

KAIZOJI

The main path beyond the railway bridge is a *cul-de-sac*, terminating in the ancient temple of Kaizoji. The founder was a priest of great celebrity named Genno, who notwithstanding his piety and erudition was still able to turn his attention to the practical side of life: to him is ascribed the invention of a tool (a species of hammer) that has been in use ever since, and to this day a '*genno*'—as it is called in honour of its originator—is included in the outfit of all carpenters.

The name of this worthy priest is moreover linked with a weird legend famed in song and story, and also represented with great effect upon the stage. In the period of *Koji* (1142) many strange and bewildering occurrences took place in the court, all being at a loss to account for these successive manifestations. One evening the company were assembled at a banquet, and the night grew late to strains of music and general revelry. Suddenly the palace quivered and shook to its foundations: all the lights were simultaneously extinguished, leaving the great hall enveloped in black darkness. The Emperor was enthroned upon a raised dais, upon the lowest step of which was standing the prime favourite of His Majesty, a graceful and beautiful maiden known as the lady Tamamo (the 'Flawless Jewel'): to the horror and consternation of all the assembled guests,

from her body radiated strange flames of golden light! At the same moment the Emperor fell back in a faint, and was moreover attacked by mysterious symptoms which the court physicians were at a loss to diagnose. A diviner was hastily summoned, who at once ascribed the malady to the magic of the lady Tamamo. With a wild cry the sorceress assumed the form of a large fox and rushed from the palace, the animal eventually escaping for safety to the eastern provinces. When the influence of the witchcraft was removed the Emperor recovered, and commanded three of his most valiant warriors to set out in pursuit of the fox.

The evil spirit was trapped and slain in the plain of Nasu, province of Shimotsuke, from whence it was supposed to have originally emanated. However although the demon's body was killed, it still possessed the power of wreaking calamity, for its soul had petrified into a large stone, known far and wide as the '*Sessho-Seki*,' or 'Stone fatal to life.' By occult powers it attracted any living thing that might be in the neighbourhood insects, birds animals, or human beings—none could escape the curse; no sooner did they touch the stone than life became extinct, and they perished with great suffering.

“The Death-stone stands on Nasu's moor
 Through winter snows and summer heat;
 The moss grows grey upon its sides,
 But the foul demon haunts it yet.
 Chill blows the blast: the owls' sad choir
 Hoots hoarsely through the moaning pines;
 Among the low chrysanthemums
 The skulking fox, the jackal whines,
 As o'er the moor the autumn light declines.”

(Chamberlain's translation)

Some hundred years later the Emperor Go-Fukakusa requested the pious Genno, abbot of Kaizoji, to repair to this haunted place and attempt to exorcise the evil spirit from its prison. When arrived at the dreadful spot the priest found the Death-stone surrounded by piles of bleaching skeletons and bones of its victims.

However offerings were made of pure water and meadow-flowers, with the thin smoke of incense ascending to heaven: after long invocations and recital from the Sacred Books, the holy man struck the fatal stone with his staff—lo, the spell was broken, it crumbled into a heap of ruins!

“Oh, horror! horror!
 The Death-Stone's rent in twain:
 O'er moor and field
 A lurid glare
 Burns fierce. There stands revealed
 A Fox—and yet again
 The phantom seems to wear
 The aspect of a maiden fair!”

(Chamberlain)

The same night the vision of a beautiful being appeared to the priest and expressed fervent thanks for delivering her soul from the evil incantation, whereby it was now liberated to escape to the realms of peace and bliss. This consummation naturally achieved high renown for the founder of Kaizoji: a memento of the event is still preserved at the temple in the shape of a fragment of the fatal stone engraved with a strange hieroglyphic, and which was supposed to possess an exorcising influence upon demented persons who were imagined by the superstitious to be possessed of a fox!

Kaizoji is a temple belonging to a branch of the

Zen sect, and is under the jurisdiction of Kenchōji: it has a charming situation, encircled with rocks intersected by many interesting caves. Beside the steps leading up to the terrace is one of Kamakura's celebrated wells—the '*sokonuke*' or baseless well. It might be naturally inferred that so suggestive a title refers to the depth of water, but this not the case.

In ancient times a pious nun was repairing to this temple to spend a vigil in '*Zazen*' or religious meditation. In those days of enthusiasm and fervour it was the custom before any religious rite to purify the whole body with a shower of clear water—to symbolise detachment from the stains of earth—before entering the holy enclosure. During the nun's ablutions the base slipped from the vessel, and the silvery beams of the full moon were caught and reflected over her form in a diffusion of radiance suggesting a baptism of sacred fire. The cloistered visitant recorded this occurrence in a dainty and untranslatable poem of gossamer fancy: this little gem of thought has been preserved through the intervening centuries, and is inscribed upon a wooden panel beside the well.

The main temple contains a carved effigy of the founder in the centre of the altar; all the other statues being enshrined in a small '*Hall of Images*' on the left of the entrance-gate. In this building a prominent object is a dark red lacquered representation of Kōbō-Daishi. The great saint and teacher of the ninth century was associated with this part of Kamakura, and, according to tradition, hollowed sixteen excavations in the rocky floor of a nearby cave; with the water that percolated into these depressions Kōbō Daishi is said to have worked many

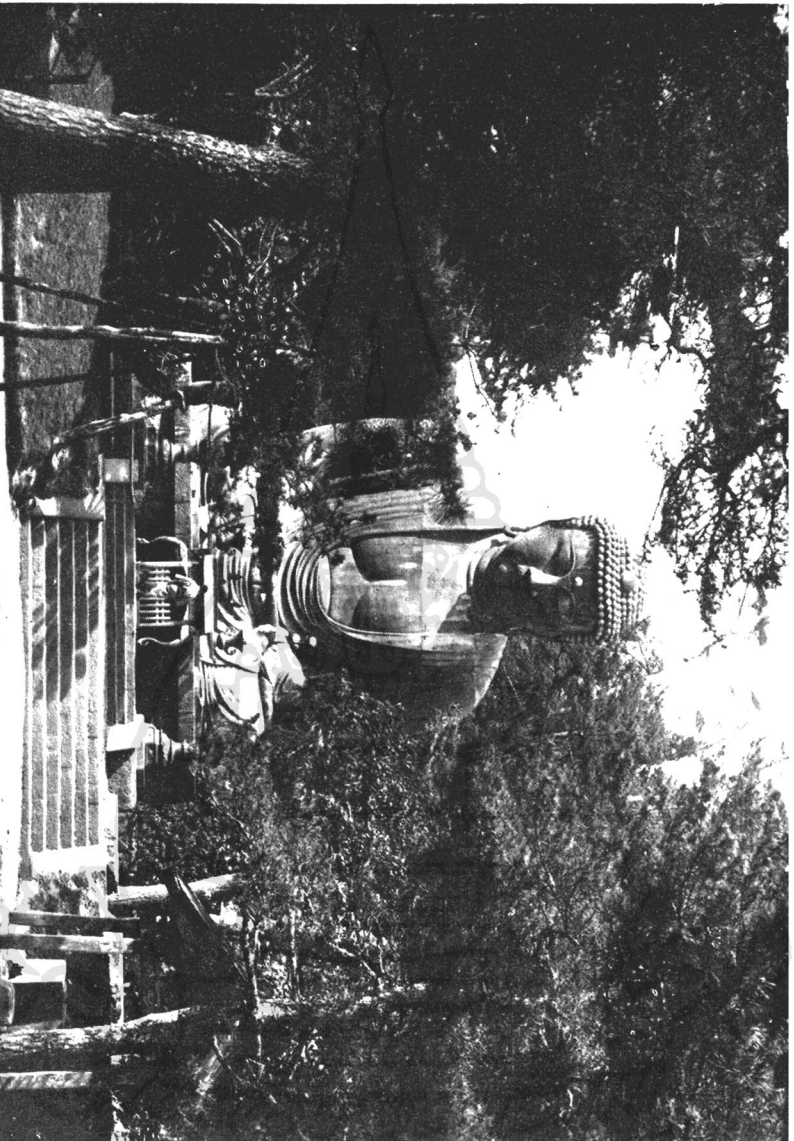
miracles in healing the sick and the blind. An adjoining path leads to this cave, which is widely known as the *Furokuído*, or 'Sixteen Pools.'

The centrepiece of the high altar is a large statue of the Buddhist Esculapius Yakushi-Nyorai. On either side stands a gilded Kwannon embellished with a green halo, while the walls are flanked by the twelve *Shinshō* that guard the healing divinity and are generally included with his effigy. This representation of Yakushi is a very ancient statue, concerning which there is a somewhat uncanny legend. In days of old, when Genno the founder was still living at Kaizoji, a strange wailing cry was constantly heard which seemed to proceed from a lonely part of mountain behind the temple. After a time the priest determined to fathom the origin of this haunting sound, which seemed more suggestive of a weeping child than of an animal in pain. Investigation of that region revealed a small tomb, from whence radiated a faint yellow light; also a strange and unknown fragrance appeared to emanate from this mysterious spot!

The wailing still being audible, the priest—reciting his prayers—advanced and laid upon the tomb his *kesa*, (an outer garment of brocade worn over the priests' robes). Immediately the sound ceased, and all became silent in that solitary and deserted place. When the day dawned, excavations beneath the little monument revealed the head of a statue of Yakushi-Nyorai carved in wood—of a fresh and beautiful colour, and by no means injured or decayed by its sojourn in the damp earth. Whereupon the worthy Genno, interpreting this incident as an intimation from the divinity, caused a new statue of Yakushi-Nyorai to be constructed,

enclosing within its body the head that had appeared in so enigmatic a fashion. This figure is known as the 'Naki' or weeping, Yakushi: it is stated that the cavity is opened and the mysterious head exhibited once in every sixty years: the *kesa* that was placed over the tomb is still said to be preserved in the temple as a sacred relic.





The Daibutsu.