

ENGAKUJI

“The mind that detaches itself from all things
becomes the very mind of Buddha.”

A few paces beyond Tōkeiji, on the high road to Ofuna, lie the precincts of the foremost of all Kamakura's Buddhist temples. The first roofed gate spans the road, shaded by a Chinese juniper so hoary, and so pierced by rents and gaps, that one marvels how such a time-corroded veteran still contrives to live and flourish. The path bearing to the right between the lotus-ponds leads up to the entrance of the temple enclosure; now alas, sadly desecrated by the march of progress in the shape of the double line of railroad that is no respecter of sanctity, and with its unlovely “ways of iron and webs of steel” so ruthlessly cuts through the grove of ancient cryptomeria, even encroaching upon the sacred lotus-ponds themselves.

The site is an ideal one. A gently rising valley enclosed by the rocky walls of the green hills, heavily shaded by majestic old trees and the feathery whispering of tall bamboo groves: the pilgrim could scarcely fail to be impressed by the monastic peace and solitude that seems to pervade the very atmosphere of this beautiful spot, and to symbolise emancipation from the dust and fetters of the world at the threshold of Nirvāna.

This temple has always been a stronghold and sanctuary of Zen Buddhism—the contemplative sect whose



Tower-Gate of Engakuji.

doctrine teaches that every man may gradually purify his own soul and achieve the knowledge of Buddha through religious meditation and the gospel of silence. *Zazen* is much practised by the Zen sect: that mysterious art by which the soul can be detached from its earthly prison to soar away beyond the problems of Life and Death, attaining through rigid discipline of mind and body enlightenment and assimilation with Buddha—the Almighty and Ineffable. “Life itself is a curtain hiding reality, as the vast veil of day conceals from our sight the countless orbs of Space. But the purified mind, even while prisoned within the body, may enter for moments of ecstasy into union with the Supreme.”

Originally founded in India by the missionary priest Dharma in the year 513, Zen first reached Japan a century later; but those early days were not ripe for its reception, and the new sect made no headway. However at a later period, in 1192, the Chinese priest Eisai (who is considered as its founder in Japan) was successful in establishing these doctrines, which made a special appeal to the dauntless old warriors of ancient days—since the introspective philosophy of the Zen dogmas especially inculcated indifference to death and the manifold dangers and perils that beset life—hence it became a potent feature in the development of *Bushido*, or chivalry.

Engakuji was founded in 1282 by the great Hōjō Regent Tokimune; an ardent believer in Zen Buddhism, and whose rule was such an eventful and momentous chapter of mediæval history. The name of this Regent is renowned for his autocratic methods of dealing with the envoys of Khublai Khan, who had the temerity to

menace the integrity of Japan, and whose unfortunate emissaries were beheaded at Shichirigahama in 1280 according to the direction of Tokimune: the next year the Mongolian invasion that threatened Japan's existence was turned into an overwhelming disaster for the attacking armada.

It is recorded that when Tokimune formed the project of erecting an important temple and monastery (1278), in company with the celebrated Chinese priest Doryū he investigated the neighbourhood of Kamakura in quest of a suitable site. When the present situation was decided on, and workmen were engaged to dig the foundations, the religious zeal of Tokimune led him to assist at the excavations in person: during the process of his labours he unearthed a stone box which was found to contain the *Engaku-kyō*—a section of the Buddhist scriptures—hence the name of the temple.

In the following year (1279) Tokimune despatched a little group of architects to China, in order to make a study of the Chinese temples and to become familiar with the styles of architecture: on their return the buildings of Engakuji were constructed. The group are on an extensive scale, comprising some 500 acres of hill and valley; at that time the number of temples and various edifices amounted to over forty, of which barely half that number survive to the present day.

On the death of Doryū in 1298 Tokimune invited another important priest from China, who was justly famed for his piety and learning, to assume the spiritual direction as first Lord Abbot of Engakuji: this functionary was known in China as *Chu-Yuan*, which according to Japanese pronunciation became *Sogen*: he is also referred

to as *Bukkō-Zenji*, the title conferred upon him by the Emperor after his death. Quaint legends are recorded concerning the arrival of this erudite divine. According to one tradition, when his procession was approaching Kamakura a flight of snow-white herons flew in front of the cavalcade and guided it to its destination, when they alighted in the lotus-ponds that still exist below the second entrance gate of the temple. In the popular opinion this manifestation was an incarnation of Hachiman, —the patron deity of Kamakura, who deigned to appear in the form of these birds as a sign of approbation, and to welcome the newcomer to his appointed place. Another legend relates that at the time of the opening ceremony, while Sogen was delivering his learned discourse, a number of pure white deer mysteriously appeared and followed the priest's instruction with rapt attention. These unexpected guests were interpreted as sacred messengers of the gods, and were considered a good omen; hence the part where the temple is situated is known as '*Zuirokuzan*,' or 'Hill of sacred deer.'

From the second entrance a path leads up beneath the deep shadows of the lofty cedars to the great tower-gate. It is only possible to appreciate the full effect of this ancient fabric from a distance, when the austere simplicity of the mighty curves and gables of its thatched roof conveys an extraordinary sense of majesty and power. The path leads on, beneath a grove of trees hoary with the passing centuries to the *Butsuden*, or Hall of Images—whose style of architecture bears a fairly resemblance to the Chinese tower-gate. The present *Butsuden* dates from some three hundred years

back; the original structure having been entirely destroyed by fire in 1558, after which calamity the temple was not rebuilt until 1625.

Paved with tiles which have assumed a mossy greenish hue—a colouring well suited to the dim light of the interior—the chief object of worship enshrined upon the high altar is a large and ancient statue of the Buddha, which was fashioned in 1381 by a Chinese artist named *Kyoden*. In the conflagration however, the body of the image was consumed, the head alone being rescued intact: it is said to have been repaired with the funds left by a pious lady belonging to the court of Iveyasu, named *Yōgenin*. Enthroned upon a gigantic lotos, the great figure is now almost entirely black—age and atmospheric influences having left scarcely a trace of the former gilding: the head moreover bears the impress of another disaster, and was somewhat inclined towards the right side by the great earthquake of 1855.

Behind the high altar on the left is a recess containing four statues of various abbots of Engakuji; the figure on the extreme right is a representation of Sogen, the first head of the temple. Various images occupy the recesses on the right side of the exit; these include a fine set of the *Juniten*, or twelve guardian deities who protect the different quarters of the horizon from malignant influences.

Above the entrance to the temple hangs a tablet inscribed by the Emperor Go-Kogon: the characters may be translated as 'Treasure Palace of the Great Light,' which somewhat enigmatic text is interpreted as signifying prayer. The inscription suspended from the tower-gate was traced by the Emperor Hanazono (1308-1348)—upon the tablet is recorded the full name of the temple. To



Butsuden, or Main Temple of Engakuji.

the left of the Butsuden is a railed-in space enclosing a granite monument poised upon the back of huge carved tortoise. This was erected by popular subscription to commemorate the heroes from this vicinity who perished upon the field of battle in the Russian war (1904-05). The characters upon the memorial were inscribed by the present Lord Abbot of Engakuji, and signify "For the Protection of their Country."

A path beside this enclosure leads to the rocky cliffs in the hillside, concealed by thick trees. Here are numerous caves; chambers hollowed out in tiers and containing a myriad images of the goddess of mercy in various shapes and forms—the 'Hundred Kwannon of Engakuji': the upper tiers are accessible by means of a narrow enclosed stairway hewn in the solid rock. In the cave above the steps is a tablet of granite whereon is carved the inscription:—

"Adoration to the great merciful Kwanzeon who
looketh down above the sound of prayer."

The upper caves command a fine view of the tower-gate's magnificent sweep of roof, embowered in the solemn foliage of the surrounding cryptomeria.

The main path gently ascends past a beautiful lake (*Myōkōchi*, or 'Lake of Sacred Fragrance')—oblong in shape, and bordered with ancient rocks—to the small temple of *Butsunishi-An*, dedicated to the memory of Tokimune, who died in 1284, and is said to have been buried in this spot. Above stands the *ihai*, or soul-tablet of the departed Regent: behind this sacred object a case encloses the fine painted and lacquered statue representing Tokimune in his thirty-fourth year, at the

time of his entering the priesthood. Owing to the fact of its being protected from the havoc of the atmosphere this valuable work is remarkably well-preserved, and is held in high esteem by art-lovers. An oil-painting of Tokimune garbed in his ceremonial robes has been executed by a modern artist (Yuji Takeo) from ancient representations, and hangs in the *Yushukan*, or Military Museum in Tokyo. A large photograph of this picture is suspended above the altar: on the left the illustrious founder is depicted in his more youthful days.

A short distance beyond this temple, somewhat screened by the trunk of a towering cedar is a small round cave of curious chimney-like shape. This is connected with the legend of the mysterious white deer, who are supposed to have gained access to the temple-precincts by this means: a venerable stone monument beside the cave bears the inscription '*Haou-roku-do*,' or 'Place of White Deer.'

The path from the upper side of the lake leads directly to the gem of Engakuji. This is the *Shariden*, the most ancient building in Kamakura, which has fortunately escaped all the catastrophes that demolished the neighbouring structures, and is the sole fabric that has been preserved intact from the Kamakura Era. As a perfect model of the *Sung* style of Chinese architecture this small temple has been placed under special Government protection. The *Shariden* was originally erected to enshrine a sacred relic, the Buddha's tooth: which was deposited within the sanctuary, enclosed in a pagoda-shaped casket made of crystal. The legend of the tooth dates back to hoary antiquity, even to the days when the Lord Buddha was yet upon earth. (Authorities agree that



Famous statue of Tokimune, 7th Hōjō Regent and
Founder of Engakuji.

(Represented at the time he entered the priesthood—shortly before his death
in 1284, aged 33.)

Buddha was born in the year 623 B. C., his death occurring in 543, at the age of 80). According to tradition the great Teacher promised to bestow upon the Lord of Heaven a relic; in the Nirvâna Sutra it is recorded "now will I give thee a relic—I will give thee a tooth from my right upper jaw"—which was obtained after the death of the Buddha to the accompaniment of miraculous demonstrations, and is deemed of extraordinary efficacy in granting prayers. This relic came into the possession of a famous Chinese priest known as *Senritsu-shi*; it was held in highest reverence by the Emperor of that remote epoch (who at first entertained doubts, but was convinced by supernatural occurrences of its validity), as well as by his successors.

The treasure was enshrined in the temple called *Nōminji* in the capital of China, and attained a wide celebrity. Now in the days when Sanetomo, son of Yoritomo, was *Shōgun*, it is stated in an ancient record that he was visited by a strange dream, wherein he imagined himself transported into a splendid temple in the Kingdom of China: there he beheld an aged priest delivering a discourse to a vast assemblage of both priests and laymen, who were following his teaching with devout attention. The *Shōgun* enquired of a bystander the identity of the master who was thus instructing the multitude, and what was the name of the great temple.

The stranger made answer 'This is the temple of *Nōminji*, the founder of which is the holy priest *Senritsu-shi* you now behold.'

'But how can he be here, since he is long dead?' said Sanetomo.

'Who shall unveil and measure rightly the mys-

teries of life and death—he is dead and yet he lives: today his soul lives in Sanetomo, ruler of Japan.'

'Who then is the priest attending on the master?' enquired the *Shogun*.

'He has also been reborn; the priest *Ryoshin* of the part of Kamakura called Yukincshita is his present reincarnation.'

When Sanetomo awoke he was deeply impressed by the vividness of his dream, and resolved to summon *Ryoshin* at once to his presence. Now it happened that this priest had also dreamed the same dream, and on his way to apprise Sanetomo he encountered the *Shōgun's* messenger upon the road: these occurrences moreover were confirmed by another priest—*Senko*, the Lord Abbot of *Jufukuji*.

Various accounts of the vision of Sanetomo are extant, but the present may perhaps be considered the most interesting version. The effect of all these coincidences was to create in the *Shōgun* a strong desire to repair to the sacred spot in China which had been the scene of his former incarnation. To that end he ordered a large ship to be constructed at *Yuigahama*, (the Kamakura beach), but this project was strongly discountenanced by his advisers, it being considered too hazardous a voyage for such an important personage to attempt in those days of primitive navigation. Nevertheless, Sanetomo remained firm in his determination and the vessel was constructed under the direction of the famous *Chinwakei*; however on completion its launch was found to be impossible, so as the result of this mysterious fact the disappointed *Shogun* was compelled to forego his project. In his stead an embassy was despatched to the

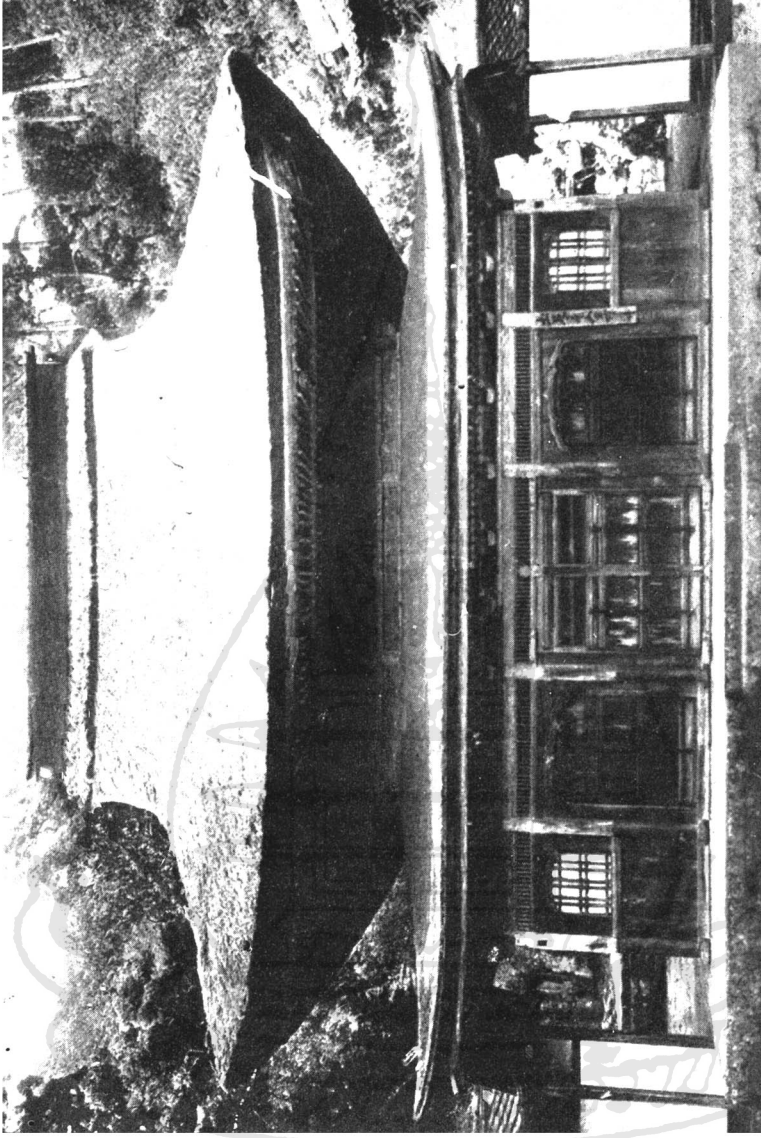
temple of Nōninji bearing rich gifts for the priests, also valuable wood and metals wherewith to repair the temple. The priests were overjoyed at these attentions, but in the place of return offerings the messengers requested the loan of the sacred relic, the Buddha's tooth, in order that the *Shogun* might be enabled to worship it in his own country.

Naturally it was a matter of great difficulty to induce the Chinese priests to part with their most cherished possession; but finally, on condition it should be returned after Sanetomo had done homage to the relic, the Japanese emissaries gained possession of the tooth, and returned to their native shores in triumph. However all was not yet smooth sailing, for these things having come to the knowledge of the Emperor Juntoku, the sovereign was desirous of retaining such an important and miraculous object in his own proximity: according to his instructions the returning party was intercepted and the relic was deposited in the Imperial Palace at Kyōto. When the messengers returned empty-handed and related what had occurred, Sanetomo was so highly incensed that he contemplated journeying to Kyōto in person to try and retrieve the coveted treasure.

However his counsellors prevailed on the *Shogun* not to resort to this extremity; one of his retainers of over eighty years of age, Adachi Morinaga, undertaking the mission in his stead. The efforts of this venerable emissary were crowned with success; Morinaga pleaded his cause with such effect that the Emperor consented to hand over the holy relic. Sanetomo, attended by a brilliant retinue, met the returning party at Odawara, and the Buddha's tooth was triumphantly installed in the

family temple of Chōshōjuin (which had been built by Yoritomo), amidst supernatural manifestations and general rejoicings. A special temple was constructed for its reception, the tooth being worshipped there until the time of Hōjō Sadatoki (1284), when the oracles decreed that the position of Engakuji was the most auspicious spot wherein to enshrine the relic. Accordingly the *Shariden* was constructed (by the versatile Chinese priest Chinwakei), and therein the holy tooth was ceremoniously deposited in the year 1301. Apparently the preservative influence has extended to its shrine, for curiously enough the *Shariden* alone has borne a charmed existence amongst the vicissitudes that have beset, not only all the other buildings of this enclosure, but all the multitude of the Kamakura temples.

Numerous are the legends regarding its miraculous intervention, and the blessings obtained when the aid of heaven was invoked at this shrine during natural calamities of all descriptions—tempests, plague, famine, flood, conflagrations, earthquake, wars—not only internal strife, but even invasion from foreign nations, for it is said that at the time of the Mongolian attack the aid of the Almighty was invoked and favourable omens obtained through the occult powers of the relic. It is further recorded that in 1391 Ashikaga Yoshimochi, (Fourth *Shogun*) removed the *Shari* from its shrine in Kamakura to Kyōto: about the year 1467, during the civil war, it fell into the hands of the enemy, but soon afterwards mysterious gleams and glitters were observed to emanate from its crystal casket and lo, the tooth was discovered to have miraculously returned! In one of the Buddhist sutras it is written:—



The Shariden, erected in the year 1301 to enshrine the sacred relic of the Buddha's Tooth.

“In this World of suffering my relics shall change to an Emerald Jewel for the sake of the poor and unfortunate, and I shall scatter the Seven Treasures upon all mankind. I will grant their prayers.”

The high altar in the centre of the *Shariden* is also under government protection, and is constructed of valuable Chinese wood, the doors of the inner sanctuary being of ornate design. On either side are ancient effigies of Jizo and Kwannon that are said to have been brought from China together with the relic.

An interesting fact in connection with the *Shariden* is that this small structure is an exact reproduction in miniature of the original main temple of Engakuji, which was destroyed by the fire of 1558. Behind the *Shariden*, and connected with it by a passage at the rear, is the shrine dedicated to Sogen, original head of Engakuji and wherein the central object is a large and impressive statue of the departed. A miniature pond lies behind this structure known as “*Shuku-ryū-en*”, or ‘Abode of the Dragon’: the mossy ascent to the left leads to a small level in the rocky hill-side whereon is the tomb of the first Lord Abbot and spiritual founder of this great monastery.

Below, on the left of the *Shariden*, is a large square cave containing a monument of imposing proportions: here rest the ashes of the priest Kosen Osho, who died in the year 1890; on the demise of that eminent scholar his most brilliant pupil, the present Lord Abbot Shaku Sōyen, was appointed to preside over the fortunes of Engakuji in his stead.

On the right of the cloistered courtyard of the *Shariden* is the entrance to the *Zen-do*, or hall where

the mystic art of *Zazen* is practised by the priests and their pupils. The interior is of an austere simplicity—the large chamber being divided by a central pathway, with a raised and matted platform on either side. Upon these mats the priests keep their long vigils: wrapped in a pall of oblivion they find deliverance from the corroding influence of the world, and attain to the state of Buddhahood through the purifying virtues of meditation and silence within this abode of peace. The single figure of a saint is enclosed within a high shrine with latticed doors—a small but beautiful statue of Monju Bosatsu, typifying the highest wisdom.

The buildings beyond include the chambers where the scriptures are expounded—lecture hall, refectories, etc. A short distance to the rear of the main temple is a walled enclosure entered by a fine old roofed gate. This is enriched with elaborate carvings, the upper panels being decorated with bold designs of dragons and waves, birds etc. The courtyard is shaded by venerable trees and forms the prelude to the guest-rooms—a hall of imposing proportions consisting of a central space of polished wood surrounded by eighty-three *tatami* (mats of 6 ft. by 3). The row of buildings leading off from the guest-hall to the south are the offices of the temple. Beyond there, and almost opposite the *Biruden*, stands the '*Yokushitsu*', an old building with hatched and gabled roof that in ancient times fulfilled the function of bathing establishment to the monastery: adjoining it is a deep square well that constituted the water supply.

Behind this relic of a bygone era grass-grown and somewhat delapidated steps ascend steeply from a wooden *torii*: these lead up to an important possession of the

temple—the great bell. High upon the hillside it hangs from the massive timbers of an open belfry, sheltered by a curved roof of Chinese shape; it moreover enjoys the distinction of being the largest in Kamakura, its dimensions measuring some eight feet in height, by six feet in diameter. In days of yore this bell was esteemed a sacred object, a spirit being supposed to dwell within its massive green curves; this can be better credited when the great swinging beam is set in motion and a peal of rich musical thunder rolls into the valleys—the vibrations throb and quiver for an incredible length of time before the atmosphere gradually sighs back into the former stillness of that upland solitude.

The famous bell was cast in 1301, its panels bearing a poetical inscription in Chinese: with the receding centuries the huge mass of copper has assumed a lovely hue of green, in perfect accord with its surroundings and highly satisfying to the æsthetic instincts. Its origin is based in legend. It is recorded that Tokimune's son Sadatoki (eighth Hōjō Regent, 1284) who had entered the priesthood, was desirous of acquiring a large bell for the monastery. With a ceremonial retinue he repaired to Enoshima, and there before the shrine of Benten he ardently besought the goddess that this design might be accomplished. His petition was favourably received: the divinity intimated that the lake lying beyond the temple should be explored. Investigations revealed a large quantity of metal deposited at the bottom of the lake; with this the great bell of Engakuji was constructed.

Other legends and fables also cluster around this bell. It is recorded that in ancient days a priest of huge stature mysteriously appeared on a pilgrimage

throughout the land, with a loud voice exhorting the populace to repair to the great bell of Engakuji; whatsoever they prayed for with a pure uplifting of the heart should be granted them. This happened, and many following his advice obtained their desires. As this gigantic priest was such a conspicuous figure, jingling his little bells along the thoroughfares, it seemed strange that none knew aught concerning his origin, or from whence he came—even his name was unknown. He vanished just as miraculously as he appeared. The mighty apparition was none other than the holy spirit of the bell—his mission ended he disappeared into the bell, becoming part of it! It is also written that in the year 1480 the bell of Engakuji was miraculously endowed with the power of volition, tolling of its own accord when no human being was near. All who accepted this fact in a reverent spirit met with good fortune and prosperity; but ill-luck attended the scoffers, and evil befel them.

In those days in a village called Tamagawa there dwelt a man named Ono. This man was attacked by mortal sickness, to which he succumbed, and in the cut off in the flower of his years he descended into the shadows of the underworld. However Enma, Lord of Death, instead of pronouncing judgment upon his soul remonstrated with the newcomer, and since the appearance in the land of shades was premature, the Judge of Souls commanded him to return from whence he came, to finish his allotted span of life in the upper world. But Ono replied that it was impossible; he knew not where the road might lie in the twilight of the shadows. Then Enma instructed him, saying that if he went towards the south, the waves of sound that flowed from



The Great Bell of Engakuji.

the great bell of Engakuji would penetrate even to the darkness of those gloomy regions, and would guide him safely back. Ono obeyed these counsels, duly regaining his home in the world of living men: from that day he and his kindred cherished a great devotion to the Bell of Engakuji, whose echoes had so well and truly guided the lost soul.

Nearby stands a small shrine dedicated to the goddess Benten, with whom the bell naturally claims affinity. To celebrate its successful construction a great festival was inaugurated at the Benten shrine of Enoshima, on which occasion a long and motley procession wended its way from Enoshima to Engakuji. These proceedings have taken place ever since those remote times at the interval of sixty-one years: the aged custodian of the shrine avers that she witnessed the last procession, which was celebrated some forty years ago. Within the little building a series of quaint and curious paintings are exhibited which are supposed to be of great antiquity, and which represent this festival of the goddess Benten and its remarkable procession.

The treasures possessed by Engakuji are manifold and priceless. Every year in mid-August these are all unearthed from their cases and wrappings to see the light of day for the space of about one week, being exhibited in the chambers and corridors of the large guest-hall to all beholders who may present themselves in a reverent spirit. This is known as the annual '*Mushibotsui*' or 'airing to free from insects'—and as practically all the temples in Japan follow this procedure, a visit at that juncture rewards the pilgrim with a view of many valuable and historical objects, often of great

beauty, which are as a rule invisible on less auspicious occasions.

Amongst such an embarrassment of riches it is hard to individualise. The paintings of the sixteen disciples of Buddha make a special appeal to the lover of ancient art, with their Botticelli treatment and muted colouring: they date from between five and six centuries ago, being the work of a celebrated Japanese priest named *Chodensu*.

A vivid portrait of Sogen, first head of the monastery of Engakuji, constitutes a charming memento of the early days of the temple. The ancient divine is represented in his old age, with two doves—one at his feet, while its name nestles in the sleeve of his robe. According to the legend, when the priest was still in China, before the summons of the *Shogun* was delivered, a little dove came and plucked at his sleeve. After his arrival in Kamakura, when the newcomer was escorted to Hachiman and there beheld the doves sacred to the god of war—with whom the military capital was so closely identified—the priest recalled the incident and interpreted the pigeon that had plucked at his robe as the spirit of the god, and as a special messenger calling him to his new field of labour. After that occasion the newly-installed Lord Abbot expressed the desire that when his portrait should be painted, he might be represented with doves. As its brilliant colouring would suggest, this picture is comparatively modern, having been executed some 150 years ago.

Many quaint Chinese objects are still preserved that were the personal property of Sogen; these include his priest's robes of curious material and design, the circular writing-box used by him, and four large torii—one

of glittering crystal that gives no hint of its antiquity, and will probably sparkle on in its wrapping of crumbling silk through all eternity. Another valued historical relic is the document traced in bold and sweeping characters by the Emperor Go-Saga conferring the posthumous title of *Bukko-Zeiji* upon the departed. Certain mementoes connected with the arrival of the Buddha's tooth are also in evidence: these include a curious bag of green and gold brocade, with silken cords and tassels of faded purple, that enveloped the outer metal case of the crystal pagoda: also the antique Chinese embroidery, of strange design and stranger workmanship, that was draped over the holy relic.

The temple possess innumerable documents and writings inscribed by notable personages of the Kamakura Era, and which seem to form a mysterious link across the centuries that have elapsed since that remote epoch—these include two letters (mounted on *kakemono*) from the *Shogun* Tokimune, founder of Engakuji, and dated July 18th and Dec. 23rd, 1278, respectively.

Suspended from the roof of the corridor is a quaint memorial of the days when life was more leisurely, and considerably more picturesque, than in the present era of rapid transit—the palanquin of black and red lacquer used by the former Lord Abbots when they emerged from the sacred seclusion of the temple precincts. Another item of special interest amongst the numerous 'Treasures of the Nation' possessed by this temple is an ancient chart of Engakuji that was made soon after its completion, and graphically depicting the numerous buildings of the great monastery as it existed in all the pristine glory of those early days.