

JŌMYŌJI

A few paces beyond the little bridge of Hōkokuji brings the pilgrim to a monument of exceeding antiquity. This is a '*gebatō*,' which in past times was a sign to mounted worshippers that they are approaching holy ground, and at this point their steeds must be left behind. A long avenue—from which many of the gnarled old pines have passed away, leads to a short flight of steps and a thatched gate, from whence one emerges into the precincts of all that remains of the once great and famous monastery of Jōmyōji.

Although now of somewhat less than ordinary exterior, and little suggestive of its ancient glories, in bygone days Jōmyōji was one of the five most prominent temples of Kamakura, ranking in importance with the great foundations of Kenchōji and Enkakuji. In those palmy days there were seven main edifices with numerous satellites; a specially fine bell-tower, and many other attributes, which alas, have gradually shrunk to the little measure of a single lowly building supported by a solitary offshoot.

Founded by Ashikaga Yoshikane in the year 1138, and established as one of the five monasteries in Kamakura of the Rinzai sect of Buddhism, in those remote times the temple was known as Gokurakuji; but in the year 1321, by Imperial permission, the name was changed



The *Gebatō* of Jōmyōji ; a sign to mounted worshippers that they are approaching holy ground, and the precincts must be entered on foot.

in honour of the founder, who was the ancestor of the first Ashikaga *Shōgun*, and whose posthumous name was Jōmyōji.

The era of its prosperity only lasted for a period of somewhat over two centuries: then it was stricken by the relentless enemy that has reduced to a heap of ashes so many priceless structures all over Japan, and the knell of its decay was sounded.

Twice destroyed by fire and twice rebuilt, the temple never recovered from these calamities: according to records, towards the end of the 15th century Jōmyōji had greatly declined, and even in those early days remained but a shadow of its former splendour. Although the views of the surrounding mountains and densely wooded landscape are picturesque, the actual enclosure of this temple many strike the visitor as being commonplace, and somewhat unattractive: however, in spite of the deterioration that the flight of centuries has wrought upon this ancient foundation, much still remains that may interest those to whom the relics of bygone ages make any appeal.

The present temple stands upon the site of the guest-room of former times: the interior is plain, but cheerful and inviting; the only note of colour being some sprays of painted flowers that decorate the panels.

The two chief treasures in the central division of the main altar are both of historical interest and extreme antiquity. The large statue of Buddha is supposed to have been the gift of Sanetomo, younger son of Yoritomo; beside it stands an ancient gilded figure of Amida. This latter image is said to have been carved in sandalwood by the Chinese sculptor Chinwakei, and was one

of the sacred possessions of Masako, wife of Yoritomo, until she presented it to this temple. It is recorded that in a dream the Inari of Okura (this part of Kamakura) appeared to Sanetomo in the guise of a venerable man, advising the *Shōgun* to reestablish the temple of Gokurakuji, as Jōmyōji was then called. The work was begun in 1212 and completed the next year, when Sanetomo and his mother marked the occasion by the presentation of the images.

The niche to the right is occupied by a large wooden statue of skilled workmanship, representing the celebrated priest who first officiated at this temple, Gyōyu: in front of this work are two smaller figures of priests. The division on the left contains, amongst other objects, a small statue of Kamatari, the sponsor of Kamakura, and who according to the claim of the Jōmyōji authorities is said to have buried his *kama* on the hill near this temple; however the spot where the *kama* was deposited is generally supposed to have been the hill called *Daijin-yama*, behind the shrine of Hachiman.

A most interesting possession is a large coloured map or chart of Jōmyōji at the height of its prosperity: by its aid the imaginative visitor can gaze down the dim vistas of departed centuries and conjure up a vision of what the halcyon days of this great monastery must have been, when the now deserted rice-fields were gay with stately edifices, lofty trees, beautiful gardens, and busy throngs of priests and worshippers.

One of the chief treasures of Jomyoji is preserved in a small detached shrine to the right of the temple entrance. A large case is unlocked, revealing a curious and striking effigy of Kōjin: an avenging deity—fierce

and bellicose of aspect and possessed of mighty strength, who is supposed to exercise the powers of punishing wickedness and crime. Equipped for that purpose with three faces to facilitate the detection of delinquents, this truculent god is moreover provided with three pairs of hands wherewith to control his weapons and effectively compass the doom of the guilty: the two upper hands hold respectively a red and white disk representing the sun and moon, and illustrating the wide sphere of his supernatural activities.

Regarding this figure tradition relates the following:—Yoshikane, founder of the temple, was the possessor of two pictures of the gods Kojin and Fudo, painted by the famous Kobo Daishi. In the first month of the year, 1198, Yoshikane dreamed that the two deities became endowed with animation and descended from their frames; so to commemorate this dream he commissioned Unkei to fashion two effigies of Kojin and Fudo exactly as they appeared upon that occasion. The great sculptor set about his work in a reverent spirit, it being recorded that each time the wood was incised he accompanied the labour of his chisel with fervent prayers: at the end of the same year both statues were completed. The following year Yoritomo died. Masako marked the demise of her lord and master by becoming a nun: when her hair was cut off she caused part of this symbol of her retirement from the stage of life to be buried in the temple enclosure of Jomyoji—and above this relic a shrine was erected wherein were installed the statues of Kojin and Fudo.

Adjoining this valuable memento of the Yoritomo Era is an overgrown mossy path leading up to a shrine

of very small proportions. Although of such insignificant appearance this shrine of the Fox-god Inari is of exceedingly remote foundation, and was dedicated to the worthy to whom Kamakura owes its name—Kamatarī: indeed a legend is extant to the effect that when the latter went forth on his nocturnal sortie in accordance with the dream, a mysterious white fox appeared, leading the way to the spot where the *kama* was to be deposited! In the vicinity of the little shrine is pointed out a rocky cave which is supposed to be the lair of the phantom fox; moreover tradition asserts that whenever this spectral animal makes an appearance it invariably heralds some species of good fortune for the temple.

Behind the main building is a miniature lake intersected by a rustic bridge. Just above, upon the hill a curious old pine will be observed—although not of large size, it is of weird shape and of a great age: since recently however, the burden of its years seems to be telling upon the strange clawlike branches, and unhappily its decay appears to be impending. Beyond this small landscape garden lies the cemetery, the centrepiece of which is the beautiful old grey monument which marks the resting-place of the founder of Jomyoji; the shape of the tomb being typical of the Ashikaga Era.

On descending from the graveyard, a footway to the right leads to a steep path. A multitude of stone steps ascend through the green twilight of foliage, and ultimately land the enterprising pilgrim upon a small enclosed level surrounded by ancient trees and tall bamboos so thickly as to preclude any distant view. The building that confronts one is called '*Komanosha*,' it formerly

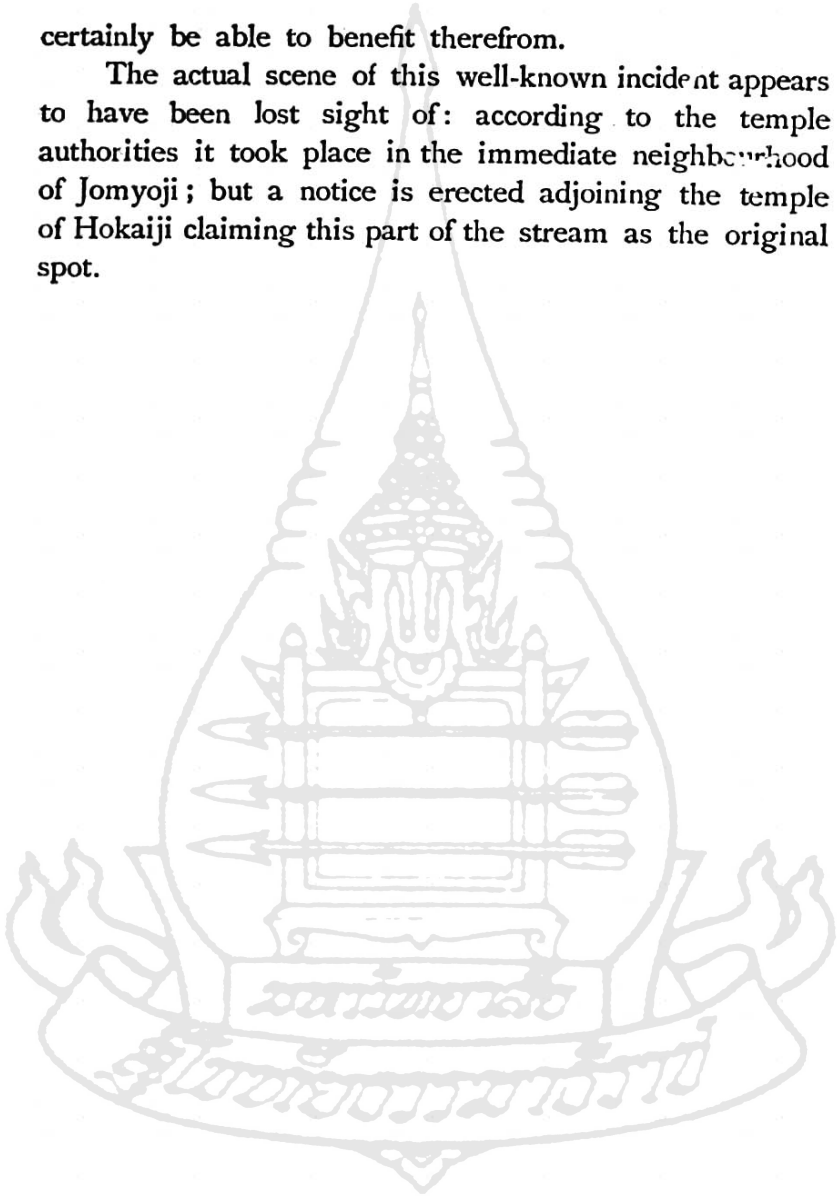
belonged to Jomyoji, however at present the object of this small structure has become obscured by the mists of time—it is now detached, and is vaguely designated as the village shrine: when its festival days recur the whole neighbourhood is *en fête*, and gaily decorated with lanterns and fluttering banners.

Beside the entrance to Jomyoji the Namerigawa ripples down to the sea in its rocky bed. Although so small, yet this stream is the chief river of Kamakura, and moreover is rendered historical by an incident concerning it which is known to every man, woman and child of Japanese birth.

In ancient days there lived a magistrate of Kamakura named Aoto Fujitsuna, a man of lofty character and noted for his wisdom and strict integrity. He exercised his judicial talents under two of the Hojo Regents, and one evening on returning from his duties at the Regency Office, he accidentally let fall some small pieces of copper money into the stream. Determined that government funds, however trifling, should not be allowed to disappear in this manner, Fujitsuna at once procured pine-torches and enlisted the services of assistants, so that the coins were all successfully recovered. But as the cost of retrieving them naturally far exceeded the slight value of what was lost, the people criticised the worthy magistrate for his zeal in what seemed to be a wasteful and senseless proceeding. However Fujitsuna, disgusted at their ignorance, indignantly represented that the coins if left in the river-bed would be permanently useless, whereas the money expended upon the torches and rewards to the assistants went into the pockets of the tradespeople, who would

certainly be able to benefit therefrom.

The actual scene of this well-known incident appears to have been lost sight of: according to the temple authorities it took place in the immediate neighbourhood of Jomyoji; but a notice is erected adjoining the temple of Hokaiji claiming this part of the stream as the original spot.





The Hoyake, or Cheek branded Amida.

From the dim recesses of its sanctum the large spiked aureole glimmers with reflected lustre from the tapers lit before it; the gleaming eyes, fashioned of jade, seem to flash in a weird and threatening manner upon the invaders of its peace and solitude.