

## KŌSOKUJI

THE TEMPLE OF THE CHEEK-BRANDED AMIDA

“ A tale, a tale—  
Woven on elfin looms of Time  
From living pageants of the Past.  
When all the world was young.”

About ten *chō* (a little over half a mile) beyond Jōmyōji on the Kanazawa high road is the small village of Junisō. The chief feature of this insignificant cluster of farmers' cottages is the temple of Kōsokuji, wherein is enshrined a famous statue of great antiquity, known as the '*Hōyake*' or 'Cheek-branded Amida.'

Founded in the 13th century, the building was gradually falling into decay, when, in a severe storm some sixty years ago the old temple was completely wrecked by the violence of the typhoon: however shortly afterwards it was rebuilt, various, of the original timbers being retrieved from the *débris* and used in the reconstruction. Above the entrance hangs a valued symbol of Imperial patronage—the ancient tablet whereon the name Kōsokuji was inscribed by the Emperor Go-Daigo, (1318–1339). The interior is inviting and quite attractive, with carvings painted in gay colours: before the sanctuary is suspended an elaborate gilt canopy with long glittering pendants.

At the rear, an unexpected object reposes upon a side-altar in the shape of a gigantic head of the Buddha, black with age, and which is said to be a memento of

the Kamakura Era. According to the story, to commemorate the third anniversary of Yoritomo's death, his widow Masako caused a huge statue of Buddha to be constructed, and installed within a temple erected for that purpose: however at a later date the building caught fire and was entirely consumed. The body of the sacred figure shared the same fate, but the head was rescued from the flames and is venerated to-day as a relic of those remote times. Another side-altar is embellished with an excellent and convincing effigy of the first priest and founder of this temple—the famous Ippen Shonin (p. 117) who was also the spiritual founder of Yugyo-dera, the temple of the wandering priests at Fujisawa. Many stories and legends are related regarding this celebrated priest. It is recorded that on one occasion he made a pilgrimage to the *Gongen of Kumano*, and there practised rigid austerities for the space of one hundred days. At the end of his penance the holy man implored the Almighty that a sign might be granted to prove his ministrations had found favour in the sight of heaven. That night in a dream the sacred figure of Amida appeared in a luminous vapour near the bedside of the sleeping priest, offering him with extended hand a small paper. On awakening, Ippen Shonin found the paper of his dream lying beside his pillow, and inscribed with the words "*Namu Amida Butsu*"—the formula that has since been so fervently declaimed by countless numbers of pious enthusiasts. Thereupon in joy and triumph the priest bore his precious message on a proselytising tour throughout the land, by its virtue gaining large numbers of converts to the faith.

The main altar is simplicity itself. A gilt figure of

the Buddha keeps guard before the locked doors of the sanctuary wherein is enshrined the holy treasure of the temple—the *Hōyake Amida*, and to which no lesser functionary than the head-priest has sole access. 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.

The sacred figure is three feet in height. With one hand uplifted as though in benison, this venerable and impressive statue has stood upon the petals of its tarnished lotus for the long space of seven centuries: a fine work of art, it is said to be one of the masterpieces of Unkei, and to which a quaint and unusual legend is attached.

An early record of Kamakura relates the following tradition.

In the days of the Emperor Juntoku (1211–1242) a sculptor called Unkei was practising his art in Kyoto. His skill in carving sacred images achieved such fame that the *Shōgun* Sanetomo summoned him to Kamakura, in order that the temples and shrines of the military capital might benefit by his genius.

It happened that amongst the ladies residing in Kamakura was one Machi-no-Tsubone, well-known for her piety and spiritual proclivities. On the arrival of the great sculptor, this lady specially requested him to carve a figure of Amida-Nyorai (a personification of the ultimate reality of the universe—'Nyorai' signifies benevolence and love), to install as the chief object of worship in her private shrine: moreover she desired the

artist to complete the work within the space of forty-eight days, to commemorate the forty-eight desires of Amida for the rescue and salvation of mankind. The figure of the divinity was duly executed within the appointed time, to the great satisfaction of the lady Machi; the new acquisition was duly deposited in her shrine with all appropriate offerings of flowers and incense.

Now amongst the inmates of this lady's household was a priest of low grade named Manzai: this man, although of pious tendencies, was apparently not without his weak points.

Some time after the carving of the image, the inmates of households frequented by this priest began to miss certain of their possessions; gradually an insidious tongue circulated the report that the disappearance of these articles was connected with the ministrations of Manzai. These scandalous rumours at last assumed such proportions that the neighbours' indignation reached a climax—the priest was arrested, and by order of his incensed patron was placed in confinement during her absence, as urgent business compelled her immediate departure for a place called Shibuya.

After his mistress had set out the priest was seized, and as a mark of the public horror at his supposed crime, he was branded with a heated iron upon the left cheek. Whilst Manzai was undergoing this torture he cried in a loud voice to the compassionate Amida to preserve his servant from the hand of the enemy. Lo! a miracle was wrought! All traces of the seared flesh immediately disappeared, leaving the cheek of the outraged priest smooth and immaculate as before. Astounded at his non-success, the assailant repeated his cruel action;

each time pressing the hot iron deeper into his victim's face—but as before, after each impression the scar miraculously vanished as though by magic.

That night the lady Machi had a strange dream. A vision of her statue of Amida appeared, and sorrowfully indicated his left cheek, as though in amazement at having been accorded such persecution. On awakening Machi-no-Tsubone experienced such alarm and consternation that she decided to immediately return to Kamakura. Her first action on arrival was to purify herself with water and fresh apparel and to repair to her shrine.

There by the light of a candle she gazed upon the holy features of the Amida, and was horrified to discover the verification of her dream. Not only was the brand deeply impressed upon the sacred countenance but a thin stream of blood was flowing from the wound! From the priest she realised what had taken place; the pitiful Amida had miraculously substituted himself for his falsely-accused servant and faithful worshipper.

In deep repentance for her hasty action in crediting the priest's traducers, and not wishing evidence of this ruthless deed to go down to posterity, Machi consulted with another priestly adviser; a sculptor from the part of Kamakura called *Kame-ga-yatsu* was summoned to repair the statue, but his efforts proved of no avail. After all traces had been obliterated and fresh gilding applied, the mark of the brand invariably re-appeared: when the sculptor had failed in twenty-one attempts he abandoned the undertaking, and the fame of the statue was spread abroad through the succeeding centuries, even at the present day being known and venerated as the '*Hōyake*' or 'Cheek-branded Amida.'

The narrative states that Manzai—naturally preferring to eschew a neighbourhood connected with such painful experiences—migrated to a temple at Ōiso, where he spent the remainder of his life in the practice of piety and good works, dying in the odour of unimpeached sanctity at a ripe old age. As for the lady Machi-no-Tsubone, she embraced religion and became a nun, assuming the name of *Hōami* in commemoration of this incident (*Ho*=cheek, *Amida*=the Buddha). It is moreover recorded that on Sept. 26th of the year 1251 at the age of 73 she passed away in the attitude of prayer, kneeling before her beloved figure of the *Hōyake Amida*.

The celebrated poet Fujiwara Tamesuke (p. 167) evinced such deep interest in this strange occurrence, that he wrote a detailed account of it, the manuscript being embellished with profuse and graphic illustrations in colour by a famous contemporary painter of the thirteenth century named Tosa Mitsuoki. This valuable work is enrolled as a National Treasure and is carefully preserved at the temple as a history of the miraculous event: it is in the form of two lengthy *makimono* or scrolls, mounted on brocade with crystal rollers—each scroll being deposited in a separate lacquer case.

Near the main exist of the temple is a small wooden shrine wherein is preserved a venerable stone image of Jizo. This is the '*Shioname*' or 'Salt-tasting' Jizo—an object of great antiquity and some renown, being specially described in a primitive record of Kamakura. A benign and compassionate expression is still distinguishable upon the crumbling features of the divinity: in earlier days he stood beside the high road to Kanazawa, but has been rescued from further vicissitudes and

tricks of naughty men to placidly end his days under the protection of Kōsokuji.

This somewhat enigmatical name was conferred upon the image from the fact that the purveyors of salt from Ōmutsūra, near Kanazawa, on their way to Kamakura made it an invariable custom to offer a sample of their wares to the compassionate deity as they passed, with a view to ensuring good luck in their business. Originally a luminous halo was said to surround the saint's head; but on one sad occasion a miscreant merchant was returning home, and incensed that the god had not presided over his transactions with more auspicious effect, vented his wrath upon the defenceless effigy; overthrowing it, and with sacriligious hand cramming the Jizo's mouth with salt! After this indignity the aureole is, not unnaturally, said to have disappeared; and was beheld no more by the rough traffickers of those regions.

