

ENOSHIMA

“Dense water-walls and clear dusk waterways. . . . The deep, divine, dark dayshine of the sea”

“And the romance of Benten—the Deity of Beauty, the Divinity of Love, the Goddess of Eloquence. Rightly is she likewise named Goddess of the Sea. For is not the Sea most ancient and most excellent of Speakers,—the eternal Poet, chanter of that mystic hymn whose rhythm shakes the world, whose mighty syllables no man may learn”

The little isle of Enoshima—the sacred island dedicated to the sea-goddess Benten, whose name is a talisman conjuring ineffaceable visions of beauty to the memory of the pilgrim—rises from the blue ocean some quarter of a mile from the mainland at Katase.

This small town, although apparently of no great significance, possesses more than one claim to distinction. Upon its shores the drama of the Mongolian Ambassadors was enacted in 1275 and 1279—the second party of envoys having been actually beheaded upon the beach; the nearby temple of Ryukoji is immortalized and has ever been the unceasing goal of the devout, by its association with the saint Nichiren, who so barely escaped martyrdom by the intervention of the celestial thunderbolt within its precincts (1271); moreover this delectable spot forms the mainland link, and principal approach to the “mystic island, so full of strange gods and strange presences, so

wrapped in the web of story and so little a part of the life of today that one almost expects to see it float out to sea and melt into cloud upon the horizon!"

The best route for a pilgrimage to the lovely islet is the main road from Kamakura, which leads through Gokurakuji across the "velvety, soundless, brown stretch of sand" known as Shichirigahama, the Seven Ri Beach, where a turn in the path suddenly reveals a panorama that is beyond description. Before one, glittering in the sunlight, lie the vast waters of Sagami Bay, whose western barrier of the *Hakone peaks*—culminating in purple *Amagi San*, and crowned by the snows of the Queen of Mountains high in the blue vaults of heaven—forms the setting of the "dusky embowered mass floating in haze and sunshine out at sea, the island of the tortoise, Enoshima." The wayfarer would be ill-advised to explore the island—at any rate upon an initial visit—in grey and cloudy weather, for although beautiful at all times and seasons—especially at the sunset hour in winter, and also when flooded by the glamour of the full moon—the mountainous surroundings vanish in the mists and it would be a loss indeed to forego the colouring of this gleaming expanse of sapphire and forget-me-not, flecked with the white sails of the fishing-boats, which is verily "a revelation of the riches and beauties of the world of water that laps around our world of earth."

Like Mont St. Michel in Normandy, and its namesake St. Michel's Mount in Cornwall, Enoshima is only completely surrounded by the waves at high tide; when the waters abate, a stretch of sand is revealed, rendering it possible to cross to the island dryshod. However, as the pine-clad promontory of Katase is approached, it be-

comes apparent that a more permanent link with the mainland is formed by a long bridge of planks, swaying with the waves, and of such light construction that in the many tempests that attack this wild coast, it is a frequent occurrence that more or less of this frail causeway suffers damage and is washed away by the fury of the storm.

The march of progress, that is so fatal to old-world romance, scattering the fabled gods with the clang of its iron-shod feet, is already threatening the abode of Benten. Rumour whispers that the problem is afloat concerning the realization of a new approach, wrought of steel and concrete, permanent, storm-defying and capable of hurling defiance at Neptune in his most ominous moods—an electric car depositing the pilgrims at the very portals of the shrine of the sea-goddess! A propos of which, it may be of interest to mention that the number of visitors to Enoshima (*i.e.*, those who paid the bridge-toll of 3 *sen*) during last year (1920) amounted to the large figure of 400,000; the regular population consisting of 1089 souls; who are distributed amongst 218 dwellings.

In bygone centuries Enoshima seems to have been completely isolated from the coast. According to an ancient record (*Azuma Kagami*, compiled 1180-1266) upon the 15th day of the first month of Kempo (1216), in accordance with a manifestation of the goddess the ocean receded upon either side, leaving a dry path from the island to the mainland, and rendering it possible for worshippers to proceed on foot. This fact excited great interest in the neighbourhood; vast multitudes of people—including a special emissary from the Shōgun Sanetomo at Kamakura—hastened to the spot to verify the fact and

inspect the wonderful causeway for themselves.

Another chronicle of great antiquity (*Taiheiki*, a narrative of events that occurred 1318-1368) records that upon a certain occasion the famous Hōjō Tokimasa (father-in-law, and chief adviser of Yoritomo) repaired to Enoshima to worship and propitiate the deity in order to make special intercession for the prosperity of his descendants. During the night of the 21st day of the period of prayer and fasting, the vision of a heavenly being appeared to Tokimasa, informing him that as in a former existence he had been a priest of Hakone famed for his great piety, as a reward he had been reborn into this world, and his descendants would become rulers of the land. This prophecy was amply fulfilled, Tokimasa becoming founder of the Hōjō dynasty, that ruled Japan for period of over 130 years (1199-1333). After these words the celestial apparition assumed the shape of a huge dragon and disappeared into the sea, leaving behind her, as a sign and token, three scales, which became the well-known crest of the house of Hōjō!

As Enoshima is approached from the long bridge "the details of the little town define delightfully through the faint sea-haze, curved bluish sweeps of fantastic roofs, angles of airy balconies, high-peaked curious gables, all above a fluttering of queerly shaped banners covered with mysterious lettering." The great bronze *torii*, ornamented with quaint carvings of waves and tortoises, forms the island gate—the "ever-open portal of the Sea City"—from whence begins the ascent that culminates in the ancient temple of Benten: a path trodden and sanctified by the feet of a myriad stream of pilgrims and worshippers for such countless centuries—a procession extending

beyond the earliest annals of recorded eras into the vague mists of antiquity.

The one narrow street of this miniature sea-city, climbing steeply to the groves above, is thickly lined on either side with hostleries and diminutive shops—above which wave the picturesque line of blue banner-shaped advertisements, giving the impression of an avenue of fluttering blue wings, “fanned by the lifting pinions of the wind.” These emporiums bear a strong family likeness to each other, and abound with every description of article that can be carried away as a *miyage*, or souvenir of the island; and which the visitor is entreated to purchase and bear off in triumph to the expectant circle of relatives and friends at home. Beads of all colours; paper-weights and balls of tinted stones; every species of toy for the little one; the ever popular hair-ornaments; rings, pins, necklaces, brooches, all the varied embellishments devised by man’s ingenuity for the adornment of the human race abound on every side, and are mostly constructed of shells: moreover the dimly-lighted shop-interiors are “opalescent with things nacreous,” and multitudes of small objects gleam with a soft iridescence of rainbow hues from the receptacles and shelves; these are representations of divers shapes and forms—storks, crabs, combs, pipes, lanterns, figures of gods, doves, bees, beetles, frogs, whole schools of fish, turtles, foxes, rabbits, monkeys, badgers—indeed manifold specimens of beasts, birds and fishes, as well as of the reptile and insect kingdoms, are skilfully carved in mother-of-pearl and sold for an infinitesimal price. For Enoshima, as well as being the domain of shells—befitting to its sea-goddess—is also the “City of Mother-of-Pearl.”

Shells abound everywhere, of every colour, size and shape: they "lie heaped on doorstep and window and wall—shells as white and lustrous as bridal moons; shells dazzling and whorled as the snow-queen's crown; shells rosy, thick, thousands upon thousands, like shed petals piled together, as if all the cherry blossoms of the spring had been blown out to Enoshima on the saving breeze, and touched to immortality, as they fell on the brown strand of Benten's magic island. Here at my feet are deep, huge nautilus shells like hollow pearls fitted with moonlight; solemn conch shells, that have slept under brown seaweed in autumn starlight, and have caught the rhymed chant of the waves on the shore; open shells of green and grey mother-of-pearl, with shifting crimson gleams on the vigorous edge turned in like an ear, where five round holes pierce through in mystic symmetry, as if the sea-king's daughter had been trying her earrings there; and little shells in myriads, thick as the Empress' cherry blossoms in spring; there are showers of spun glass, as sharp and silvery as moonbeams on ice—the glass ropes of the beautiful *Hyalonema* sponges; there are huge tortoise shields, measuring four and five feet across; there are sprays of shells like lilies-of-the-valley dipped in milk, sea-foam lilies—born of a kiss where the sun met the wave."*

This quaint street of shells and trophies of the deep culminates at another of the chain of *torii* that extends through Katase—this 'gateway of the silent gods' being of green moss-stained stone. From this point the irregular rock-hewn ascents rise to the summit of the

* This charming description of the shells of Enoshima was written by Mrs. Hugh Fraser.

island: immediately facing the *torii*, broad flights of steep stone steps give access to the lowest of the three temples of the sea-goddess, wherein Benten reigns, supreme but invisible. Lying one above another upon lofty terraces in the pillared solemnity of ancient forest-trees, this three-fold shrine impresses the pilgrim with a sense of sadness and desolation. No statue of the beautiful deity appears, to greet her worshippers with kindly smiles—bare and melancholy are her altars. All decoration, images and gay adornment have been banished by the depressing hand of the iconoclast: all that is visible being the austere symbols of the Shinto faith—the mirror, typifying the human soul, and the clusters of pure white *gohei* gently rustling in the sea-breezes that penetrate the thick screen of foliage, and whisper around the shrine “like sighs from ghosts of perished hours.” What magic can lurk within the mysteries of the mirror to inspire travellers along the highways and byways of life with hope and confidence in the future, or solace in the present? “The face of the Buddha is as the face of a friend—serene, merciful, gracious to poor humanity; but in the mirror of Shinto, man finds only his own travel-stained reflection—the picture of that self which must be left behind before he can enter into peace.”

According to an early record, upon the 5th day of the 4th month of the period *Jishō* (1180) the famous priest, friend and counsellor of Yoritomo, Mongaku Shōnin, proceeded to Enoshima, in order to spend three weeks in prayer and fasting and the performance of austerities. The holy man was accompanied by Yoritomo, and upon that occasion mystical rites in honour of Benten took place. However, popular tradition associates

the deity with her island fastness from considerably earlier times. Legend avers that in the year 552 this part of the coast was shaken by a series of great earthquakes, when the beautiful goddess Benten descended from heaven in clouds of celestial radiance to dwell upon an islet that had suddenly appeared in the sea; the ostensible reason for this apparition being the subjugation of the poisonous dragon who was preying upon the unfortunate inhabitants of Katase, and who made his lair within the depths of the mighty cavern below.

Poised upon the edge of the cliff upon either side of this lowest sanctuary are two stones of fabulous antiquity, and described in ancient records. The weird mass crowning the abyss upon the left is known as the *Gama-ishi* or the Toadstone. According to the legend, an old-world priest was engaged in prayer upon that spot, when a large toad appeared, disturbing his devotions; so by virtue of his supplication the intruding reptile was petrified into a block of stone, and remains as a warning to those who would trifle with matters sacred to the other world. It is supposed to bear a resemblance to a giant frog, but in former years the head of the monster became loosened, and disappeared.

Surrounded by a grove of bushes upon the opposite bank stands the *Fuku-ishi*, or "Stone of Good Luck," and whoever may be fortunate enough to find any article lying in its vicinity may take it as a sign that he will become the possessor of wealth! It is said that the blind man *Sugiyama Kengyō*—celebrated as the originator of a school of *hari* (acupuncture*)—in his student days, while still poor and obscure and discouraged at his lack

of success, made a pilgrimage to the holy island of Enoshima for a period of fasting and prayer. When his austerities were terminated the blind student stumbled against the stone, to discover—for his sight was momentarily restored by miraculous means—a needle glittering in the sand: then darkness again descended upon him. In after years this man became famous as the founder of a school of *hari* which still exists at the present day: moreover he was honoured by a summons to the sick bed of the highest in the land, the reigning Shōgun, and is said to have relieved his sufferings by skilled application of the same needle so mysteriously revealed to him at the Fuku-ishi. When the ruler, in gratitude, desired to reward Sugiyama for his ministrations, the blind man requested that a donation should be bestowed upon the temple of Benten at Enoshima, as from thence had emanated all his good luck. A large tablet of ornamental stone in the vicinity of the *Fuku-ishi* is inscribed with Chinese characters and bears a detailed history of the career of Sugiyama Kengyo.

From the *torii* below, two ways are available to ascend over the crest to the Dragon's Cave, which penetrates the sheer rocky precipice upon the southern flank of the island. The western path is the more beautiful, the woodland grove remaining as in happier days, unprofaned by the despoiling hand of man, and leading beneath the heavy shade of overarching trees—with

* Acupuncture is one of the three great remedies practised in the far East, the other two being the massage and the moxa. The skin is perforated to the depth of about half an inch with fine needles of gold, silver, or steel by means of a tiny mallet—the number of perforations ranging from 1 to 20. The practice of *hari* is a very ancient custom, having been brought over to Japan from China before the dawn of history. (Chamberlain).

visions of the gentian-blue wavelets dancing between the leaves—to a junction with the eastern footway, from whence one ascends to the eminence whereon the third and chief shrine is situated. The same atmosphere of desertion and aloofness pervades the present-day aspect of each of the Benten temples. The same stone lanterns and graven monuments, darkened by time and velveted with moss, lie in the dusky shadows and green dimness of solemn forest trees: however in this uppermost shrine an unexpected and desolating feature has appeared in the shape of a row of invading souvenir-shops, which boldly encroach upon the very courts of “Benten’s desecrated home.”

Facing the temple steps is a small *haiden*, or place of prayer, where the pilgrims make their offerings and bow the head in supplication to the deity. The ceiling is arranged in caissons; the centre being decorated with an ancient and curious painting of a large tortoise (by the celebrated artist Hōitsu) which is said to look in eight directions—another name for the Benten temple being *Kinkisan*, or “Hill of the Golden Tortoise.” Legend relates that at one time the cave below was inhabited by a giant turtle: it is moreover chronicled that in bygone centuries the great cavern was known as the “Golden Cave” from whence gold and copper ores seem to have been obtained—the process of separation from sand and alloy being effected upon the mainland at the spot known as *Kanearaisawa*, or “Metal-washing pond.” Hence the possible origin of the “Golden Tortoise.”

Upon a rock to the right of the temple, is the seated figure of a man—a bronze statue that has been decorated by the salt breezes with an æsthetic hue of green. This

work of art represents *Yamada Kengyo*, the originator of a school of music (*koto*) in Japan: the effigy was erected to his memory by a group of followers and musical adherents in 1916, to celebrate the centenary of his death.

In close proximity to the temple, a tea-house is perched above the precipice, open to the sea and sun, and from thence flights of worn, uneven, and somewhat perilous steps steeply descend to the rocks below. The view from this inn, which hangs like a sea-bird's nest high on the face the cliff, is enchanting. "What a sea! The breadth and the blue of it! From this lofty place the horizon is so distant that it almost ceases to be; the world is a sapphire globe endomed in sunshot crystal: earth seems an accident, Enoshima a seaweed freak that has come up to breathe!" An appealing feature of this far-flung sea-picture is the whirring of the winged denizens of the Dragon's Cave—the flocks of tame doves which nest in the glooms of the great cavern nearby, and gaily circle and hover in the soft blue atmosphere—their iridescent plumage flashing in the sunlight like the gems of the sea-kingdom's princess. Lured by a promise of plenty from the inn, these "small almoners of Heaven" find coigns of vantage in the boughs of the great surrounding pine-trees—serenading with soft music, and watching their opportunity with alert and eager eye, alight to daintily refresh themselves with any stray remnants unneeded by the tea-house guests.

By carefully negotiating the hazardous descent cut in the sheer face of the cliff, one lands upon the region of rocks and weedy pools below; and to those mortals who are under the sway of the sea-spell, this rocky floor of Enoshima is a never-ceasing wonder and delight. Surely

a spot in days of old

“ Ou l'on sacrifia, dit-on
Au dieu Neptune.”

Ancient dealers in magic and the arts of necromancy aver that there exists a secret road to the soul in all the sons of men—an elemental affinity which is the veiled door to the inner life: some are children of air, some of fire, some of earth, others of water. And to those of us who at birth, or in former aeons, were dowered by the fairy godmother with brine in the blood and a wave in the heart—whose natures are dominated by the clarion music of the sea, this corner of the earth will make a special appeal, with the great breakers eternally surging and fretting against the rocks and rushing to one's feet “to perish in a mist of pearl.” But however exquisite the scene may be in fine weather, with the pure turquoise of the heavens mirrored in the blue tranquillity below, it becomes almost more unforgettable and exhilarating upon rough and stormy days—when the sea-gods let loose their fury and hurl the huge billows to crash and thunder in unrestrained rage upon the rocky barriers, crowned with their snowy coronals of spray: while oceanward, far as the sight can reach, “the sea-horses sweep magnificently, whirling white foam about their green flanks and tossing on high their manes of rainbow gold, dazzling white and multitudinous.”

Immediately below lies a deep whirl-pool almost enclosed by a girdle of sharp rocks, into which the breakers churn and foam incessantly—this is *Chigo-ga-fuchi*, or the “Maiden's Pool,” concerning which a legend of love and death is related in ancient books. Long,

long, ago, a priest of Kenchōji, known as *Yikiu*, repaired to the sacred isle of Enoshima for the purpose of devoting one hundred days to prayer, worship, and the practice of austerities: as fate decreed, a *chigo*, or maiden acolyte, of another Kamakura temple made a similar pilgrimage at the same time. Her name was *Shiragiku*, or White Chrysanthemum. They met: the maiden's beauty cast a fatal spell upon the susceptible divine, causing him to forget his priestly vows and to pursue his prey with amorous intent. She managed to elude his attentions for a time, but as his resolution showed no symptoms of abating, poor White Chrysanthemum solved the problems of love and life by casting herself into the cruel rocks of the whirlpool. On her last death-journey she left a poem with the ferryman, to be delivered in case one should come in pursuit. One did come in pursuit. The too-persistent lover, on learning the doom of his hapless victim, determined to accompany her soul into the shades of those dim regions from whence no man returneth: following in the beloved foot-steps, he also leaped into the seething waters. Hence the tragedy of *Chigo-ga-fuchi*, the "Maiden's Pool."

A climb along the shelving rocks brings the wayfarer to another frail structure of wooden scaffolding, winding around a promontory of the cliff into the great cave, whose floor is almost level with the sea at high-tide, and up whose dusky echoing aisles the waves rush with sonorous roar and clamour, breaking against their rocky confines in hissing drifts of spray. So frequently does this plank approach suffer damage at the rough onslaughts of Neptune, that recently a stairway has been cut in the cliff leading to a tunnel above in connection



Cave of the Dragon, Enoshima,

with the cavern, thus enabling the incessant stream of visitors and pilgrims to conduct their explorations unmolested, and in defiance of the menaces of the angry deep.

The entrance of the Dragon's Cave is said to be 30 feet in height, and pierces the heart of the rock to the depth of some 380 feet. According to ancient chronicles, at the time of the Kamakura era the cave of Enoshima was one of the sever. holy places from whence it was customary to supplicate the gods for rain in times of drought. A visit to this cavern, so rich in legend, and the goal and destination of worshippers from time immemorial, is always a weird and mystifying experience. As one penetrates farther and farther into the gloom, gleams of soft light reveal an altar presided over by a shadowy priest, with attendant silhouettes: from here candles are provided, by whose flicker the long black corridors are gropingly explored. Here and there the forms of dusky brine-encrusted gods are carved in the black walls of rock: "grey and solemn, buried in eternal darkness near the springs of things—feeling the earthquake rive its way to the light through the heart of the world, hearing the thud of breakers upon the outer wall of their island castle." Before their shrines burn with steady flame the candles deposited by the hand of faith—yellow points of fire illuminating the heavy gloom "like good deeds in a naughty world"—the whole effect conveying an indescribably mystic and unreal impression, as though the invader from the outer world were groping in "a mortuary pit, some subterranean burial place of dead gods." The labyrinth forl's in the centre; the lateral chambers being supposed to represent the wings of the

dragon. Occasionally the rushing sound of hidden waters, descending from above, is heard with weird effect: gradually the long passage narrows until it culminates in the last twist of the dragon's tail, wherein is another dark shrine, tenanted by a dusky silhouetted image—the mysterious deity who is supposed to personify the Ultimate Reality of the Universe, Dainichi Nyorai.

According to tradition the uttermost ends of this historic cavern are still veiled in mystery, and are connected with the fiery heart of distant Fuji. In fact a legend is extant concerning a man of ancient days named *Nitan-no-shiro*, who entered a cave upon the western side of the mountain, pursuing his subterranean course until he finally emerged from the cave of Enoshima: but concerning the details of this hazardous and ghostly journey—which must have borne a strong resemblance to the wanderings of disembodied spirits in the underworld—nothing remains and tradition is silent.

Alas, alas! that roses should have thorns, and silver fountains mud; that clouds and eclipses should stain both moon and sun. In a world of imperfections every picture must have its reverse side, and a sad surprise awaits the pilgrim who climbs to Benten's rocky heights after an interim of years. The beautiful forest-shaded crest of Enoshima—in former times so remote, so fraught with the dim magic of the past and the mystic influences of the calm-eyed immortals as to seem part of more ethereal regions than the sordid elements of this commercial planet—has suffered change and melancholy desecration at the devastating hands of worshippers of that hideous and all-penetrating god, the Mammon of unrighteousness. Where formerly reigned peace, solitude

and hushed tranquillity, the ancient trees have been hewn down, the shadowy groves and ferny glades hacked away, and the rocks relentlessly cut and levelled by ruthless invaders to give place to an incredible array of restaurants, inns, shops and emporiums wherein lie heaped formidable battalions of the island souvenirs—flanked by long long rows of the all-pervading and unescapable picture-postcard! Verily hath it been said “Where nature is most puissant to charm, there man is mightiest to destroy.”

Farewell, beautiful Enoshima! As we recede and slowly wend our way across the frail bridge back to the busy world, the western mountains gradually assume their twilight vestment; from the sea creeps a faint blue haze, like a fairy veil of powdered turquoise, which clings to their flanks, rendering their purple heights immeasurably distant and remote. Suddenly the cloud-gates of the west open, flooding the world with a radiance of splendour indescribable. Benten’s magic isle, with her crown of sun-flamed foliage, is dyed in sunset gems of carmine, dazzling orange and molten amethyst: her bases fretted by a foam of golden sparks, as a mirage she seems to hover between earth and heaven—like an enchanted boat, jewel-laden, and putting off to sea in an ocean of shimmering gold and liquid rose-leaves. The glory of the cloud-colours and mirrored in the pure snows of Fuji, staining her white shroud with roseate tints that recall old cathedrals of the West: the death-rites of a perfect day are flaming in this feast of pageantry, which makes one wonder with old Isaac Newton, “Lord, what raptures hast thou provided for thy saints in heaven, when such joys are given to naughty men below!”

Farewell! farewell! Despite the havoc of the despoiler, to the heart of the faithful pilgrim this sacred isle will ever be the land of the gods enshined in beauty and loveliness immortal—oblivious to the inevitable lament: “Now all is changed—all save the changeless things: The mountains, and the waters, and the sky.”

