

*On the Stolen Bronze Buddha Which Gave an
Extraordinary Sign and Identified a Thief¹*

In some part of Hine district, Izumi province 和泉國日根郡,² near a highway, there lived a thief whose name is unknown. Evil-natured, he lived by robbery and had no faith in the law of karmic causation. He would steal metal from temples to make into strips and sell.

In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, a Buddhist image of Jin'e-ji 盡惠寺³ in that district was stolen by the robber. One day a man passed on horseback along the north side of the temple. He heard a voice crying, "Ouch! ouch!" The man on horseback, thinking someone was being hit, galloped forward in the direction of the voice, which faded out as he came closer. He stopped the horse to listen, but he heard nothing except the sound of metal being hammered. Therefore he passed on by the place. As he went further along, however, he heard the same cry. He could not bring himself to ride off; he returned but again he heard no cries, only the sound of hammering. Suspecting that there had been a murder or at least some evil scheme, he wandered about for a while and sent his attendant to peer secretly into the house. The attendant saw a man cutting off the limbs and chiseling the neck of a bronze Buddha that had been laid on its back.

On the spot he caught the man and asked him, "To which temple does this Buddha belong?" He said, "This is the Buddha of Jin'e-ji." At that, a messenger was sent to the temple to ask about the Buddha, and he learned that it had been stolen. The messenger reported the whole affair in detail. Both the monks and patrons of the temple came to the spot and, surrounding the broken Buddha, wailed, "How pitiful! How dreadful! What fault caused our great master⁴ to suffer such a disaster? If the sacred image were at the temple, we would look up to it as our master. Since it is broken, what shall we revere as our master?"

The monks purified a palanquin to enshrine the broken Buddha, held a tearful funeral service⁵ at the temple, and let the thief go with-

1. Cf. *Konjaku monogatari-shū* (XII, 13).

2. Present Sennan-gun, Ōsaka-fu.

3. Unidentified.

4. *daishi*; see II.17, n. 6.

5. 葬 *mogari*, funeral rite before burial; see Chap. II(3)a. They treated the broken Buddha like a human being.

out punishment. But the man who had caught the thief sent him to court, where he was imprisoned.

We learn indeed that the Buddha performed a miracle in order to stop evil and that the Buddha's spirit responds to utmost devotion! In the twelfth volume of the *Nehan-gyō*⁶ there is a passage which runs like this: "I have a high regard for the Mahayana teachings.⁷ I killed a Brahman⁸ who spoke ill of a Mahayana scripture.⁹ Consequently I will not fall into hell hereafter." Another passage in the thirty-third volume of the same scripture¹⁰ speaks to the same effect: "Those of the *ichisendai* 一闍提¹¹ shall perish forever. If you kill even an ant, you will be accused of the sin of killing; you will not, however, be accused of the sin of killing if you kill the *ichisendai*." (Because the *ichisendai* slanders the Three Treasures, fails to preach for all beings, and lacks a sense of gratitude, killing him is not a sin.)¹²

*On the Bronze Bodhisattva Miroku Which Was Stolen
by a Thief and Revealed His Identity by
a Miraculous Sign¹*

In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, an imperial messenger went round the city at night. When he was in the city at midnight, he heard wailing in the field covered with smartweed² south of the Kazuraki nunnery 葛木尼寺³ in the capital of Nara. Something cried, "Ouch! Ouch!" On hearing this he proceeded in the direction of the cry, and found a thief breaking a bronze image of Bodhisattva Miroku 彌勒菩薩⁴ with a stone. He caught and questioned the thief who confessed,

6. *Daihatsu nehan-gyō*, XII (*Taishō*, XII, 434c). 我... 心重大乘闍婆羅門 誹謗方等... 斷其命根... 以是因緣從是已來不墮地獄。

7. 大乘 *daijō*; see I.23, n. 13.

8. A member of the top caste of the Hindu community which was in charge of sacrificial rites. As Buddha denied their spiritual authority, Buddhism was rejected by them.

9. 方等 *hōdō*; equal to *hōkō*, *daijō*.

10. *Daihatsu nehan-gyō*, XXXIII (*Taishō*, XII, 562b). See Chap. II(2)a. 一闍提輩 永斷滅 故以是義故 殺害蟻子 猶得殺罪 殺一闍提 無有殺罪。

11. Transliterated from Skt. *ichantika*; see Chap. II(2)a.

12. Kyōkai's note.

1. Cf. *Konjaku monogatari-shū* (XVII, 25).

2. 蓼原 *tadehara*, the field of smartweed or a local name.

3. Located east of Daian-ji on the East Side of Nara. See *Shoku Nihongi*, XXXVI (Hōki 11:1:14); also, Fukuyama, *Narachō jūin*, 74-80.

4. Maitreya; see Chap. II(3)b, n. 131.