

DAIBUTSU By YONE NOGUCHI

THE valley, a snug basin forgotten by consciousness, was filled with the autumnal sunlight of gold, which shone up to the tremendous face of Daibutsu (famous holiness at Kamakura) who, like thought touched by emotion, appeared as if vibrating ; Nature there was in the last stage of all evolution, having her energy and strength vaporised into repose. The trees, flowers and grasses in the sacred ground calmed down, to speak somewhat hyperbolically, into the state of Nirvana. The thought that I was a sea-tossed boat even with all oars broken, formed itself then in my mind ; it was natural I felt at once that it was the only place, at least in Japan, where my sea-wounded heart would soon be healed by the virtue of my own prayer, and by the air mist-purple filling the valley most voluptuously. I cannot forget my impression when I heard there the evening bell ring out and the voice of sutra-reading from the temple, and how I lost my human thirst and pride, becoming a faint soul, a streak of scent or a wisp of sigh ; I was a song itself which grew out from my confession. Such was my first impression on finding myself in Daibutsu's ground, the haven of peace and heavenly love all by itself, soon after I returned home from my long foreign sojourn, that is quite many years ago now ; but it seems it was only yesterday that I, like a thousand waves hurrying toward the Yuigahana shore of Kamakura, hurried to Daibutsu with my own soul of wave-like song of prayer ; can our human souls ever be more than the waves of the sea ?

It was the next summer that I had many many more occasions to lay my body and soul under the blessing of Daibutsu's valley (Oh, what a scent that is the Lord Buddha's !) as I had many weeks to spend there at Kamakura : Summer, the month of my love, with the burning ecstasy that would soon be intensified into the greyness of Oriental desolation. I like the Summer heat, you understand, not from the fact of heat itself, but from the reason we have to thank its presence for the sweetening of the shadows of trees, where I will build, while looking at the delicious white

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feet of passing breezes, my own kingdom with sighing ; to speak plainly, dream old Kamakura of the Middle Age, that is, of art and religious faith. To-day, it is in truth a common sort of country town of modern Japan, of stereotyped pattern with others ; if there is a difference, it is only in its appearing less individual and far sadder because it has had such a great history, when we observe that its general ambition now points toward commercialism. But it is during those summer weeks only that we can fairly well connect it with the old art and prayer, let me say, with the true existence of Daibutsu the wonder, as we see then with our living eyes the thousand pilgrims in white cotton, bamboo mushroom hats on head and holy staff in hand, and sacred little bells around their waists (what desolate voices of bells !) swarming here mainly to kneel before Daibutsu from every corner of the country where all winds come from ; I was glad to see the whole town religiously changed at once. How often I found myself with those pilgrims, muttering the holy words in Daibutsu's valley, where the nature, not unlike that of the former October of rest, was in all its spiritual asceticism with repentance and belief ; the gigantic divinity in bronze, of folded hands and inclined head in heavenly meditation, over whom time and change (summer heat, of course) have no power to stir its silence, is self-denial itself. Oh, let my heart burn in storm and confession like the hearts of a thousand cicadas whose songs almost shake the valley and trees ; we might get the spiritual ascendancy out of physical exhaustion ; it makes at least one step nearer our salvation. The autumnal rest or silence can only be gained after having all the summer heart-cry ; isn't Daibutsu's self-denial the heart-cry strengthened into silence ?

There is in this statue a great subtlety, speaking of it as a creation of art, which might result, let me define it arbitrarily, from a good balance of the masses of idealism and what we generally understand as realism ; as the latter is indeed so slight, even our modern imagination whose rush is always proved to be disturbing, has enough room here to play to its content. The proof

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that the said idealism and realism melt into one another in such a perfection is clearly seen in its external monotony, or, let me say, in its utter sacrifice of gross effect ; while it, on the other hand, has gained the inward richness most magically. To call it an accident is not quite satisfactory, although I do not know how far it is explained by saying that it is the realisation of magic or power of prayer which our ancestors placed in bronze ; there is no denying, I think, that it is the work of prayer to a great measure. Tradition says :

It was Itano no Tsubone, one of the waiting ladies to Shogun Yoritomo, who undertook, when he passed away with unfulfilled desire to have an object of worship at Kamakura, his own capital, similar to the Daibutsu at Nara, to collect a general contribution and fund, with the assistance of the priest Joko ; the first image which was of wood was finished in 1238 or the first year of Rekinin. She was again called to action, when in the autumn of the second year of Hoji (1248) the image, also the chapel, was overthrown by a storm, this time assisted by the Shogun Prince Munetaka, and successfully restored the image in bronze. The artist who executed it was Goroyemon Ono of Yanamura of the Kadzusa province.

Putting aside the question who was Ono and Itano no Tsubone, the significant point is that it was created by a thousand people whose religious longing and hope were fulfilled in this Daibutsu. It is not our imagination alone to think that the statue lives as it is the real force of prayer ; when we see it, we build the most musical relation one with another at once, because we forget ourselves in one soul and body, we might say, in one sound and one colour, perfectly wedded with it. After all, it is nothing but our own emotion and yearning personified.

I believe that it might not have been so great an art as it is if it had been made in our day, mainly because it would express too delicate details ; and the temple light from the opening of the doors, when it used to stand within, must have often played with it unjustly. But it became a great art when the storm and tidal

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waves destroyed the temple and washed the statue in 1355 and again in 1526, and left it without ever since, with the rustling trees behind, the light and winds crawling up and down, against whose undecidedness its eternal silence would be doubly forcible. Is it not that our human souls often grow beautiful under the baptism of misfortune and grief? So Nature once unkind to the statue proves to be a blessing to-day; it looms with far greater divinity out of the rain, wind, lights of sun and moon, whose subtle contribution it fully acknowledges. Where are the foolish people who wish to build the temple again to put the image in?