

MEIGETSUIN

This small temple lies a short distance to the south-east of Engakuji and is worth inspection for its romantic setting, as well as for its association with Kamakura's early history. Situated in a valley, the grounds are surrounded by rock-scenery fringed with bamboo-groves and wooded heights with natural amphitheatres—which in early summer are heavy with the fragrance of the great white lilies that bloom in profusion, starring the hills and dales with fairy-like effect. The precincts are entered by a pine-shaded gate with thatched gables; a long grassy approach gradually rises to the rocky level where stands a forlorn and meagre building, the sole remnant of former times that is left to mark this historic spot.

The environment of Meigetsuin (Temple of the Clear Moon) is intimately associated with the famous Tokiyori—fifth Hōjō Regent—as his dwelling-place when he retired from the world, and the scene of his death: upon this site he constructed a temple called Saimyōji, with a small abode for himself in close proximity. Although all this has long passed away, on the Ofuna high road nearby there still stands an ancient stone landmark bearing the temple's name cut upon its rugged grey surface. Tokiyori had a most interesting personality, indeed his life reads like a chapter of romance. An

astute philosopher and possessed of great benevolence, many stories are related, and also dramatised, regarding his extreme frugality and contempt of luxury: in the disguise of a mendicant priest he would wander about the country to get in touch with the common people, and to ascertain at first hand their grievances. These pilgrimages abounded in incident, and resulted in the rectification of many wrongs.

The spiritual side of this just and virtuous man was highly developed; from his youthful days he had been a devoted adherent of the Zen sect of Buddhism. Consequently, when his health declined he entered the priesthood in 1256, and retired to the congenial seclusion of the hermitage that he had prepared, with the intention of devoting the remainder of his life to practising the rites of his religion amidst the rural surroundings of this tranquil retreat.

But Tokiyori's fervour for things spiritual did not obliterate his interest in things mundane. Nominally a relative was appointed, Nagatoki, (his own son Tokimune being of too tender years) to rule in his stead: yet he kept his hand upon the helm of state—especially when any unusual or complicated matters arose—and practically ruled in *camerâ* until the day of his death, which occurred in 1263. It is recorded that Tokiyori's demise took place when arrayed in his priest's vestments and while practising *Zazen*: realising his end was at hand he knelt upon a rope mat, and assuming the attitude of meditation and communion with the unseen world, the great ruler thus serenely "abode his destined Hour and passed into the life beyond."

So popular and so beloved by the common people

was this shrewd and kind-hearted Regent that, according to ancient records, after his death such numbers of people imitated his example—from respect to his memory shaving their heads and becoming recluses—it became necessary to deal with the matter by law, and instructions were issued to the governors of different provinces prohibiting this practice. After the decease of Tokiyori the temple of Saimyōji seems to have fallen rapidly into decay: later it was rebuilt on a modest scale by Tokimune, rechristened by the name of Zenkōji, and placed under the direction of Doryū, first Lord Abbot of Kenchōji, who had officiated at the ceremony when Tokiyori was ordained priest.

However in 1379 a large and imposing temple was erected upon this site by Ujimitsu, second Ashikaga Regent, which was of such importance that it ranked first of the ten great temples in the *Kwantō* (the eight provinces east of Hakone). The name of Zenkōji was retained: from the ancient coloured chart that is still preserved these various edifices must have possessed considerable artistic beauty; they were surrounded by a charming landscape garden, a lake of fanciful shape spanned by a curved bridge facing the main buildings. Meigetsuin was erected by Uesugi Norikata, who died in 1394. The Uesugi were a powerful and important family of ministers and statesmen during the Ashikaga *régime*, proving the prop and main-stay of the first four *Kwanryo*, or governors-general. On the death of the fourth Regent Mochiuji in 1439, the Uesugi influence had become so potent that the authority was wielded by themselves until the fall of the Ashikaga Era.

In those days Meigetsuin was a vassal attached to



Statue of Uesugi Shigefusa, a Court noble of the 13th century.

Zenkōji, and always mentioned in connection with the more important building; a record of some 240 years ago describes it as the guest-chambers of Zenkōji—it is claimed that some of the original timbers still remain in the present small building. But although declined to such barren and scanty proportions, it is noted as the possessor of an important National Treasure. This work of art is a statue of *Shigefusa*, court noble and first ancestor of the Uesugi family: he accompanied the Emperor Go-Daigo's youthful son Prince Munetaka to Kamakura when, at the request of Tokiyori, the Prince was appointed *Shogun* in 1251. Carved in coloured wood, and garbed in the lofty and wide exaggerated pantaloons of official uniform, the effigy affords a vivid illustration of the picturesque costumes of those remote times, and is considered a most valuable relic of the Kamakura Era. This statue was sent to London in 1910, and exhibited in the Japan-British Exhibition as a representative example of the realistic style and bold chiseling of the sculpture belonging to that period of art. At the present time however, the large empty lacquered case, as a sign and token, alone remains upon the altar; the statue having been lent to the National Museum at Ueno, where it doubtless commands a wider public than in the vague seclusion of Meigetsuin.

Sundry other treasures remain in the possession of this small temple. On the left of the altar is an interesting and unusual bust of Tokiyori, which is said to have been constructed by the famous Chinese priest Sogen. (first director of Engakuji), of a clay material in which Tokiyori's own ashes were mingled. Regarding the principal statue of Kwannon, an early record states

that it contains numbers of diminutive images of saints. On the right side of the building is a fine representation of the fifth Tokugawa *Shogun*, Tsunayoshi, carved in dark wood and presenting the appearance of bronze. Five sets of lacquer bowls are still preserved that are widely known and esteemed amongst connoisseurs as the '*Meigetsu-wan*,' they are of beautiful red and purple colouring, inlaid with the fitful fires of mother-of-pearl: with these are kept two other valued relics—a pierced scarlet incense-box; and an antique Chinese *suzuri*, the dark stone being exquisitely carved with a design of clusters of grape-vine and monkeys.

Upon the altar is a quaint memento of the famous Yoshitsune, in the shape of a small carved metal reliquary containing a '*Shari*' that is said to have been a prized possession of this ever-popular hero. The ancient chart of the temple is enrolled as a National Treasure, and bears the seal of Ujimitsu (died 1398).

Beside the temple is the tenth, and last of Kamakura's ten celebrated wells, the *Kame-no-ido*, or 'Tortoise Well.' To the rear, on the left-hand side, the surrounding screen of rock is pierced by a wide cavern, around whose walls are carved in relief a row of large dark figures: in the centre stands a stone monument. This is said to be the tomb of the founder Uesugi Norikata, from whose posthumous title of "*Meigetsu*" the temple derives its name.

According to certain authorities the mortal relics of this worthy were despatched to Gokurakuji for interment so possibly the cave-tomb may be merely a memorial; but if not the whole, it is most probable that a portion of his ashes were deposited here, according to an old-estab-

lished and somewhat confusing custom in Japan, whereby an important personage may possess more than one gravestone reared over his remains. A path leads to the tomb of Tokiyori, which stands near the entrance-gate and has recently lost its rustic aspect of former years, being now fenced-in within a comparatively ambitious enclosure. Upon a hillock of rocks and grasses shadowed by trees, stands a small lichened monument the Hōjō shape: beneath this insignificant tomb sleeps the dust of the great and sagacious ruler who loved this peaceful spot so well that he renounced the tumults of the world in order to dedicate the last seven years of his life to the attainment of spiritual enlightenment in the dreamy repose and calm tranquility of this sequestered valley.

