CHAPTER II

NICHIREN'S BIRTH, STUDIES, AND CONVERSION

THE LOTUS OF TRUTH

NICHIREN was born on the seacoast of the south-eastern corner of Japan, in a fishing village surrounded on the north by undulating hills and washed by the dark blue waves of the Pacific Ocean on the south. Tidal waves have washed away the part of the seacoast where his father's house stood, and today the spot is pointed out in the depths of the wonderfully clear water, on the rocky bottom of the sea, where lotus flowers are said to have bloomed miraculously at the birth of the wonderful boy. His father was a fisherman, and doubtless the boy was often taken out in the father's boat, and must have enjoyed the clear sky and pure air of the open sea. When in later years, during his retirement in the mountains, a follower sent him a bunch of seaweed to eat, the old hermit wept as he called to mind his early memories of the seaweeds, which are, indeed, a charming sight as they are seen through the transparent water. Far away from the effeminating air of the Imperial capital, far away from the turmoils and agitations of the Dictator's residence, the boy grew up in the fresh and invigorating atmosphere of a seaside village, in the midst of unadorned nature — wooded hills and green trees, blue waters and sandy beaches. The inspiration of nature and the effect of association with the simple, sturdy people are manifest in each step of Nicheren's later career, in his thoughts and his deeds. The new light was to come out of

the East for the salvation of the Latter Days — this prophetic zeal of Nichiren is in large measure to be attributed to his idea about his birth, and to the surroundings of his early life.

In 1233, when the boy was eleven years old, his parents sent him to a monastery on the hill known as Kiyozumi, the " Clear Luminosity," near his home. The reason is not given, but it was in no way an exceptional or extraordinary step; in those days many a father did the same, whether from motives of piety or for the sake of the boy's future career. The peaceful and innocent days of the boy novice passed; he was made an ordained monk when he was fifteen years old, and the religious name given by his master was Renchō, or " Lotus-Eternal." Doubts grew with learning, because too many tenets and practices were included in the Buddhist religion of his days, and the keen-sighted youth was never satisfied with the incongruous mixture in the religion he was taught. " My wish had always been," he tells us in his later writings,[1] " to sow the seeds for the attainment of Buddhahood, and to escape the fetters of births and deaths. For this purpose I once practised, according to the custom of most fellow-Buddhists, the method of repeating the name of Amita Buddha, putting faith in his redeeming power. But, since doubt had begun to arise in my mind as to the truth of that belief, I committed myself to a vow that I would study all the branches of Buddhism known in Japan and learn fully what their diverse teachings were." His distress of mind was, however, not over a merely intellectual problem, but was a deeply religious crisis; and, indeed, the young monk was then passing through so violent a struggle of religious conversion that he at last fell into a swoon, following a fit of spitting blood. It is said

[1] *Nichiren's Works* (ed. Katō, Tokyo, 1904), p. 1770.

that during this swoon he saw, in vision, Kokuzō, the deity of wisdom.

This happened when Renchō was seventeen years old, and in the next year we find him studying under a teacher of Amita-Buddhism in Kamakura, the residence of the Commissioners. The uneasiness of the young monk was not allayed, and his quest of truth was not satisfied by the teachers who were accessible in the provinces. Renchō then went to Hiei, the greatest centre of Buddhist learning and discipline, where he stayed from 1243 to 1253, pursuing a varied course of study and training. During these years he also visited other centres of Buddhism, where special branches of Buddhism were taught and practised, and extended his study even to Shinto and Confucianism. The results of all this study and investigation are shown, not only in the erudition of his later writings, but in the comprehensive breadth of his doctrine. But the range of his studies never diverted him from his central problem: What is the true form and the unique truth of Buddhism? On the contrary, as he progressed in knowledge, the conviction gradually grew strong in his mind that the truth is *one*, and that the essence of the Buddhist religion — nay, of human life — is not manifold. "I had gone to many centres of the religion," he says in reminiscence, "during those twenty years, in the quest of Buddhist truths. The final conclusion I arrived at was that the truth of Buddhism must be one in essence. Many people lose themselves in the labyrinth of learning and studies, through thinking that every one of the diverse branches might help to the attainment of Buddhist ideals." [1] Wherein, then, did the young zealot find the unique truth?

[1] *Works*, pp. 1770–71.

Fierce internal struggles, wide study, and prolonged thought brought this sincere seeker after truth to the final conviction that the scripture, " The Lotus of Truth," was the deposit of the unique truth, the book in which the Lord Buddha had revealed his real entity, and on which the great master Dengyō had based his religion and institutions. The name Renchō was now exchanged for Nichiren, which means Sun-Lotus; the Sun, the source of universal illumination, and the Lotus, the symbol of purity and perfection, were his ideals. Nichiren's firm belief was that the Lotus of Truth was not only the perfect culmination of Buddhist truth, but the sole key to the salvation of all beings in the latter days of degeneration. Thus, all other branches of Buddhism, which deviated from the principle of the exclusive adoration of this scripture, were denounced as untrue to Buddha, as we have already seen in Nichiren's condemnation of the prevalent forms of Buddhism. Nichiren's idea was the restoration of Buddhism to its original purity, and to the principles propounded by Dengyō; but what he understood by restoration was quite different from our modern idea of historical criticism. The truths are eternal, but the method should be a simple one, available for all, especially for men of the Latter Days, and without regard to differences among them in wisdom and virtue. These convictions of Nichiren had a complicated background of philosophical thought, in accord with the general trend of Buddhist speculation, and as a result of his learning. But all these doctrines and arguments were fused by the white-heat of his faith and zeal; that is, he simplified the whole practice of religion to an easy method, that of uttering the " Sacred Title " of the Scripture.

The Sacred Title meant the exclusive adoration of the truths revealed in the book, Lotus, practised in the repetition

of the formula: "*Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō*," that is, "Adoration be to the Scripture of the Lotus of the Perfect Truth!" This formula is, according to Nichiren, neither merely the title of the book, nor a mere symbol, but an adequate embodiment of the whole truth revealed in that unique book, when the formula is uttered with a full belief in the truths therein revealed, and with a sincere faith in Buddha as the lord of the world. Nichiren's thought on this point will be more fully expounded further on, but here let us see just what he meant by the Lotus of Truth. He wrote later, in 1275, explaining his position, as follows:

> All the letters of this Scripture are indeed the living embodiments of the august Buddhas, who manifested themselves in the state of supreme enlightenment. It is our physical eyes that see in the book merely letters. To talk in analogy, the *pretas* (hungry ghosts) see fire even in the water of the Gangā, while mankind sees water, and the celestial beings see ambrosia. This is simply due to the difference of their respective karmas, though the water is one and the same. The blind do not perceive anything in the letters of the Scripture; the physical eyes of man see the letters; those who are content with self-annihilation see therein emptiness; whereas the saint (Bodhisattva) realizes therein inexhaustible truths, and the enlightened (Buddhas) perceive in each of the letters a golden body of the Lord Śākya-muni. This is told in the holy text in the teaching that those who recite the Scripture are in possession of the Buddha's body. Nevertheless, prejudiced men thus degrade the holy and sublime truth.[1]

What, then, is taught in this book which Nichiren esteemed so highly, and what led Nichiren to his conviction? The Lotus of the Perfect Truth, or *Myōhō-renge-kyō* in Sinico-Japanese, is an equivalent of the extant Sanskrit text, *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra*.[2] The book circulated in

[1] *Works*, p. 1165; cp. ibid., 1126, 1184, 1313, 1317, 1533, etc.

[2] The Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra, edited by H. Kern and B. Nanjio, St. Petersburg, 1912. An English translation by Kern is in Vol. XXI of the Sacred Books of the East; the French translation of E. Burnouf is entitled, Le Lotus de la Bonne Loi. Beside Kumārajīva's version (Nanjio's Catalogue,

China and Japan in a Chinese translation produced by Kumārajīva in 407. The translation was so excellent in the beauty and dignity of its style that it supplanted all other translations, and was regarded as a classical writing in Chinese, even apart from its religious import. It was on the basis of this book that Chi-ki, the Chinese philosopher-monk of the sixth century, created a system of Buddhist philosophy of religion.[1] This system was called the Tendai school, from the name of the hill where Chi-ki lived; and it was this system of religious philosophy and philosophical religion that was transplanted by Dengyō to Japan as the corner-stone of his grand ecclesiastical institutions.

Nichiren discovered, during his stay on Hiei, that Dengyō's far-reaching scheme of unifying Japanese Buddhism in his institutions on Hiei had been totally obscured and corrupted by the men of Hiei itself, who had imported degenerate elements of other systems. This thought induced Nichiren to make a zealous attempt at restoring Dengyō's genuine Buddhism, and therefore the orthodox Tendai system. This could be done only by concentrating thought

no. 134), there are two Chinese translations; and one of them produced by Dharmarakṣa (Nanjio's Catalogue, no. 138), is much nearer to the extant Sanskrit text than the former. Now as to the rendering of the title, Dharmarakṣa has for *sad* the word meaning " true " or " right," like Kern's rendering " true," while Kumārajīva's rendering *myō* is understood to mean " perfect," " mysterious," " subtle." Here the rendering the " Lotus of the Perfect Truth " is according to Nichiren's exegesis.

Moreover, Nichiren, after comparing the two Chinese versions, decidedly preferred Kumārajīva's. The reasons given are several, exegetic and doctrinal; but here it suffices to say that we reproduce passages of the book from Kumārajīva's translation, and as interpreted by Nichiren. For our object is to show how Nichiren derived inspiration from the book through Kumārajiva's version, and chiefly according to the Tendai exegesis. References are made to a Japanese translation by Yamakawa, and for the sake of comparison the Sanskrit text and Kern's translation are referred to.

[1] See Appendix, on the Buddhist Conception of Reality, Part II.

and devotion upon the sole key of Buddhist truths, as promulgated by the two great masters — that is, upon the Lotus of Truth, especially in Kumārajīva's version.

The book, Lotus, was acknowledged by nearly all Buddhists to be sermons delivered by Buddha in the last stage of his ministry, and, as such, called forth the highest tributes from most Buddhists of all ages. Critical study of Buddhist literature will doubtless throw more light on the formation and date of the compilation; but even apart from minute analysis, we can safely characterize the book as occupying the place taken in Christian literature by the Johannine writings, including the Gospel, the Apocalypse, and the Epistles. The chief aim of the Lotus, both according to the old commentators and to modern criticism, consists in revealing the true and eternal entity of Buddhahood in the person of the Lord Śākya, who appeared among mankind for their salvation. In other words, the main object is to exalt the historic manifestation of Buddha and identify his person with the cosmic Truth (*Dharma*), the universal foundation of all existences.

This main thesis of the book is illustrated, supported, and exalted in manifold ways, and there are many side-issues and episodes. Similes and parables, visions and prophecies, warnings and assurances, doctrinal analysis and moral injunctions — all these ramify from the central strand or are woven into it. The whole composition is a symphony in which the chief motive is the identifying of Buddha and Dharma, but the melodies, the instruments, the movements, and even the key-notes vary from part to part; and, naturally, the inspirations imparted by the book varied from time to time, in accordance with the temperaments, the needs and aims, of different ages and persons. Thus, in describing the outlines of the sermons and narratives con-

tained in this wonderful religious book, let us pay attention to the different phases which were emphasized by different teachers, and especially to the points which inspired Nichiren in the several stages of his life.

The book opens with a prelude played in the serene light of the stage, the Vulture Peak idealized,[1] which is illumined by the rays emitted from Buddha's forehead. He sits immersed in deep contemplation, and yet in the air made brilliant by his spiritual radiance are seen not only innumerable Buddhas and saints, who move in the luminous air, but existences of all kinds, down to those in the nethermost purgatories. Heavenly flowers pour upon the place, the quaking of the earth heralds the approach of an extraordinary occasion, and the congregation is deeply moved with amazement and admiration — men and gods, saints and ascetics, demons and serpent-kings — all are tense with wondering expectation of what the Lord Buddha is going to reveal. (Chapter I, Introduction.)

Buddha arises out of contemplation, and what he reveals is that the real import of the *Dharma* is beyond the ordinary comprehension or reasoning, and that only those who put faith in the unique truth promulgated by all Buddhas are enabled to grasp it. What he now means to disclose is the truth of the Sole Road (*Ekayāna*) which has enabled the Buddhas of the past to attain Buddahood, and which is destined to lead all beings, the future Buddhas, to the same attainment. The Truth is one and the goal the same; but the means and methods are not, because the beings to be enlightened are various in character, capability, and inclination. Thus, all Buddhas have entered upon their training and work for the purpose of leading all beings to the same

[1] Cp. Anesaki, *Buddhist Art*, pp. 15–17, and plates II and VI.

height of attainment they themselves have reached, and Śākya-muni is one of these. Yet, mindful of the varying dispositions of the beings to be instructed, Buddha has opened three gateways, one for those who are keen for knowledge and illumination in philosophical truths, that is, for the *Śrāvakas*; the second for those who are inclined to meditation and self-seclusion — the *Pratyeka-buddhas*; and the third for those who wish to perfect themselves along with others — the *Bodhisattvas*. Although these three ways are different in method and in result, they are destined finally to converge to one and the same Sole Road of Buddhahood. The opening of the different gateways is due to the " tactfulness " (*upāya-kauśalya*) of Buddha's educative method, while the basis of all lies in the same Truth, and the aim is universal enlightenment. This idea of tactfulness, or pedagogic method,[1] gave to many Buddhist thinkers a clue to explain the diversity existing within Buddhism, and we shall later see how Nichiren made use of this explanation. (Chapter II.)

The discourse now proceeds to further elucidation of the relation between the final aim and the educative methods. Three parables are adduced for this purpose: the parable of rescuing children out of a burning house; the parable of bringing a prodigal son to the consciousness of his original dignity and properties; and the simile of the rain-water nourishing all kinds of plants (chapters III–V). Śākya-muni, our master, is at the same time the father of all beings, who tries and does everything to save his errant children. The truth he teaches is the universal truth which can finally be realized by all beings in various existences, just as rain-water, one in essence and taste, enables all sorts of plants to grow and flourish, each according to its capacity

[1] "Accommodation."

and disposition. Thus, the tactful achievement of Buddha's revelation is possible, because he has himself realized the truth of existence, and his person is the embodiment of universal *Dharma*.

What is set forth is the aim of all Buddhas, and the efficacy of the truth they reveal to lead all beings to enlightenment. The leader in this work is found in the person of Śākya-muni, and naturally all of his disciples are assured of the highest attainment and made representatives of the future Buddhas. This assurance, called *vyākaraṇa*, is a prophetic revelation given to those earnest Buddhists who would engage themselves to practise the moral perfection of the Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva is a Buddhist who has expressed his desire to perfect himself by saving others, and taken the vow (*praṇidhāna*) in presence of a Buddha, as his master and witness, and who lives his life, dedicating all his goods to the spiritual welfare of all fellow-beings. When a Bodhisattva takes the vow, and his zeal proves worthy of his determined vow, the Buddha, his witness, assures the Bodhisattva of his future attainment, and reveals his destiny by prophesying how and when the final end of Buddhahood will be attained. The vow (Jap. *seigwan*, Skt. *praṇidhāna*), the dedication (Jap. *ekō*, Skt. *pariṇāmaṇā*), and the assurance (Jap. *juki*, Skt. *vyākaraṇa*), make up the three cardinal points in Buddhist ethics for the achievement of the Bodhisattva ideals.

In accordance with this principle of Buddhist ethics, the discourse of the Lotus proceeds (in chapters VI–IX), to reveal the *vyākaraṇa* given by Śākya-muni to his disciples, assuring them their future destiny, as well as telling the remote causes accumulated for its fulfilment. The *vyākaraṇas* given in these chapters are indeed prophecies, but Buddhist thought has never been satisfied without referring

future accomplishments to their past causes. This is the reason why chapter VII tells how the start was made by Śākya-muni, in a remote past, when he was a prince and took the vows of Bodhisattvaship before the Buddha Abhijñājñānābhibhū,[1] and how, ever since, the connection between himself and his disciples has been maintained. Just as the vows taken by that prince, have been accomplished and his master's *vyākaraṇa* fulfilled, so will the destiny of his present disciples surely be attained. And thus the prophetic assurance is extended to all Buddhists of the future. These discourses have been a great inspiration to many earnest Buddhists, who have journeyed on the way to their perfection with confidence in the assurance given in these chapters.

The purpose of Buddha's work has been laid down, the assurance given to his followers, and the foundation of the Sole Road explained. The further revelation naturally turns to how the destiny is to be worked out by the Bodhisattvas. The essence of Bodhisattvaship in this sense consists in the adoration paid to the sacred text of the Lotus, the embodiment of universal truths — adoration not only in worship through ceremonies and recitations, but in practising its precepts and preaching its truths to others; in short, in living the life of Truth according to the sermons of the Lotus. The Bodhisattva is the messenger of the Tathāgata[2] (Buddha), the one sent by him, who does the work of the Tathāgata, who puts absolute faith in Buddha and his Truth, and lives the life of Truth, especially by

[1] The name means "the Conqueror of Powers and Wisdom."

[2] *Tathāgata* (Jap. *Nyorai*) means the "Truth-winner" and, at the same time "Truth-revealer." Cp. Anesaki, *Buddhist Art*, pp. 3–5, and 8; also the article "Tathāgata" to appear in Hasting's *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*.

working to propagate the truths of the Lotus among the degenerate people of the Latter Days. Thus, chapter X, entitled the " Preacher," consists of the injunctions given to the Bodhisattvas to live worthy of their high aim and in obedience to Buddha's message and commission.

A vision follows the injunction, a miraculous revelation, as well as an apocalyptic assurance (chapter XI, entitled " The Apparition of the Heavenly Shrine "). A vast shrine (*stupa*) adorned with the seven kinds of jewels appears in front of Śākya-muni as he is preaching; heavenly hosts surround it, waving banners, burning incense, playing music; the air becomes luminous, iridescent, fragrant; the sky resounds with heavenly music and chanted hymns. Suddenly, the scene is totally transformed, as we see in apocalyptic literature generally. A voice is heard from within the shrine in the praise of Śākya-muni's work and sermons. In the midst of the celestial glories and the hosts of heavenly beings, the Heavenly Shrine is opened, and therein is seen seated the Buddha Prabhūta-ratna,[1] who long since passed away from his earthly manifestation, and has now appeared, to adore Śākya-muni who is still working in the world. The dramatic situation reaches its climax when the old Buddha invites the present one, and the two sit side by side in the Shrine. The joint proclamation made by them is to prepare the disciples for the approaching end of Śākya-muni's earthly ministry, and to encourage and stimulate them to the work to be done after the master's passing away. " Revere the Truth revealed in this holy book, and preach it to others! Any one who will fulfil this task, so difficult to do, is entitled to attain the Way of Buddha, beyond comparison. He is the child of Buddha,

[1] The name means " Accumulated Treasure "; Japanese *Tahō*.

the eyes of the world, and will be praised by all Buddhas." (Chapter XI.) [1]

The admonition is further encouraged by the prophetic *vyākaraṇa* given to Devadatta, the wicked cousin of Buddha, who, because of his long connection with Sākya-muni, will, in spite of his wickedness, attain Buddhahood at a certain future time. Moreover, the assurance of the final perfection is vividly impressed by the instantaneous transformation of a Nāga (Serpent-tribe) girl, who now appears as a preacher of the Perfect Truth and one of the Tathāgata's messengers. The final conversion of the typical wicked man and of the innocent girl indicate that Buddhahood is to be realized by all; and these episodes were always a source of inspiring faith, and encouraged trust in the efficacy of the excellent truth revealed in the book.

After the apocalyptic scene and the miraculous conversion, other practical admonitions are given to the future Buddhas. Two ways of spreading the truth are indicated, one the way of vigorous polemic, the repressive and aggressive method of propaganda, and the other the way of pacific self-training, the gentle, persuasive method (chapters XIII and XIV, entitled respectively the "Exertion," or "Perseverance," and the "Peaceful Training"). The peaceful training in meditation and watchfulness over self was a source of great inspiration to many Buddhists; but greater, at least so far as Nichiren is concerned, was the power inspired by the admonition to perseverance. Indeed, the

[1] Yamakawa, p. 364; Text, p. 256; SBE., pp. 242–243, verses 38–41. The Chinese version makes a separate chapter out of the portion corresponding to Text, pp. 256–266 (SBE., pp. 243–254). This chapter, no. xii, is called the Devadatta, and Nichiren was very particular about this division, for various reasons. In this volume we shall keep to Nichiren's division; and consequently the numbers of the several chapters after this are higher by one than the numbers in the extant Sanskrit text.

characteristic feature in Nichiren's ideal consisted in translating into life the exhortations to strenuous effort, in what he called the " reading of the Scripture by the bodily life," which meant actual life, fully in accordance with the truths taught in the book, especially with the exhortations, encouragement, and assurances contained in this chapter on " Perseverance." As we shall see later, in every hardship and peril which Nichiren encountered, he derived consolation from Buddha's reassurance, and stimulating inspiration from the vows uttered by his disciples to sacrifice everything for the sake of the Truth, and to endure perils, sustained by firm belief in the mission of the Tathāgata's messengers.

With these exhortations given to future Buddhas closes the first grand division of the book, which is the revelation of the Sole Road proclaimed by Śākya-muni in the " manifestation " aspect of his personality. With the fifteenth chapter opens the revelation of his true, eternal, primeval [1] personality, together with the apparition of his primeval disciples, the vows they take, and the mission entrusted to them.[2]

This thought on the two aspects of Buddha's personality is a consummate outcome of religious and philosophical speculation on the transient and the everlasting aspects of Buddha's person and work — a matter touched upon before, when we characterized the book, Lotus, as the Johannine literature of Buddhism. And now, in the last

[1] [" Primeval " is used here and in the sequel of beings, attributes, and relations in a transcendent sphere of reality, in distinction from the world of historical manifestation. — *Ed.*]

[2] Arthur Lloyd, in *The Wheat among the Tares* (p. 79) and *The Creed of Half Japan* (p. 289), totally misinterprets the import, accepted by most Japanese Buddhists, of the division of the book into these two parts.

half, is revealed the primeval Buddhahood or the entity and functions of the Buddhist Logos. So long as the Buddhists regard their master as a man who achieved Buddhahood at a certain time, they fail to recognize the true person of Buddha, who in reality from eternity has been Buddha, the lord of the world. So long as the vision of Buddhists is thus limited, they are unaware of their own true being, which is as eternal as Buddha's own primeval nature and attainment. The Truth is eternal, therefore the person who reveals it is also eternal, and the relation between master and disciples is nothing but an original and primeval kinship. This is the fundamental conception, which is further elucidated by showing visions reaching to the eternally past as well as to the everlasting future.

Having been quickened by Buddha's urging, the Bodhisattvas in the congregation ask the Lord to entrust to them the task of propagating and perpetuating the Truth. Quite contrary to their expectation — and ours — they are counselled to keep themselves quiet. While they are astonished at the Lord's dissuasion, he summons the innumerable hosts of saints, who appear out of the earth from all quarters. Among them four figures are conspicuous, who were never known before to any in the assembly, and whose names, they are told, are Viśiṣṭa-cāritra, Ananta-cāritra, etc.[1] The endless hosts, following the four leaders, pay adoration to Buddha, and pledge themselves to work for the perpetuation of the Truth and the salvation of all beings. The surprise of the other members of the assembly is voiced by Maitreya, the highest of the Bodhisattvas, who asks Buddha, "Who are these saints who have appeared out of earth?"

[1] The names mean, "Superior-conduct," "Endless-conduct." The former, *Jōgyō* in Japanese, was the one with whom Nichiren was most eager to identify himself.

The answer is that they have existed from all eternity, and have always been Śākya-muni's disciples — an answer which puzzles the inquirers still more, because their idea of Buddha as a man who no great while ago attained Buddhahood under the Bodhi-tree at Gayā is incompatible with the statement that these miraculous beings existing from eternity are his disciples (chapter xv, entitled the "Issuing-out-of-the-Earth"). How Nichiren believed himself to be a reincarnation of Viśiṣṭa-cāritra, or Jōgyō, will be seen later on; and his reference to an eternal and primeval discipleship to the eternal Buddha can be understood by turning to this scene.

The sixteenth chapter, entitled the "Duration of the Tathāgata's Life," is meant to solve the puzzle, and to reveal the eternal existence of Buddha's personality. The Buddha who was born and is going to die, or to disappear from among mankind, is but a manifestation, and his (apparent) death is in order to dispel the disciples' vain hope of having his earthly manifestation with them forever. Neither is birth the beginning, nor death the end of life; the true life extends far beyond both of these commonly assumed limits. Things come and pass away, but truth abides; men are born and disappear, but life itself is imperishable. Buddhahood is neither a new acquisition nor a quality destined to destruction. The One who embodies the cosmic Truth, Buddha, the Tathāgata, neither is born nor dies, but lives and works from eternity to eternity; his Buddhahood is primeval and his inspiration everlasting. How, then, can it be otherwise with any other beings, if only they realize this truth and live in full consciousness of it? Thus, the revelation of the everlasting life discloses the infinite measure of the Tathāgata's life, which means at the same time the share of the true Buddhists in the eternal

life of Buddha, and in the inextinguishable endurance of the Truth.

It was this teaching of the eternal life, both of Buddha and of ourselves, that inspired in Buddhist belief boundless strength, and led Tendai and Dengyō to systematize their theory about the primeval dignity of Buddhahood and the pre-established possibility of our supreme enlightenment. Nichiren inherited and emphasized these doctrines as the very basis of his religious thought, but we shall see later how he applied the conception of the primeval relationship between the Lord and his disciples to the moral life of mankind.

The climax of the revelation is followed by a series of encouraging assurances given by Buddha, and of enthusiastic vows made by the disciples and celestial beings. The revelation of the eternal past is thus followed by the assurance for the everlasting future. The past and the future are united in the oneness of the Truth, by the unity of purpose, methods, and power, in all the Buddhas of all ages — in short, in the Sole Road of Truth. This is the cardinal teaching of the Lotus, as in other Buddhist books or systems; but the special emphasis laid by the Lotus, particularly in the last twelve chapters, is upon the question, Who shall really be the one who will perpetuate and realize this truth of the Sole Road? The Truth abides eternally, but it is an abstraction, a dead law, without the person who perpetuates the life of the Truth. The Buddha Śākya-muni, in his human manifestation, was the one, the Tathāgata *par excellence*; but who shall be the one in the future, nay in the present, in these days of degeneration and vice ? This was the question of Nichiren, who at last, as the result of his hard experience and perilous life, arrived at the conclusion that he himself

was the man destined to achieve the task of the Tathāgata's messenger.

All of the remaining chapters (XVII-XXVIII), the "Consummation and Perpetuation" of the truths revealed, have always been a strong inspiration to Buddhist piety. The narratives and prophecies contained in them gave consolation in various ways, and the saints in the stories were the objects of pious devotion on the part of many Buddhists. Especially the compassionate help promised to Buddhists by Avalokiteśvara, the god of mercy (chapter XXV), was regarded as a powerful incentive to grateful piety. Other saints or deities appearing in these chapters were regarded as protectors of Buddhists, and their worship consisted in devotion to them and dependence on their divine grace. In short, for most Buddhists before Nichiren, the admiration of these chapters and the worship of the divine beings who appear in them amounted to praying for benefits, and even to superstition.

Now Nichiren interpreted the "Consummation and Perpetuation" in a totally different manner. The inspiration he derived from these narratives was a spirit of emulation, instead of mere piety; the life of the true Buddhist was to be lived in emulating the courageous and compassionate spirit of the divine beings and the vows they uttered. This was due to Nichiren's peculiar conception of the whole scripture, namely, that it was a book not to be read simply by the eyes, or merely understood by the mind, but to be "read by the body," that is, by flesh and blood. The truths revealed therein were, for Nichiren, the records of the true Buddhist life, which was realized by the saints of the past, and therefore to be striven for by all Buddhists of the coming ages.

Seen in this light, the whole book, and especially the part on the "Consummation and Perpetuation," was a storehouse of exhortations and precepts, prophecies and assurances, given to the future Buddhists, especially to those living in the latter days of the world. For instance, take chapter XXI, on the "Mysterious Power of the Tathāgata." It is not only a revelation of Buddha's own divine work, but an assurance given to all Buddhists, that the "Mysterious Power" should be realized and embodied in every Buddhist's actual life. Nichiren regarded as of the highest importance a passage pointing to a definite person, designating him as "this man."

> Just as the light of the sun and moon
> Expels all dimness and darkness,
> So *this man*, living and working in the world,
> Repels the gloom (of illusion) of all beings.[1]

How this statement was taken as a prophecy concerning the leader of the true Buddhism in those days, that is, Nichiren himself, will be seen as we follow his growing consciousness of his mission. To take another instance, there is a passage in chapter XXIII, on the Bodhisattva Bhaiṣājya-rājā,[2] foretelling the propagation of the Lotus of Truth in the fifth five hundred years after Buddha's death.[3] Herein Nichiren saw another prophetic assurance given to his mission.

Of great importance, in Nichiren's view, was the story of the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta, a previous life of Buddha himself, told in the twentieth chapter.[4] The story is this. While Buddha was still striving for Buddhahood, he was a monk, and used to salute every person he met as a future

[1] Yam., pp. 567–568; Text, chapter xx, verse 13, p. 394; SBE., p. 369.
[2] The name means "Medicine-King"; Japanese, *Yaku-wō*.
[3] Yam., p. 596; Text, p. 420, lines 13–14; SBE., p. 391.
[4] Sanskrit text, chapter xix.

Buddha, because he was convinced that every one was destined eventually to be so. The people, however, took this salute as an insult, and in turn insulted and abused the monk. He endured all this, but never changed his way of saluting others, or his conviction that every one was a Buddha-to-be. Therefore he was called the " Constantly-revering." [1] This story is told as an occurrence in the past, and also as an example for all Buddhists, especially for those living among the evil-disposed men of degenerate ages. It was this aspect of the story, indicating an underlying bond connecting the true Buddhist of the past with his successor in any age, that inspired Nichiren and kept him ever perseverent throughout all persecutions. Thus, in *his* mind this story of the " Constantly-revering " saint was nothing else than another version of his own life, which was also foretold in the vows of endurance as recorded in the thirteenth chapter. The same spirit of endurance for the sake of the Truth, and the same life in emulation and practice of the ardent vows of the ancient saints — this was what he found in the story, and derived from it incentive and consolation.

The Lotus of Truth is a rich treasury of religious inspiration and moral precepts, prophetic visions and poetic imagery, philosophical speculations and practical admonitions. From this book, all ages, and every man in Buddhist countries, derived some sort of instruction and inspiration, each according to his needs and disposition. Most Buddhists of a speculative trend of mind occupied themselves in elaborating the teaching of the oneness of

[1] The Sanskrit name Sadā-paribhūta, certainly means the " Constantly-abused," but Kumārajīva rendered the name by the " Constantly-revering," that is, *Sadā-aparibhūta*, or with a different termination, indicating the present participle. Japanese, *Jō-kufyō*.

Truth, the doctrine of the Sole Road, notwithstanding the three gateways opened by Buddha in chapter II, on " Tactfulness." Many others, inclined to fantastic imagination, and delighted with supernatural glories, were keen for heavenly visions and apocalyptic scenes. Many others, again, found objects of worship in the deities of mercy and benefaction, such as Avalokiteśvara. Much was written on the Lotus — philosophical treatises, miracle stories, poems, and prayers; the book also inspired many painters and sculptors, and we have a rich store of works of art whose subjects are taken from it.[1] But there was none, until Nichiren " read " the book in his original way, who derived from it such a wonderful power of strenuous, militant life, and thereby lived a life of striving toward the ardent zeal exemplified by primeval disciples of Buddha. Indeed, Nichiren deemed himself to be an embodiment of the Scripture, a personal version of its teachings and prophecies and a living testimony to them.

How did he carry out his life in accord with this idea and attain to a full conviction of his mission, foreordained in the Lotus of the Perfect Truth ?

[1] See Anesaki, *Buddhist Art*, Chapter I.