

## THE CAVE OF TAYA

(TAYA-NO-ANA)

About 5 miles from Kamakura in a N.W. direction (one mile beyond Ofuna station) lies the little hamlet of Taya, whose claim to celebrity centres in its great cavern piercing a hill within the precincts of the temple of Jōsenji. The latter is of such ancient origin that all records of its foundation have merged into obscurity; but the famous cave is of comparatively recent construction, its present form having been inaugurated about a century ago.

As the water supply from the ordinary wells of the hamlet proved inadequate for irrigating the fields, an enterprising resident of the neighbourhood—Sato Shichi-zaemon by name—initiated his undertaking with the primary object of utilising the waters of the underground springs; however his labours were extended over a period of 30 years, and resulted in the excavation of a species of imperishable subterranean temple—the ceilings and walls of the numerous corridors and chambers being decorated with the large number of 350 figures. These carvings were executed by amateur artists from the vicinity of this little village, and include numerous animals, dragons, turtles, birds, angels, historical personages etc. in addition to the multitude of disciples, saints and Buddhist divinities.

Within the dark and ghostly chambers of this winding labyrinth two special altars, hewn in the eternal rock, enshrine the goddesses Benten and Kwannon respectively—their sanctuaries adorned with sprays of living flowers that are silhouetted with pallid and spectral effect in the heavy gloom, but dimly illumined by the flickering lamps; the faint scent of incense and the clamorous roar of hidden waters accentuating the illusion of lost souls wandering in the Purgatorial shadows beyond the Styx.

According to another record preserved in the temple, the cave appears to have been in existence in mediæval days—probably on a considerably smaller scale—and is supposed to have originated about the time that Kamakura was devastated by Nitta Yoshisada's army (1333) for purposes of refuge and concealment.

The rock has been penetrated to the depth of 1260 feet, the corridors vary in width from 4 to 12 ft., while the height averages from 6 to 21 ft.—certain of the chambers being the size of a room of 10 *tatami*. (1 *tatami* = a mat 6 × 3 ft.)

The grounds of Jōsenji are especially picturesque in April, when the fine old cherry-trees are in bloom, forming a landmark from afar. The small temple moreover possesses a somewhat unique treasure in the shape of a figure of the Buddha that was brought from Siam some years ago by a priest named Shaku Konen; the Master reclines in a recumbent position and is represented as delivering his last discourse upon earth before the *Nehan* took place, when his soul was translated to the peace and bliss of Nirvāna.

“Then the Blessed One, perceiving that Death was near, uttered these words: ‘He who gives away

shall have real gain. He who subdues himself shall be free of passions. The righteous man casts off sin; and by rooting out lust, bitterness, and illusion, do we reach Nirvâna . . . . .

Decay is inherent in all component things, but the truth will remain forever. Work out your Salvation with diligence !'

This was the last word of the Tathâgata. Then the Tathâgata fell into a deep meditation, and having passed through the four *dhyânas*\*, entered Nirvâra." Carus.




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\* *Dhyâna* = beatific vision, ecstacy.