

NICHIREN TRADITION IN PICTURES.

BY T. J. KINVABARA.

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION.

NICHIREN, the Buddhist saint, is one of several reformers of Buddhism, and his sect has become one of the most powerful institutions of Japan. In the last number of *The Open Court* we published an account of the Nichiren sect and its founder by Mr. T. J. Kinwabara. Around the traditions of this sect there has been developed an enthusiastic sentiment which has produced artistic representations of their tradition in all its naïveté which at once reminds Occidental readers of the medieval legends of Christian saints. We publish in this issue reproductions of twelve selected paintings which picture events in the life of the saint and his followers. They are accompanied with the explanation of Mr. T. J. Kinwabara, who represents Mr. Tanaka Chigaku, the founder of the University of Miho. Mr. Kinwabara explains to us why Mr. Tanaka has withdrawn from the sect and we learn that he did so not on account of a desire to modernize the sect but on the contrary he finds that the present adherents of Nichiren do not preserve the master's true teachings. Mr. Kinwabara writes as follows in a personal letter:

"Mr. Tanaka, who is now in his fifty-fourth year, was in his youth a monk of the Nichiren sect, but at the age of nineteen he returned to secular life. One of the main reasons for his giving up the life of a so-called priest and for severing all connection with the Nichiren sect was that in his opinion the Buddhism of the future should be the Buddhism of the layman; that the monks ought not to have anything to do with it. In these days the Japanese *bonze*, no matter to what sect he may belong, either marries or requires a woman to take care of him, which is quite against the original teaching of Buddha. Then too the law of the country does not exempt

even monks from military service and of course no Buddhist monks are allowed to acquire the arts of warfare. It was, therefore, from his desire to become a layman and a simple priest of orthodox Buddhism that Mr. Tanaka separated from the sect. Moreover, the Nichiren sect of the present day has lost all semblance of the original teaching of its founder, and is in fact disfigured by all sorts of superstitions. Mr. Tanaka urged ameliorations and reforms upon the representatives of the sect but in vain, so that his own movement is to-day entirely independent of the sect.

"Though no longer a member of the Nichiren sect, he is nevertheless a follower of Nichiren and has given up his life to the work of propaganda. Twenty-five years ago he founded the Rissho Ankoku Kai, an organization whose members are counted by the thousands. He edits *Nichirenshugi* which aims to introduce to the general public a popular and at the same time a scientific exposition of the doctrines of Nichiren, and the *Myoshu* which publishes material of a more specific character and is therefore more suited to those who already know and believe in Nichiren's teaching. He has written, among many other books, the *Myoshu Shiki Moku* which is the first synthetic treatment of the teachings of Nichiren Shonin in the polemical history of the sect.

"Mr. Tanaka does most of his work in the Saishokaku, and once or twice a year he travels over the whole country to deliver lectures. He is the father of seven children, and though he is one of the busiest men in the country, his home life is extremely happy."

MR. KINVABARA'S EXPLANATION OF THE NICHIREN PICTURES.

Nos. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 8 of the pictures and the frontispiece present a panoramic view of the most notable events in Nichiren's life, and Nos. 4, 7 and 9 are pictures that refer to the doings or conduct of his direct followers, while 10 and 11 illustrate certain phases in the lives of famous persons in the history of the sect.

1. The man on top of the high rock is Nichiren Shonin, the founder of the Nichiren sect. In his devotions he stands facing the sun, which is characteristic of Nichiren worship, although it must not be thought that he taught adoration of the sun. After pursuing his study for nearly fifteen years in the noted temples, monasteries, and educational institutions of the country, he returned to his old master, Dozen, and his friends in the temple on Mt. Kyojumi, and, on the morning of April 28 in the fifth year of the Kencho era

(1253 A. D.), he climbed to the top of the mountain, and ten times repeated the formula, *Namu-Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo*, as a formal declaration of his faith.



I. NICHIREN CONFESSING HIS FAITH.

Three reasons may be given for his reverencing the sun on this occasion: (1) Of all phenomena in nature the sun presents the most glorious sight, and is at the same time the very symbolization of the principles of growth, unity, harmony, and benevolence, and

what he desired to teach mankind was in substance identical with the virtues of the sun. (2) The sun is the spiritual body of Amaterasu-o-Mikami, the ancestral god of Japan who proclaimed that his descendants shall forever rule the country and finally realize the unification of the world. The principles taught in the Saddharma pundarika-sutra which he would expound to humanity aimed for the establishment of an eternal unity, harmony, and peace among mankind, and it was not only a matter of faith, but of acute knowledge for Nichiren Shonin that the spirit of the Sun-God and the Law of the Saddharma were originally one thing and worked in unison and harmony. (3) According to the teaching in the Saddharma-pundarika-sutra, all things in the universe whether spiritual or material are emanations of the omnipotent and omnipresent Sakyamuni, and as an actual manifestation of his powers and virtues in the world the sun is the most real and conspicuous. It was therefore with the mingled emotions of awe, admiration, affection and duty towards his master that he did homage to the sun on this most momentous occasion in his life.

2. Here again Nichiren is seen on a rock overlooking the sea, but this time in a perilous situation surrounded by the surging waves. At a distance is seen a fisherman coming up in a boat. The moon shines forth from a rift in the clouds. In the fortieth year of his life, Nichiren Shonin incurred the wrath of the regent Hojo by the zealous insistent method of his propaganda, and was sent over the sea to the Ito peninsula in Izu province, at that time a barren, desolate land, situated in a south-eastern direction from Kamakura in Sagami province. After a perilous voyage in a small boat over the rough sea he reached the country but was not allowed to land in safety. The guardsmen left him on a certain rock which bears the name of "Chopping-Board Rock" (*Mana-ita-irwa*) telling him that he was to make his own way out of this wretched plight. He could not, of course, find passage to the mainland because the rock was surrounded by deep, surging water. It was evening, the tide was gradually rising, and in a short time the rock would be hidden from view and he would perish in the water. The Shonin was reciting aloud from the Sutra (the book of the Lotus of the Good Law), when a fisherman by the name of Funamori Yasaburo heard the voice and came rowing towards the rock. The fisherman was surprised and mystified to behold the priest standing alone on the rock. He was struck also with admiration for his noble appearance and calm demeanor, and, though not yet aware of his character, he asked him to get into the boat, took him home, and gave

him shelter and protection. Daily this ignorant but high-minded fisherman and his wife listened secretly to Nichiren's teaching and finally became his most faithful converts.



2. ABANDONED ON A ROCK AMID THE SURGES.

3. After three years' exile in the bleak peninsula of Izu, Nichiren was permitted to return to Kamakura, and the next year he made a visit to his mother who was lying dangerously ill in his old home in the province of Awa. After his mother's recovery under

miraculous circumstances, he started back to Kamakura. When he was passing "Little Pines Field" (*Komatsubara*) in the district of Tojo in Awa province, he was suddenly attacked by one of his



3. THE DEATH OF TWO FAITHFUL DISCIPLES.

inveterate enemies on horseback, who with several hundred armed men rushed upon him with drawn sword. There were only a few persons with the Shonin on this occasion, and among them were Kyoninbo, his disciple, and Kudo Yoshitaka, the lord of Amatsu.

one of his loyal adherents. All fought vallyantly in defence of their master and these two died on the spot. The dying man in the picture is Kudo Yoshitaka who is being blessed by his master in the moment of death.



4. REPORT OF KUDO'S DEATH IS BROUGHT TO HIS WIFE.

4. The woman dressed in white is the wife of the lord of Amatsu who, in his dying moment received a blessing from his master as seen in the foregoing picture. The two warriors are the nobleman's retainers. They had fought with their master and have

come back to report his death to their lady. She holds her child in her arms, who, when grown up, became one of Nichiren's disciples.

5. Nichiren Shonin has been riding the white horse, and



5. ON THE WAY TO EXECUTION.

has just alighted from it. In his fiftieth year, when he was engaged in his proselyting work with ever increasing energy and enthusiasm, Nichiren Shonin was suddenly captured, imprisoned, and, after a nominal trial, was sentenced to capital punishment. He

was to be beheaded at the beach of the Dragon's Jaw (*Tatsunokuchi*), a few miles westward from the town. During the day set for his execution, he was taken round the town on horseback for



6. A MIRACULOUS DELIVERANCE.

public ridicule and in the night was led to Tatsunokuchi with a guard of several hundred swordsmen. On the way he passed a shrine dedicated to Hachiman, one of the principal guardian deities of the country. He alighted from the horse, and standing erect be-

fore the shrine delivered a warning to the god. According to the teaching in the Saddharma-pundarika-sutra, all gods and deities have issued from the Lotus of the Good Law. Hachiman was one of the most prominent of them, and was in duty bound to protect a hard-working, persecuted priest of orthodox Buddhism like Nichiren. On this occasion, therefore, Nichiren challenged the god to prove that he was faithful to his duty, and warned him that he would be punished if he should in any way neglect his task, in spite of the fact that Nichiren himself was only too glad to die for the sake of the Saddharma, his country and mankind.

6. When he reached Tatsunokuchi he was ordered to sit on a piece of flat stone. The executioner stood behind him and drew his sword, and death certainly seemed to be the fate of the holy priest, when to the astonishment of all, a gigantic ball of fire was seen to descend to the spot, and to hover above the executioner's head. The man was greatly terrified, but mustered up his courage and was about to pass the sword across the neck of the priest, when, lo, the sword broke into several pieces. These incidents may be what are called miracles. The facts are stated here as they have been recorded by authentic hands. At any rate, either these unusual happenings or some other unknown cause prevented the execution of Nichiren Shonin, and he was ordered to be banished to the island of Sado.

A noteworthy incident, though not savoring in any way of miracle or supernatural agencies, may be mentioned in connection with this event. The four Shijo brothers, Nichiren's most faithful devotees, who followed him to the place of execution ready to commit *harakiri* and share his fate, wept bitterly at seeing the pitiable, apparently helpless, state of their beloved master. They cried, "Oh, Shonin, you will certainly be beheaded," but Nichiren Shonin replied with a calm and radiant expression of his face, "My men, be not so foolish as to give way to tears. This is a thing to be rejoiced over. Had we not promised among ourselves to laugh with joy when such a thing happened?" These words of his uttered at the most critical moment of his life places him in peculiar contrast with Jesus on the cross. Both confronted death, but the former was optimistic, even joyous, while the latter according to the accounts given in the four gospels was either pessimistic or simply resigned and composed. It is clear that Nichiren Shonin's spiritual triumph, as it were, over the most preponderating secular power of the time at Tatsunokuchi marked one of the most significant periods in his life as Buddhist teacher, reformer and prophet.

7. The man on horse-back in full career is Shijo Kingo, the oldest of the four faithful and devoted brothers who followed Nichiren to the place of execution at Tatsunokuchi in order to die with



7. SHIJI KINGO TO HIS MASTER'S RESCUE.

him. On another occasion when the master's life was endangered in some political trouble, Kingo, hearing of his lord's peril, crossed over Hokone Mountains, covering a distance of eight *ri* (about 20

miles) in an hour that he might be with his master in time to save his life. The mountain road is not covered with snow as might at first be thought. To the eye unaccustomed to the strong realistic



8. NICHIREN'S REFUGE ON THE ISLE OF SADO.

coloring of Japanese oil painting the strokes of the painter are often misleading.

8. The figure which Nichiren Shonin is here worshipping is a golden image of the omnipresent Sakyamuni. The scene represents

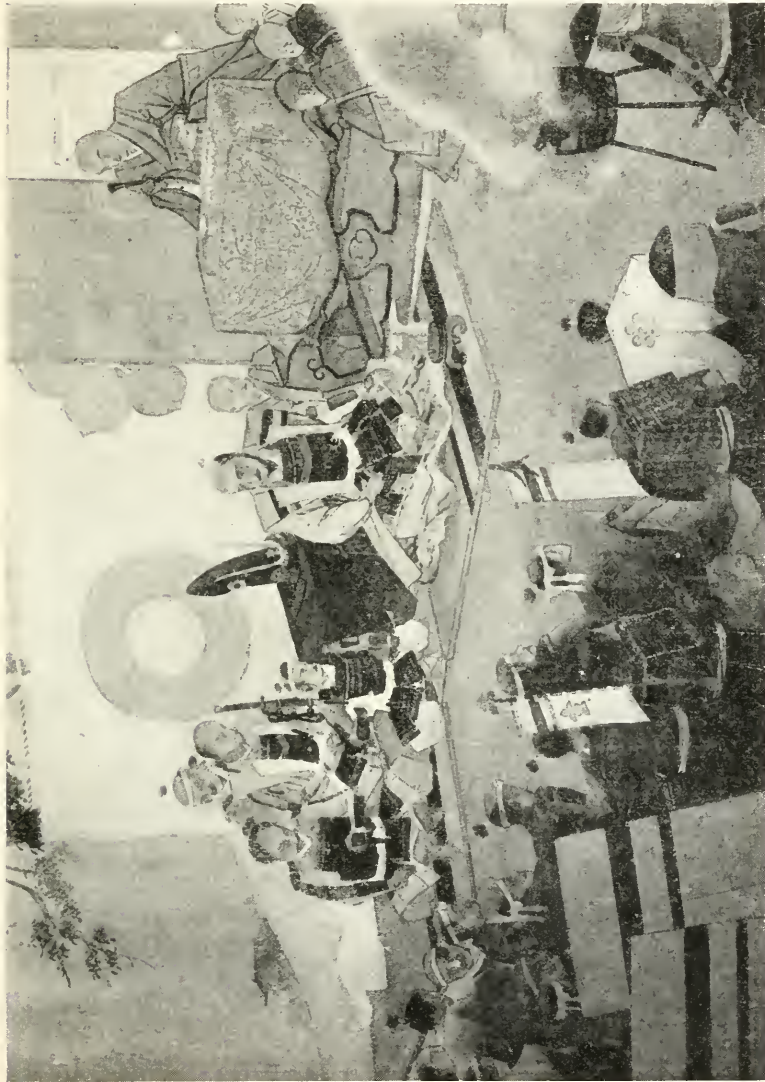
the ruined temple in Tsukakara in Sado. As has been stated, Nichiren Shonin was sent to Sado from Tatsunokuchi, and this was the temple where he was forced to seek shelter for several weeks, for



9. THE LORD OF WAKAMIYA BEARING GIFTS TO NICHIREN.

when he landed on the island there was no one to give him protection. Night and day he repeated the formula *Namu-Myo-Ren-Ge-Kyo* before Buddha's image which came into his possession mys-

teriously while he was an exile in Izu. He was four years in the island under banishment. While he was there he made a great number of new proselytes and wrote several important polemical



10. KATO KYOMASA, THE DEMON GENERAL.

works which form the basis of his religious system. He was permitted to return to Kamakura when for the third time he had an interview with the regent Hojo for the purpose of advising him to

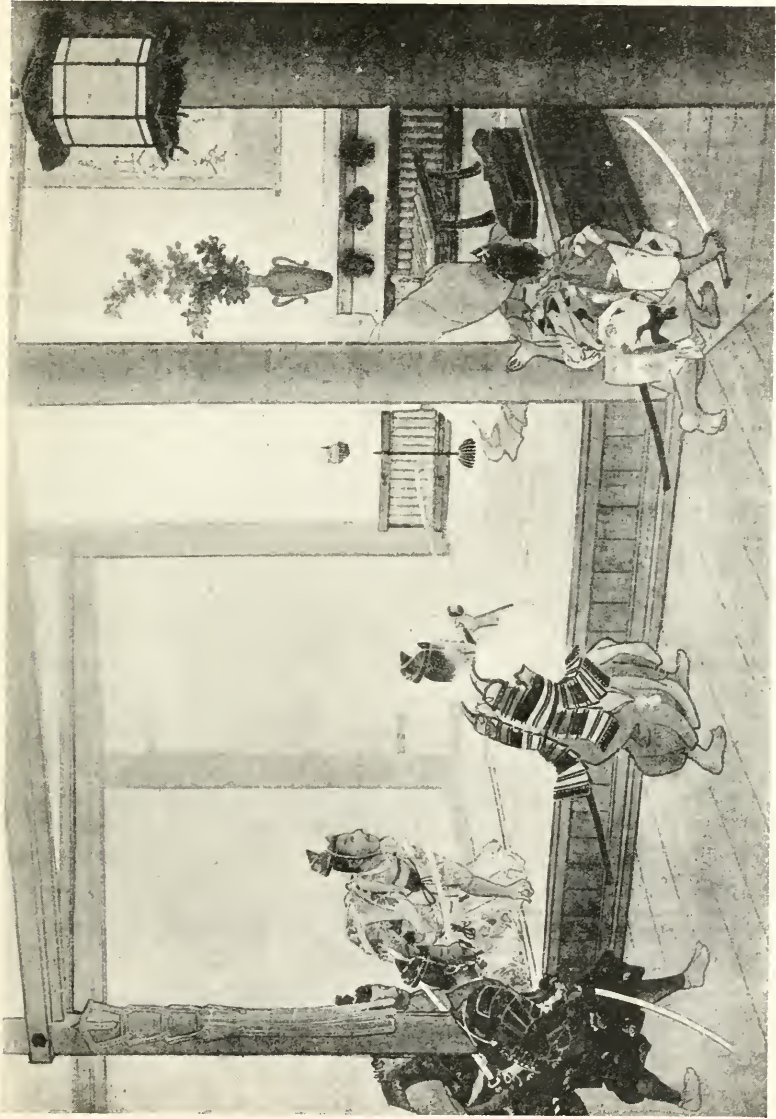
prohibit the dissemination of all Buddhist teachings except that expounded in the Saddharma-pundarika-sutra, for to him false Buddhism was the cardinal evil of the country.

On finding that the regent was reluctant to accept his advice he left him, sternly refusing certain favorable propositions offered him, and went to Kai province to spend the rest of his life on Mt. Minobu as a hermit. Our frontispiece shows him seated beneath the thatched roof of his mountain retreat. While his disciples and devotees were propagating his doctrines in the towns and cities, he led the life of a hermit on the mountain. The term "hermit" does not, however, in his case, denote a person who has forsaken the world that he may live in solitude, for, although the inclination of his heart was to live a serene and unmolested life, nevertheless he considered it a duty to educate the great number of new pupils who flocked to him to receive his teaching. Besides this educational work he found time to write and to perfect his plan for the spiritual resuscitation and future upbuilding of the country. He lived nine years on the mountain and passed away in his sixty-first year. One of the characteristic features of his secluded life was that every day, no matter what the weather, he climbed a distance of about fifty *cho* from his cottage to a precipice where he could obtain a full view of his native province, Awa. There he read from the Sutra that he might bless and honor his parents' spirits in their graves. To cherish the memories of his dead parents was almost a passion with him even in the closing years of his life.

9. The man on horse-back and wearing a white mantle is Gorosaemon-nojo Togi, the lord of Wakamiya in Shimofusa province. Nichiren Shonin, during his student life, and in his work as a teacher and a reformer, received valuable support from this nobleman. The pious lord is here depicted on his way to visit the master on Mt. Minobu. The chest is filled with presents.

10. The priest in this picture is a military chaplain, and the presiding warrior sitting near the table is Kato Kyomasa, the most loyal and able of the generals of Toyotomi Hideyoshi. He was a devoted adherent of the Nichiren sect. During the campaign in Corea, he carried into the battle-field a banner on which were inscribed the seven characters of *Nam-Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo*. Whenever his army went the opposing forces fell back so that he was called by his enemy "Demon General." Cruelty is not implied in this use of the word "demon," but rather an almost superhuman invincibility. After his death, he was deified, and as a god he is popularly known as "Seisho Ko." The priest is holding in his hand

a *hossu*, a brush of long white hair which is an insignia of dignity and rank.



11. HONKOJI NICHIRZU PROTECTED BY HIS SANCTITY.

11. The man sitting before the altar is Honkoji Nichirzu. He lived about one hundred years after the death of Nichiren Shonin. He claimed that the true spirits of Buddha and Nichiren were em-

bodied in only eight of the twenty-eight chapters in the Saddharma-pundarika-sutra. His strenuous, insistent method of propaganda made him many enemies. On a certain occasion while he was reading from the Sutra before the Mandala (a Buddhist representation of the universe) several samurai armed with swords approached him from behind to make an attack, but determined as they were they could not assail the priest, so dignified, composed and absorbed was he in the performance of his devotional duties.