

## THE DAIBUTSU

SASUKE INARI      ZENI ARAI BENTEN

“The Buddha of Immeasurable Light illuminates  
all worlds in the Ten Directions of Space.”

This colossal statue of Amida—the pride and glory of Kamakura—is situated in a sequestered grove about a mile south-west of the railway station. The precincts are entered by a roofed gate, on either side of which the threatening figures of the *Niō*, or Two Deva kings, keep guard against demons and enemies of this sacred spot. Upon the entrance the following notice is affixed:—

“Stranger, whosoever thou art, and whatsoever be thy creed, when thou enterest this sanctuary remember thou treadest upon ground hallowed by the worship of ages. This is the temple of Buddha and the gate of the Eternal, and should therefore be entered with reverence.”

According to tradition, Yoritomo, with his consort Masako, repaired to Nara in 1195 to take part in certain religious festivities. The *Shōgun* was so impressed by the majestic proportions of the great *Daibutsu* that he became desirous of erecting another gigantic figure in his own capital, but his death occurred before the scheme could assume any practical form. However the pious and devoted Itano Tsubone—who is said to have been a lady of Yoritomo's court—together with the priest Jōkō Shōnin, collected the fund; for this purpose; their efforts

being crowned with such success that a large image was sculptured in wood, the construction of which, together with the temple wherein it was enshrined, occupying over five years—from March 1238 until June 1243.

This temple must have been a structure of great beauty and elaboration—but alas, the days of its glory were of short duration, for ten years later the whole fabric was ruined in a severe storm, the sacred figure also suffering great injury. From this catastrophe the Daibutsu in its present form originated, for it was resolved to create its successor in a more lasting form: the mass of metal necessary for casting a colossal image was collected, and the work of constructing this triumph of Japanese art was achieved by the artist known as Ono Goroemon. The mighty figure bears the date of the fourth year of *Kencho*, (1252) and consequently has reigned in solitary majesty over the little valley for between six and seven hundred years; where it has successfully resisted the havoc of storms and floods, and through the succeeding centuries has been the object of worship and admiration to countless streams of pilgrims and visitors from all corners of the globe.

Of the three huge historical effigies of Amida in Japan the Kamakura figure alone survives intact and in its original form. The statue at Nara (which dates from the eighth century) has been twice repaired and recast; whereas the famous Kyōto *Daibutsu* was entirely destroyed—a small wooden substitute alone remaining to represent the gigantic figure set up by Hideyoshi, which towered to the height of 160 feet and the story of whose construction reads like a romance.

The measurements of the Kamakura *Daibutsu* may

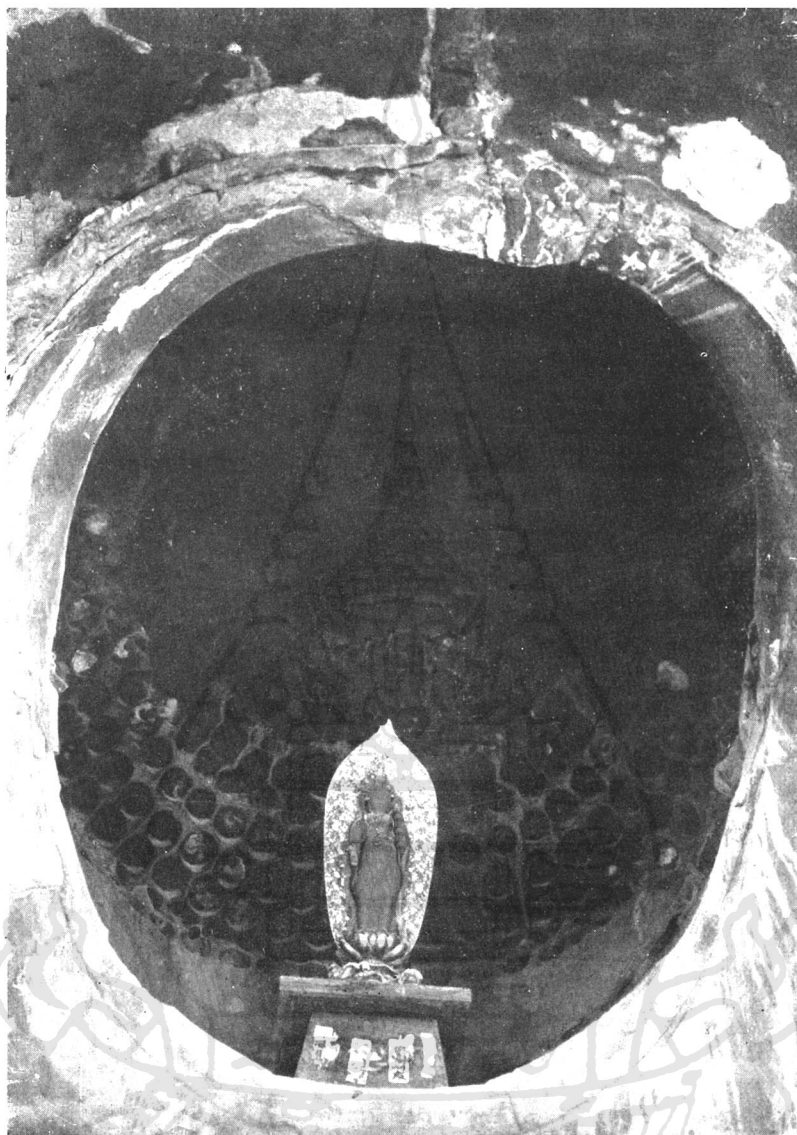
be roughly given as 50 feet in height by about 100 feet in circumference; the face being over 8 feet in length. The eyes (some 4 feet) are fashioned of pure gold, and the silver boss (*byakugo*)—representing the jewel from whence emanates the light that illumines the universe—is said to weigh 30 lbs. avoirdupois. The weight of the statue is computed at 460 tons. Upon the head are 830 curls, concerning which there is a curious legend to the effect that on one occasion when the Buddha was preaching with his shaven head exposed to the rays of the burning sun, myriads of snails assen'bled to shelter the Master from its scorching rays.

When this valuable statue was completed, it was naturally enshrined within a splendid temple of suitable proportions; its mighty roof being supported by sixty-three massive pillars of *keyaki* wood, of which fifty of the circular stone bases still remain in evidence. However this edifice was doomed to repeated calamities. It is recorded that in August 1335, during a civil war, an expedition was starting from Kamakura when suddenly a great storm arose, numbers of soldiers seeking shelter within the vast temple of the *Daibutsu*. During the night the building was wrecked by the violence of the wind, the unfortunate warriors perishing beneath the ruins to the number of five hundred. Again in September 1369 this ill-fated structure suffered heavy damage, and was partially ruined by a typhoon.

In 1495 during another furious storm a tidal wave rushed up the valley, completely annihilating the temple; since that time the great Buddha has remained unsheltered—a fact unlamented by its admirers, for however effective may have been the ornate environment and the

scented twilight of the gods,' surely no artificial background could be more entirely in accord with the dreary meditation of this embodiment of eternal peace than the blue heavens with its shifting clouds, the sunshine, and the whispers of wind-stirred trees. The great divinity seems fraught with a special significance in the dark hours when the shadowy valley is flooded by the pure silver of the full moon, investing the lonely figure—its head bowed in sorrow for the sins and sufferings of the world—with a mysterious and unreal atmosphere, that accentuates its austere majesty and utter aloofness from the unrest and turbulence of this human earth-life. Mortal forms may crawl and wander about its feet, but the great serene *Daibutsu*, oblivious and undistracted, will apparently sit enthroned upon his stony pedestal through all infinity, a symbol of repose and absolute detachment from the world.

Before the deity is an incense-burner and two tall bronze lotus-flowers, fifteen feet in height. From a small opening on the right side the interior of the statue can be entered, wherein are various effigies of Amida and inscriptions relating to the history of the *Daibutsu*. The statue of the goddess of mercy installed within the great cavity of the head was originally the chief image belonging to the private shrine of the second Tokugawa *Shōgun*. A steep ladder leads up to the shoulders, which are pierced by two windows. Immediately behind the *Daibutsu* is a large stone memorial before which fresh flowers and incense are constantly offered: this is in perpetual commemoration of the Lady Itano-Tsubone, to whose efforts the origin of the great statue is partly due.



The Daibutsu from within.

The statue of Kwanon, goddess of mercy, installed within the great cavity of the head was originally the chief image belonging to the Second Tokugawa Shōgun (1605—1623).

The hill at the rear is of easy access and commands a charming view : especially beautiful in spring, when the grove of cherry-trees below embowers the mighty form in pale-pink clouds of bloom that seem to emphasize the contrast between the evanescent and the abiding. Many writers have given inspiring accounts of the sacred figure that seems to be the presiding genius of Kamakura. In Professor Chamberlain's article on 'Metal-work' he says :—

“The grandest example of such colossal bronze-casting is the *Daibutsu* (literally 'Great Buddha') at Kamakura, which dates from the 13th century. He who has time should visit the *Daibutsu* repeatedly ; for like St. Peter's and several other of the greatest works of art and nature, it fails to produce its full effect on a first, or even on a second visit : but the impression it produces grows on the beholder each time that he gazes afresh at the calm intellectual passionless face, which seems to concentrate in itself the whole philosophy of the Buddhist religion—the triumph of mind over sense, of eternity over fleeting time, of the enduring majesty of Nirvâna over the trivial prattle and the transitory agitations of mundane existence.”

Lafcadio Hearn writes :—“No matter how many photographs of the colossal you may have already seen, this first vision of the reality is an astonishment. The gentleness, the dreamy passionlessness of those features—the immense repose of the whole figure—are full of beauty and charm. And, contrary to all expectation, the nearer you approach the giant Buddha, the greater this charm becomes. You look up into the solemnly beautiful face—into the half-closed eyes that seem to

watch you through their eyelids of bronze as gently as those of a child, and you feel that the image typifies all that is tender and calm in the Soul of the East. Yet you feel also that only Japanese thought could have created it. Its beauty, its dignity, its perfect repose, reflect the higher life of the race that imagined it; and, though doubtless inspired by some Indian model, as the treatment of the hair and various symbolic marks reveal, the art is Japanese."

The path on the right behind the *Daibutsu* leads to an embryo park that is being laid out as a memorial of the Coronation of the present Emperor and Empress (1915). For this purpose land amounting to 20,000 *tsubo* has been contributed by 121 owners, and many thousands of pine and cherry-trees have been planted. If the hill at the northern end of the valley is scaled, it leads to the picturesque little temple of *Sasuke-Inari* which lies below the crest, and from whence a path leads back to Hasé through the valley known as *Sasuke-ga-Yatsu*. This foundation is of extreme antiquity, being mentioned in ancient records as belonging to the pre-Yoritomo days. Legend relates that during the early days of the first *Shōgun*, while he was still in seclusion at Hirugashima (Idzu) the fox messenger of Inari appeared to Yoritomo, predicting that the scene of his future glory lay at Kamakura: hence the erection of this shrine soon after his arrival.

On the hill behind the temple will be found a small rocky cave beneath the roots of superb old trees and approached by numerous *torii*—the habitation of the mystic fox! Near the approach to this venerable temple is a stone landmark directing the pilgrim to the beautiful

cave of *Zeni-Arai*-(or coin-washing) *Benten*. This narrow track leads to a spacious cavern in the rock that has existed from ancient times. An image of *Benten* encircled by the serpent is installed within a niche; below the goddess the spring apparently wells out of the solid rock. According to tradition if coins are washed in this deep pool it is an action of good omen, and they will increase: the pure water of the spring being associated with the god of wealth, wherein he is supposed to have washed the contents of his money-bags.

