

IN BUDDHIST TEMPLES: III. HIGASHI  
HONGWANJI. AND THE FUNERAL  
CEREMONY OF THE LATE LORD  
ABBOT OF HIGASHI  
HONGWANJI

AS is well known to students of Japanese Buddhism, Shinran Shōnin was the founder of the Shin (True) sect. After his death the sect under various leaders divided itself into different sections, and gradually the Hongwanji became the largest and most prominent. The abbots of the Hongwanji trace their descentance back directly to Shinran Shōnin, and this fact has always been of great influence among the followers of the Shin sect. The Hongwanji itself split into two divisions in 1594 when the abbot Kyonyo Shōnin retired in favour of his brother Junnyo and made his own residence at a new temple, the site of which was presented to him by Tokugawa Iyeyasu. This new temple became known as the Eastern Hongwanji, later called the Otani Branch from the family name of the presiding abbot. The two Hongwanji branches teach exactly the same belief, their religious tenets are the same. Historical reasons make the basis of their separation and has nothing to do with religious faith.

Since the building of the Higashi Hongwanji, it has had to meet with several devastating fires when the temple was entirely destroyed. The splendid structure now standing was built in 1895 at an immense cost and is one of the largest and finest temple buildings in Japan.

The temple is approached through wonderful gates, the central one, two-storied, supported by great pillars of *keyaki* wood and the superstructure richly carved. Sheltered in the second story of this great gate is a statue of Shakyamuni the

Buddha, with Ananda, his faithful disciple on the one side, and Mahākāshyapa on the other. Another gate, the Chokushimon, is reserved for Imperial use only. It is brilliant and beautiful and bears a great sixteen-petalled chrysanthemum, the Imperial crest. At the time of the visit of the Prince of Wales, this gate was thrown open, and the Prince's automobile swept through it when it bore the Prince to make his visit to this temple. There is still another gate opening to the Amida hall, covered with rich ornamentation.

In the enclosure within the gates, many doves are flying, having their nests in apertures of the gates. The main temple itself dedicated to Shiuran Shōnin is of colossal proportions, outside richly decorated. The inside however is remarkably simple and perhaps gains its very grandeur by its great size and its simplicity. There are nine hundred and twenty-seven mats in this large temple room which is 27 by 66 feet, and the roof is supported by sixteen enormous *keyaki* wood pillars. The panels above and before the altar section are finely carved with portrayals of Buddhist symbology, angels, and phoenixes. The altar contains a statue of Shinran Shōnin said to have been carved by himself.

The last time I visited this beautiful temple apartment was one week before the funeral of the late abbot, Count Otani. A ceremony in honour of the dead abbot was taking place, presided over by his son, the present abbot of the Eastern Hongwanji. There was something very impressive and solemn in this sutra reading. Before the altar rails were many devotees listening devoutly. It was on this day that they had paid their last respects to the departed abbot, when his coffin under a white robe was placed to public view.

Adjoining the main hall is the Amida hall devoted to the worship of Amida Buddha. There are also smaller altars erected to the honour of Prince Shōtoku, the Im-

perial patron of Buddhism, to Hōnen Shōnin, the teacher of Shinran Shōnin, and to the eight patriarchs of the sect.

I cannot complete this brief description of the temple buildings without referring to the hair ropes. These are enormous ropes, each one two hundred and twenty-eight feet long, thirteen inches around, and weighing one hundred *kw.in.* They are made of human hair, given by women devotees who gladly cut off their black tresses to donate them to the temple. Fifty-two such ropes are preserved in the temple, some of them being exposed to public view in the corridor. These ropes were used to hoist the enormous *keyaki* beams, which being so heavy could not be lifted up with any other kinds of ropes. Of these hair ropes Lafcadio Hearn has written; "What faith can do in the way of such sacrifice he best knows who has seen the great cables, woven of women's hair that hang in the vast Hongwanji at Kyoto."

The water of the fountain in the precinct of the temple comes from Lake Biwa. A mechanism of extinguishing fire has been contrived when the water rises one hundred and thirty-eight feet and iron pipes running over the roofs can discharge water enough to put out any fire. On occasion of the visit of the Prince of Wales in April, 1922, this mechanism was set off, and it was an interesting sight to see the play and spray of the waters upon the great roofs.

The present abbot is Reverend Count Koyen Otani. Although his father, formerly abbot, died only early in February, he had previously retired some years ago, leaving his son Rev. Koyen to take the place of abbot. The present abbot is not only the head of a great church, but he is a poet of distinction, composing poems in what is called the *haiku* style. A few examples of his poems are here given. But it must be mentioned that Japanese poetry loses much of its poetic beauty in translation and only a slight idea can

be given of the brilliancy and dainty charm of these *haiku*-poems in miniature. The *haiku* is composed of seventeen syllables, the shortest poetic expression ever contrived by any people, and naturally much is left to the imagination of the reader who must be acquainted more or less thoroughly with the circumstances that inspired the poet.

Where the temple bell rings,  
The villagers are joyous  
With a joy of the Law,  
Even in their field labours.

Opening his mouth wide,  
How absorbed he looks  
At the flowers wind-blown!  
A Buddha this village lad.

The holy sutra,  
Mother's old letters,  
I read,  
This year-end.

How longingly I feel  
For the ancient city!  
The willows are growing green.

Quiet mountains in summer,  
All around nothing but mountains;  
A lone bird  
Singing just once!

Serene shines the moon tonight!  
How small, human beings,  
We of this earth!

Rather than the stately temple,  
A hut, straw-thatched,  
This autumnal eve!

On February the eighth died Reverend Count Koyei Otani, formerly abbot of the Higashi Hongwanji, and on

February the twenty-second his funeral took place at the temple. The funeral ceremony was most impressive and interesting. With many others I went very early in the morning to the grounds of the main temple. Gradually there assembled a large number of priests and laymen with temple rank, students of the Buddhist University and others having some relationship to the temple. All these gathered in groups before the main portal. After a time, the shrine containing the coffin of the dead abbot was brought down; previously many ceremonies had taken place, but now the abbot as well as others of high priestly rank did obeisance before the coffin for the last time. They did this by placing a broad white sash signifying a carrying rope around the neck and then replacing it with a bow,—this being a symbol of the idea of actually carrying the coffin by a strap upon the shoulders. Having taken this farewell, everyone formed into a procession to march to the funeral ground.

First came students and teachers of Otani University, and then a long line of laymen in ancient court dress (showing that they held some official temple rank). The dress brought us back to the olden days of Japan, some wearing bright-coloured over-dresses and some in white with odd-shaped black caps. Then came many priests in their ceremonious robes, and some of them were very brilliant indeed. Gradations in rank are distinguished by colours, purple being the highest. Past us went priests in red and violet, blue and green, swaying graceful silken robes hanging over full pantaloons resembling those of Turkish gentlemen. Rosaries of all kinds, some of simple wood and some of crystals and amber were held in their hand. After the long line of priests had passed, came a company of soldiers, especially sent to represent the government, a most unusual proceeding to honour a Buddhist priest. At the end of the procession immediately following the coffin shrine which was

borne by many men in white costumes, came the mourners of the abbot's family: first the present abbot, Rev. Koyen Otani, clad in a grey garment, his feet encased in peculiar grass shoes. Beside him walked men holding a large red umbrella to shield him from the sun. Behind the abbot walked his son some day abbot to be, now a slender young college man, and after him came the other sons and nephews of the dead priest. At the end of this group walked many laymen. Along the route of procession as it passed through the streets were crowds of people, most of them devoted Buddhists, clasping their rosaries in their hands, and murmuring *Namu-amida-butsu*.

The procession moved slowly and solemnly through the streets until it reached the specially prepared funeral ground where a funeral pavillion and altar had been arranged. This altar was of great interest, for here offerings had been made of all things representing the different products from land and sea. There also stood some artificial flowers symbolising the sala trees under which the Buddha died so many centuries ago.

The pavillion was a beautiful white building,—white you know and not black being the colour for mourning among the Japanese. The structure really was a crematory where the dead abbot's earthly remains were to be committed to fire, now merely symbolising the fact.

After the procession had arrived at the funeral grounds, there was an interval of some time for rest, but at one o'clock those gathered for the final ceremony took their places either standing or sitting. Then guests of high rank were escorted to their places, abbots and high priests of other sects, representatives of the Imperial family and many others of high official or ecclesiastical rank.

The abbot and his son sat in a canopied pavillion near the altar. At last began the final services, the doors of the

pavillion containing the coffin were opened, the voices of many priests chanted the "Shoshinge" composed by Shinran, and as it drew to a close, the representatives of the Imperial family one by one went to the altar to offer incense and bow their respects to the spirit of the dead. Then the abbot himself did the same. Each one who came to the altar to offer incense did so in a most solemn and stately manner, and I could not help thinking that I was looking at some picture of the past, that I had gone back many years and was in Kyoto of the long-ago. It was indeed a beautiful and interesting sight, this last paying of respect to a great priest of the Buddhist church, abbot of the Higashi Hongwanji.

SEIREN (BLUE LOTUS)