

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

written in admirable style and has become a classic widely read in the present day. This journal is called the '*Izayoi Nikki*' or 'Diary of the Moon of the Sixteenth night,' the authoress having set out on the evening of that day.

An interesting passage relates to Mount Fuji: she is surprised to see no column of smoke rising from the crater as on her last visit to those parts, (neighbourhood of Okitsu). Enquiries reveal the fact that the smoke has become intermittent and no longer issues continuously, as in earlier days. During her residence in Kamakura she stayed near the great temple of Gokurakuji. She describes it thus in the *Izayoi Nikki*:—"My dwelling in the *Azuma* (a poetical term for this part of Japan) is in the *Tsukikage-ga-Yatsu*,—or 'Valley of the shadowed Moon'—which lies compassed by hills near a bay, in the vicinity of a mountain-temple. All is peaceful and sublime: the roar of the waves and the sighing of the wind is unceasing.

Abutsuni died in this sympathetic environment before the lawsuit was concluded, and her tomb is said to be in the nunnery of Eishōji: however eventually a decision of the lawcourt was pronounced in favour of her son. Meanwhile Tamesuke had followed his parent to the capital. He selected the present site for his abode and apparently found it congenial, for he spent all the remainder of his life in this part of Kamakura, which in compliment to this illustrious scion of the Fujiwara became known as *Fuji-ga-yatsu*, or 'Wistaria Valley.'

The romantic scenery of the little nook—enclosed with rocks of fantastic shape, hills, and green distances—would make an appeal to any mind susceptible to beauty,

and it is not surprising that the poet found it inspiring to his muse. Here he composed the well-known 'Hundred Poems of Fuji-ga-yatsu,' and here he breathed his last in the year 1328, at the age of sixty-six. On the right is a small shrine dedicated to Fudo. In early times the tract below, now covered with rice-fields, was an ornamental lake; but this has long vanished, together with the gardens and the various vassal buildings belonging to the temple above.

Jökomyōji, or 'Temple of Sacred Pure Lustre' was erected in 1252 by Hōjō Nagatoki—who four years later became Regent on the retirement of Tokiyori. The only building left is the 'Hall of Amida'—a time stained mildewed structure from which all pure lustre appears to have long departed. However the large statue of Amida is still enthroned upon its neglected altar—this figure was known as the 'jewel-crowned Amida' from its gem-studded head-dress: on either side are effigies of the goddess of Mercy which were considered works of great merit.

But the forlorn condition of the temple is atoned for by its beautiful setting. Perched upon a little rocky plateau in the hill-side and sheltered by fine old forest trees, the surrounding rocks are perforated with quaint caves of varied shapes and contain curious old tombs and monuments—apparently survivals of the very remote past. Indeed several are so incredibly ancient of aspect as to have become the mere ghosts and phantoms of tombstones; in some cases the surfaces have assumed the semblance of maps in high relief, seeming upon the point of crumbling into a puff of fine dust—yet to the touch these venerable relics remain hard and unresist-

ing as when hewn from their native beds of rocks.

To the rear of the temple a steep ascent gives access to another terrace above. Here one is confronted with a huge rock pierced by a spacious cavern, the ingress being reminiscent of a cathedral door—the cave of the '*Amibiki Jizo*.' A divinity almost black with age, as his name implies (*Amibiki*=drawn by nets), he was retrieved from the depths of the sea by fisherman with nets, and is supposed to preserve a mysterious connection with the deep. He sits aloft upon his throne placidly smiling at the blue ocean in the distance; the depression at the back of the cave, behind the great stone halo of the deity, is said to contain salt water that rises and falls with the tides. A wooden ladle will be observed upon the statue's base; it is considered an efficacious prelude to orisons at the shrine of this divinity of sea-origin to make him an offering, and to spray his body with the salt water.

The children of the neighbourhood come and vigorously rub themselves with the piles of stones heaped up before their protector—this being supposed to grant immunity from disease. The *Jizo*'s kind, stern countenance is crowned with a baby's hat, and around his stony neck are tied several mouldy bibs—doubtless offerings from anguished mothers who hope to gain some favour for their tiny wanderers in the dark ways of the underworld. According to some accounts the statue was placed here by the agency of Tamesuke: this may possibly have been the case, as an inscription carved upon the back of the figure states that it was consecrated by the priest Shōsen in the eleventh month of the year 1312.

In the interior of this cavern is a sort of inner



Tomb of the Poet Tamesuké.

chamber hewn in the cliff, traversed by a stone ledge upon which is a tomb: it is said that in ancient days this grim enclosure was used as a prison, and criminals were incarcerated within its rocky walk. Yet another path leads from this plateau; another flight of mossy and well-worn steps ascends to a third level. The centrepiece of this beautiful spot—enclosed within a stone fence, with standing lantern, font for the water of purification, and incense burner, for any stray admirer to do homage to the soul of the dead poet—is the old grey monument that marks the burial-place of the departed. A charming and wholly appropriate spot for the last sleep of a singer of earth's beauties; lying so near to the blue sky, and shrouded by the ancient pines in whose out-stretched boughs the zepthers seem to whisper a soft requiem.

According to the inscription, the tomb with its accessories was erected to commemorate the talents of the deceased by his followers and pupils. At the rear of this enclosure is a low deep cave wherein are piled an abundance of small tombstones, and suggesting that in former times a graveyard must have existed in this upland region. A track to the right can be followed across the hills, and a descent to the road effected in another locality. However should the same means of retreat be preferred, a broader and fairly easy path leads gradually downwards from the Jizo, landing the pilgrim upon the level ground in the vicinity of a small shrine of Fudo.