

KUZUHARAOKA-JINJA

A short distance beyond the railway bridge a track intersects the fields to the left. The characters cut upon a stone sign-post convey the intimation that this path winds up to a small shrine called Kuzuhara-oka-Jinja. This historic spot was the scene of a harrowing tragedy early in the 14th century: the shrine is dedicated to the memory of a celebrated scholar and patriot, Fujiwara Toshimoto.

A high official at the court, and specially favoured by the Emperor Go-Daigo, Toshimoto—together with another Fujiwara nobleman, his colleague Suketomo—was a prime mover in the plot to wrest the power from the *Shoguns* at Kamakura and to restore the supremacy of the Emperor. This scheme becoming known to the military authorities, by order of the Regent Takatoki Toshimoto was seized and sent as a captive to Kamakura. Upon the site of this shrine he was met by the emissaries of the Regent and executed. A brilliant member of a family long famed for their distinction in scholarship and literature, the unfortunate Toshimoto achieved such renown as a poet that his writings still remain as classics. A description of his long journey along the Tōkaidō from Kyōto to Kamakura is given in the '*Taiheiki*,' the famous and widely-read history of the great events that occurred between the years 1318—1368.

The account of his capture runs thus :—

“ On the eleventh day of the seventh month he was arrested, taken to Rokuhara (the residence of the *Shogun's* representative at Kyōto), and thence despatched to the eastern provinces. He set out on his journey well knowing that the law allowed no pardon for a second offence of this kind, and that whatever might be pleaded in his defence release was beyond hope. Either his doom would be accomplished during the journey or he would be executed at Kamakura. No other end was possible.”

“ But one night more and a strange lodging would be his,
Far from Kadono, where in spring his steps had often
wandered in the snow of the fallen cherry-flowers ;
Far from Arashiyama, whence on an autumn eve he was
wont to return clad in the brocade of the red maple
leaves—

Despondent, his mind could think of nothing but his
home, bound to him by strongest ties of love,
And of his wife, and children, whose future was dark to him.
For the last time ' he thought, as he looked back on the
ninefold Imperial city,

For many a year his wonted habitation.

How sorrowful must have been his heart within him

As he set out on this unlooked-for journey ! ”

(*Aston's translation*)

The scene of the execution is further described. Toshimoto, borne in a kago, at length arrived at the appointed place. Here he was received by the official deputed by the Regent, and in the nearby upland field known as '*Kuzuhara-oka*' a space was enclosed with the '*maku*,' or curtain, according to custom. The prisoner, with the utmost composure knelt within the enclosure. Taking out a paper from his garment he wiped his

neck ostensibly to prepare it for the fatal stroke then upon the same paper inscribed his farewell poem. As he traced the final character and replaced his writing-brush, the sword flashed from behind. The severed head fell upon the victim's knees and lodged between his arms presenting the uncanny spectacle of embracing his own head!

On Feb. 22, 1885, the Emperor Meiji promoted his rank in recognition of loyal and faithful services; four years later (1889) the people of the neighbourhood established this shrine a small wooden structure approached through a large *torii*. The date of Toshimoto's death was May 20th, 1329: here his remains were buried, his tomb being in the vicinity of the shrine.

