

# Three Remarkable Examples of Philanthropism in Japan.

DR. GENCHI KATO.

I should esteem it a great honour for me here to mention the following three remarkable examples of philanthropism nobly practised in this country which from generation to generation the Japanese nation has proudly preserved to the memory of her posterity in the annals of history.

As the frontispieces show, one is a sketch map of Buddhist temple-buildings with various kinds of hospitals for both men and animals, the others are photographs taken from the copies of the inscriptions of the two stone monuments, all of them representing or symbolizing that noble precept, "Love your neighbour, even your enemies" with which, needless to say, Westerners are very familiar.

The 1st picture shows the ancient holy precincts, outlined in a sketch map of the famous Buddhist Temple Gokurakuji at Kamakura in Sagami Province, which was founded by the renowned Buddhist monk Ninshō<sup>(1)</sup>.

Ninshō, otherwise known as Ryōkan,<sup>(2)</sup> was born in 1217 (the 5th year of Kempo),<sup>(3)</sup> at Shikishima in Yamato Province. His mother dying when he was 16 years old, Ninshō became a Buddhist monk under the guidance of the famous Buddhist priest Eison,<sup>(4)</sup> the Kōshō Bosatsu<sup>(5)</sup> (the Bodhisattva Kōshō, *i.e.*, the Saint Kōshō) of the Buddhist Monastery Saidaiji,<sup>(6)</sup> belonging to

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(1) 忍性 (2) 良觀 (3) 建保 (4) 睿尊 (5) 興正菩薩 (6) 西大寺

the Ritsu Sect. Ninshō was a learned as well as a virtuous master-priest. General Regent Tokiyori and Nagatoki, and Tokimune of the Hōjō Family showed their regard for him, by founding for him the famous Temple Gokurakuji at Kamakura and putting all under his control.

Although Ninshō belonged to the Ritsu Sect there is no shadow of doubt but that he embraced the faith in Amida (Amitābha Buddha) and that it was this faith, no less than the great monk's virtue, that so greatly attracted and influenced his adherents.

It was on the Promontory of Inamura that Ninshō prayed to the Buddhist gods to give their unseen protection to the Japanese nation against the invasion of the ferocious Mongols under Kubilai Khan in 1281 (the 4th year of Kōan).

The life of Ninshō filled, as it was, with self-denial, benevolence, and sympathy towards others, was completely ruled by the fundamental Buddhist moral principles of Loving-kindness. In short, he was indeed Charity itself. He did everything in his power for the sick and poor, for orphans and sinners. His sympathy extended itself not only to men but also to animals, and in especial to sick horses.

From this point of view, he is justly entitled to be called the founder of the *Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals*.

This monk Ninshō established a number of asylums, hospitals and orphanages, and, in particular, prepared bath-rooms for the sole use of lepers, for whose comfort he untiringly laboured.

To cite but one instance : there was a poor leper who could not walk owing to his constant ill health ; the Great Physician (Iōnyorai,<sup>(1)</sup> lit., the Physician-King-Tathāgata), as

(1) 醫王如來

Ninshō was called, who nursed the sick man with special care, and out of his pity and compassion, oftentimes went so far as to go shopping for him in the morning and back again in the evening from the distant market-place with the patient on his back.

It is said that the sick for whom Ninshō cared during twenty years numbered 57,250. He was indeed the bosom friend of the poor and forlorn, the sick and decrepit.

He died in 1303 (the 1st year of Kagen<sup>(1)</sup>). After his death, in recognition of the meritorious charitable services which he rendered to the Japanese people, the Emperor Godaigo was pleased to canonize by conferring upon him the posthumous honorary title of Ninshō-Bosatsu (lit., Bodhisattva, the Buddhist Saint) in 1327 (the 2nd year of Kareki<sup>(2)</sup>).

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Recently, the Imperial poem of the Emperor Meiji breathes the same spirit :

“ Though for his country’s sake  
Each man should have its foes,  
Yet never let him dare forget  
The law of mercy and good will.”\*

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\*We are told that the Russians are using the following petition to their God in their liturgy on behalf of animals :—

“ And for those also, O Lord, the humble beasts who with us bear the burden and heat of the day, and offer their guileless lives for the well-being of their countries, we supplicate Thy great Tenderness of heart, for Thou hast promised to save both men and beasts and great is Thy Loving-kindness, O Master, Saviour of the world ” (Quoted by the Bishop of London at a great gathering at the Church House, Oct. 17, 1914.).

This is just the same truth upon which the Red Cross Society was founded and it is why this society has come to have an international significance. The idea of universal benevolence and loving-kindness to the enemy fostered by the teaching of compassion towards all sentient beings ever since Buddhism was first introduced into this country in the 6th century was already in existence long before the Red Cross Society was founded in Europe about the middle of the 19th century.

Suffice it to mention two remarkable facts in Japanese history which assuredly reflect the good influences of Buddhism upon the Japanese heart. One is the religious monument erected by the Buddhist Priest Son-e<sup>(1)</sup> in the compounds of the Shōjō-kōji,<sup>(2)</sup> popularly known as the Yūgyō-Dera after the honourable name of the Founder of that temple, Yūgyō-Shōnin, Ippen<sup>(3)</sup> of the Ji Sect, at Fujisawa, Sagami, in 1418 (the 25th year of Ōei<sup>(4)</sup>), in memory of not only all the soldiers in both the rival forces, but all the animals that fell in the civil war, between Ashikaga Mochiuji<sup>(5)</sup> and his traitor Zenshū Uesugi Ujinori<sup>(6)</sup> in 1416. The other is also a sacred monument erected by a feudal lord (daimyō) in Kyūshū, called Shimazu Yoshihiro,<sup>(7)</sup> in 1599 (the 4th year of Keichō<sup>(8)</sup>), in the precincts of the sacred Mount Kōya in Ki-i after the famous Taikō's<sup>(9)</sup> expedition to Korea (1592-1598) in memory of those soldiers in both the Japanese and Sino-Korean armies who sacrificed their lives for the sake of their respective countries.

In both these cases the dead friends and foes, Japanese and foreigners, were treated on exactly equal terms, the barrier of nationality being no hinderance at all; the distinction of rank,

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(1) 尊惠 (2) 清淨光寺 (3) 一遍 (4) 應永 (5) 足利持氏 (6) 禪秀 (上杉氏憲) (7) 島津義弘 (8) 慶長 (9) Otherwise called Toyotomi Hideyoshi.

high or low, counting as nothing in respect of their souls,..... this is a conspicuous instance of the influence exercised by the Buddhist teachings of Universal Benevolence, and the Equality of all beings.

Lastly, let us cite one instance out of many which is described in the *Taiheiki*, namely, that Kusunoki Masatsura (+1349), the son of the famous warrior Masasige (1294-1336), took a good deal of trouble to save the hostile troops who in crossing the River Yodo at the Watanabe Bridge were in risk of drowning.

This at once reminds us of that noble action after the signal victory in the Battle of Japan Sea, performed by Admiral H. Kamimura, who in his compassion and true-hearted kindness towards even the Russian foes (who were devoid of fighting strength), rescued the lives of all these unhappy souls who must otherwise have been drowned.

This historical fact is a convincing proof of the truth contained in the saying of the renowned Chinese sage Laotze : "Compassion is that which is victorious in the attack, and strong and impregnable in the defence."

The Epitaph on the monument erected at the Yogyō-Dera on the 6th of the 10th. Month in the 25th year of Ōei (1418), after mentioning the principal names of those killed on either side run as follows :—

*"Praised be the Buddha Amitābha—Namu Amida Butsu!*

*"This monument is erected for a memorial of the men and animals.....whether friends or foes.....who fell in the campaigns of the 23rd and 24th years of Ōei<sup>(1)</sup>(commencing on the 6th of the 10th month). Do you, priests and lay-believers, offer your sincere prayers to the Buddha Amitābha on behalf of the dead!"*

*(Cf. The New Topography of Sagami Province<sup>(2)</sup>).*

(1) 1416-1417 (2) 新編相模風土記稿、鎌倉郡(三十五卷)

The memorial inscription on the monument erected on Mt. Kōya in 1599 are as follows :—

“On the 15th of the 8th month in the 2nd year of Keichō<sup>(1)</sup> some three thousand soldiers of the Ming Army and four hundred and twenty Japanese soldiers were killed at Nangen<sup>(2)</sup> in the Zenra-Dō.<sup>(3)</sup>

“On the 1st of the 10th month more than eighty thousand men of the same hostile army were killed at Shisen<sup>(4)</sup> in the Keishō-Dō.<sup>(5)</sup>

*“May Buddha bestow protection upon each soul, who took part on either side and found his last resting place in Korea, being loyal to the end to his own fatherland !*

*“In those different engagements the slain on both sides numbered over three thousand, and those who died of some diseases or lost their lives by some casualties either on land or sea were too numerous to count.”*

The three facts above related prove that works of Universal Benevolence were already carried out in Japan in the same noble spirit as that of the Western Red Cross Society to whose membership Japan was admitted in 1886 (the 19th year of Meiji).

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(1) 1597    (2) 南原    (3) 全羅道    (4) 泗川    (5) 慶尙道