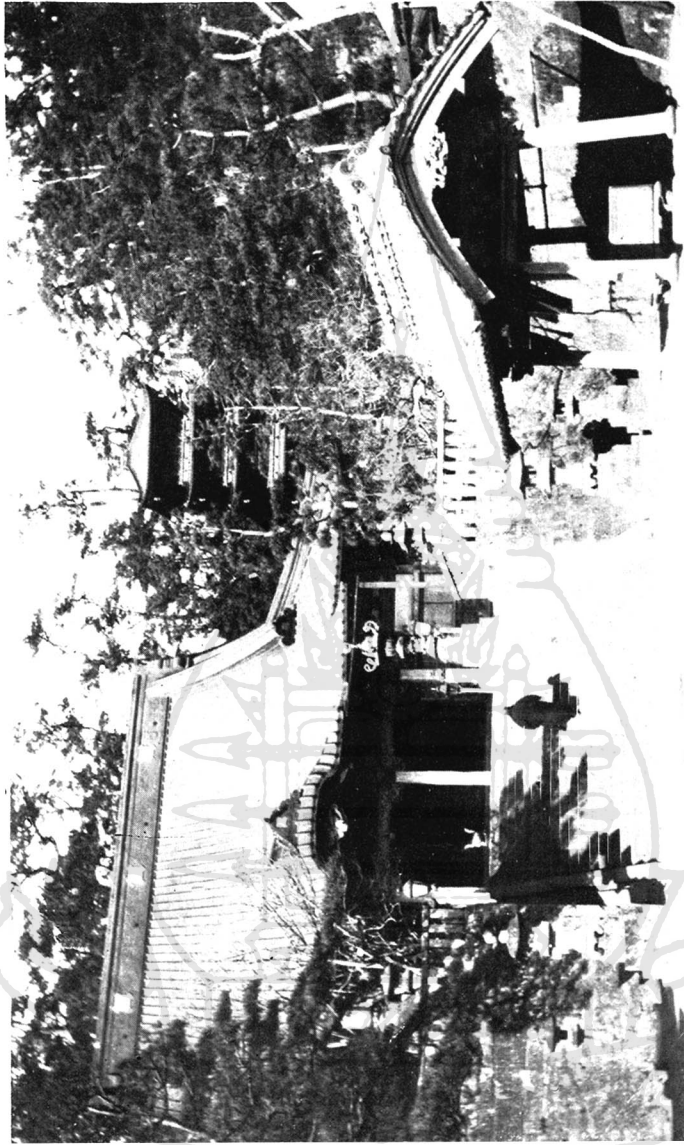


RYUKŌJI .

This temple, situated in a part known as *Tatsunokuchi*, or 'Mouth of the Dragon' is the pride and glory of the village of Katase. The picturesque grounds—upon an extensive and park-like scale—extend over the surrounding hills, and are intersected by a labyrinth of winding shady paths which command a feast of beauty and colour: the green heights of Enoshima lie like a jewel in the rich blue ocean below, spangled with the sails of countless white-winged fishing-craft; the distant mountains, with an uninterrupted view of Fuji's pure outline, blend into a picture justly famed for its romantic character.

But the wide celebrity of Ryukōji does not emanate from scenic attractions, but from its association with the thrilling episode in the life of the most popular saint Nichiren. In commemoration of his miraculous deliverance from the sword in 1271 the temple was erected by his disciples in the year 1337, in order to preserve the sanctity of this historic spot. When the precincts are entered by the main gate, a short distance to the left is a small green pond enclosed with ornamental stones, adjoining which is a grassy hillock crowned with an antique monument of beautiful shape—this marks the site of the *Keijō* or Execution-ground; a large stone nearby is engraved with a record of the circumstances. This part was used for the public execution of criminals from the year 723; in those days, and also in Nichiren's time, the



Main Temple of Ryūkōji, the celebrated Nichiren memorial at Katase erected by the Saint's disciples in 1337 to commemorate his miraculous deliverance from the sword,

sea appears to have been in close proximity, and must have receded considerably during the succeeding centuries. In ancient times the small pond was quite a large lake; the fact that its shape was considered suggestive of a dragon's mouth gave the name to this locality.

According to tradition its waters were inhabited by a poisonous seven-headed serpent who was the scourge of the neighbourhood, and whose habit was to prey upon and devour the terrified inhabitants of those regions. This monster was subjugated by the goddess Benten, who descended from heaven upon the adjacent island of Enoshima in order to rescue the distressed villagers from the dragon, in the year 552. The flight of steps behind the monument lead up to a venerable shrine which, according to ancient chronicles, was originally established in the year 516 to propitiate the serpent, who was considered an evil spirit, and was consecrated as *Myojin* or 'divinity.'

From the main gate below, steps lead up to the *Sanmon*, or tower-gate, beneath whose thatched roof the beams and panels are decorated with fine carvings of scenes in which hermits and patriarchs are the chief figures. From this gate the upper courtyard is entered. On the left is a small temple containing elaborate decorations: the central statue is the founder of the sect, surrounded by figures representing his chief disciples. Before this building is a pine enclosed by a small fence—this is the *Hikari* or 'Glittering pine-tree.' According to the legend, the goddess *Myoken-Bo.atsu* upon one occasion descended into the tree enveloped in a dazzling effulgence of light: a stone monument stands nearby recording this event, also a shrine, gay with artificial

flowers and other emblems, is erected in honour of the goddess. However although the site is identical, this is not the actual pine that was thus honoured by the deity : according to the aged custodian of the little shrine, the present is the grandchild of the original *Hikuri-Matsu!*

On the rocky slope to the left are two caves. The lower contains a large statue of the founder carved in wood : the upper cavern was the historic prison wherein Nichiren was confined whilst awaiting his execution.

The main temple occupies a commanding site upon the upper plateau. The timbers are ornamented with many carvings of dragons, birds, pines, and various animals : outside the entrance stands a green copper incense-burner of quaint shape—the carved inscription stating it to be the gift of a merchant of Yedo. Near this emblem a curious object is attached to a pillar, containing one hundred movable slips of wood enclosed within a frame. It constantly happens that pious persons—in fulfilment of a vow, or as a penance, or perhaps merely to emphasize their petitions—undertake to make one hundred circuits of the broad gallery surrounding the temple, while incessantly repeating the formula of their religion. This is called the *hyakudo*, or ‘hundred rounds,’ and is considered of great efficacy in prayer : each time the frame is passed the suppliant turns back one slip of wood to mark the number of his revolutions. In time of war the amount of devotees making the *hyakudo* greatly increases—the relatives hoping by their intercession to preserve their loved ones from the perils of the battlefield.

Like all Nichiren temples, the interior abounds in colour and gorgeous decorations. In front of the altar—surmounted by an angel in bright robes playing the

flute—is suspended a *tengai*, or canopy, from which float long pendants; hosts of lanterns, flowers, banners, and a paraphernalia of other adornments present a gay and somewhat garish ensemble, in strong contrast to the subdued and mysterious twilight atmosphere of the Zen interiors. Upon the floor rest numbers of small vermilion lacquer stands, carved with gilt lotos-flowers and bearing red and gilt cases containing the scriptures. The coffered ceiling is painted with designs of Nichiren's crest, the citron, in blue, red and gold. The inner sanctuary is elaborately carved and hung with a rich curtain of scarlet and gold brocade.

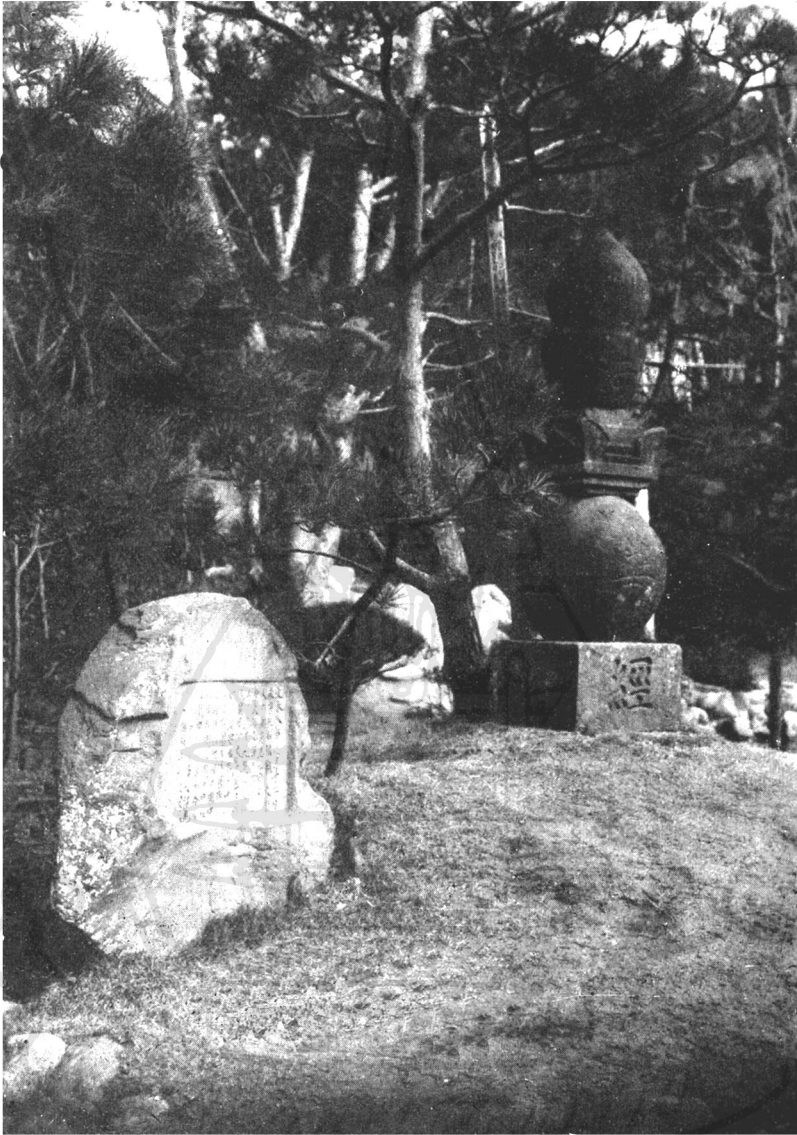
Within the left-hand chamber is preserved a revered possession of the temple; upon a high carved stand of dark red lacquer, with cushions of glittering brocade, reposes the stone upon which the saint is said to have been kneeling at the time the divine thunderbolt paralysed the hand of the executioner. On the great anniversary festival of Sept, 12th this highly-venerated memento is displayed from the greater height of the sanctuary above the main altar. Another curious memorial of their founder is also exhibited upon these occasions, in the shape of the wooden lid of a cooking vessel. Legend asserts that when the priest was taken captive and was on his way to Tatsunokuchi to be beheaded, the little band passed the lake known as *Tanabe-no-iké*—in the back-woods behind the Shichirigahama beach. An old woman, whose heart was melted by compassion for the unfortunate captive, bestowed upon him her own repast of *botamochi*—a cake made of sweetened riceflour: having no plate whereon to place her offering, she utilised the circular lid of her *nabe*—or small cooking-pot. The saint, touched by

the kind action of his aged sympathiser, inscribed upon the wooden lid a text of the scriptures.

On the wall near the memorable stone hangs a large picture painted in colours and vividly representing the execution-scene at the moment of the thunderbolt. The large vestibule abounds with countless *ema*—votive pictures of all shapes and sizes, presented by worshippers as a mark of gratitude for answers to prayer, or for some benefit obtained and ascribed to the saint's influence; many of these represent harrowing calamities in which rescue was effected through the intervention of Nichiren.

Further ascents behind the temple conduct the pilgrim to an upper terrace whereon stands another small temple of fabulously ancient foundation. This dates back to the days of legend—the *Shichimen-do* or 'Shrine of the Seven Heads,' whose object was to exorcise the evil qualities from the dragon tenant of the lake below. Nearby tower the picturesque roofs of a fine five-storied pagoda; this memorial to the founder of the sect is of recent construction, having been erected by devotees in 1910. The lowest story is a repository for the statue of Nichiren, surrounded by many glittering figures of saints.

A sloping path on the western side of this terrace leads to a space upon the height above that is well-known for its inspiring panorama; this particular aspect of Fuji's sacred crest floating into 'the crystal blue of space' above ridge upon ridge of purple mountains being justly famed for its vision of ethereal loveliness. The scene is at its best upon a clear day in the colder seasons of the year; the intervening plain is rich with every tone of green; the river below, gay with flitting sails, winds



Monument that marks the site of Nichiren's attempted execution, 1271.

into the vanishing-point towards Fujisawa ; while beneath the broken line of peaks the sweep of blue bay curves in a complete semicircle, fringed with its rolling line of snowy breakers.

