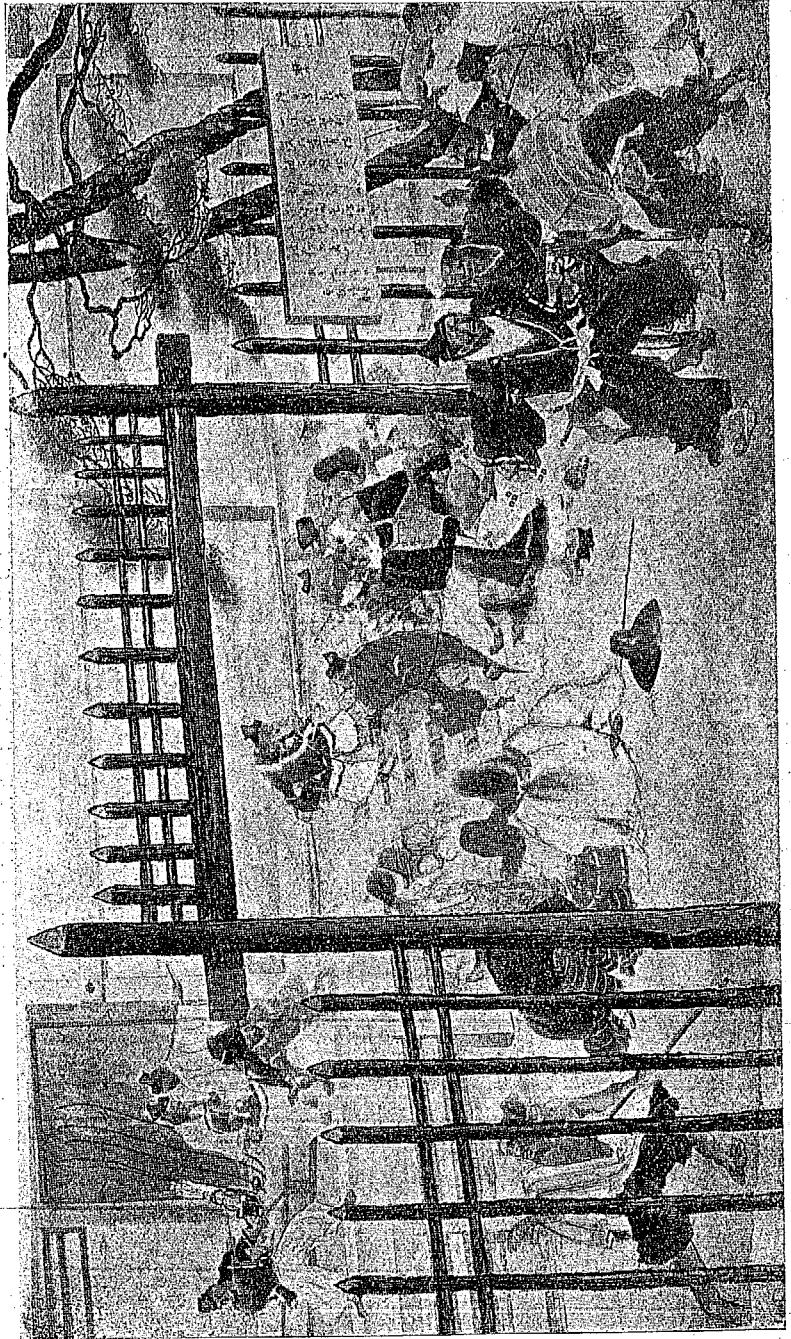
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The frontispiece of Mr. Chigaku's book is the picture of Nichiren. It represents Nichiren in his later years, and is said to be the most faithful portrayal of his face. The painter's name is Okura. He lived in the time of Nichiren, but of his life much is not known. The long lobes seen in the portrait need not have been so long in reality, as you say, but it is recorded that the lobes of Saint Nichiren's ears were uncommonly long.

The picture facing page 554 represents a scene where Atsuwara Jinshiro Kumishige, a zealous follower of Saint Nichiren, is being shot to death with other friends of the faith who numbered more than twenty. With every arrow that pierced Atsuwara, the demand "to quit *Nam-myō-ho-ren-ge-kyō* and worship the Amitabha" was uttered, but only the cry of "*Nam-myō-ho-ren-ge-kyō!*" came from the mouth of the faithful martyr as a response. When seven arrows had pierced him, Kumishige expired repeating the sacred formula with his dying breath.



NICHIJI ABOUT TO SAIL FOR FOREIGN FIELDS (P. 558):



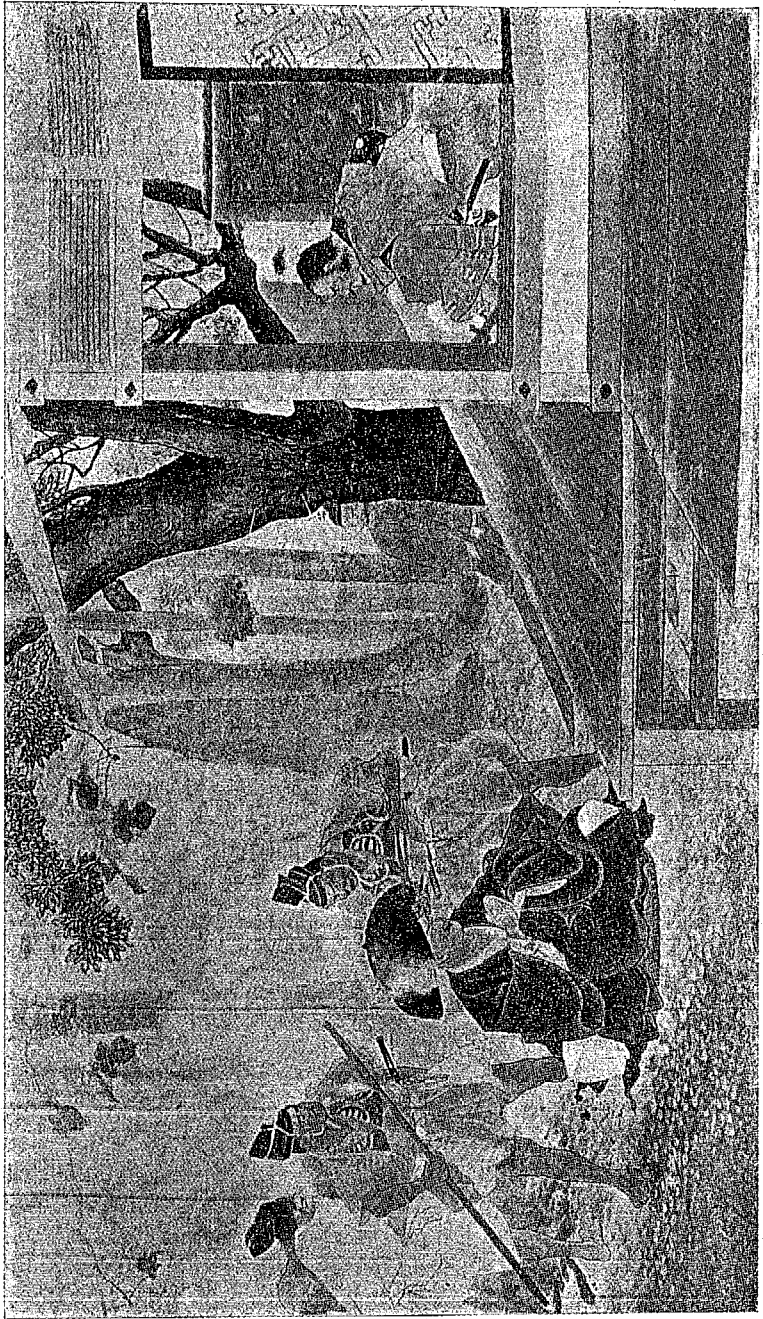
THE SHOGUN'S PROCLAMATION (P. 562).

The picture on page 556 is not a confession. Nitcho, one of the six senior disciples of Nichiren committed a certain inexcusable fault seven years after the death of his master, and he read from the Sutra for seven days and nights to ask pardon, but his appeal was not listened to, only a robe of ashen hue being given him as a mark of partial approval of his contrition. I wish I could describe this episode in detail but that would involve a long story.

The picture facing page 558 is not an apparition. The person on the rock is Nichiji, one of the six senior disciples of Saint Nichiren. He is about to depart from the country to undertake foreign missionary work, and is inscribing the seven characters reading *Nam-myo-ho-ren-ge-kyo* on the rock as a memorial autographic writing. He is the first of all Japanese Buddhist priests who started for a foreign land to open a propagandist work.

The picture facing page 562 represents an incident having both serious and humorous features. Some five hundred years ago, in the era of Eikyo, the Ashikoga Shogun issued the order that all persons professing faith in Nichiren should be decapitated or banished to an island, and a board on which was inscribed the Shogun's order was hung on every street-corner in the town (Kamakura). To the surprise and regret of the Shogun several hundred persons, including young and old, men, women and children, flocked to the palace court from all quarters in the city and asked the officials that they be taken into custody and be given any punishment, because they would rather undergo any hardship than forsake their faith. But the Shogun had too much conscience to punish persons guilty of no offence, and made haste to withdraw the order.

The picture facing page 564 represents the event known as "The Pot Persecution of Nisshin." In the 12th year of the era of Eikyo, the Ashikoga Shogun Yoshinori (not the one who issued the threatening order) summoned before him the priest Nisshin. An iron pot heated to red heat was put on Nisshin's head for torture, but the maltreatment did not disturb the priest. When asked by the Shogun how it was that the divine wrath did not immediately descend on him, Nisshin replied that the wrath would come within three years. Again when Yoshinori said in ridicule that three years were too long to wait for wrath to come, he replied, "Then I will shorten the three years to 100 days," and lo, on the day which exactly counted 100 days from the day on which Nisshin was tortured and made his prophecy the Shogun was assassinated by Akamatsu Maniu, one of his retainers. Nisshin was imprisoned and tortured 28 times in his life.



THE POT PERSECUTION OF NISSHIN (P. 564).

The courses to be given in the university are not quite formulated, and I can not give you any exact information in that line at present. All modern and ancient languages are to be taught in the school. The institution is not to be a seminary, and the students are to be trained rather to become new citizens of New Japan than to be priests. The word *Saishokaku* means "the most admirable hall" and is the name of the building; the university assumes the name of Hongo-Dai-Caku-Iu. I hope that the picture I sent you may be of service to you. The place commands an excellent view of Mount Fugi, and that is the reason why the Saishokaku has been built in this place.