

## CHAPTER VI

### THE EXILE IN SADO AND THE RIPENING OF NICHIREN'S FAITH IN HIS MISSION

TEN days were spent in the journey from the southern coast of Japan to the northern, and Nichiren now stood on the exposed coast of Echigo, gazing upon the waves raging in a winter gale. On the way thither he had travelled over hills and passes, crossed streams and valleys never before trodden by him. Now, in the midst of winter,<sup>1</sup> the lands all along the northern coasts were covered with snow. There he saw for the first time the Sea of Japan — this man who hitherto had known only the Pacific Ocean. The gale raged so continuously that he was obliged to stop at the little haven of Teradomari for a week. All of his past life seemed to him something like a series of frightful dreams, yet the dreams were as real as any facts of human life — nay, more real than anything else, because the records had been written in his tears and blood. During his stay there, while waiting to embark, he pondered over the past and the future. “Mountains beyond mountains” he had found in his journey in coming thither, and “waves upon waves” were raging in the sea before him. Similar had been his past experience, and such was also the prospect of the coming years. He examined and reviewed all the history of his life,

<sup>1</sup> He left Echi on the tenth day of the tenth month (November 13), arrived at Teradomari on the twenty-first day (November 24), wrote the letter quoted below on the following day, embarked for Sado on the twenty-seventh (November 30), landed there on the following day (December 1), and was installed in an abandoned hut on the first day of the eleventh month (December 4), 1271.

comparing it with the words of the Scripture, and could only arrive at the same conclusion he had come to in Izu, but now upon more conclusive evidence.

Although every step of his perilous life had been a subject of reflection in the light of the prophecies in the Scripture, Nichiren had never before had an opportunity so well suited to a comprehensive retrospect and profound meditation as at this time. As he reviewed it, his career had step by step fulfilled, almost to the letter, the prophecies concerning the propagators of the Truth; and now he was entering a new life, after a resurrection—the proper part of his life as the man wholly dedicated to the cause of the Truth, as well as to the spiritual welfare of all people in the coming days of degeneration. “The one, the pioneer, who lives the life of the Lotus of Truth,” was surely not a product of chance, but a realization of the vows and promises recorded in the Scripture. Then, why should not he, Nichiren, be in vital continuity with some of those saints who had been commissioned by Buddha to work in the future, and were destined to suffer persecutions on that account? Many persons are mentioned who appeared in the assembly of the Lotus, and took the vows to perpetuate the Truth. Whoever they might be, Nichiren must be one of them—this was the conviction that was now firmly established in his mind. This is stated in a letter addressed to one of his earliest believers, Lord Toki, written one day after his arrival at Teradomari. This letter<sup>1</sup> is the first of a series of testimonies evincing Nichiren’s consciousness that he was a reincarnation of one of the saints in the prophecies.

After a brief narrative of the journey, the letter quotes the passages to which Nichiren had paid special attention,

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, pp. 697–700; dated the twenty-second of the tenth month (November 25), at eight o’clock in the morning.

interpreting the meaning of his life. The quotations are similar, but in this letter a special emphasis is laid on passages in the thirteenth chapter on "Perseverance," such as, "They will deride us and abuse us, and assail us with weapons and sticks," "We shall repeatedly be driven out of our abodes." He continues:

Nichiren has indeed been driven out repeatedly, and exiled twice. The Lotus of Truth proclaims the truths which are universal to all ages, past, present, and future. (What it says concerning the past is to be true of the present, and what it announces to occur in the present will be fulfilled again in the future.) Thus, the chapter on the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta,<sup>1</sup> telling what happened to him in the past, is now being realized in (the life of one who is practising) what the chapter on Perseverance tells, and *vice versa*. Then, surely (the man who is now realizing) the Perseverance will be in future (the man who practises the life of) Sadāparibhūta. Thus, Nichiren will be the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta. . . . (The chapter on Perseverance says that in the future, in the days of the Latter Law, there will appear eight billions of millions of saints who practise their vows.) Now, in these days there are the three kinds of opponents of the Truth (as exemplified in Nichiren's persecutors); and yet, if not one of those millions of saints should appear, it would be something as if an ebb were not followed by a flood; and as if the moon, when it had waned, did not wax again. When the water is clear, the moonlight is reflected in it; when a tree grows, birds abide in its branches. Nichiren is the vicar of those saints, eight billions of millions in number, and is protected by them all.

The vicar of the innumerable saints who took the vows of "Perseverance" was the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta. Nichiren is not here quite as definite as he was in a letter addressed to the same lord, more than one month later, from Sado. In the latter <sup>2</sup> he says, in part:

During nearly two months since my arrival in this island of Sado, icy winds have been constantly blowing, and, though the snowfall is

<sup>1</sup> Chapter xx (Sanskrit Text, Chapter xix); see above, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, pp. 702-703; dated the twenty-third of the eleventh month (December 26), 1271.

sometimes intermitted, the sunlight is never seen. My body is penetrated by the cold, whereof (as is told concerning the cold hells) there are eight kinds . . . As I have written you, during the two thousand and two hundred years since Buddha's death, various masters have appeared in the world and labored to perpetuate the Truth, knowing its import, and yet adapting it to the needs of the times. The great masters Tendai and Dengyō made explicit the purport of the Truth (by uttering its Sacred Title), and yet they did not propagate it. One who shall fulfil this task is to appear in this country. If so, may not Nichiren be the man? . . . The Truth has appeared and the omens are already more clearly manifest than ever before. The Scripture says, "There appeared four leaders, Viśiṣṭa-cāritra," etc.

This is the first definite statement<sup>1</sup> about his personal connection with Viśiṣṭa-cāritra (Jap. *Jōgyō*), the leader of the saints called out of earth in the chapter on the "Apparition of the Heavenly Shrine." From this time on, Nichiren remained constant in the belief that his former life was that of Viśiṣṭa-cāritra, although he often referred to other saints as his predecessors, and spoke as if he were a reincarnation of one of them.

The place where Nichiren was abandoned was a hut in a cemetery, little sheltered from wind and snow. No regular supply of food reached him. He was clad only in coarse hempen robes. It is a wonder how he survived these severities. He "felt in his body the eight kinds of icy cold," yet there was a fire in his inner heart; he almost starved, but he was provided with spiritual ambrosia. Yet he would have died of cold and hunger, if a zealous adversary, who at first attempted to kill him, had not been, contrary to his intention, converted by Nichiren. The man was a warrior who had come thither in attendance on the ex-emperor, who had been banished to the island more than fifty years before.

<sup>1</sup> A reference to the same man is made in the first essay after his return from Izu, (*Works*, p. 472), but is not directly referred to Nichiren himself.

He continued to live there, and was a devout Amita-Buddhist. The honest but simple-minded man, having heard of Nichiren's antagonism to Amita-Buddha, determined to kill the devil monk. He approached the solitary hut, and watched for an opportunity to stab the hated man, but was involuntarily attracted by Nichiren's voice as he recited the Scripture, and finally entered into religious discussion with him, because he thought it not proper for a Buddhist and a warrior to kill another without giving him warning and attempting to convert him. The man, no match in learning and piety for Nichiren, was converted by him whom he had formerly hated. His wife followed the example of her husband, and it was they who supplied Nichiren with food. They remained faithful to him until death; and, as in the case of the fisherman and his wife in Izu, the prophet never forgot to be grateful to them. Several tender letters written to them later are testimonies to the close relation established between the master and his converts. Hatred and persecution, on the one hand, but consolation and protection, both miraculous and human, on the other, all worked to strengthen Nichiren's gratitude toward the Scripture and his faith in his mission as the messenger of Buddha.

In this way the severest of the winter season was passed. Several communications were meanwhile received from Nichiren's followers on the mainland. By the time the snow and frost began to melt and the sun was pouring down its warm rays, the exile was no longer solitary and deserted, but had about him a few converts, and was preparing to continue his work. The work to be done was, of course, of quite a different sort from that which he had done in combating others. The fifty years before the "resurrection" were introductory to the proper part of his mission. There, in Sado, he was to arrive at the climax of his life, the revelation

of the profound truth of his gospel. This idea was a necessary consequence of Nichiren's belief that his own life was an embodiment of the Lotus of Truth, because the Scripture was always divided by interpreters into three parts, the introduction, the climax, and the consummation and perpetuation.<sup>1</sup> Nichiren conceived his own mission in conformity with this division, and the task to be done in the climax of his life, now begun, was to reveal the essence of his religion, which in the event proved to be the revelation of the "Supreme Being" in a symbolic representation of the universe.

For this ultimate revelation he had to prepare the way, just as the revelation of the Tathāgata's infinite life (chapter xvi) had been preceded by the issuing of the innumerable hosts of the primeval disciples (chapter xv). These preparations consisted of a concise exposition of his doctrines, and of a critical estimate of the relative values of various religious and ethical systems. The exposition is contained in an essay entitled, "The Heritage of the Sole Great Thing Concerning Life and Death,"<sup>2</sup> together with a cognate essay on "The Oral Instruction for the Attainment of Buddhahood by Trees and Grasses."<sup>3</sup> After this, in the same month, was finished the "Opening the Eyes," Nichiren's greatest treatise on the ethical aspect of his religion, with reference to his own mission as well as to his followers' duties toward himself and Buddha. All these were com-

<sup>1</sup> Taken as a whole, the nineteen chapters from the second to the twentieth were regarded as the proper part, while in the two other divisions, the "manifest" part and the "primeval" part, the proper part of the former consisted of chapters ii-ix, and in the latter of xvi and a part of xvii.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, pp. 742-744; written on the eleventh of the second month (March 12), 1272.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, pp. 745-746; dated the twentieth (March 21).

pleted by the time the first winter in Sado was coming to an end, and, with the return of vernal breezes, the outlook was growing brighter. "Do even trees and grasses attain Buddhahood?" you ask. "But the truth is, Buddha manifests himself as trees and grasses. The whole universe in its essence is nothing but Buddha's own body." In these utterances we can see the cosmological aspect of Nichiren's doctrine, as well as the surroundings in which the words were written down.

Now, let us see what is said concerning the Heritage of the Great Thing.

What I call the Heritage of the Great Thing Concerning Life and Death is nothing else than the Scripture, the Lotus of the Perfect Truth. For the Sacred Title of the Lotus was handed down from the two Buddhas, Śākya-muni and Prabhūta-ratna, to the Bodhisattva Viśiṣṭa-cāritra, when the Buddhas appeared in the Heavenly Shrine, and from eternity the heritage has been kept without interruption. "Perfect" represents death,<sup>1</sup> and "Truth," life; while life and death make up the essence of the ten realms of existence — the essence identical with that of the Lotus. . . . All that is born and dies is a birth and death of the Scripture (Truth), the Lotus in its ultimate reality. . . . Then, to utter the Sacred Title of the Lotus with the conviction that the three are one — the three, that is, Śākya-muni, the Buddha who from eternity has realized Buddhahood; the Lotus of Truth, which leads all beings, without exception, to Buddhahood; and we, beings in all the realms of existence. To utter the Sacred Title is, therefore, the Heritage of the Sole Great Thing Concerning Life and Death. This is the essential key to (the religious life of) Nichiren's disciples and followers, namely, adherence to the Lotus of Truth. . . .

Wherever Nichiren's disciples and followers utter the Adoration of the Lotus of the Perfect Truth — being united in heart, even in separate existences, like the association existing between fish and water,

<sup>1</sup> Nichiren interpreted the word "Perfect" (Sanskrit, *śad*) to mean resurrection, the mysterious continuity and perpetuity of life through births and deaths. In this sense death is but a phase in the perpetual flow of life, a step to another manifestation of life. Therefore, this interpretation. This thought of Nichiren's reminds us of Marcus Aurelius, when he said: Death, like birth, is a revelation of nature.

there, lies the Heritage of the Sole Great Thing Concerning Life and Death. This is the essence of what is promulgated by Nichiren. If it should be fulfilled, the great vow of propagating (the Truth throughout the Latter Days) over the whole world would be achieved. . . .

Will the Bodhisattva Viśiṣṭa-cāritra appear in these days of the Latter Law to open wide the gateway of the Truth, or will he not appear? The Scripture tells us so; yet will it surely happen? Will the Bodhisattva appear, or not? At any rate, I, Nichiren, have now accomplished the pioneer work.

Whatever may happen to you, arouse in yourselves a strong faith and pray that you may, at the moment of death, utter the Sacred Title in clear consciousness and with earnest faith! Do not seek besides this any heritage of the sole great thing concerning life and death. Herein lies the truth of the saying that there is Bodhi even in depravities, and Nirvāna even in birth and death.<sup>1</sup> Vain it is to hold the Lotus of Truth without this heritage of faith! I shall tell you more about this at another time. In sincerity and reverence.

Nichiren had passed through many perils, and was now going to reveal the kernel of his mission. For whose sake? Of course, for the sake of all beings living and going to live; but his vision was chiefly directed toward the future. Hence the "coming myriad of years" was the motto of his work. But could that task for the future be fulfilled without a remote cause and solid foundation laid in the past? All beings are to be saved. The task is grand and the end remote. The preparation for it must be proportionate to the magnitude of the future accomplishment. The necessary connection between the future and the past is shown in the revelation of the Heavenly Shrine, before which all primeval disciples of Buddha were summoned and took the vow to perpetuate the Truth throughout the coming ages. The link between the past and future is Nichiren,

<sup>1</sup> This does not mean to nullify the distinction between enlightenment and illusion, but to emphasize that truth is not to be sought beyond what we deem this life of vices and the realm of birth and death. The point may be seen in the synthesis of "vacuity" and "phenomenal reality," in the "Middle Path," for which see the Appendix.



who represents in this country at this moment the solemn pledge of salvation, and is commissioned to work in the days of degeneration. Thus his person is the key to the efficacious working of the everlasting Truth, which has its origin in eternity and is destined to prevail forever in the future.

This was Nichiren's conviction about his person and his mission. In order to open the eyes of all fellow-beings to this, it was necessary to bring them to the same enlightenment concerning themselves. For this purpose, each must, first of all, know the true relation existing between himself and the eternal Buddhahood, which is represented, pre-eminently, by the Lord Śākya, and is to be realized in one's own self. This metaphysical relation between the Master and the disciples, between the cosmos and the individual, is the very foundation of all religion and ethics. Open the eyes to this cardinal relation, then all enlightenment will naturally follow.

"There are three objects which every man ought to revere, his lord, his master, and his parents; there are three subjects which should be studied, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism." Thus begins the essay on "Opening the Eyes."<sup>1</sup> The key-note — the emphasis on the eternal Buddhahood — runs through all the argument, but the melody varies, just as diverse systems of religion and ethics are engaged in inculcating one and the same principle of reverence to the same objects of veneration. According to Nichiren, the manifold teachings existing are but the varying aspects of the same cosmic principle; and each of those systems represents a certain truth, while errors come from sticking to a particular point of the teachings. The Truth is touched, but the whole Truth is missed,

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, pp. 747-824; finished in the second month (March), 1272.

as squinting eyes, though not totally blind, distort images. The full-opened eyes see the Truth of the everlasting relationship between ourselves and the eternal Buddhahood, in which the Buddha, as revealed in the chapter on the Eternal Life of the Tathāgata, is the Lord ruling over all subjects, the Master leading his pupils to maturity, and the Father who gives birth to the children. We are, from all eternity, subjects of the Buddha, his disciples, and his children; being essentially like him through the eternal Truth. When seen in this light, every religion and ethical system, compared with Nichiren's religion revealed in the Lotus, is one of the preliminary steps leading up to the ultimate truth. Yet men are blind or squinting and do not see the whole truth in its full light.

Confucianism, being a system of humanitarian ethics, limits its view of this relationship to the visible side of human life. Hinduism, worshipping Brahmā or Vishnu as the highest Lord, goes a little beyond the actual world, yet sees in those phantom gods the ultimate Being. There are relative merits in these systems, but, after all, they are blind or half blind to the true foundation of human relations and religious worship. Buddhism opens our spiritual eyes to the being of Buddha, our Lord, yet many Buddhists are too "squint-eyed" to see his real nature and our proper relation to him. Nichiren criticizes these distorted forms of Buddhism most severely, and shows less clemency toward them than toward other religions. Especially Hīnayāna, the way of those who are contented with mere knowledge of certain truths or with solipsistic transcendence in contemplation, is further away from the true way than the secular teachings of ethics which inculcate loyalty and filial piety.

That Nichiren emphasized these virtues, together with obedience to the master, is noteworthy as showing his keen interest in moral life. It must be observed, also, that this ethical interest was not with him merely an adjunct of religious belief, but a vital criterion of religious truth. For to worship Buddha and revere the Truth revealed by him does not consist in devising rituals, or in contemplating Buddha's truths in visionary ways, but in working out in our own life the truths taught, by putting faith in Buddha as the Lord, Master, and Father. Faith ought to be actualized in life, but is empty unless realized in the three cardinal virtues named above. Nichiren's conviction that his life was vitalizing the Lotus of Truth was another way of stating his ethical interpretation of religion.

Buddha, as he is represented as declaring himself in the chapter on Eternity, is the Tathāgata from all eternity and has ever been working to lead all sentient beings to maturity in Buddhahood. He is the Lord of Truth and Father of all, and we are his disciples and children. Religion is nothing but the way to enlightenment in this eternal relationship, and morality, nothing but the method of realizing the same truth in our life. We have ever been Buddha's children, but, up to the present, we have been blind to his presence and work, just like the prodigal son in the parable in the fourth chapter of the Scripture. We are now awake to this everlasting fundamental relationship, and thereby shall surely attain Buddhahood, because the Tathāgata is constantly caring for us and watching over us, as he says:

Now, this threefold realm of existence is my dominion,  
 And all beings therein are my children.  
 Yet existence is full of troubles and tribulations,  
 I alone am the protector and savior.<sup>1</sup> (Chap. III).

<sup>1</sup> Verse 87; Text, p. 90; SBE., p. 88.

Since I have attained Buddhahood, . . .  
I have constantly been preaching truths,  
And helping innumerable beings to maturity,  
Leading them in the Way of Buddhas;  
Thus, innumerable aeons have passed in this work.<sup>1</sup> (Chap. XVI).

The duties of the true Buddhist, then, consist in fully knowing the vast scheme of Buddha's salvation working upon us, in being convinced of our indebtedness to Buddha, and in requiting it by practising the true morality.

Morality in human relation means, according to this point of view, a life of gratitude shown in fidelity to the Lord, obedience toward one's master, and filial piety toward one's parents; all other moral relations flow out of these fundamental ones. But this passive aspect of morality implies the active duty of showing gratitude by perpetuating the will of the benefactor. The ruler fulfills his duty by cooperating with the ruler in the maintenance of order and government, the disciple by propagating the truth taught by the master, and the child by perpetuating the life given by his parents. Similarly with moral duties viewed from the standpoint of religion: the true faith consists in propagating the Truth, and in ourselves living the life of Truth as revealed by Buddha. This is what is inculcated in the Scripture, and is the real import of the vows taken by the saints, the faithful disciples of Buddha.

The question for Nichiren, was, therefore, Is there any one, in the present age of degeneration, who practises the true essence of the Buddhist religion? In order to answer this question, Nichiren proceeds anew to re-examine the stanzas of the chapter on Perseverance. The three kinds of opponents, the malicious laymen, the perverse monks, and

<sup>1</sup> Verses 1-2; Text, p. 323; SBE., p. 307.

the jealous hypocrites, have been actually embodied in Nichiren's persecutors. The persecutions heaped upon him are letter by letter prophesied in the Scripture; the perils which the saints, consecrating themselves, promised Buddha to endure—abuse and derision, weapons and sticks, banishment and execution—these have all been experienced in Nichiren's life. Is there, then, any room to doubt that Nichiren is the true Buddhist, the man who is realizing the prophecies about the propagator of the Truth in the Latter Days? If Buddha is really omniscient and his prophecies not falsehood; if the "Saints-out-of-Earth" are not liars and hypocrites, and their vows not vain; then Nichiren is surely the man who is fulfilling the vows of the old saints. Buddha is the primeval master, and Nichiren is now living the life of his primeval disciples. Primeval, therefore everlasting, and as true for the future as in the past—he is the one predestined to be the leader, the savior of the coming ages. In short, Nichiren is the man who is "reading" the Truth by his life.

By such considerations, Nichiren justified himself in his polemic attitude. The precedence he gives to the "repressive" method in propaganda over the "persuasive" was the necessity of the time; it was the way ordained by Buddha, because the malicious men of the Latter Days could be converted only by arousing their utmost malice, and thereby exterminating their radical sins.<sup>1</sup> Let men's eyes be opened to the existence and work of the true Buddha, and to the duties of the true Buddhist, and their sight will be clear enough to see in Nichiren the predestined manifestation

<sup>1</sup> The idea is that radical sin can be exterminated only by arousing the sinful thought and deed to the utmost. Nichiren compares the "repressive" method to a surgical operation, without which certain kinds of disease cannot be cured. Later, we shall see more of his idea of sin.

of the primeval saint, the messenger of the Tathāgata. Expressing this thought with firm confidence, Nichiren says:<sup>1</sup>

Finally, let the celestial beings withdraw their protection, let all perils come upon me, even so, will I dedicate my life to this cause. . . . Be it in weal, be it in woe, to desert the Lotus of Truth means to fall to the hells. I will be firm in my great vow. Let me face all manner of threats and temptations. Should one say to me, "Thou mightest ascend the throne of Japan, if thou wouldst abandon the Scripture and expect future bliss through belief in the 'Meditation on Amita'; or thy parents shall suffer capital punishment, unless thou utterest the name of the Buddha Amita," etc. Such temptations I shall meet unshaken, and shall never be allured by them, unless my principles be shattered by a sage's refutation of them. Any other perils shall be the dust before a storm. I will be the Pillar of Japan; I will be the Eyes of Japan; I will be the Great Vessel of Japan.<sup>2</sup> Inviolable shall remain these oaths!

When Nichiren had finished the "Opening the Eyes," amidst the snows of winter, with the coming of the spring a better time began for him. The governor of the island was much attracted by his saintly life, as well as by his strong personality. The government issued an order to protect the exile; Nichiren was given an abode at Ichi-no-sawa, a place on the slope of a range of hills. The local chief of this region admired and protected him, showing him great respect; his wife and son were converted. The place of exile became a veritable centre of propaganda, and many flocked to listen to the sermons of the wonderful man. Nichiren reviewed his past experience anew, in calm reflection; the hardships he had gone through appeared in another light, and he now recognized that they were all in expiation of the grave sins accumulated from eternity through neglect or abandonment of duty, or through not having always lived as the true Buddhist. The strenuous repression of which he made so

<sup>1</sup> In the "Opening the Eyes," *Works*, p. 816.

<sup>2</sup> The Pillar means the supporter, the lordship; the Eyes, the mastership; and the Great Vessel, the giver of life, the fatherhood.

much in his combative propaganda meant the repression not only of others' illusions and vices, but of his own. In a letter<sup>1</sup> written about one month after the "Opening the Eyes," he sums up the arguments expounded in that work, and speaks of himself as follows:

That Nichiren suffers so much is not without remote causes. As is explained in the chapter on the Bodhisattva Sadāparibhūta, all abuses and persecutions heaped upon the Bodhisattva were the results of his previous karma. How much more, then, should this be the case with Nichiren, a man born in the family of an outcast fisherman, so lowly and degraded and poor! Although in his soul he cherishes something of the faith in the Lotus of Truth, the body is nothing but a common human body, sharing beastlike life, nothing but a combination of the two fluids, pink and white, the products of flesh and fish. Therein the soul finds its abode, something like the moon reflected in a muddy pool, like gold wrapped up in a dirty bag. Since the soul cherishes faith in the Lotus of Truth, there is no fear even before (the highest deities, such as) Brahmā and Indra; yet the body is an animal body. Not without reason others show contempt for this man, because there is a great contrast between the soul and the body. And even this soul is full of stains, being the pure moonlight only in contrast to the muddy water; gold, in contrast to the dirty bag.

Who, indeed, fully knows the sins accumulated in his previous lives? . . . The accumulated karma is unfathomable. Is it not by forging and refining that the rough iron bar is tempered into a sharp sword? Are not rebukes and persecutions really the process of refining and tempering? I am now in exile, without any assignable fault; yet this may mean the process of refining, in this life, the accumulated sins (of former lives), and being thus delivered from the three woeful resorts. . . .

The world is full of men who degrade the Lotus of Truth, and such rule this country now. But have I, Nichiren, not also been one of them? Is that not due to the sins accumulated by deserting the Truth? Now, when the intoxication is over, I stand here something like a drunken man who having, while intoxicated, struck his parents, after coming to himself, repents of the offence. The sin is hardly to be expiated at once. . . . Had not the rulers and the people persecuted me, how could I have expiated the sins accumulated by degrading the Truth?

<sup>1</sup> Sent to his disciples on the mainland; written on the twentieth of the third month (April 19), 1272. *Works*, p. 827-835.

Such reflections on his own sinfulness naturally led Nichiren to apply the same principles to his followers. No one is totally destitute of Buddha-nature, which is dormant in the innermost recess of the soul; but none is free from the sin of having disregarded and disobeyed the Truth. Nichiren is now fulfilling the oaths taken before Buddha, and thereby expiating his sins through a severe discipline in hardships. Persecutions are necessary accompaniments of the lives of those who labor for the sake of the Truth, because of their efforts to stir up the malicious and perverse nature of their fellow-beings, among whom the work of propagating the Truth is done. But the perils are at the same time a means of expiating the workers' own grave sins. Moreover, an existence of any kind is never an individual matter, but always the result of a common karma, shared by all born in the same realm of existence. Hence the expiation made by any one individual is, in fact, made for the sake of all his fellow-beings. Both the persecutors and the persecuted share the common karma accumulated in the past, and therefore share also in the future destiny, the attainment of Buddhahood. Nichiren's repression of others' malice and vice is at the same time his own expiation and self-subjugation. How, then, should his followers not share his merit in extinguishing the accumulated sins, and preparing for the realization of the primeval Buddha-nature? "Therefore," Nichiren exhorts his disciples, "believe in me, and emulate my spirit and work, in the firm faith that the Master is the savior and leader! Work together, united in the same faith! Then, the expiation of sins will be achieved for ourselves and for all our fellow-beings, because we all share in the common karma."