

## IN BUDDHIST TEMPLES

### IV. CHION-IN (知恩院)

CHION-IN is approached through a great *Sammon* (山門), one of those huge gates which stand sentinel before many Buddhist temples. Chion-in's *sammon*, eighty feet high, is one of the three largest in Japan. Its solidity and strength make one think of the days when Buddhism was a power and when great temples in the Buddha's honour were erected throughout the land.

Chion-in is a temple belonging to the Jōdo sect, situated on the eastern hills of Kyoto. It was founded in 1211 A. D. by Hōnen Shōnin and it was here that he died. Fire played havoc with Chion-in as with many other splendid temples in Japan, and the buildings were twice destroyed. The Tokugawa Shōguns were friends of the Jōdo sect, and first by the Shōgun Ieyasu, and later by his grandson Iemitsu was Chion-in rebuilt: in its present form, the temple is due to Iemitsu and here his memory is revered.

Beautiful indeed is this Chion-in amidst the great cryptomeria and pine trees. The temple grounds are quiet and attractive, and while roaming around them, one can get a backward glimpse into the ancient world and pause for a time, gazing.

Up the steep steps—and we can enter the compound and come to the Hondo (main hall), one of the largest temple buildings in Kyoto. The curving black-tiled roof rests on red porches over a complicated beam foundation; at the roof corners are bronze wind-bells which tinkle in the breeze. If you look up at the porch with sharp eyes, you may be able to see a wire screen protecting an umbrella. This umbrella is said to have flown here from a boy, really the God Inari in disguise, in order to protect the abbot who was conducting an outdoor

service when rain began to fall. The umbrella was left and is called the *wasure-gasa*, the forgotten umbrella, and is now considered as a charm to protect the temple from fire.

The interior of the Hondo is very richly ornamented. At the altar which is dedicated to Hōnen Shōnin and in the shape of a shrine heavily gilded, there are masses of golden ornaments. Before the altar and under a rich canopy of hanging gilded ornamentation, is the seat of the abbot. The golden lotus ornaments before the altar are twenty feet high and large pine trees are growing not in earth but in water vases. The swinging golden ornaments give a most lovely effect to this rich altar. The four great *keyaki*-wood pillars which support the roof are gilded and look sumptuous. In fact this altar and its fittings give an effect of a palace shrine, but let it be here remembered that these regal-like ornaments were given not by princes or kings but by devotees of the temple in 1911 on the seven hundredth anniversary of the founding of the temple. On one side of the altar are memorial tablets or *ihais* of the Tokugawa family.

Passing from the main altar room, we come to the Shuei-do, a large apartment where there is an Amida enshrined, supported on each side by the Bodhisattvas Seishi and Kwanon. There is another altar with Amida and sitting in front of him as if on guard is a life-sized statue of Monju. He is clad in priest's robes and is most impressive, his face bearing a beautiful and calm expression. I paused for some time before him and returned again striving to get from that sculptured calm some reflection for myself. This is one of the most interesting images of Monju which I have ever seen, so life-like and represented not as a holy Bodhisattva but as a wise priest. Monju or Mañjuśrī, as is well known, is the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, especially of religious wisdom or insight. It is he who is supposed to have written the *Saddharma-Pundarika*, the Lotus of the Good Law. He is

represented alone or on the left of the Buddha and often sits upon a roaring lion which typifies the voice of the Law. When seated thus, he is opposite Fugen, the god of Love seated upon an elephant. In Monju's right hand he holds the sword of knowledge, and in his left the book of sacred knowledge, but sometimes instead of this book he has a jewel. In Zen monasteries his image sometimes sits at the head of the meditation hall, symbol of that inner spiritual wisdom which is the goal of Zen monks. When Hōnen Shōnin as a boy of thirteen was sent by his temple superiors to study at Enryakuji on Mt. Hiei, the letter of introduction which he bore to the abbot read; "I am sending you a miniature of Mañjuśri." The boy Seishimaru, as he was called then, seemed already so wise and so saintly that the head-priests of his temple felt that he must be an incarnation of Mañjuśri, the God of Wisdom.

The hall for the worship of Amida is connected by a covered corridor with the main temple. It is a two-storied building so graceful in design that it has almost a pagoda-like effect. The porch is covered with handsome wood-carvings, and two splendid water basins in the form of lotus leaves stand at the side of the steps. In the hall the great gilded Buddha Amida is enthroned upon a golden lotus flower beneath a glittering array of hanging ornamentation. He has a kind and gentle expression which is heightened by his great size and brilliant rich golden hue. Many of his devotees did I see kneeling reverently before him intoning over and over the holy phrase "Namu Amida Butsu."

The Goten or Palace apartments built by Iemitsu adjoin the main temple buildings, and as we pass along the corridor a peculiar musical sound is emitted from the planks, which is supposed to resemble the song of the nightingale, so these floors are called nightingale floors and are found also at some other temples.

In 1609, Prince Hachi-no-miya, son of the Emperor Goyōzei, entered the temple under the name of Chion-in-no-miya Monzeki, this latter title being the one that was given to the sons of emperors who became priests. Later, he was ordained as Ryōjun-Ho-Shinno and lived for many years at Chion-in. The decoration of these rooms are fine expositions of classic Japanese art of the Kano school. The rooms are bare, but the sliding screens and wooden doors are decorated with paintings, many of which are unfortunately very faded. The rooms are all named according to the chief decorative designs—plum, stork, pine-tree, chrysanthemum, willow, etc. There is a famous picture here—the celebrated “*nuke-suzume*.” The painter put the spirit of the sparrow into the picture and after a time, it flew away out of the screen leaving only its outline behind. On the verandah are to be seen some wooden doors painted with pine-trees now much faded, but which are thought to be so life-like that in the spring they exude resin. On another sliding door is a sleeping cat, and it is said that if one is very quiet, one can hear her purr, so naturally has the artist depicted her.

There are many beautiful paintings on the sliding screens or *fusuma*, and one of the finest in the fifth room painted by Kano Naonobu is the “*Konoma Fuji*.” Garrett Chatfield Piers writes most enthusiastically of it and I can do no better than to quote him. “The composition leaves nothing to be desired, as the design fills in the alcove with all an Egyptian’s feeling for spacing. The noble sweep of Fuji’s towering outline soars into and above, high above one of these cloud diadems which are seen so often about the lower stretches of her snow fields. The long stretches of valley and field that fill the middle distance are drawn with more than Chinese rhythm. Perhaps we stand upon some vantage point near Kamakura; upon wooded Inamura or the highest point of Shōjōken above Kenchōji. The medium of this finished

little work is the lightest *sumi*, touched here and there by a dully glowing wash of minute gold flakes."

Of the pictures in the Eighth Room which was once used by the Emperor Meiji, Mr. Pier writes: Here is "depicted a design dear to the Chinese artist of the Early Sung in which a gnarled and twisted pine hurls its consorted branches far out over a steep and rocky chasm. Into the unseen depths of this seemingly bottomless abyss, a roaring cataract hurls itself in one gigantic leap. As we watch the glistening ground shake beneath our feet, the cool moisture settles upon our cheeks." I confess I had something of the same sensation when I looked at the winter landscapes by Kano Eitoku in the Seventh Room. They came to me with a start of surprise, and I note with appreciation what Mr. Pier says of them. "Here by means of *sumi-ye* alone are depicted the atmospheric contrasts between the soft, white glow that hangs above a snow covered ground, and the broken dull gray of the exhausted snow clouds. And here too hints of wash-gold seem to bespeak the sun that shall soon entirely dissipate the broken clouds. Well might Tannyū, in this *genre* at least, model himself upon the work of his gifted grandfather, for the author of these charming *fusuma* might indeed be called 'a master of the snow-clad bearers of winter'."

Writing of pictures I must not forget one of Chion-in's great treasures, "The Descent of Amida and Bodhisattvas" by Eshin Sōzu. Mr. Pier has again written so beautifully of this great picture that I cannot refrain from quoting him. "Of the spirituality of Eshin's art, this Tosa-like landscape is a most representative example. To the right of the painting sits Eshin in an attitude of adoration. He gazes heavenward, where, upon a splendid fan-shaped cloud, Amida and his attendants reveal to him a vision of the 'Pure Land of the West.' His little pavilion is charmingly placed, being set upon the high slopes of Mt. Hiei. Here blossoming wild

cherries and tall cedars cling tenaciously to the slopes and a wild mountain stream tumbles headlong in many leaps and bounds to vanish in a mist. The landscape and minor details are painted in soft and tender pigments, a restraint which serves to throw into greater prominence the main theme of the picture. This glorious vision of the welcome, which Amida vouchsafes to the faithful, is a mass of cut gold-leaf. As an expression of the unbounded love and solicitude of the deity, such a theme and rendering could hardly fail to rivet the attention of the masses, with whom the Jōdō doctrine was more especially concerned. At sight of such a glorious vision, the most insensible must needs have been moved."

From the temple interiors, I wandered to the garden and to see the great bell. Chion-in's bell is famous; it is the second largest in Japan and one of the great bells of the world. It weighs seventy-four tons and measures nine feet in diameter and is over ten feet high. It does not ring often, but those who have heard it never forget its great rolling boom that deepens all over the city and dies away in waving whispers. Whenever I listen to it, I feel as if the whole spirit of Buddhism breathes through it. As long as this bell rings out its philosophy of life, Buddhism will never vanish from the soul of the Orient.

The bit of garden near the pond is very charming—big trees in the background; at their feet a tiny bridge, a great stone lantern, the pond in which the red carp swim and where I saw a large tortoise lazily basking, and about the banks of the little water, blooming bright azaleas and stately purple iris. Near the garden is the Revolving Library housed in a picturesque building surmounted by the flaming wish jewel, the *Chintamani*. I looked through the barred windows, thinking of all the sacred Sutras secured there, The *Saddharma-Pundarikā* revered by all the Buddhist sects but especially by the Tendai and Nichiren teachers; the *Pragñā Pāramitā*

much read in the Zen temples, *Sukhāvativyūha* beloved by the Jōdo and Shin followers, and the *Avatamsaka* (*Kegon*) studied as the most profound philosophy.

Seated in the round enclosures were statues of Fu-Daishi (傅大士) and his sons, Fugen (普建) and Fujō (普成), the laughing Buddhas. Fu-Daishi was a Chinese priest and is said to have invented the Rinzo (輪藏) or Revolving Library. At each corner were great statues of the Shi-Tennō, the Four Heavenly Kings who guarded the four quarters of the earth. Of these four kings Bishamonten is the most popular. He is the guardian of the North quarter and as the patron of fortune in war was much revered in feudal days.

Standing near the library in earnest converse, I noticed two young Buddhist nuns. They were dressed in black, and while the Christian nuns always cover their heads these girls had their heads entirely shaven. Most of the nuns in Japan belong to the Jōdo sect and Chion-in has a school for them where three hundred attend. They can often be seen going about in the streets of Kyoto. Some of them are pretty, and all are young, for they come to Kyoto to get their education before going to live in their home temples. Besides Buddhism they study all the subjects taught in a regular girls' school. They look as if they were happy.

From the library, I turned to the left and climbed up the stone steps to the terraces to the Seishi-do (勢至堂), the oldest building in Chion-in, which survived the devastating fires which took away other buildings. It was here that Hōnen Shōnin died.

Here I came up on a funeral ceremony. Before the altar where offerings had been made to the departed spirits and where a priest was officiating, were kneeling the friends of the dead person. Each was beating on the sleigh-like wooden bell, so often used in Buddhist ceremonies and repeating over and over again "Namu Amida Butsu."

Still more steps up to the tomb of Enkwo Daishi (圓光大師), Hōnen Shōnin! In a previous number of this magazine much has been written of Hōnen Shōnin. It is he, as will be remembered, who was the founder of the Jōdo sect and the teacher of Shinran Shōnin. He lived 1133-1212. He believed that the way to Paradise, the Pure Land, lay in the *Nembutsu*, the constant repetition or holding in the mind of the sacred phrase, "Namu Amida Butsu." When he lay dying, he recited the holy words as usual, but his last utterance as he turned his face toward the West, was this: "The light of Amitābha illumines all sentient beings throughout the ten quarters of the world, and whoever calls upon this sacred name is protected and never forsaken by him."

From all that can be learned of Hōnen Shōnin, his seems to have been a simple and beautiful character. His influence upon others was great, for he was the teacher of the noble and the wise. He was benign and holy, a most striking and gracious personality in Buddhist history.

SEIREN (BLUE LOTUS)