MYOHONJI

"...the solitude, the pillared solemnity of the
great trees in the green dimness."

This picturesque and beautiful old temple is the larg-
est of the Nichiren sect in Kamakura; it is also famed
for its historic associations and the tragedy that was
enacted upon its site. The long approach begins from
the Ebisudo bridge spanning the Namerigawa. After some
distance mossy steps ascend to the Niomon—or gate of
the Kings—lying in the deep shadows of noble crypt-
teria, whose dark foliage lends a note of solemn and
dignified remoteness to this valley, so thickly enclosed
with forest-trees and known as Hiki-ga-yatsu; the name
originated from the fact that here lived the woman who
tended Yoritomo from his infancy, and who came of a
family belonging to the district of Hiki in the province
of Musashi. The great Shogun naturally cherished the
associations of his old nurse, and it is recorded that he
frequently repaired to this spot, accompanied by Masako,
to visit the family.

The nurse was known as Hiki-no-ama, or the Nun
of Hiki; here she reared with her adopted son Yoshikazu and his offspring. This Yoshikazu was a samurai
of high renown and a special favourite with Yoritomo;
he was also a member of the council of illustrious men
that was formed after Yoritomo’s death to discuss the
affairs of the Bakufu or military government, but whose
deliberations were subject to the endorsement of Masako and her father Hōjō Tokimasa. Yoshikazu’s daughter, known in history as Wakasa-no-Tsubone, was the mistress of Yoriyue, eldest son of Yoritomo; she became the mother of Ichiman, Yoriyue’s eldest son and also a girl-babe, who is known as Take-no-gosho from the name of her residence.

The loyalty of Yoshikazu to his master led him to organise a scheme that aimed at the destruction of his enemies the Hōjō, whose power was rapidly increasing, and whose aim was to destroy all the Minamoto, replacing them with Hōjō—a state of affairs that was speedily consummated. The knowledge of this plot soon reached Tokimasa’s ears, with the result that Yoshikazu was assassinated; a large number of valiant soldiers and partisans also perishing at the same time. This tragedy took place Sept. 2nd, 1203.

On the left of the Niōmon is an enclosure with stone lanterns etc., within which is a small monument. This is the tomb of Ichiman, the baby son of Yoriyue, who was only three years of age when the extermination of the Hiki family took place: certain of the kinsmen of Yoshikazu were slain at Nagoye, Tokimasa’s residence, the site of which is in the vicinity of Myōhonji. The remaining members assembled at the abode of Ichiman at Yukinoshita, (another part of Kamakura), but all perished in the attack, including the little i.eir. On the following day, amongst the ashes was discovered the sleeve of the child’s robe. This relic, together with some bones, was buried here and the tomb was erected, which is universally known as the Sodezuka, or ‘Sleeve-tomb.’ Within the small enclosure a memorial stone tablet has been
The Sodezuka,

or 'Sleeve-tomb' of Yoritomo's infant grandson Ichiman, who was burnt to death Sept. 2nd, 1203.
erected in 1904 to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the death of Ichiman, grandson of Yoritomo, and bearing an account of these historical facts engraved upon its surface.

At the time these events took place, the youngest son of Yoshikazu Daigaku Saburo, happened to be in charge of a relative elsewhere, and so escaped the general annihilation. He was taken to Kyōto for greater safety, and there educated; achieving high distinction for his scholarship and the lofty character of his mind. When the Emperor Juntoku (1211–1222) was exiled to the island of Sado he was accompanied by Saburo, who served and attended his Imperial master with great devotion during the period of his banishment. Meanwhile circumstances in the military capital had undergone considerable change: when liberty was restored to this remaining member of the unfortunate house of Hiki, he was able to return to Kamakura. This was the time when Nichiren's activities were at their height. Daigaku Saburo became an enthusiastic convert and layman pupil of the saint, assuming the religious name of Nichigaku: the temple is said to have received its name from Nichiren himself, Myōhōn being the posthumous title of Yoshikazu's wife. On the hill behind the present site Daigaku Saburo built a small place of worship in the year 1260—the Hokke-dō—in memory of Take-no-gosho, daughter of Yoriiye and Wakasa, who had escaped the general slaughter when an infant, eventually becoming the wife of Yoritsune—kinsman of Yoritomo and successor to the Shōgunate upon the death of Sanetomo. At the beginning of the Meiji Era this Hokke-dō was removed below to the site where it still exists near the lake, and was re-named the Shaka-
do, a valuable statue of the Buddha being enshrined therein: the original wooden pillars are said to remain intact, and still support the little building.

Upon the island in the lake stands a moss-encrusted stone pagoda. According to tradition this was erected in remote times by a wealthy man of Yai (the district adjoining the sea-shore), to commemorate the tragic fate of his baby-girl, who was carried away by an eagle; the bereaved parent is said to have established several of these memorial stones in various parts of Kamakura.

Behind the tomb of Ichiman is a fire-proof building containing the temple's most important treasures. These include an ancient statue of the Buddha said to have been carved by the famous Chinese sculptor-priest Chin-wakei; a picture of Buddha painted by Nichiren, and various other prized objects. The building near the residence of the priests is a large guest-hall, containing a high altar and attractively decorated.

On the left-hand side of the Gate of the Kings steps lead up to the temple graveyard, wherein are divers mossed and ancient tombs. However the central monument, of polished marble, marks the passing of a modern hero (1916), and is reared above the ashes of Admiral Kamimura—the distinguished commander who played such an effective rôle in the Russo-Japan war (1904–05), and who was a devoted adherent of the Nichiren doctrines.

A short distance beyond the first tiled gate of this foundation a path ascends to a space in the hill-side, enshrouded by trees and dedicated to the days of legend. Beside the green waters of a small deep lake stands a little temple—Jakushi-Myōjin, or 'Shrine to allay the Sufferings of the Serpent.'
Lake of Myōhonji.

With moss-encrusted stone pagoda; memorial to the babe of ancient days that was carried away by an eagle.
On the fatal day of Sept. 2nd, 1203, the despairing Wakasa-no-Tsubone is said to have drowned herself in this pond, when her spirit assumed the guise of a dragon: moreover, according to ancient chronicles, the ghostly inhabitant of its depths entered the young daughter of Hojo Masamune causing the possessed girl deep anguish. At the request of Wakasa's brother, Daigaku Saburo, Nichiren recited the scriptures and prayed for the lost soul on the banks of this lake. The demon was exorcised. In the watches of the night Wakasa appeared to the saint in joy and gratitude that by virtue of his intercession her spirit was liberated from its tortures to ascend to the regions of the blest; the apparition averred that for all eternity her ghost would hover around this sacred spot, to protect the temple from malign influences—hence the redeemed soul came to be deified as Yakushi Myojuin.

Near the lake (Jagyo-no-ike, or 'Pond of the Dragon') is a spring of extreme antiquity, sheltered by a roof: this is the Dragon's Well (Jagyo-no-i), so-called from the following tradition. In the course of a civil war that was being waged in the Era of Oei (1394–1427), for protective purposes a priest of the temple—Nihigyo by name—is said to have concealed beneath its waters a holy figure that had been bestowed by the deified Wakasa: during this period if any person ventured to approach the well with the intention of drawing water, the dragon appeared—putting the alarmed intruder to flight; moreover evil befel them.

On either side of the main temple are the famous Kaido (Pyrus spectabilis)—the right-hand specimen being a veritable giant of its species, which as a rule does not attain to large proportions. Towards mid-April, when
these great bushes are in full bloom, numerous visitors assemble to admire the enchanting effect of the billowing masses of pale-pink and crimson blossom, that transforms the austere dignity of this usually scanty courtyard into a vision of fairyland.* A track on the right ascends somewhat steeply to the summit of the hills, the temple, which are intersected with paths and command views on all sides of quite exceptional beauty, through the boles and drooping boughs of the magnificent old pines. In November the numerous scarlet maples invest the landscape with a brilliant note of colour. An easy and picturesque descent on the eastern side leads down into the valley of Matsuba-ga-yatsu, rendering it unnecessary to return by the same route.

* Alas, since these lines were written the great Kyūdo reigns alone; the second largest of these beautiful trees being one of the many lamented victims of the typhoon that occurred Oct. 1st, 1917.
The Great Kaidō of Myōhonji in full bloom.