

## KAKUONJI

On the left of the large *torii* marking the gateway of Daito-no-miya runs a grassy path intersecting a valley between densely wooded hills. At the outset is a large stone monument recording the fact that this path leads to one of the eighty-eight resting-places of the famous abbot and saint Kōbō Daishi: it culminates (7 *cho*, or about half a mile) in a slight eminence planted with a grove of plum and cherry-trees.

Here is situated a venerable temple of unimposing exterior, Kakuonji. In former times this tranquil valley presented an aspect of considerable animation, the approach being lined with ten subsidiary temples: moreover the Kakuonji of those remote days consisted of numerous edifices, studding the level terrace and the adjoining hillsides; much is recorded in ancient writings concerning the elegance of its original aspect. As the result of a sacred dream Hōjō Yoshitoki (afterwards second Regent) constructed a shrine in the parts of Kamakura called Okura (1218), installing therein a statue of Yakushi-Nyorai fashioned by Unkei: owing to the fame of this figure the district became known as the "Valley of the *Yakushi-do*" (*Yakushi-do-ga-yatsu*). This shrine was destroyed by fire in 1250, repaired in 1263, but later again fell into decay. The temple of Kakuonji is supposed to occupy the identical site. Founded by the

8th Hōjō Regent Sadatoki in 1296, and placed under the direction of a famous priest named Chikai, the chief objects of worship were the set of large figures consisting of Yakushi attended by his satellites—all said to be the work of Takuma.

An interesting feature of the existing temple is its great age. In Dec. 1352 the *Butsuden*, or Hall of Images, was repaired by Takauji (first Ashikaga Shōgun), many of the fine old timbers of the declining vassal buildings being used in the process of reconstruction: so thoroughly was this work carried out that it has lasted until the present day—between five and six hundred years—and is consequently one of Kamakura's most ancient buildings. The space of the main altar is entirely occupied by the three huge images—the centre-piece being the famous Yakushi-Nyorai, or the Healing Buddha, enthroned upon a gigantic lotus, the petals of which are beautifully shaped. To this deity—the Esculapius of Buddhism—is also attributed the power of giving sight to the blind. On either side he is supported by the solar and lunar divinities Nikko and Gekko Bosatsu, representing sunlight and moonlight, and who are generally associated with Yakushi. In former days these statues were richly tinted in colours; alas, this embellishment has shared the general fate of annihilation and extinction and but the merest traces remain. Below the main altar is a great effigy of the Buddha sculptured in wood; the boss on the forehead, from which the radiance that illumines the universe is supposed to emanate, is of crystal: this figure is said to date back from the Ashikaga days—sculptor unknown. The walls are flanked on either side by twelve mighty warriors of

pugnacious and threatening aspect; some appear to be singularly ferocious, brandishing swords and various weapons with long hair bristling erect; others are of more reposeful demeanour. These are the "*Juni Shinsho*," or guardian ministers of Yakushi-Nyorai, who serve as messengers to execute his purposes and desires. This divinity is supposed to have made twelve vows to succour human beings who are afflicted with illness, or suffering from various perils and distresses.

It will be remembered that Yoshitoki—founder of the *Yakushi-do*—held the office of bearer of the sword of state to Sanetomo, the third *Shōgun*, on the occasion of the latter's visit of thanksgiving to Hachiman, when the assassination took place (p. 100). The ghostly dog that Yoshitoki beheld, warning him to turn back, was supposed to be one of these messengers to the god Yakushi—tradition states that on that occasion one of the twelve known as *Inu-no-kami* (or 'dog divinity') was missing from his accustomed place!

The ceiling of the temple is decorated with a large blue dragon surrounded by the white clouds—this design was executed in the Tokugawa period by an artist named Tenshin. But the *pièce de résistance* of Kakuonji is the famous '*Kuro Jizo*,' or 'Black Jizo,' who occupies the place of honour in a small shrine within the temple precincts. This statue is also said to date from the Kamakura Era: it is a National Treasure and is considered an admirable work of art, the worshippers of this dusky but popular deity being numbered by thousands. Sculptured in dark wood and adorned with a golden breast-ornament of archaic design, the Jizo has a gracious and benign countenance: a most effective

background is afforded by the elaborate golden mandorla—known as *funa-gokō* or 'boat halo' from its resemblance to the shape of a boat. This is beautifully carved with a design of flames, and is further embellished with pale-blue disks upon which Sanskrit characters are inscribed in gold, surrounded by the infernal fire.

A record of many centuries ago avers that this celebrated statue was endowed with miraculous powers. Although with the object of beautifying the figure it was repeatedly painted in lighter colours—on each occasion during the night the Jizo, repudiating such meretricious embellishments, mysteriously returned to his original sombre hue. According to another tradition this Jizo once made a special descent into the Infernal regions, in order to witness the punishment and tortures of the condemned souls. The kindly nature of the benevolent deity was so affected by the agony of these miserable wretches that he undertook for a time to take the place of their relentless custodian, greatly reducing the intense heat of the Purgatorial fires and thus lessening the torment of the writhing sufferers. For this reason the Black, or '*Hitaki Jizo*' as he is called has many devotees amongst firemen. (*Hitaki*=fire kindling).

In former times July 13th was supposed to be the day when the lid was taken off the fires of hell and the ghosts of the departed were allowed to return to the upper world; this is still celebrated as the Festival of the Dead.

It is recorded that on that day there were special rejoicings at this *Jizo-do*, thousands repairing to the shrine for worship, and many sacred dances taking place upon that festal occasion.



The small shrine containing the famous 'Black Jizō' who, according to tradition, made a special descent into Purgatory in order to alleviate

On either side the dominant central figure (which is somewhat over 8 feet in height) are myriads of images arranged in twelve rows; at first sight their identification is not apparent, but a nearer inspection proves them to be figures of Jizo. Some appear of great antiquity; some are quite new and freshly painted; some are wearing little bibs, while to others labels are attached upon which a date is inscribed; occasional gaps are also visible where certain of the small effigies seem to have been removed. The reason for the vacancies in the long lines of the little gods is as follows. To be childless, and therefore to have no successor to carry on the name and family traditions is considered almost in the light of a calamity in this land, where the family is of paramount importance. Consequently when a wife has been married some years and the joys of motherhood appear to have passed her by, as a last resort she may apply to the temple for the loan of one of the 'Thousand Jizo.' This she reverently carries home and deposits in the *Butsudan*, or household shrine, with daily prayers that her hopes may be granted. Should the gods lend a favourable ear to her applications, after the successful birth of the child the borrowed Jizo is returned to the temple with due rejoicings. But in the reverse case—when all petitions before the little children's god have proved of no avail—he is kept a reasonable time and then sadly brought back to rejoin the miniature army of saints in the dim twilight of the *Jizo-do*.

Jizo (who has been identified with the Sanskrit *Kshitegarbha*) is one of the most popular and widely venerated deities in Japan, and has been described as

the most Japanese of all the Japanese divinities. He is certainly the most loveable figure in the popular faith, and is specially the protector of children and of expectant mothers, as well of travellers and pilgrims. For this latter reason little groups of *Roku Jizo*, or 'Six Jizo,' may be constantly seen on the high roads; as he is universally revered as the guardian of dead children, frequently the sorrowing mothers bring the little garments of their lost ones to deck the statues, hoping that in return the kindly god will specially protect the poor little wandering ghost in the shadowy and demon-haunted *Sai-no-Kawara* or 'Dry Bed of the River of Souls' in Purgatory. Occasionally however the little hat or bib has been gratefully offered by a rejoicing parent whose child has been cured of dangerous sickness by the intervention of the benevolent deity. The heaps of little stones that are always in evidence around the statues of Jizo signify that if a stone is offered with faith, it helps the tiny wanderers in the dusky regions to perform their long penances, and shortens the time of their suffering in the underworld.

In the little valley a few paces to the rear of the main temple is one of Kamakura's ten celebrated wells—'*Munetate-ido*.' Its claim to celebrity lies in the fact that because of the exceptional purity of the spring Kōbō Daishi is said to have dug the well, and used its waters to offer to the gods. A path behind the main building, intersecting a grove of cherry-trees, gradually ascends to another small vassal temple situated on the hill-side, also of great age and weather-beaten exterior, this is known as *Dairokuji*. Here, in the centre of the altar, a deity of menacing appearance

is enshrined in a huge case of black and gold lacquer : a near inspection will reveal his extreme antiquity, for the figure is constructed of metal that seems to be crumbling away with the flight of centuries. With fiercely gleaming eyes and brandishing a sword, this divinity is not so alarming as he seems. He is Fudo, the god of wisdom according to some exponents, the god of fire according to others : the fire is for the purification of the mind ; the sword (*goma-no-ken*) is to make war on the devils—the purpose of the rope in his left hand being to bind them up when vanquished.

The sword is supposed to be typical of intellect, or enlightenment ; the rope signifying mastery of the evil passions and desires of unregenerate mankind, and subjecting them to the sway of reason. The Lord Buddha truly said “ Fudo dwells within the mind of every man.”

This effigy is said to be the work of *Gangyo*—a famous sculptor of the time of Hōjō Sadātoki, (1284-1300)—and was known as the *Kokoromi*, or ‘ Experimental Fudo ’ because the artist subsequently constructed a second statue of the same divinity, an exact model of the present figure but on a larger scale ; this is still worshipped in a shrine on the mountain of Oyama (adjacent to the Hakone range).

A strange square stand will be observed below the image, with an iron depression containing ashes : this is the *gcmadan*, or receptacle to contain holy fire for invocation, which is said to have been used by Kōbō Daishi. On special occasions fire is kindled, it being supposed that the smoke is typical of the prayers ascending to heaven, and the flames scare away the demons, otherwise the unruly passions of erring mortals.



On the hill just above the Fudo temple is another small shrine, the exterior of which is also much weather-worn and decayed, but the interior has been recently renewed (in 1905), thanks to the munificence of the faithful. This little structure is the home of thirteen gods. It is full of rocks, and perched here and there are the small figures, bearing a strong family resemblance, but with their various names attached on labels to prevent confusion amongst the worshippers.

The rocky path winds up, with ever-varying views, to a plateau at the top of this height which is railed in and provided with seats, inviting the wanderer to repose awhile in enjoyment of the prospect. A long vista of wooded hills and valleys, in every shade of luxuriant verdure, rolls away to meet the distant blue expanse of ocean melting into the paler turquoise of the sky above; the white sails gleaming in the sunshine seem no larger than butterflies dancing across the quivering wavelets; while in spring and summer the little brown birds (*uguisu*) serenade in chorus from the surrounding glades and tempt the pilgrim to unduly linger in this sylvan corner of the earth, lying so far aloof from the "world's wide din."

At the rear of the plateau is another shrine dedicated to, and containing a larger stone image of Kōbō Daishi. The fact that during this holy man's wanderings he rested in this spot is a cause of great pride and felicitation to the temple, several other images and various mementoes being preserved of that remote occasion. This celebrated priest (774-835) and great religious instructor of mediæval times was the founder of the *Shingon* sect of Buddhism, the mystic formula of which he was

commissioned to propagate by the erudite Chinese abbot *Huikwo* during his sojourn in China. This occult creed made a strong appeal to the public taste and soon achieved an extraordinary popularity, numbering millions of adherents; its centre was established on the summit of Kōyasan amidst scenery famed far its natural beauty, becoming the largest and most powerful monastery in Japan. Such was the sanctity of this most popular saint that many of his followers are said to believe he is not really dead, that his body is incorruptible, and preserved in a state of repose within the tomb awaiting his next reincarnation. This sepulchre is the Mecca of his numerous devotees, and every year at least 100,000 worshippers repair to do homage to the great departed.

Kōbō Daishi is also renowned as the inventor of the Japanese syllabary *Hiragana*: a marvellous calligrapher himself, as well as a skilled sculptor, there are many stories extant of his supernatural achievements. A typical legend of this wizard of the brush relates that when he was in China the Emperor desired him to inscribe the name over one of the palace doors that had become effaced by time. Kōbō Daishi at once took five brushes: one in each hand, one between the toes of either foot, and the fifth in his mouth. With simultaneous strokes he traced with exquisite delicacy the desired inscription—then from a distance he spattered drops of Indian ink upon the wall, where they alighted in the form of beautiful characters!

Upon a large slab of grey stone beside the shrine the following is recorded:—On Kōbō Daishi's return from China in the year 816 he travelled all over Japan in search of a suitable site whereon to found his monastery.

During his stay in Kyōto the Emperor bestowed upon him as a gift a piece of valuable wood. The priest fashioned therefrom a statue of himself and offered it to the Emperor as a souvenir of his sojourn in the capital: it was a somewhat unusual image—the arms and legs being jointed with chains to render them moveable, so the figure could be made to rest either in a sitting or standing posture, hence it was known as the ‘*Kusari* (or chain) *Taishi*.’ (The title of *Taishi* means ‘great instructor’). The present statue is a copy in stone of the original work.

Behind this shrine a wooden gateway marks the exit from the plateau. The narrow path on the left leads up over mossy crags to the summit of the mountain; an unexpected feature being the large number of irregular and picturesque caves that honeycomb the rocky crest. They are said to number over one hundred; from the fact that bones and relics of human remains have been discovered it is inferred that in former times they were used as a mausoleum—a more ideal spot for that purpose could hardly be imagined. Eighty-eight of these caves contain statues known as the ‘Eighty-eight Kōbō Daishi,’ while within many others are ancient monuments. The track that winds towards the west leads gradually up to the ‘*Washi-no-Miné*’ or Eagle’s Peak. Upon the summit, enthroned upon a high stone base is a large and well-carved statue of the saint—it has evidently been protected from the elements by a roof, but storms have swept away the outer covering, and only the iron supports are left. The steps leading up to the small rocky level upon which the figure stands are steep and somewhat difficult, but the vast panorama

commanded from this height is enchanting, and should on no account be missed: on either side of the peninsula lies the sea—the bays of Tōkyō and Sagami respectively, studded with white-sailed craft—while the undulations of the landscape billow away into the far horizon with indescribable effect. If the path is continued in a south westerly direction it leads to the summit of Hansōbō—the goblin mountain behind Kenchōji—its rounded peak being visible for some distance as a guide. A descent can either be effected from the track on the western side, from which the main road can be regained in the vicinity of Meigetsuin; or by the route between the chains, which steeply descends to the platform in the hillside upon which is perched the little shrine of Hansōbō.

This is one of Kamakura's most beautiful walks. The scenic effects are greatly enhanced in spring, when the mountains are gay with wild flowers and the new shoots of the luxuriant foliage; also in the fall, when the joyous tints of the autumn leaves and the rich crimson and scarlet maples paint the landscape with vivid colouring.

