

ZUISENJI

“Beauty and solitude are the shepherd-kings of the imagination—to compel our wandering memories, our thoughts, our dreams.”

This famous old temple stands back from the Kanazawa road some distance beyond Daito-no-miya; the narrow road leading to it intersects the pine avenue of Egara Tenjin. Formerly ranking second of the ten leading monasteries in Eastern Japan of the Rinzai Sect of Buddhism, it was founded in 1327 by Ashikaga Motouji, and was distinguished by becoming identified with the Ashikaga *Shōguns*.

The approach gradually ascends between high grassy banks until the thatched gate is reached which marks the temple enclosure: the grounds are beautiful with lawns and flowers, rocks and caves, and many interesting old trees. The fragrant foliage of an exceptionally large eucalyptus towers in front of the temple, the seed of which was brought from Australia in 1878. The small cavern behind the lake contained the statue of Benten and was known as the Angel's cave: beyond this, on the extreme left steps are hewn in the mossy rock—this route gradually ascends through charming environment to the top of the mountain: from its winding nature the path is called the *Fuhachi Mawari*, or ‘Eighteen Curves.’ In olden times the distant view commanded from this small plateau was highly renowned amongst

poets and nature-lovers; its beauties having been immortalised in many songs and poems. Beyond the irregular ridges lies the deep blue ocean, distant purple mountains closing in the picture with lovely effect. In spring the masses of red and crimson azalea lend a brilliant note of colour to the scene; the groves are musical with the cry of the *uguisu*, the little brown bird whose note is supposed to be a text of scripture—' *Hō-hōkke-kyō* ' ; while the trees and bushes of this thickly wooded region are gay with newly-budding foliage, the delicate shell-pink and pale green hues presenting the felicitous appearance of giant clusters of blossoms. In bygone days Zuisenji enjoyed a high reputation for its maples; their "flaming brocade" is still effective and beautiful, but of late years their number has somewhat decreased.

In 1328, shortly after the temple was founded, the first priest—the celebrated Muso Kokushi—caused a pavilion called *Ichirantei* to be erected upon the summit of the hill in order to afford facilities for rest and appreciation of the landscape: poets have compared this little structure to a miniature Elysium from which one could gaze down upon the vision of the world below.

When in the course of time this fabric fell into ruins, a new structure was erected some two hundred years ago by the enlightened scholar and philosopher Mitsukuni, Lord of Mito, who was also a constant visitor and patron of Zuisenji. This building was modeled upon the Chinese pavilion *Suiotei*, built by the Chinese Emperor Kiso, of the Sung dynasty: around the interior panels of lacquered wood were suspended upon which a collection of poems—inspired by the beauty of the scenery

and composed upon the spot—were inscribed: these panels are still preserved in the guest-room of the temple.

About a century after its construction this second pavilion was destroyed in a severe storm, but its site is still plainly to be seen. Within it was installed a thousand-handed statue of Kwannon, now enshrined upon the altar of the temple below.

The centrepiece and place of honour upon the main altar is occupied by a large and interesting effigy of the first priest of Zuisenji, the erudite and renowned Muso Kokushi: the tints are considerably faded and the flight of centuries has left its mark upon this ancient work; it is said to have been executed during the life time of the original, and has therefore been in existence some six hundred years. In the lefthand division is the chief object of worship, a valuable statue of Shaka; on either side are small but realistically painted images of Ashikaga Motouji and Ujimitsu, the third Ashikaga *Shōgun*. The righthand division is occupied by the above-mentioned Kwannon, in front of which is a fierce little statue with gleaming yellow eyes. This is the ever-popular *Daruma*, (Sanskrit *Dharma*), the Indian missionary priest who founded the Zen sect in China in the 6th century. Much depicted in popular art, and generally with a ruffianly countenance strangely belying his saintly character, Daruma was the great exponent of the doctrine of 'Thought transmitted without Utterance: ' he is said to have remained in profound religious abstraction for nine years, when his legs withered away from disuse, and disappeared!

In olden times a high tower was erected in the grounds to the right of the entrance gate. This was

used as a repository for the most valuable statues, but when the tower was attacked by fire they were rescued and removed to the main temple. Behind the site of this structure is a large cavern in three divisions, the rocky chamber on the left is dimly lighted by natural openings like circular windows, shaded with ferns and greenery: in the congenial gloom of this retreat the ancient priest Muso Kokushi was in the habit of practising *Zazen*, the mystic art of detaching the mind from the body in religious meditation. The sequestered path to the right of this historic cave—between the cliffs and a grove of bamboo—leads to the graveyard, where interest centres in the fine old tomb of Motouji, founder of the temple. This archaic monument has a beautiful setting; it stands in a mossy cave surrounded by wet and glistening pebbles, upon which drops of water continually percolate from the rock above, conveying a strange symbolism of purity and peace. A little beyond is the solitary rounded tomb of a former priest of the temple, but amongst these venerable sepulchres no relic exists of Muso Kokushi; this great divine had been summoned to officiate at Tenryuji, the temple of the first Ashikaga *Shōgun* at Kyoto; there he died at the age of seventy, and there his ashes were interred.

Originally another temple, Eianji, stood in close proximity to Zuisenji: built and dedicated to the memory of Ujimitsu after his death in 1398. On February 10th in the year 1439 the fourth Ashikaga Regent Mochiuji, on the betrayal of his plans, committed suicide in this temple together with over thirty of his retainers. On that tragic day the battle raged fiercely

in Kamakura, and unhappily a strong wind fanned on the flames that were the inevitable feature of these conflicts: it is recorded of this calamity that many temples and vast numbers of dwellings perished in the holocaust.

The wife of the ill-starred Regent, with many of her attendant ladies, had taken shelter in the three storied tower of Zuisenji, but it was impossible to avert their doom: the tower caught fire and all the unhappy fugitives were burnt to death. The two little princes alone had managed to escape, but as a sequel to this disaster the Ashikaga family entirely disappeared for nine years: at the end of that time the family was forgiven, and Mochiuji's son Nariuji returned to take up his quarters in Kamakura. However in 1445—while Nariuji was officiating as *Kwanryo*—he was attacked by his too-powerful representative, and from whose violence he fled to Koga in the north of Japan: this feud caused the termination of the office of governor of Kamakura, a fact that materially conduced to the decline of the city.

Just within the entrance gate of Zuisenji is a new *Jizo-do*. This small structure is a recent erection, the opening ceremony having taken place on June 26th, 1916. It was built to enshrine a fine old statue of Jizo—a standing figure sculptured in dark wood: this image dates back from the Kamakura Era and is considered a representative example of the art of that period. Upon either side are ranged six small figures of pugilistic demeanour, armed with various weapons: these are the 'Twelve *Shinsho*,' or ministering attendants upon Yakushi-Nyorai, the god of wisdom and healing. These valuable

images have only recently been acquired by the temple. In past times there were twelve vassal shrines attached to the temple of Hachiman, but at the Restoration these buildings gradually fell into decay and disappeared. At that time the statues were acquired by a resident of Kamakura named Jimbei Yoshimura; he presented them to Zuisenji and the *Jizo-do* was erected under his auspices.

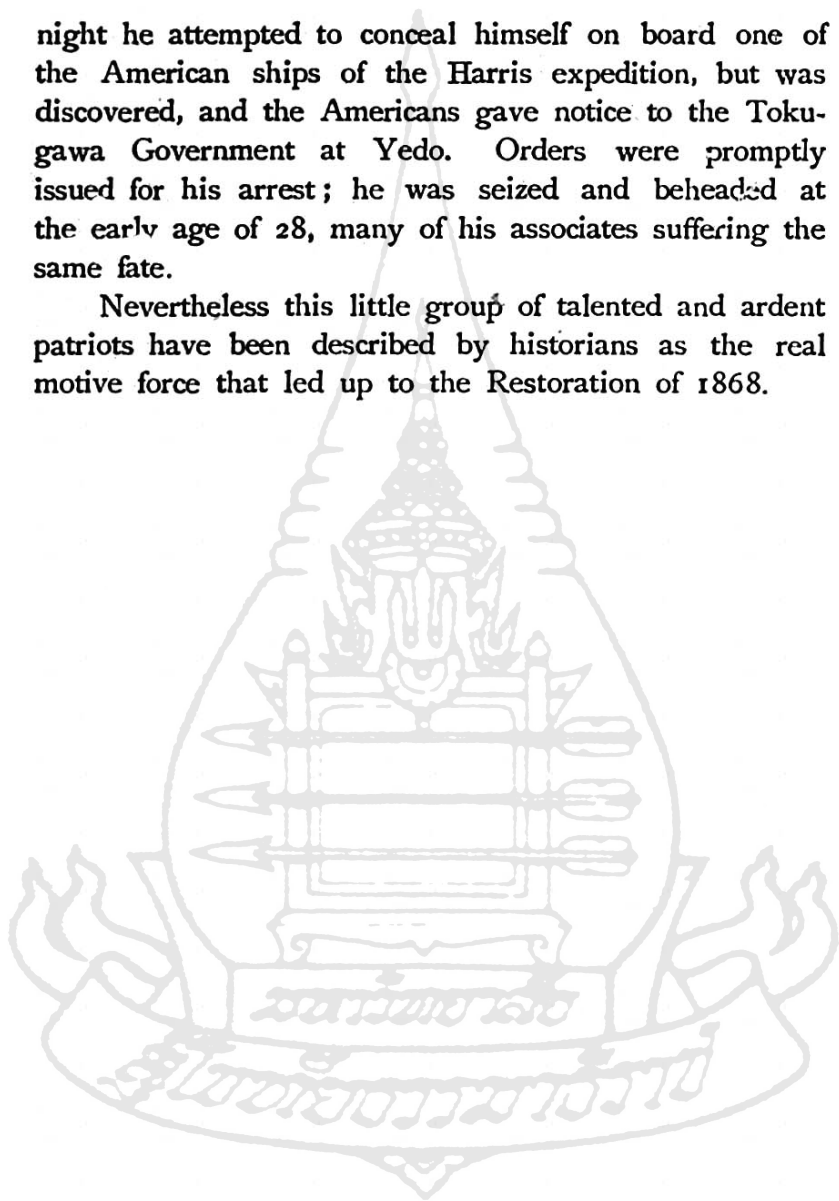
An interesting fact in connection with this temple is that for a time its tranquil seclusion afforded a shelter to the celebrated patriot and martyr Yoshida Shōin, whose uncle was then officiating as head-priest of Zuisenji (a celebrated scholar named Chikuin); some writings of the former are still preserved as treasures of the temple—mementoes of his loyalty to the Imperial cause and of his tragic fate.

This young samurai was an ardent loyalist. When the American Envoy Townsend Harris came to Shimoda for the second time in 1859 to conclude the commercial treaty between Japan and America, Yoshida Shōin was deeply incensed that the treaty was concluded by the *Shōgun's* minister, Ii Kamon, the Emperor's authority being practically ignored. With a little band of enthusiasts (the translation of whose motto means "Revere the Sovereign, expel the barbarians") they determined to attempt to overthrow the *Shogunate*. With that end in view Yoshida resolved, in spite of the national edict that meted out death to any Japanese subject who should leave the Empire, to secretly go abroad in order to make a careful study of foreign customs and methods.

His preparations were made at Zuisenji. One dark

night he attempted to conceal himself on board one of the American ships of the Harris expedition, but was discovered, and the Americans gave notice to the Tokugawa Government at Yedo. Orders were promptly issued for his arrest; he was seized and beheaded at the early age of 28, many of his associates suffering the same fate.

Nevertheless this little group of talented and ardent patriots have been described by historians as the real motive force that led up to the Restoration of 1868.





The dark Cavern wherein the unfortunate Prince Morinaga was imprisoned for seven months before his assassination in 1335.