

HONGAKUJI AND MYŌRYUJI

Facing the Myōhonji entrance, upon the opposite side of the Ebisudō bridge is another Nichiren temple of ancient foundation. This is Hongakuji; an edifice professing to possess a relic of the saint in the shape of one of his bones, and which apparently enjoys great popularity, judging from the incessant sound of drums that resounds throughout the neighbourhood. The building was originally in charge of Nichiren's disciple Nisshutsu; he was succeeded by his well-known pupil Nicchō, who subsequently became the eleventh head of Minobu, dwelling in that remote mountain for the long space of forty years.

Prayers offered in this temple are credited with special efficacy in the cure of eye-diseases, and the pugilistic occupants of the two-storied gate are thickly bespattered with paper pellets adhering to their huge forms—a sign that the petitions have been received with favour. Behind the building is a group of beautiful ancient tombs; but the passing of their dusty occupants has long fallen into oblivion with the ebbing centuries, their names being forgotten and unknown. On the left, lying in the heavy shadow of a spreading tree, is a small monument of celebrity—erected to the memory of Masamune, the famous maker of sword blades who died in the 13th century: the date upon the tomb is given as Jan. 11th 1288.

A short distance to the north of Hongakuji, a few

steps beyond Nichiren's preaching-site, is another old temple, Myōryuji, founded by another disciple of the saint—Nichiyei. He was succeeded by Nisshin 'the persecuted,' who was also known as *Nabe-Kammuri*—or 'Crowned-with-a-Cooking-Vessel!' This somewhat unusual title was acquired through the severe persecutions Nisshin was subjected to during his mission. The hostile listeners to his doctrines were in the habit of emphasizing their disagreement with the propaganda by hurling stones, tiles, or any missile that lay at hand at the head of the unfortunate exponent: hence Nisshin was driven to the precaution of protecting himself from his assailants by wearing a large iron cooking-pot as a helmet! Within the temple are preserved three paintings illustrating in a graphic manner the horrible tortures to which the priest was subjected during the period of his public ministry.

Another relic of early days is the beautiful pine, whose great boughs droop before the mouldy old temple as though to protect what is left of it from the blighting influences of the outer world. Near this pine is a pond of walled-in curious shape, somewhat resembling an arena. It is said that upon this site Nisshin was in the habit of practising austerities: at the rear is a statue of the saint protected by a roof, the monument on the right being his tomb. Blood-curling accounts are recorded of the merciless discipline and tortures this heroic priest inflicted upon himself. It is chronicled that upon one occasion of special prayer and mortification, for ten succeeding days he plucked the nail from each of his fingers, beseeching Heaven that if his petitions were heard with favour, new nails might grow within one hundred days,

as a sign and token. With the blood that flowed from his lacerated flesh this agonised martyr painted a *Mandara*, or representation of the joys of the Blest; which trophy was known as the *Tsume-kiri-no-Mandara* or 'Nail-cut picture of Paradise.'

