

EISHŌJI

“ Through many a leafy corridor,
Dim gallery, deep arcade.”

The enclosure adjoining the temple of Jufukuji on the northern side contains some picturesque copper roofs. These deserted buildings formed part of the nunnery of Eishōji, which from its original pictures and representations must have been indeed a thing of beauty in its palmy days. But alas, this ancient foundation has fallen upon evil times; its present condition being ruin and decay, tenanted by one single nun.

Eishō was a beautiful court lady and prime favourite of Iyeyasu: she was cherished as the mother of Iyeyasu's son Yorifusa, founder of the house of Mito. Her ancestor was the celebrated Ōta Dōkwan who built the original castle in Yedo upon the site of the present Imperial Palace in Tōkyō, and whose residence was in Kamakura, situated upon the same spot that was occupied later by the nunnery. On the death of Iyeyasu the disconsolate Lady Eishō cut her hair and entered religion; this convent being founded in her honour in the era of *Kwan-ei* (1624-1643), and here she was buried. The first to preside over the administration of Eishōji was a daughter of the Lord Mito. A peaceful little graveyard, a few paces north of the nunnery, contains the large and imposing tombs of the departed lady abbesses: sheltered from the world by a heavy screen of foliage and

the green plumes of bamboo, this lovely and sequestered retreat is entered by a broad flight of steps ascending from the singularly inappropriate vicinity of the railroad.

It is recorded that these gentle nuns took great pleasure in the natural beauty of the wooded heights behind the convent, which were included in the grounds in the foundation. A memento of those departed days still remains in the shadowed remoteness of a thick grove of pines near the foot of Genjiyama. To mark their appreciation of this tranquil spot a large and beautiful statue of Jizo—with peace and benevolence beaming from his stony countenance—was erected in this natural temple; and here, unseen and unknown, he holds his solitary court with apparently the little wild creatures and the birds of the air for his sole worshippers and devotees.

The hill of Genjiyama—whose summit, crowned with the solitary majestic pine, is such a familiar landmark of Kamakura—was also the property of Eishoji in those days, and was known as *Hatatate-yama* or ‘Hill of the Standard.’ This was due to the tradition that Minamoto Yoshiie—ancestor of Yoritomo—planted his flag upon the crest of Genjiyama, with special prayers to the gods for the downfall of his enemies, as he crossed this hill at the head of his warriors to encounter the attacking rebels.



The Jizō in the Woods, erected by the Nuns of Eishōj

THE TOMB OF TAMESUKE

“In the distance the calm hills close the landscape like a dream guarding reality.”

In front of the nunnery of Eishōji a road branches in an eastward direction. A few paces beyond, a path (on the left) leads up to a weatherbeaten temple ledged in the rocky amphitheatre above. Beneath a cherry-tree at the entrance stands a large stone bearing the inscription ‘*The historic site of Reizei Tamesuke.*’ Tamesuke was a famous poet of the 13th century belonging to the great Fujiwara family, and was the worthy descendant of a long line of poets and distinguished men of letters: his grandfather was the celebrated and epoch-making *Teika*, whose work ranks among the classics of Japanese literature.

His father Tameiye also achieved such success that an estate conferred upon him by Imperial favour. At his death a quarrel ensued between the two brothers regarding the possession of this estate, and as the efforts of Tamesuke to retrieve his property proved of no avail, his mother—a lady of independent and intrepid character, and herself an authoress of distinction—undertook the long journey to Kamakura to refer the case to the court of law, in the hope of obtaining justice for her son. This lady was named ‘*Abutsuni*’: the diary that she kept on this journey, containing a poetical account of her experiences copiously interspersed with verses, is