

EGARA TENJIN

'I have considered the days of old,
the years of ancient times.'

This small shrine, situated near the main road to Kanazawa, is of extreme antiquity, being one of the few relics of the pre-Yoritomo Era; a long and imposing avenue of ancient pines forms the approach, spanned by a large stone *torii*. The exact date of the foundation is unknown; records of it doubtless existed at the time of Yoritomo, when this shrine was of considerable importance and on a much more elaborate scale. In those days three temples were situated in a grove of *umé*, or plum-trees, upon the high terrace of the present shrine; with a vassal building in the enclosure below the hill.

It is recorded that in front of the main gate there was moreover a place called the '*Sekitoriba*,' or barrier, and there all worshippers and visitors to the temple were requested to make a contribution of money by order of the Regent (Hōjō Ujinao): the funds thus raised being employed for the temple repairs. The original document embodying this command is still preserved among the treasures of Egara Tenjin. The dedication is to Sugawara Michizane, a statesman and distinguished scholar of the 9th century: descended from a line of erudite literati, Michizane was the most renowned for his profound literary achievements, and was universally revered as the most brilliant man of the age.

He was also a minister held in high esteem by the Emperors Uda and Daigo: but at the height of his career, owing to the jealousy and intrigues of his enemies, he was unjustly banished in the year 901. Two years later he died in exile at the age of 58.

After the death of Michizane a series of misfortunes befel those who had compassed his downfall. The Imperial Palace was struck by lightning, and the chief agents in the conspiracy, one after another, all mysteriously died: these occurrences were interpreted in the popular mind as the spirit of Michizane wreaking vengeance upon his foes.

Forty-five years after the death of the exiled statesman he was deified under the name of *Tenjin*, and the first shrine was raised to his memory in Kyōto: this resulted in the erection of memorial temples throughout the land. Since that time Tenjin has taken his place amongst the national divinities, and has been universally worshipped as the patron of learning and scholarship.

The present building is considerably affected by the flight of time, but in recent years certain repairs were carried out, including a new roof, on the occasion of a festival to commemorate the one thousand years anniversary of the death of Michizane: a large stone monument recording this fact stands on the left of the ascent. The shrine is embowered in a dense grove of lofty cedars and other ancient trees—on the right a superb old *icho* towers up into the sky, a veritable giant: through the solemn green twilight, upon the mossy sward

“the slanted sunlight weaves

Rich-flickering through the dusk of plenteous leaves

Its ever-tremulous arabesques of gold.”

The *umé* trees of former days have all passed away. The memory of the departed scholar is invariably entwined with these poetic and fragrant blossoms, of which he was an ardent worshipper; for this reason the shrines to his memory are always planted with his favourite flowers, which have come to be universally recognised as the emblem of Tenjin. But on the elaborate roof of the shrine, embellished with fish, lions etc., one finds countless plum-blossoms designed on the grey tiles, in addition to a long black panel with three of these flowers painted in white—the crest of the deified statesman: this device also ornaments the entrance gate to the enclosure. Severe simplicity marks the interior of this little structure. Painted in dull red, with the two black doors marking the inner sanctuary hermetically closed; the sole decoration is a faded gold panel upon which the characters “*Temmangu*” or ‘Shrine of Tenjin’ are inscribed in black.

In former times a long list of treasures were accredited to this shrine, but their numbers have been lamentably decimated by the various conflagrations that have proved fatal to so many priceless possessions of the Kamakura temples. However a few notable exceptions still remain. Within the sanctuary is preserved an ancient statue of Michizane garbed in his official uniform: this effigy moreover is possessed of remarkable features, for it is said to contain all the organs of the body shaped according to the physiological ideas of that period—inside the mouth a little bell is suspended in place of a tongue, and within the head is carved an eleven-headed Kwannon, goddess of mercy. The knees and lower portions of the statue have become scorched and blackened by its presence in various fires.

An interesting incident recorded in connection with this temple is that in February 1213 a samurai of literary tendencies named Shibukawa, being convicted of an offense, was condemned to be executed. In his anguish the doomed man composed ten poems and presented them to the shrine of Egara Tenjin. These being brought to the notice of the *Shōgun* Sanetomo, who was himself a poet of great renown, he was so touched by the beauty and pathos of the poems that a free pardon was accorded to the delinquent.

The residue of the *Temmangu* treasures are kept at the neighbouring shrine of Kamakura-no-miya, as there are no means of preserving them where they rightfully belong. These consist of several paintings of the tutelary deity, and various other antique objects. Amongst them is an ancient record which accounts for the existence of the shrine in the following legend.

In the first year of *Chōji* (Aug. 25, 1104), Kamakura was visited by a mighty tempest. Great winds shrieked; the earth was shaken by the thunder's crashing artillery, while incessant flashes, like hissing serpents, seemed to rend the heavens in twain. When the war of the elements was at its height the black clouds opened, and a scroll, upon which was painted a portrait of Michizane, descended upon the spot where the present temple stands. This demonstration was regarded by the populace as signifying Michizane's desire for a shrine to be constructed in his honour upon this site. Consequently an appeal was made to the Emperor Horikawa (reigned 1087-1107), and he consented to erect the temple, with the mysterious picture enshrined as the chief object of worship. Although obviously of a great

age this ancient painting is well-preserved, and is popularly supposed to be the work of the divinity himself: he is represented as standing upon white clouds arrayed in the court official costume—wide black robes lined with scarlet, a large and elaborate sword, and holding the *shaku*, or bâton of office. It is recorded that during the course of the civil war then being waged, an attacking general (Imagawa Noritada) created great havoc in several temples in Kamakura, amongst which Egara Tenjin was included: the picture was carried away by him to Suruga, (Sept. 1455), but thirty-two years later it was restored to the shrine.

Records also state that Yoritomo, when constructing his residence in Kamakura (the district known as Ōkura) made this temple of Egara Tenjin his tutelary shrine to guard against the entrance of demons—and consequently ill-luck—to the new building. Yoritomo also caused the curious statue, that is still preserved within the little temple, to be sent from Tsukushi, Kiūshū, and installed for the veneration of the faithful. According to the *Azuma Kagami*, in Sept. 1202 a memorial service to Michizane was performed here in honour of the 300th anniversary of his death, by order of the *Shōgun* Yoriyō, eldest son of Yoritomo. Amongst the various personages of exalted rank that did homage at this temple, it is stated that in 1590 Hideyoshi visited Egara Tenjin and caused it to be re-decorated and beautified. During the Tokugawa Era it was customary to renovate the shrine with the material left over when the temple of Hachiman was repaired.